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# An Ethic of Global Fiction: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and Min-gyu Park's *Dinner with Buffett* *

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Abstract

Beginning with ethical nature inherent in the novel, this paper argues that ethical responsibility of 21st century global fiction lies in its invitation to readers to rethink the status quo in a globalized world. While David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and Min-gyu Park's *Dinner with Buffett* use international settings, these works exemplify how global fiction fails at, or succeeds in, the ethical task of challenging the contemporary world, respectively. This is because Mitchell's 500-page novel, although a felicitous embodiment of globalization and hybridity, does not challenge dominant ideologies and instead ends up reproducing a conventional humanist ideology against the backdrop of exotic places and diverting literary pastiches. In contrast, *Dinner with Buffett*, a novella about a Korean average Joe who wins a charity meal with tycoon Warren Buffett, perplexes the reader with counterintuitive turns and, in doing so, uncovers what we believe to be common sense today that serves global capitalism.

Key Words : *Cloud Atlas*, *Dinner with Buffett*, David Mitchell, Min-gyu Park, Global Fiction, Ethics

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## Ⅰ. Introduction: Ethics of the Novel

Since its rise in the 18th century, the novel has been at the forefront in defying society with its "novel" yet thought-provoking actions and ideas. While the novel has been a receptacle of—in England, in particular—bourgeois sensibility, Victorian morality, and the modernist credo, it has accomplished its agendas by continually confronting and incorporating new ideas and forms; Henry James reveres this limitless freedom as "the magnificence of the form" and the "splendid privilege" (21) of the novel. Along the same line, Mikhail Bakhtin argues, "The novel, after all, has no canon of its own. It is, by its very nature, not canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself, and subjecting its established forms to review" (60). Thus, to question given thoughts and forms is the nature of the novel, an inherently ethical genre that has survived by pushing and revising the borders of the permissible. The history of ethical literary criticism is too long and tortuous to be neatly mapped in this introduction.[1] Suffice it to say here that out of two current modes of ethical literary criticism, the neo-humanist attempt to reclaim moral values of literary "canons" espoused by Martha Nussbaum, on the one hand, and the ethical search for "other" meanings in conjunction with a group of radical "post-" theories, on the other hand, this essay roots for the latter.[2]

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1) While the intersecting histories of moral philosophy and literature trace back to Aristotle, literary criticism arose as an autonomous discourse only after the onset of modernity and the death of God in the 19th century. Invested in modernist humanism, modern literary critics including Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, and F. R. Leavis sought for a "disinterested" interpretation of "the canon" through which to divulge its serious "moral purpose." But modern criticism's preoccupation with morality was inseparable from the imperialist power of the colonial west. The elitism of modern humanists began to be challenged in the post-1945 era by new radical "post-" theories, which shift focus to, among other issues, the hitherto unacknowledged significance of the other.

2) This second mode of ethical literary criticism can be represented, to name just

That is to say, my essay aims to highlight the novel's capacity *and* ethical responsibility to challenge the status quo. In this sense, it is "natural" for the novel to "turn to ethics" (Sanders 4).

Insofar as the ethical core of the novel emerges when it invites the reader to rethink the status quo, today's fiction, largely consumed in a global context, has a new ethical responsibility. That is, if fiction in the past spoke primarily to the national reader, as is implied in Benedict Anderson's term, "imagined community," the 21st century fiction should undertake its ethical task by interrogating and redefining what it means to live in a globalized world for its international readers. The goal of this essay is to examine the ways recent global fiction uses international settings in order to reimagine the world, particularly in the light of ethics. As opposed to "the cosmopolitan novel," for example, "global fiction" is not an established term in English literary studies; it loosely refers to international fiction, stories by authors from around the world. Rather than pinning down the category of global fiction, my essay chooses this term in order to examine two fictions side by side, one written by a British author and the other by a Korean. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the different ways that these global fictions crisscross national boundaries and contemplate global themes.

The two novelistic works I chose for this purpose are David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Min-gyu Park's *Dinner with Buffett* (2014) which, I would argue, exemplify how global fiction fails at, or succeeds in, the ethical task of challenging contemporary world, respectively. On the surface, *Cloud Atlas* appears to be a felicitous embodiment of globalization and hybridity. Mitchell's 500-page novel travels back and forth between five continents and embraces vast expanses of time, interweaving six heterogeneous genres into a single work. *Cloud Atlas*' ambitious combination of cosmopolitan, postmodern, and posthuman components (it includes a narrative about clones) has been duly noted by critics. But my contention is that these components

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a few, by Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Emmanuel Levinas.

do not contribute to destabilizing dominant social ideologies. Instead, they end up reproducing a conventional humanist ideology against the backdrop of exotic places and diverting literary pastiches. In contrast, *Dinner with Buffett* is a novella about a Korean average Joe, named Ahn, who turns out to be the highest bidder for a meal with Warren Buffett, one of the world's most successful investors. Ahn has dinner with Buffett but curiously shows absolutely no interest in Buffett's investment advice, the presumed reason for the obscenely expensive 1.72 million-dollar meal. Having spent the money he had won from a lottery for this occasion, Ahn has no money left for investment anyway. As Ahn *literally* only has dinner with Buffett, Park's novella uncovers what lies beneath the power lunch with the tycoon: a business transaction disguised as "charity." By debunking the late capitalist "common sense," Park's story intervenes in ruling capitalist axiom in an unexpected and succinct way which, this essay argues, constitutes the ethical core of the story.

## II. *Cloud Atlas* and Unethical Fiction

*Cloud Atlas*, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, has been often discussed in relation to its ambitious scope and stylistic feats. As Mitchell mentions in an interview, *Cloud Atlas* is inspired by Italo Calvino's postmodernist novels, and has a peculiar structure in which five plots are unfolded in order, interrupted by the sixth plot, and continue but in reverse order in the latter half (i.e. 1.1—2.1—3.1—4.1—5.1—6—5.2—4.2—3.2 —2.2—1.2; See Figure 1).


〈Figure 1〉

What seems equally intriguing yet complicated is that each of the six narratives replicates a literary (sub)genre: a journal kept on a slave ship across the Pacific in the 1850s, a young composer's letters to his same-sex lover written in Belgium in the 1930s, a detective story set in the 1970s Los Angeles, an aging publisher's recollection of his baffling experience in contemporary London, a dystopian sci-fi epic featuring a female Korean clone, and a post-apocalyptic story of the doomed Hawaii narrated in the badly broken English. Unlike Calvino's writing which abruptly ends in the middle for the ultimate open-endedness, Mitchell acknowledges adding up the second half of the novel to ensure closure. For another critical difference, *Cloud Atlas* makes a link to all the narratives by having each main character carry the same comet-like birthmark on his or her shoulder.

Due to the fact that Mitchell's novel touches upon a variety of literary techniques and themes, prior criticism has read the novel from the diverse perspectives of cosmopolitanism, globalization, and posthumanism, to name a few. In *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction*, Fiona McCulloch draws upon Rosi Braidotti's notion of transpositions, arguing that *Cloud Atlas* employs "a transpositional model in its critique of global capitalism's destructive will to power" (142). More specifically, the novel's multiple protagonists who exist far away from each other but remain connected nevertheless embody "resistant subjectivities that are multiple, mutable and acentered, yet simultaneously coherently patterned" (McCulloch 141) found in transpositional nomadism. *Cloud Atlas*' conjoining of disparate lives across the world causes a critic to brand Mitchell's novel as a portrayal of "the experience of the large, abstract economic, social, and political phenomenon known as globalization" (Mezey 11). As mentioned earlier, the fifth narrative of the novel, entitled "An Orison of Sonmi~451," follows the journey of a clone named *and* numbered Sonmi~451, through which she rises from a robotic server at a Papa Song's restaurant (a stand-in for McDonald's) to an awakened revolutionary fighting enslavement. Mitchell's use of clones as "the higher beings that tame human hubris and cause us to rethink our ontological posture" (Sims 218), although it sounds clichéd and

human-centered, reveals the novel's posthumanist interests.

While these critical remarks illustrate the broad extent of the novel, Heather Hicks rightly argues that Mitchell's "ventriloquism" is "android" and "lacks originality," and calls the author "more [⋯] a stylist than an idea man." It is true that *Cloud Atlas*' main achievement derives from an innovative assortment of ostensibly unconnected stories. But to applaud it as thoroughly postmodern and posthuman as some reviewers do seems inappropriate. It is beyond the scope of this essay to fully explicate postmodernism and posthumanism, but we can safely assume that both of the isms share resistance to certain preceding beliefs; postmodernists are those who have lost the modernist faith in the form and mimesis, and the followers of posthumanism are wary of the "historically specific construction called the human" (Hayles 1). Despite the typical postmodern literary tropes used in the novel, such as a fragmented structure and a mixture of high and low, Mitchell's strong wish to provide a closure to each plot and organize the book into a nebulous "atlas" stamps this novel with modernism. Likewise, Christopher Sims states that "the shared birthmark" presents "an unexpected synthesis" and leads the novel to be "more in line with modernist literature" (178).

From the perspective of posthumanism, the same birthmark owned by all the major characters is a contrived device which implies the interconnectedness of people, and serves as a prime example of a humanistic belief which, transcending race, class, and gender, incorporates clones into the perimeter of the human. In posthumanist thinking, in Cary Wolfe's words, human is no other than "a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically 'non-human' and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is" (xxv). In this sense, Sonmi~451's final "ascent" to the human, as well as the novel's glorification of it, is diametrically opposed to posthumanism. Inasmuch as posthumanism suggests an ethical way of embracing nonhuman others as they are, *Cloud Atlas*' need to turn Sonmi~451 into a respectable human exerts epistemic violence and perpetuates an unethical humanist ideology. All in all, in spite of the exhilarating surface crisscrossing time

and space, and genres and techniques, the ideas and beliefs advocated in *Cloud Atlas* are surprisingly traditional.

It is probably for this reason too—conservative ideas wrapped in a structural puzzle—that *Cloud Atlas* was readily adapted into a Hollywood blockbuster of the same title by Lana and Andy Wachowsky in 2012. Attracting publicity for a gala of international casting, including Tom Hanks, Halle Berry, Hugh Grant, and Doona Bae, the poster for the film version of *Cloud Atlas* conveys the clichéd theme, "Everything is connected" (See Figure2). Among other gimmicks, the film pitches its message by giving every main actor multiple roles of different generation, body type, and even ethnicity. For example, Halle Berry was cast as a white European, an Indian party guest, an African American journalist, a Korean plastic surgeon named "Madame Ovid," and a "prescient" woman from the future (See Figure 3). While this stunning makeup and costume technology may well evince a cinematic triumph, the idea of a single humanity whose differences have become a matter of "special effects" erases particularities of race and nationality. Considering the oppression of global capitalism which reorganizes the world under its unified economic and cultural hegemony, *Cloud Atlas'* flattening of difference, or the fantasy of metamorphosis and hybridity promoted in the film version, is complicitous to such hegemony, rather than being critical of it.


〈Figure 2〉

〈Figure 3〉

To return to the novel, "An Orison of Sonmi~451" best exhibits how Mitchell's innocuous effort to create an anti-capitalist parable in the genre of sci-fi fantasy actually reinforces the national, gender, and humanist stereotypes that such effort purports to subvert. A transparent allegory of the class conflict between "pureblood" (human) capitalists and enslaved "fabricants" (clone), "An Orison" chronicles the process whereby Sonmi~451, a fabricant with limited language and emotion programmed to work at a fast food restaurant, gains knowledge and "ascends," becoming an awakened savior fighting against "the Ministry of Unanimity." The future Korea is ruled by a new form of sovereignty called "corpocracy" where words for daily items have been replaced by brand names, such as "sony," "disney," "nike," and "starbuck." Sonmi~451 mocks the racism of corpocracy when she observes that its "social strata" is "demarked, based on dollars and, curiously, the quantity of melanin in one's skin" (235). Despite the post-national and posthuman setting of the novel, the choice of Korea for this update of the Orwellian dystopia appears to be motivated by fairly well-worn images: the popular association of the country with state-supported family monopolies—what Benjamin Kunkel accurately identifies as "*chaebols*" (original italics, 90)—plastic surgery, and cloning technologies. So the author depicts the seedy backstreets of Seoul swarming with "facescapers" and ridicules the uniform standard of beauty facilitated by plastic surgery. This provides an apt example of the novel's perpetuation of national stereotypes, intended or not by the author.

Another problem arises when Sonmi~451, the Asian-looking

waitress-clone, finds that she longs to be entirely human. Even in the beginning, she is unique in believing that even the "same-stem fabricants [are] as singular as snowflakes" (187). As Sonmi~451 ascends and goes through various emotions, she learns that the "xistential qualms you suffer, they just mean you're human" (232) and is excited by herself becoming a "real" human little by little. Her yearning for individuality and complexity, however, is far too generalized to be meaningful, except for an infantile wish for all humans to be precious. The moment Sonmi~451 becomes a "complete" woman is when Hae-Joo Im, her "pureblood lover" (345), makes love to her (tellingly, Hae-Joo is played by Jim Sturgess in the film, made up as Korean with Asiatic eyes). After discovering the shocking truth about how fabricants are slaughtered and are processed into food at the end of their service, Sonmi~451 feels enraged and helpless and has sex with Hae-Joo, calling their sex "an act of the living" (ibid.). While the novel asserts Sonmi~451's humanity by way of her act of lovemaking, her love story cannot move away from what Kunkel astutely terms "sci-fi humanism" (92). According to Kunkel, romantic love, by its very nature, presupposes "the irreplaceability of one person by another" (ibid.) which is precisely lacking in the romance of clones. Thus, Sonmi~451's mimicking of erotic desire evidences less her humanity than an anthropocentric and masculinist fantasy, leaving the perimeter of the human and heterosexual love unchallenged.

The solemn passages accompanying Sonmi~451's witness to the slaughterhouse and her lovemaking are inadvertently amusing to the Korean reader. This is because several examples of cultural faux pas, such as Korean-sounding names that are anything but to a Korean ear like "Hel-Han," or cheap street foods like "pungent *ttokbukgi*" and "a glass of *soju*," belie the tragic or romantic scenes, rather than evoking the exoticism presumably intended by the author. It is far from my goal to find fault with the numerous inaccuracies concerning Korean life and geography prevalent in the novel. *Cloud Atlas* is a work of fiction, and "An Orison" is set in a future dystopia; it cannot be condemned for the way it mis-invents a foreign

culture. What remains much less amusing, however, is the novel's ease with which it conjoins dissimilar things to present them as an example of cultural hybridity when it is merely an amalgam. *Cloud Atlas*' supposedly cosmopolitan and postmodernist endorsement of hybridity—a facile and often misleading combination in truth—occurs in multiple planes, from the height of intertextuality reminiscent of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* to a confused jumble of historically and politically separate issues (e.g. Japan's annexation of the Korean peninsula and North Korea's doctrine of "Juche"). Mitchell's fumbling fusion masked as hybridity does not further delve into what is assumed, opened up, or problematized by such fusion.

One example of this colorful yet superficial comingling, Mitchell's description of "pureblood" sailors gratifying themselves in Pusan invokes many critical thoughts on cosmopolitanism, race and masculinity, and corporate prostitution:

> Pureblood sailors from all over Nea So Copros sat in frontless bars, flirting with topless comforters, under the scrutiny of PimpCorp men: leathery Himalayans, Han Chinese, pale-hued Baikalese, bearded Uzbeks, wiry Aleutians, coppery Viets and Thais. Comfort houses' AdVs promised satisfaction for every peccadillo a hungry pureblood could imagine. "If Seoul is a Boardman's faithful spouse," said Hae-Joo, "Pusan is his no-pantied mistress." (337)

In this brief scene, the diversity of ethnicity amounts to no more than a skin-deep pornography without further explanation and, if anything, reveals the irony that this scene's global-ness depends on the very "quantity of melanin" (235) previously sneered at in the novel. Of the six narratives of *Cloud Atlas*, "An Orison of Sonmi~451" offers the best site in which the exuberant mixture of cosmopolitan, postmodern, and posthuman components creates nothing new. To borrow from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, all kinds of boundary are unsettled and deterritorialized in "An Orison," but

such movement is soon reterritorialized within conventional parameters of humanism and global capitalism. That is, Mitchell's banal critique of "corpocracy" is incapable of urging the reader to radically rethink today's global consumerism and thus remains an entertaining yet thoughtless project.

Since there is little space for analyzing other narratives of *Cloud Atlas*, let me look at the last scene of the novel and conclude with an emphasis, again, that the novel's breakdown of borders is instantly reterritorialized under a humanist ideology. Oscillating between a naïve celebration of difference and a universalizing of that very difference into an idealized, harmonious humanity, *Cloud Atlas* ends with the last narrator's optimistic declaration. In the last chapter, the second half of "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," Adam is spared his life by a slave during his voyage back to the antebellum America, and is taunted by his father-in-law for his hopeless abolitionist cause: "your life [will] amount to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean!" Adam responds, "Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops? (509). This last sentence of the novel is meant to be touching, but it simultaneously submerges singularities into the humanistic dogma of sameness and sounds tyrannical. *Cloud Atlas* is loaded with twists and turns and provides a wonderful read as a whole. But in light of the ethical responsibility of the 21st century global fiction discussed in the introduction, this novel neglects its duty and should be deemed unethical. *Cloud Atlas* not only lacks the capacity of pushing the reader to reimagine our world, but actively inculcates a repressive humanist ideology, consciously or not.

## Ⅲ. *Dinner with Buffett*: An Ethical Intervention

If *Cloud Atlas*, despite its surface complexity, propagates a monolithic humanist belief, Park's novella is perplexing—even frustrating—as it rejects an easy translation into "values" sought by most fiction readers. In this

story, we follow several hours of Warren Buffett's day in Washington D.C. and New York City, starting with his recalling of a quick meeting with the President earlier in the day. In this highly cryptic conference, the President says, "they're coming now" (15), and asks for Buffett's advice. In the situation where it is impossible to know "whether they have the concept of money, currency, or even value," Buffett leaves the President with an assuring yet in the end unsatisfactory answer: "We have been [⋯] doing our best, haven't we? [⋯] I believe that's our value. Since we have value, I'm sure we'll find a solution" (17). While the reader is kept in the dark as to who "they" are and the relationship between "our value" and "a solution," the fictional Buffett of the story draws attention to the concept of value, possibly interpreted in the context of money, utility, merit, etc. as the story's main topic.

On his way to the annual charity dinner at Smith & Wollensky—although it is lunch in real life—Buffett passes by the Occupy Wall Street demonstration, another passing yet critical reference to global capitalism: to be more specific, a protest against the enormous socioeconomic inequality made manifest during the 2008 financial crisis. When Buffett is informed that the man he is having dinner with is a 28-year-old, self-claimed "*ordinary* citizen" (original italics) from Daegu, South Korea, the business mogul quickly believes him to be "a Korean Mark Zuckerberg" (25) and thinks of what information on the stock market to share with his young and rich guest. Due to the traffic jam caused by the Occupy Wall Street protest, Buffett is running late for over an hour. In the car, he reflects on his guest's generosity—for paying this amount of money for a meal and for awaiting him patiently at the restaurant—in the investor's terms.

> This fellow had paid 1.72 million dollars for the meal. Buffett thought that this young man had been generous only because he expected a return, a "value" double or triple that 1.72 million dollars. Businessmen knew well that courtesy and promises were simply accessories to the formal attire of "value." (39)

"Value" in the above quotation means nothing other than wealth, namely, a lot of money. By assuming his guest's "generosity" as entirely motivated by monetary reasons, Buffett dismisses other types of value, including the value of "courtesy and promises" for instance, as subordinate to materialistic one. For the world-renowned investor, a transaction with no return or a reward less valuable than is invested seems worthless.

Unbeknown to Buffett, however, the reader finds that Ahn is eating a Big Mac burger at a McDonald's and is coming to Smith & Wollensky, the high-end steakhouse in New York City, clad in a Nike hooded sweatshirt and sweatpants. To Buffett's bewilderment, Ahn is nothing like Zuckberg; Ahn works at a convenient store part-time and shows no ambition whatsoever unlike the past winners of charity dinner. That Ahn has spent all the lottery money he won on this single meal causes a real problem as it deprives Buffett of his crucial role as a financial advisor, the whole (hidden) point of the event. Stuffed with fast food, Ahn is not even interested in the huge steak and dessert and gives Buffett all of it. Carrie Kim, Harvard-educated translator, has to explain this unprecedented behavior and tells Buffett of the "Korean-style courtesy": "To be courteous, one has to offer one's food to the elder or superior" (63). While Buffett thinks, "it [is] all very foreign and incongruous" (53), he makes the final suggestion to his guest.

> "Would you, by any chance, like to learn how to invest?" Buffett asked.
> In English, Ahn's reply finally couldn't have been any simpler.
> "I'm fine, thanks,"
> And then,
> "And you?" (67)

Following Ahn's preposterous answer, the story cuts away to the last short scene in which Buffett sees a "One Way" sign in the car back home and feels "as if an age was settling into the night" (69). Ahn's answer made up of two parts is farcical at first because these two are often automatically

memorized as a set by Korean English learners and are blurted out together by Ahn when the second phrase is absolutely unnecessary. More importantly, Ahn's simple and nonsensical answer which pays no attention to investment skills stands for a complete rejection of communication in a capitalist language, a "one way" kind of communication unaffordable for most people in the world. In this sense, Ahn's extra question, "And you?" asks Buffett a number of grave questions: it asks if Buffett feels okay with himself, and by extension with his way of accumulating wealth, or global economic system; and whether he would like to learn how to invest, not only for money but a plethora of other "values." In a commentary on *Dinner with Buffett*, Kyung-jae Lee views Park's novella as a "protest narrative" (77) tackling global capitalism, and Ahn's nonchalant words—"I'm fine, thanks." —as breaking free from the dominant ideology of materialism.

The often ludicrous yet invariably compelling attempt to break away from ruling ideology comprises a core theme of Park's work. For example, in *The Last Fan Club of Sam-mi Superstars* (2003), a group of former fans of the ever-losing, short-lived professional baseball team based in Inchon strive to live up to "the philosophy of Sam-mi" (275) by "not hitting the ball difficult to hit, not catching the ball difficult to catch" (my translation, 270). Through their laughable effort to lose, Park's novel critiques our obsession with winning and relentlessly competitive society in a counterintuitive way. In another novel, *Pavane for a Dead Princess* (2009), Park depicts an implausible romance between a good-looking male protagonist and an indescribably ugly woman who works at a department store, an epitome of consumer capitalism. This unconventional love story reveals the violence exercised by the society which shamelessly relates good looks to all sorts of values, such as diligence, self-control, happiness, and success; good looks are goodness in itself. As Sungho Kim argues, this novel leads the reader to face a chilling truth that our dreams for "good" life are viciously prescribed upon jealousy, peer pressure, and meaningless competitiveness. (49) Rather than creating a utopia *outside* the realm of the real, Park's novel

delineates alternative ways of living in realist settings and uncovers the tyranny of neoliberal capitalist ideology. Calling Park's writing as the substantiation of "utopian realism" (45), Kim notes that the political power of Park's novel lies less in naïve optimism for a utopia than in its guerrilla-style stoppage of the flow of society, albeit momentarily. (49)

Park's pursuit of utopian realism and the political power embedded in it presents itself in *Dinner with Buffett* as well. In contrast of the multi-racial orgy scene in Pusan in *Cloud Atlas*, Park's portrayal of the multi-racial dinner invokes more than a sense of global-ness and calls the whole system of thought into question. That is, Ahn's complete indifference to Buffett's investment genius undermines the system of thought built by consumer capitalism. Ahn's disregard of monetary value contradicts the "common sense" that money *must* be used to maximize profit. In other words, you cannot *refuse* to make the best use of your meeting with Warren Buffett; you are not allowed to be uninterested in hearing his invaluable advice because it is the foremost reason for your "donating" the huge sum of seed money to begin with. Ahn's lack of such "common sense" is the opposite of the current fashion of thought which, as Philip Goodchild cogently remarks, is "constructed as a market":

> In such a market, validity is constituted by exchangeability. Those thoughts which offer themselves for general consumption, which satisfy base interests, which flatter the complacency of the consumer, which gratify desires, which devalue alternatives, are those which can circulate the most freely. (250)

In today's market of thought, the ideas people love to "buy" would include respect for diversity, the world as a "global village," and material success fulfilled via a strong work ethic, all of which are conveniently conducive to multinational business. While these neoliberal ideas appeal to the consumer by seeming to guarantee all types of equity and the freedom of

choice, what they actually accomplish is to circumscribe the range of choice per se. This means that in showcasing commodities of different size and color, for example, consumerism concocts a fantasy of choice, but simultaneously makes it impossible to imagine anything *outside* the showcase. This is why Irvine Welsh, Scottish writer and fierce advocate of counterculture, argues for "freedom *from* choice": trivial choices which effectively conceal the "absence of any real political opposition" (original italics, qtd. in Redhead 145).

In the sense that Ahn is clothed in a Nike outfit and is a lover of McDonald's, he hardly makes a contemporary hero struggling against global consumerism; nor does Park's novella paint a utopian "beyond" free from such global economic hegemony. But the fact that Ahn spends a lot of money on a dinner with Buffett for no better reason than because "it's a good thing to eat at the same table like this" (61) shatters the logic of capitalism which dictates that money should be spent in ways to produce capital. At first, Buffett's "charity" meal appears to be an ideal combination of a good cause and money. This annual event displays affluent donors' goodwill and boosts their public image, not to mention feeding a meal to one million people. But what remains unnoticed is the winner's expectation of "a return" (39) as presumed by Buffett earlier in the story. While the way it works between Buffett and the generous donor—the donor pays a tremendous sum of money for lunch with Buffett, and the latter in turn donates the money to feed the poor—seems legitimate, the nature of these donations remains a question to me. This is because the "casual" conversation occurring in lunch, part of which is Buffett's invaluable investment advice, brings about a reward to the donor in the form of a double or triple that initial "donation"; isn't this process of accruing millions of dollars playing in the stock market what has been instrumental to exacerbating the disparity between the rich and the poor in the first place? Supposing that donation by definition does not assume reward, what drives this event is nothing less than the bidders' desire to dramatically increase their wealth by obtaining investment information from the world's most successful investor. From this view, the "charity" meal is

a business transaction disguised in "donation," and the feeding-the-poor part is a side effect rather than a major cause.

By inviting readers to look into the working of global capitalism, often circulated in such virtuous terms as charity and donation, *Dinner with Buffett* makes an ethical intervention in the flow of society, whose ideologies are freely sold and bought in a market of thought. Insofar as Ahn shows no interest in engaging with this market, he can be considered as one of "they" (Lee 85), the unspecified group of those threatening American and global "values" mentioned by the President in the beginning of the story. No matter whether "they" are aliens, the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators, or simply some of us who think and act differently, the mode of thinking popularized in a market does not apply to "their" universe. As the reader keeps wondering who "they" are, Park's story makes room for an alternative universe *within* reality. In this universe, by no means a utopian haven free from global capitalist sovereignty, "they" are fully aware of the repressive ideologies imposed by society, but choose not to choose any of them and become uncommunicable aliens. While Ahn's one-time denial of Buffett's world does not immediately translate to an anti-capitalist utopia, Park's utopian-realist novella shows that it still matters to keep puncturing "common sense," vigorously promoted by global capitalism, with apparently idealistic yet strangely provoking thoughts and plots. Here lies the ethico-political significance of Park's global fiction.

## Ⅳ. Conclusion

It is far from my intention to criticize Mitchell's novel as worthless and praise Park's novella exclusively. My argument is that, although they both provide excellent reads and are cleverly written with intriguing techniques, 21st century fiction has an ethical obligation of taking issue with the status

quo and *Dinner with Buffett* achieves such obligation better than Mitchell's big novel does. In spite of the exciting crisscrossing of many types of borders, *Cloud Atlas* fails to call into question the motivational forces that underlie this busy crisscrossing, and instead comforts the reader with a complacent look to humanity. To draw on Goodchild, *Cloud Atlas*' endorsement of democratized global diversity merely repeats some of the most "marketable" thoughts circulating across the world now. In contrast, Park's story perplexes the reader with unpredictable turns and, in doing so, discloses the so-called common sense in the service of global capitalism. This invitation for the reader to see things differently halts the movement of society, if momentarily, and opens up a new ethical space of critical reading. 21st century global fiction needs to undertake this responsibility and push the reader's thoughts with its novel ideas and plots. The reader, in turn, should cultivate the ability to discern two opposite types of global fiction—one catering to dominant ideologies, the other in defiance of them—as vividly exemplified by *Cloud Atlas* and *Dinner with Buffett*.

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**국문초록**

# 21세기 소설과 윤리: 데이빗 미첼의『클라우드 애틀라스』와 박민규의『버핏과의 저녁식사』

김 수 연

본 논문은 데이빗 미첼의 장편소설『클라우드 애틀라스』와 영어로 번역 출판된 박민규의 중편 『버핏과의 저녁식사』를 21세기 글로벌문학이 수행해야 할 윤리적 의무에 초점을 맞춰 분석한 것이다. 국제적 배경과 인물을 중심으로 펼쳐지는 오늘날 소설에는 현실의 지배적 이데올로기에 맞서 새로운 세계를 상상해내야 할 윤리적 의무가 있다고 여겨지는데, 미첼과 박민규의 작품이 각각 이러한 책무에 어떻게 실패하는지, 혹은 성공할 수 있는지 보여주고 있다는 것이 본 논문의 주장이다. 우선 미첼의 소설은 다섯 개의 대륙과 수백 년의 시간의 넘나들며 각기 다른 여섯 가지 이야기를 엮은 '코즈모폴리턴, 포스트모던, 포스트휴먼 소설'로 칭송 받지만, 정작 경계를 넘어 모든 인류가 연결되어 있다는 휴머니즘 사상을 설파하는데 그치고 만다. 이런 의미에서 다양한 국제적 배경과 문학 장르의 혼합은 피상적인 국제화와 혼종의 흉내에 그칠 뿐, 억압적 현실에 대한 아무 도전도 던지지 못하고 있다. 반면『버핏과의 저녁식사』는 투자가 워렌 버핏의 유명한 자선 식사 경매를 통해 버핏과 저녁식사를 하게 된 한국 청년의 짧은 이야기를 다룬다. 이 낯설고도 난해한 중편에서 한국청년 안씨는 정작 이 비싼 식사의 진짜 목적인 버핏의 투자 정보에는 관심을 두지 않음으로써, '자선행사'의 이면에 감추어진 자본주의의 민낯을 드러낸다. 즉, 오늘날 국제사회에서 '상식'이나 '도덕'이라 여겨지는 많은 가치들이 사실은 국제자본주의의 원활한 작동과 맞물려 있음을 일깨워주며 글로벌문학의 저항정신을 구현하고 있는 것이다.

주제어 :『클라우드 애틀라스』,『버핏과의 저녁식사』, 데이빗 미첼, 박민규, 21세기 소설, 윤리학

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