Article

Time Is/Time Was/Time Is Not: David Mitchell and the Resonant Interval

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Abstract: Seven weeks before the release of his novel, *Slade House* (2015), David Mitchell began tweeting as a character, "Bombadil", from the forthcoming text. The tweets appeared on an account, @I_Bombadil (2015), set up by Mitchell, with the platform affording the author the opportunity to extend the character's narrative arc beyond the pages of the print-published novel and into Twitter's digital environs. For Mitchell, the boundaries separating literary works are never absolute and the process of repeatedly returning to and referencing prior works, methodically expanding and stretching his corpus by thematically and structurally folding each new work into an extant literary universe, is the central characteristic of his literary practice. What was notable in the case of @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, however, was that the connections across and between the works were also connections across and between distinct media environments. This article examines the ways in which the temporal-spatial entanglements between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, characteristic of Mitchell's retrospective and recursive literary practice, were intensified and complicated as they were further tangled up with the temporal–spatial dynamics of digital and print media respectively. By utilising Marshall McLuhan's media studies, and particularly his concept of the "resonant interval"—the borderline between "acoustic" and "visual" space produced in the dialogue between electronic (digital) and print media—as a means of articulating the dialogic double-space in between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, this article addresses the works as a symbiotic product of both literary technique and materialist media operability, adopting a nuanced, media-oriented perspective that fully engages with the temporal affordances of the Twitter platform as an inextricable aspect of the fundamentally temporal-spatial dynamics of Mitchell's "resonant" literary practice.

Keywords: David Mitchell; Marshall McLuhan; temporality; resonant interval; Twitter literature; the novel; serialisation; digital media; print media

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'[W]hat if a character from *Slade House* begins tweeting in the real world as himself, seven weeks before the reader encounters [them]?'

David Mitchell

On the 7th of September 2015, seven weeks before the release of his novel, *Slade House* (2015), author David Mitchell began tweeting as a character from the forthcoming text. The tweets appeared on an account, @I_Bombadil (2015), specifically set up by Mitchell for the character. The account followed the character, a twenty-something male hacker using the pseudonym "Bombadil", through the minutiae of his day-to-day life and, latterly, the events that prefaced his appearance in the fifth and final part of *Slade House*, 'Astronauts'. The Twitter platform afforded the author the opportunity to digitally extend Bombadil's narrative arc beyond the pages of the print-published novel so that the two works existed in symbiotic relation, across two distinct media environments. For Mitchell, the boundaries separating literary works are never absolute. The process of repeatedly returning to and referencing prior works, methodically expanding and stretching his corpus by thematically and

structurally folding each new work into an extant literary universe, is the central characteristic of his literary practice.

The first part of *Slade House*, 'The Right Sort', and by extension the novel as a whole, found its genesis in Mitchell's first foray into Twitter literature, with the publication of an earlier version of the 'The Right Sort' (2014), produced at the suggestion of his publisher as a prologue to his then-upcoming novel, *The Bone Clocks* (2014), which itself contained characters and concepts that he returned to in *Slade House*. In this way, Mitchell's literary deployment of Twitter, in both 'The Right Sort' and @I_Bombadil, was already intrinsically bound up with his print-published novel output as a part of his retrospective and recursive literary practice. Within Mitchell's oeuvre, then, and most notably in the case of @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, the connections across and between works have also been connections across and between distinct media environments. This meant that the ensuing temporal and spatial entanglements between the works, produced by Mitchell's retrospective and recursive literary practice, were further intensified and complicated as they were inextricably tangled up with the functional characteristics and structural biases of digital and print media respectively. This, in turn, meant that the reader following Bombadil's narrative back and forth, across and between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, was effectively suspended in a dialogic double-space in-between the two works and their respective media environments.

A means of articulating this dialogic double-space can be extrapolated from Marshall McLuhan's media studies, particularly his co-authored posthumous texts, *Laws of Media* (1988) and *The Global Village* (1989) [1,2]. In McLuhan's terms, *Slade House* and @I_Bombadil were emblematic of the dialogue between "visual" and "acoustic" space. For McLuhan, visual space was the type of space created by print media, characterised as 'static, linear, continuous, and connected', while its counterpoint, acoustic space, was the type of space created by electronic (digital) media, characterised as 'dynamic, spherical, discontinuous, and resonant' [1]. As with the boundaries between Mitchell's works, the separation between each type of space is not absolute. The borderline between visual and acoustic space is what McLuhan referred to as a "resonant interval". This is an in-between space where "figure" and "ground"—two more McLuhan terms, borrowed from Gestalt psychology—are each dynamically reshaping one another. The "figure" refers to the surface-level of the works, *Slade House* and @I_Bombadil, and their respective media, the print-published novel format and the Twitter platform; the "ground" refers to the context of the media, or the entire environment of services and disservices that the print (novel) and digital (Twitter) media environments bring with them.

McLuhan's "tetrad"—his four paradigmatic laws of media, which ask what a new artefact or technology "enhances" (what it amplifies or extends), "obsolesces" (what it pushes aside), "retrieves" (what it brings back), and "reverses" into (what diametrically opposing form it turns into once it reaches the limits of its operating potential)—was designed to '[illuminate] the borderline between acoustic and visual space as an arena of spiralling repetition and replay, both of input and feedback, interlace and interface in the area of an imploded circle of rebirth and metamorphosis' [2]. In other words, the tetrad illuminates the resonant interval, and hence can also be used to help elucidate the dialogic double-space between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*. At the same time, McLuhan's description of the resonant interval also fittingly describes the sort of thematic and structural repetition, doubling back, and repeatedly returning and referring to previous works typical of Mitchell's retrospective and recursive literary practice. An "interval" can also equally refer to a gap in time and/or space, synthesising the two in the same way that the temporal and spatial are synthesised in Mitchell's narratives as they oscillate between discrete succession and cyclic repetition.

@I_Bombadil and *Slade House* were timely works in the sense that they permit proper analysis of Mitchell's "resonant" literary practice as a product of both literary technique and materialist media operability. But they were also "timely" in the sense that they were works thematically obsessed with time, as well as works that could only be read as together, as discussed in this article and as intended by Mitchell, for a brief window of time. As a means of stressing the latter, both @I_Bombadil and *Slade House* are referred to in the past tense throughout this article, diverging from the conventional, "present

tense" descriptive mode of literary studies in an attempt to underline the temporal specificity of the relationship between these works, and to adopt a media-oriented perspective complementary to the apt analytical framework McLuhan's media studies provide. In line with this perspective, and in order to delineate the scope of this analysis and differentiate this study from extant analyses of @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, this article addresses arguably the most salient aspect of Mitchell's "resonant" literary practice in its deployment across and between print and digital media environments: the temporal and spatial entanglements between the works. Time in Mitchell's work is expressed in temporal-spatial terms as a perpetual sense of forward narrative momentum that is simultaneously, retrospectively and recursively disrupted by a series of doublings back. Time in Mitchell's work, then, is both all and nothing; or, as the clock in *Slade House* suggests, *time is*, *time was*, and *time is not*.

1. Time Is

Time is a definitive feature of Twitter's functional characteristics and structural biases, and was hence central to Mitchell's deployment of the platform in @I_Bombadil. As the article's epigraph suggests, Mitchell's main aim in utilising the Twitter platform was to provide a 'seven-week' prelude to his then-forthcoming novel, *Slade House*, extending a character's narrative arc, namely the self-styled hacker known as "Bombadil", beyond the printed pages of the novel and into Twitter's digital environs. Thus, Bombadil sent his first tweet under the username @I_Bombadil on the 7th of September 2015 and his last on the 31st of October 2015, four days after the publication of the novel on the 27th of October. Bombadil's Twitter narrative therefore amounted to approximately seven weeks' of "real-time" narrative prior to the novel's publication, which also represented a seven-week narrative prelude to Bombadil's appearance in the fifth and final part of *Slade House*, 'Astronauts', with the Twitter narrative ending where 'Astronauts' began. Twitter allowed Mitchell to create this prelude as a "real-time" narrative, leading up to *Slade House*'s publication.

Similarly, the epigraph also reveals what Mitchell saw as the functional characteristics and structural biases of Twitter, whereby he equates the platform with 'the real world' and describes the character as 'tweeting as himself'. These aspects of his premise separated the potential Twitter work from the already completed novel, indicating Mitchell's awareness of the fundamental differences between writing for a digital platform and for a print-published novel. Although Twitter permitted the extending of Bombadil's narrative arc, it required that Mitchell write in a form and style compatible with Twitter's specific affordances.

The platform promises to show users 'what is happening in the world and what people are talking about right now', stating that 'when it happens it happens on Twitter'.[1] As a platform, Twitter aims not just to present an image or reflection of reality, but to create its own sociomaterial reality. In Twitter's case, this is perhaps most expressly evident in its exigent temporality, wherein time is always critical.

Whenever a user tweets on the platform, they respond to Twitter's default prompt: 'What's happening?'[3]. The question is pointedly in present tense, creating a sense of "nowness", of perpetual presence, where tweets, regardless of their content, are always composed in response to a present tense prompt. The platform also enhances this sense of perpetual nowness in functional ways. Tweets are published on Twitter in reverse chronological order, based on the representation of time generated by its timestamp, as designated on a universal basis by the platform's algorithms. The newer a tweet, the closer to the top of users' streams it will appear, and as newer tweets are published, older tweets are pushed further and further down users' streams, emphasising the platform's "newest-first" temporal bias. Twitter functionally constructs its own sense of "real-time" via its cues and queues, and through its exigent temporal dynamics and perpetual presence.

When @I_Bombadil began appearing on Twitter, its first six tweets appeared in 16 min, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. @I_Bombadil's first six tweets.

Another sixteen tweets appeared at irregular intervals throughout the day, ranging from eight in the morning to eleven at night, GMT (Greenwich Mean Time). The tweets' timestamps were instantly and visibly significant narrative cues in that they represented a "real-time" narrative, outwardly published by Bombadil, which reflected the structure of his day. The earlier tweets indicated his Twitter activity as he travelled to work, and the later tweets referred to his having arrived at his place of work: 'I am on the tube2work right now [. . .] I'm @my desk, pretending2work'.[2] Embedded within Twitter's present-oriented temporal bias, Bombadil's narrative took the form of stream of status updates, always focusing on what was currently happening from his own subjective perspective. @I_Bombadil was, as Tore Rye Andersen and Sara Tanderup Linkis [4] rather eloquently put it, 'not so much a tweeted story as a story made up of tweets'. The tweets routinely ceased during blackout hours when Bombadil was asleep, occupied at work and, later, once he passed through the door to Slade House. Twitter amplifies this sense of nowness, which it renders through its enabling and encouraging "real-time" publishing.

Andersen and Linkis[6] align Twitter's "real-time" publishing mechanisms with the related concepts of "concurrent narration" (Uri Margolin, via Bronwen Thomas) and "real-time narration" (Ruth Page), describing the illusory simultaneity of narrated events, narration, and publication potentially created by digitally serialised narratives. As they rightly point out, this (potential) illusion of simultaneity is reified by the types of digital/social media and networked devices that permit access to and engagement with serial narratives from any place, at any time, creating the appearance of narrative uncertainty as to how, if, and when the story will end, without necessarily indicating any genuine uncertainty in this regard. Drawing in particular on Page's [5] work on "real-time narration", Andersen and Linkis note that this "real-time" is effectively "quasi-real-time", with the narration occurring near-to, rather than simultaneously with, the time of the narrated events. The illusion of narrative uncertainty and of "real-time narration" in digital serial narratives is produced by the author "acting as if": acting

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2   Mitchell, D. @I_Bombadil. 2015.

as if the narrative's closure is not preordained, even when it is, and acting as if the narrated events are concurrent with the narration and publication, even when they are not. Although Page briefly discusses the role of Twitter's timestamping as an aspect of narrative temporality on the platform, inferring the sequence of narrated events, it is crucial to understand that the timestamp of tweets simultaneously constructs and deconstructs Twitter's sense of "real-time", further complicating the inherently complex temporalities of serialised narratives.

Twitter's "real-time" publishing is an innate fallacy. There is an inevitable temporal lag created as the platform processes users' tweets, timestamping and assigning them a queued position within the users' streams in which they are eventually published. This is Twitter's version of buffering, meaning that, despite Twitter's present-tense prompt, tweets are always already in the past when they are published. No tweet ever appears timestamped as "Now". The nearest-to-present, true real-time a tweet can be is "1s", standing for one second, although more typically, tweets appear with a timestamp of "3s" or "4s". The seconds, milliseconds, or micro-seconds between the user clicking "Tweet" and the tweet appearing at (or near) the top of streams underscores the fabricated nature of the platform's "real-time" temporality as an aspect of its structural and linguistic biases; its sense of nowness comes from its cues and queues, not from a true real-time functionality. It is the user, influenced by these cues and queues, who ultimately ratifies the platform's "real-time" by forging functional norms that reflect true real-time. In other words, the emphasis is once again on the user to "act as if". However, this is not to suggest that the time of a tweet is not narratively significant, as Page rightly asserts. Fabricated or not, Twitter's exigent temporal relations—created by its cues, queues, and ratified by dominant user practices—are ineradicable and inexorable, meaning that narrative temporalities must still operate within the conditions established by the platform.

It is certainly probable that Mitchell had pre-written, if not the entire narrative, then the vast majority of Bombadil's tweets prior to publishing it on the Twitter platform, ensuring @I_Bombadil converged with *Slade House* as and when he intended in terms of the time of narrated events, narration, and publication. But, through his performative engagement with the platform as a part of his literary practice, Mitchell "acted as if" and thus, even in the act of deciding when to publish tweets, @I_Bombadil was subject to and ratified Twitter's amplifying and encouraging of its particular "real-time" temporalities. As such, the story appeared as if it was being told "live", even if and when it was not.

Twitter's functional and structural biases are not only palpable in prompting users to constantly update but also in encouraging users to respond instantaneously to replies and/or other users' tweets, occupying a persistent present that focuses on 'what's happening' now or what has just happened. @I_Bombadil was written from a first-person perspective in the present tense, containing numerous temporal adverbs, such as 'now', 'today', 'this morning', and 'yesterday', that further grounded the narrative in the present or very-near past so that the narrative appeared as if Bombadil was responding instantaneously to 'what's happening' now or reflecting on what had just happened.

Twitter also amplifies everyone's voice, so that some readers following @I_Bombadil were able, and often inclined, to reply to Bombadil's most recent tweets. The responses showed readers—including Mitchell, tweeting as himself[3]—playfully engaging with the character and receiving responses from Mitchell-as-Bombadil, as can be seen in Figure 2.

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[3]   Mitchell, D. @david_mitchell.

Figure 2. @david_mitchell replies to @I_Bombadil's tweet.

Readers shared in the narrative experience and further embedded it in a(nother) real world by drawing parallels with and referring to events outside of the story and/or platform, connecting @I_Bombadil to their personal experiences, opinions, and world views. In amplifying and providing all users with the ability to respond, contribute to, and ultimately affect narratives, Twitter amplifies environmental noise, whereupon first-person narratives are frequently and recursively disrupted and diluted by other users. In Twitter, a singular first-person narrative naturally becomes multiple first persons; a monologue becomes a dialogue; readers become users and users become producers. As Ganaele Langlois et al. [6] suggest, platforms such as Twitter 'serve to establish the conditions within which content can be produced and shared and where the sphere of agency of users can be defined'. Within Twitter, the condition that perhaps most tangibly defines users' spheres of agency is the platform's tweet-length character restrictions.

2. Time Was

As well as enhancing nowness/imperative time relations, user engagement, environmental noise, and conditional user agency, Twitter also enhances brevity. Twitter was originally designed to work within the constraints of SMS (the short messaging service), which provided the rationale for the character length of a tweet. Although the platform's character limit for a single tweet has since been expanded to 280, at the time @I_Bombadil was published, tweets were still capped at 140 characters per tweet. @I_Bombadil's narrative thus amounted to 513 tweet-length instalments, published between the 7th of September and the 31st of October 2015. As an on-going fictional narrative published regularly in sequential instalments over an extended period of time, @I_Bombadil, via Twitter, retrieved the Victorian print serial format from obsolescence. Tore Rye Andersen [7] has elsewhere traced the return of serialised literature via the Twitter platform, connecting @I_Bombadil to the temporal and interactive aspects of the Victorian serial form. The intention within this article is to augment Andersen's analysis by examining more extensively @I_Bombadil's retrieval of these aspects of the serial for a contemporary technocultural context, both as a part of Mitchell's wider, retrospective and recursive literary practice, and as a part of the broader dialogue between print and digital media. As McLuhan stressed, a process of transformation was an immutable part of retrieval: it is not simply a case of bringing something back as it was—rather, '[s]ome translation or metamorphosis is necessary to place it into relation to the new ground' [1]. In order to be compatible with its new ground (Twitter and its contemporary context, in comparison to its old ground, the print periodical and its Victorian context) the figure (the serial)

must be transformed in relation to the functional characteristics, structural biases, and contextual situation of the new ground.

Time was a key characteristic of the Victorian serial form. Mark W. Turner [8] locates the serial form within 'emerging modernity itself, in which the fleeting and ephemeral become integral to the fabric of everyday life, with its new forms of labour and leisure, with its encounters with fragments of time'. Put another way, the serial form was temporally tied to the increasingly industrial technocultural context of the 19th century. Rob Allen [9] similarly refers to the 'rhythm of modernity' that structured and was simultaneously structured by serial fiction. Serial fiction was published in periodicals that typically reflected weekly, monthly, and quarterly cycles—that is to say, periodically, at fixed intervals. The periodical press therefore played a part in constructing the sociomaterial temporality of Victorian life around these key cycles and intervals, as well as organising readers' sense of media time to suit the structural biases of the periodical press itself. As a result, both the cycle of publication and the intervals between each publication are meaningful and not simply arbitrary. The meaning that resides in the pauses—whether a day, week, or month—is intrinsically tied to both the Victorian era's organisation of time, reflecting the contemporary social milieu of the 19th century, and to the print culture of the periodical press. Turner has elsewhere referred to this as "periodical time". The temporality of serial fiction must take into account the temporality of the technocultural context in which the work is grounded, as well as the narrative temporality of the work itself.

@I_Bombadil reflected serial publication as transformed for 21st century social media and digital culture. Readers/followers of @I_Bombadil were not routinely left to await instalments, wherein the pauses in publication were narratively insignificant. In Victorian serial publication, instalments typically ended with a suspenseful cliff-hanger that generated the desire for future instalments as readers waited for the next part to be published, with the pause rooted in the temporality of periodical print culture rather than the narrative. In @I_Bombadil, the pauses in publication were significant in that they indicated or emphasised something narratively resonant. Desire for future instalments functions as a product of the follower relationship on the platform, where users express their wish to have another user's tweets appear in their stream, and suspense was generated in not knowing when the next instalment would come, particularly through the leveraging of this indefinite hiatus to signify danger for the narrator.

Towards the end of his Twitter narrative, Bombadil took a trip into the "orison", 'a bubble reality inflated inside reality […] | … a room in a room. A micro in a macro. […] Folded-up dream in unfolded reality', in which Slade House was located.[4] At 07:57 on the 30th of October, he tweeted, '… &in I go'.[5] There was an interval of nearly nine hours before he tweeted again, stating, 'BACK! In at 7.57am; got back 4.52pm. Spent 45mins inside. Orison unchanged. Misty&grey. Walked up closer2Slade House. Windows … '.[6] During the pause, as shown in Figure 3, users replied to the first tweet, expressing their concern. At 16:24, @JayEmmTee1 asked, 'Where are you? Are you out yet?'[7] At 16:45 and alluding to the temporal disruption of the orison, @Kovacs88 wrote, '45 mins in is long enough, come back?'.[8]

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4   Mitchell, D. @I_Bombadil. 2015.
5   Ibid.
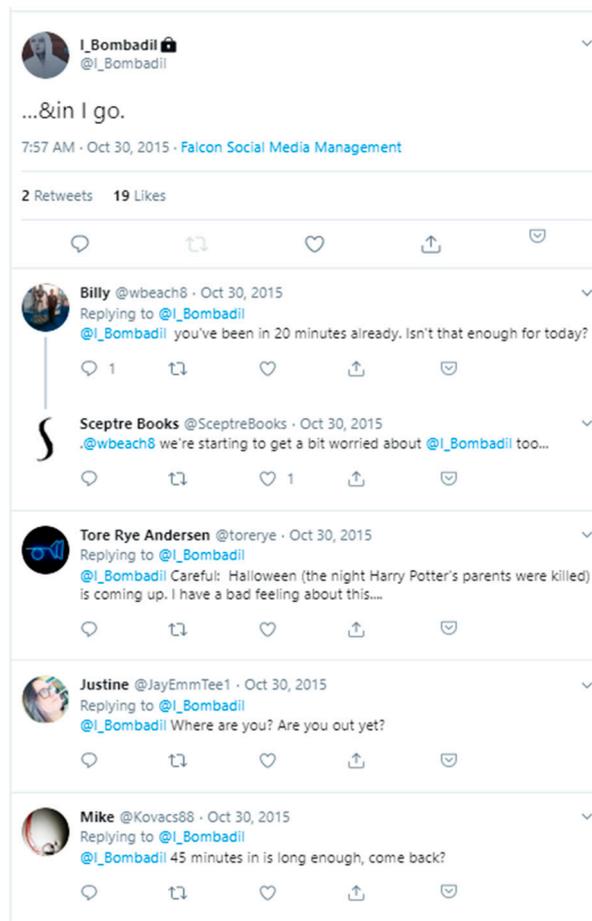6   Ibid.
7   Ibid.
8   Ibid.

Figure 3. Replies to @I_Bombadil's tweet, ' . . . &in I go.'.

The interval spoke to readers' desire for more instalments, with a threat to Bombadil being interpreted as a threat that the narrative/instalments would not continue. Upon confirmation of Bombadil's safe return with his next tweet, @christina2012gr replied, 'Glad to hear from you again! I was certain you were gone forever'.[9] As such, Twitter's retrieval of the serial form obsolesced non-narratively resonant pauses in publication.

The only reason @I_Bombadil itself came into existence was due to the interval between Mitchell submitting his final galley of *Slade House* for publication and the novel being printed and available to the public. In this broader sense, Twitter also obsolesces enforced non-productive intervals in the publication cycle by providing authors with an (ostensibly) operatively "real-time" medium through which they can connect to readers and produce material that generates interest for and extends the narrative of their text. By using the Twitter platform to extend Bombadil's narrative arc, Mitchell gave the character a life beyond the text, and it is through this extended arc that McLuhan's concept of the "resonant interval" can be applied to articulate the more dynamic temporal involutions across and between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*.

3. Time Is Not

Through Bombadil's extended narrative arc Mitchell led the reader, in Paul A. Harris' [10] terms, 'iteratively and recursively' from one work to the other. Bombadil occupied the threshold between the works, as, ineluctably, did the reader encountering both @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*: Mitchell

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9　　Mitchell, D. @I_Bombadil. 2015.

positioned the reader so that they were never reading only one work or the other, but always, ineluctably, both. He suspended the reader in the dialogic double-space between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, an invisible zone of tension between the works and print/digital media environments. In McLuhan's terms, this zone is the "resonant interval" created when two contrasting media environments, in this case print and digital, are brought into dialogue. McLuhan argued that the meeting of print and electronic (digital) media environments was effectively the meeting of "visual" and "acoustic" space, wherein acoustic space was the counterpoint to visual space, representing a complete contrast in all of its properties. Visual space is 'structured as static', while acoustic space is 'a flux' [1].

In their dialogue, the two spaces are interlaced, interfaced, and rendered inextricable from each other, obscuring the borderline between them. It is the in-betweenness of the resonant interval, then, that fundamentally comes to define both spaces. It is in this in-between space that figures and grounds are dynamically reshaping one another. In relation to literary practice, the content and the medium of the work, along with its contextual services and disservices, are continually in a dialogic state from which the work itself arises. It was by writing across these two media environments and positioning the reader in the resonant interval between them that Mitchell's works made most apparent the role that each medium/context plays in the emergence of the literary work. As McLuhan pointed out, the resonant interval is irrefutably 'where the action is' [1].

Situated in the resonant interval between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, Mitchell placed the reader where the action is. The "action", in this instance, was the very specific and unique way in which these two works were orchestrated to stimulate a resonant, intertextual, cross-media reading practice. In other words, what was most interesting about these works lay in the space in-between them, rather than within the works themselves. Led iteratively and recursively from one work to the other by Bombadil's extended narrative arc, the reader iteratively and recursively traversed the space in-between. As Harris [10] notes, Mitchell's narratives '[oscillate] between discrete succession and cyclic repetition'. Bombadil was the oscillation point between discrete succession and cyclic repetition, persistently presenting the reader with motivation to both read on in *Slade House* and circle back to @I_Bombadil, with Mitchell ensuring the reader was repeatedly required to decide between pressing ahead or repairing and returning to trace narrative connections between the works. The tension between the discrete succession and cyclic repetition was then reified by the reader as they followed Bombadil back and forth. Through @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, through Bombadil's extended narrative arc, Mitchell utilised the resonant interval to leverage this tension and amplify the effects of his literary practice, always moving forward but also simultaneously circling back to more acutely address obtuse elements from earlier in the narrative(s). Bombadil was the impetus to this two-way movement of time across the works, drawing the reader into the interstices between works, spaces, and media environments.

Around the mid-point of @I_Bombadil's narrative, Bombadil recounted a dream:

So last nite I dreamt I'd morphed in2 a baggy padded suit like those strap-on sumo wrestler costumes u get at team-building weekends . . .

. . . & 'I' was just lying on the floor at end of my bed. Then this naked bone-sharp woman appears&climbs inside me and zips me on over her . . .

. . . like a puffy flesh-suit! Stood in front of mirror&asked (lips didn't work well) "Who are you?" & she said (thru my mouth), "Call me Norah . . .

. . . You can ask only the customary number of questions." So I asked, "How many?" & Norah said, "Three of course; & you just blew your second."

So I thought 'Bitch' & she said, "I heard that"

So I asked, "Why are you zipped up inside me?" Norah sang, "Wherever I lay my hat, that's my home."

> Then I woke up, with that80sPaul Young hit on a fading loop in my ear canals. Fuck1n'mental! Can any1 pls tell me wtf that dream was about?![10]

In the context of @I_Bombadil, the episode was a strange non sequitur, as indicated in Bombadil's exclamation, 'Can any1 pls tell me wtf that dream was about?!'. Here, he directly addressed the users reading his narrative. It suggested those users/readers could or should know something that he did not, which proved to be a prescient indicator of Bombadil's eventual fate. Within @I_Bombadil, it registered as the fever dream of a reliably unreliable young man, an insignificant episode that was never resolved or returned to again. However, by the beginning of 'Astronauts', the fifth and final part of *Slade House*, the details of the dream came perspicaciously into focus:

> Bombadil's iPhone vibrates over his heart. With his cold fingers, I fish out the device from the large skiing jacket I made him buy near our anonymous hotel this morning when I saw the ominous that of the sky. Sleet peppers the screen [11].

Towards the end of @I_Bombadil, Bombadil confusedly stated, 'Leaving John Lewis department store wearing knee-length padded coat I apparently just bought... | ...Weird thing is, I don't recall even going in. Huh'.[11] As with the dream, these tweets seemed strangely superfluous to @I_Bombadil's narrative, beyond, perhaps, indicating a brief lapse in memory that only signified the reliability of the narrator's unreliability. To the reader of *Slade House* encountering the above paragraph at the beginning of 'Astronauts', though, they were imbued with resonance.

Having read the four preceding parts of the novel, the reader had already encountered Slade House's occupants, the pseudo-immortal, soul-decanting Grayer twins, Jonah and Norah. Every nine years, the Grayer twins had to consume the soul of an "engifted" mortal—one with a specific "psychovoltage" signature—in order to continue living beyond the standard human time scale. As *Slade House*'s narrative unfolds throughout its first four parts, each representing an individual engifted mortal's journey down Slade Alley to Slade House, it was also revealed that (via contrivances more clearly established elsewhere in Mitchell's corpus) the Grayer twins were able to occupy the bodies and minds of the novel's mortal characters.

During the dream sequence, Bombadil had been inhabited by one of the novel's primary antagonists, Norah Grayer. But it was not until later, during the final part of *Slade House*, that this was finally revealed. 'Astronauts' was the only part of the novel in which the narration alternated between the first and third person, rather than exclusively following the first person form. This differentiated the final part from the four that preceded it, marking the point at which the two (practical) preludes to 'Astronauts'—the first four parts of *Slade House* and @I_Bombadil, respectively—converged. The alternating narrative registers at this juncture emphasised the tension between the two works. Mitchell pulled the reader in both directions at once, between discrete succession and cyclic repetition: between following the narrative thread and revelation of Norah Grayer's occupation of Bombadil in *Slade House*, or circling back to the narratively prescient dream sequence of @I_Bombadil. Norah Grayer was 'Norah', the 'bone-sharp woman' who 'climb[ed] inside' Bombadil in his dream.

The reader—following the two works' chronological timeline, reaching 'Astronauts' already having read @I_Bombadil—encountered and unravelled this narrative mystery simultaneously in the dialogic relationship between the works. It was through the connective narrative thread of the forgotten skiing jacket, echoing between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, that Norah's possession of Bombadil was illuminated in both works. McLuhan described the resonant interval as an interval where 'resonant and interpretative processes are simultaneously related with centers everywhere and boundaries nowhere' [2]. With Bombadil occupying the resonant interval between @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*, Mitchell attempted to ensure reader's interpretative processes were resonant, reverberating

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[10]　Mitchell, D. @I_Bombadil. 2015.
[11]　Ibid.

between the works so that the centre, the reader's position, their focus, was simultaneously in both. The boundaries between the works would then be iteratively and recursively traversed and the reader would be drawn into an arena of spiralling repetition and replay, of input and feedback, of interlace and interface, that at once relied upon and disrupted narrative chronology.

Maria Beville [12] has written of 'the tension that exists in Mitchell's writing between the simultaneous desire to find, and to abandon coherent notions of time and subsequently, history'. @I_Bombadil preceded the publication of and led up to the events of the final part of *Slade House*. This created a two-way movement of narrative time that simultaneously moved forward, consecutively, from @I_Bombadil to *Slade House*, and from 'The Right Sort' to 'Astronauts' (the first to last parts of *Slade House*), but also iteratively and recursively circled back from *Slade House* to @I_Bombadil as the reader reached 'Astronauts'. Yet, in terms of the time of publication, @I_Bombadil also referred to other narrators/protagonists and characters that appeared in *Slade House*, chronologically before they appeared in the not-yet-published novel. However, these references were also chronologically disjointed from the historical timeline constructed by the novel in its five-part structure of nine-year cycles spanning from 1979 ('The Right Sort') to 2015 ('Astronauts'). In alluding to almost every other narrator/protagonist of *Slade House*—'No sign of Nathan Bishop&mother, Gordon Edmonds or X-Files Six; or any1 referred2by Fred Pink'—in @I_Bombadil, Bombadil both found and abandoned a coherent notion of narrative temporality and narrative history.[12] This combination of what Beville [12] refers to as the 'circularity and causality' of Mitchell's writing is redolent of the resonant interval and the interlacing of visual and acoustic space.

Where visual space was linear and continuous, homogenous and uniform, acoustic space was spherical, discontinuous, non-homogenous, resonant, and dynamic. While visual space created a spatial and temporal continuum, acoustic space provides 'simultaneous access to all pasts' so that 'there is no history. All is present' [1]. In their dialogue, and through the resonant interval, visual and acoustic space become 'inseparable' [2]. Situating the reader-via-Bombadil in the resonant interval between works, spaces, and media creates a taught two-way pull in narrative space and time that oscillates between circularity and causality, between discrete succession and cyclic repetition where, under the strain, as Harris [10] states, 'time may be broken into episodes causally connected in complete story arcs, or bent in concentric circles'. The two-way movement of narrative space and time is most dynamic and recursive as 'Astronauts' calls back to @I_Bombadil: astronauts typically measure time as a compression of space and time (a light-year) in the same way they are synthesised in Mitchell's narratives and in the notion of an interval. The two-way temporal and spatial movement creates temporal involutions both within and across the works. As Harris suggests, these type of temporal entanglements are characteristic of Mitchell's work.

As a consequence of these temporal-spatial entanglements, there is a double-bind at play. As Beville [12] notes, Mitchell's writing desires to both find and abandon coherent notions of history. Similarly, for McLuhan, through the resonant interval, the historical continuum of visual space and the simultaneous lack of history of acoustic space collide. Through the resonant interval, and through Mitchell's resonant literary practice, this simultaneous construction and deconstruction of history presents itself in readers' limited window of access to Bombadil's full narrative. As the article has already stressed in its use of past tense, the ideal reading experience of the two works was to follow @I_Bombadil "live" in the lead-up to *Slade House*'s publication. With @I_Bombadil only being active for seven weeks, the reader only had seven weeks in which to experience the story as ideally intended. Shortly after Bombadil's final tweet on the 31st of October 2015, Mitchell set @I_Bombadil to "private", locking the Twitter account so that it was not visible to new readers/users. After having relied on a coherent notion of history to create a prelude to the events of 'Astronauts', Mitchell then made sure only the readers/users who originally followed @I_Bombadil could access his tweets, abandoning

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12   Mitchell, D. @I_Bombadil. 2015.

the coherent notion of history he had initially relied upon. As a result, the type of idealised reading experience of @I_Bombadil and *Slade House* discussed here was temporally specific to the seven-week timeline Bombadil's tweets represented, ironically not unlike the "aperture" that only briefly and periodically appears to permit access to Slade House. It could be that Mitchell intended to lock @I_Bombadil from the outset, in which case it could be referred to as a form of literary "planned obsolescence", which may in turn underscore the capitalist imperative for the work as a marketing exercise for the forthcoming *Slade House*, even as it similarly supports the assertion regarding Mitchell's literary construction/deconstruction of history.

4. Conclusions

Paul Ricoeur [13] stated that, although all fictional narratives are 'tales of time', very few are 'tales about time' in which the experience of time is principally what is at stake in the narrative. Mark Currie [14], referring to Ricoeur's narrative theory, also states that, '[n]arratives are often not only about time, but they are about about time'. In *Slade House*, through its cyclical five-part structure, recurring nine-year intervals, and in its thematic preoccupation with the literal consumption of time, it was a novel about about time, in which time itself is pointedly and principally at stake. The print format allowed Mitchell absolute authorial control over narrative temporality whereas Twitter's exigent time relations were ineradicable and inexorable, meaning that narrative temporality needed to operate within these conditions. In @I_Bombadil, seven weeks of narrative created an inelastic timeline that inevitably led to the beginning of the final part of *Slade House*. Yet both works eventually led to the same point, with @I_Bombadil and *Slade House*'s first four parts converging at 'Astronauts'. Through the resonant interval between the works, @I_Bombadil did not merely act as a prelude, a beginning to *Slade House*, ending as it begins, nor did *Slade House* itself solely act as an ending to @I_Bombadil.

'For one voyage to begin, another voyage must come to an end, sort of' The final line of *The Bone Clocks* [15], Mitchell's last publication prior to @I_Bombadil and *Slade House* aptly articulates the spiralling repetition and replay, the input and feedback, interlace and interface, the circle of rebirth and metamorphosis evident in his literary practice and across his corpus. It is also fitting that this article end where it began, at the point preceding the publication of *Slade House*. Mitchell used the Twitter platform as a means of extending Bombadil's narrative arc and his life beyond the novel, in manner that, following *Slade House*'s publication, became quite literal. When the novel was published on the 27th of October 2015, at which point Bombadil was effectively still-born, always already dead within its pages, he was still actively tweeting about his visit to Slade Alley on his yet-to-be-locked Twitter account.

His death in the novel marked the end of his voyage down Slade Alley to Slade House, but this was the necessary end that precipitated the beginning of Bombadil's new life on Twitter. This rendered his death in the novel only a 'sort-of' ending. In a sense, Bombadil still exists, undead and disjointedly out of time, visible only to previously "live" readers/followers of @I_Bombadil on his now-locked Twitter account. Here, once again, he is ironically not unlike the novel's other protagonists, lured down Slade Alley to Slade House and their 'sort-of' deaths, visible only to those who are likewise lured to Slade House. The tension between circularity and causality, discrete succession and cyclic repetition, and the dynamic, recursive, and—as this article has suggested—ultimately resonant nature of Mitchell's literary practice were crystalized in the four days during which Bombadil tweeted from beyond the grave, dead and undead, his fate certain and uncertain, caught, as he *is*, *was*, and *was not*, in the resonant interval between *Slade House* and @I_Bombadil.

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