

Presentation abstracts and speaker biographies

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On the Politics of Adaptation: *Cloud Atlas* and Narrative Evolution

Keynote speaker: Dr Sarah Dillon, University of Cambridge, England

This keynote address aims not to provide an overall argument about Mitchell's oeuvre, but to address an area of his work as yet little studied in academic Mitchell criticism – film adaptations of his work – and to explore the way in which Mitchell's work has value not just in itself but in opening up, and contributing to, key contemporary debates about media and politics. In the paper, I will look closely at a number of changes to *Cloud Atlas*' structure and thematic emphases as a result of the change of medium from novel to film. I will do so not within the framework of traditional adaptation studies with its evaluative fidelity discourse, but through a new understanding of narrative adaptation as homologous to post-Darwinian evolutionary biology. My aim in doing so is to use *Cloud Atlas* as a case study in order to make wider arguments about the politics of adaptation from novel to film; to make intersectional feminist arguments about the constraints on narrative created by the cinematic environment; and, to develop the arguments made in *Cloud Atlas* with regard to the effectiveness of political resistance. *Cloud Atlas* offers itself as a perfect case study since, as Lev Grossman observes in 'The Screen's the Limit', '*Cloud Atlas* is [...] in a weird way, a story about adaptation' (Grossman, 'The Screen's the Limit'). *Cloud Atlas* is a story intimately concerned with the repetition and transmission of narratives across times, places and cultures, and with a variety of vehicles of transmission – diary, letters, novel, memoir, digital recording and oral culture – which has itself been adapted from one medium – novel – to another – film. Extending the biological homology, the conclusion I reach is that through cultural niche construction we can change our environment – cinematic, social or political – in order to change the types of narratives that are successfully replicated within it.

Biography

Dr Sarah Dillon is University Lecturer in Literature and Film in the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge. She is author of *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (2007) and *Queer Intimacies: Deconstruction ∩ Feminism ∩ Film* (forthcoming 2018), and editor of *David Mitchell: Critical Essays* (2011) and *Maggie Gee: Critical Essays* (2015). She is Chair (Elect) of the British Association for Contemporary Literary Studies and General Editor of the book series *Gylphi Contemporary Writers: Critical Essays*. She also serves on the editorial board of *C21: Journal of Twenty-First Century Writing* and *Fantastika*. Sarah is also a BBC radio broadcaster.

Cloud Atlas: Adaptation and the primacy of science fiction

Christoffer Bagger, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

This paper will discuss how the film adaptation of David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas* took a number of very interesting choices which ultimately leave the film as a significantly different experience from the book. The clearly segmented stories of the novel are told concurrently in the film, and the themes of rebirth and recurrences are underlined by the choice of utilizing the same cast of actors in different roles in the different eras of the plot.

The analysis will be based on a thorough formal analysis of the composition of the film version of *Cloud Atlas*, ascertaining the patterns behind the unusual construction of the narrative and how this relates to the composition of the source material.

It will be discussed how this is not without filmic precedents, where stories from different time periods are juxtaposed and edited together. The composition of *Cloud Atlas* will be compared to such films as *Intolerance* (1916), *Leaves Out of the Book of Satan* (1922) and *The Fountain* (2006).

Special attention will be given to how *Cloud Atlas* the film breaks from these predecessors as well as the novel in the emphasis on the science fiction genre and fiction time periods. In this way, *Cloud Atlas* can also be placed in a tradition of newer science fiction films with unusual narrative approaches. The film adaptation is thus not a place with rigid borders between genres and time periods, but a far more complexly structured work in which, in the words of co-director Lana Wachowski exists a "utopia" of intermixing genres (quoted in Hemon 2012) which tells a story "suggest[ing] a wider breadth of humanity" (Lana Wachowski quoted in Robinson 2012) but stretches this preoccupation beyond a focus on the present and into a fictional future which mixes both the utopian and the dystopian.

Biography

Christoffer Bagger holds a Master's Degree in film and media studies, and is employed as a research assistant at the department of Media, Cognition and Communication at the University of Copenhagen. His research interests particular include film form, and innovations in the recent science fiction cinema.

**“The weak are meat the strong do eat”:
Representations of cannibalism in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas***

Leanne Brown, University of Stirling, Scotland

Traditional narratives of cannibalism represent the cannibal as a primitive and savage Other, a subhuman figure that transgresses the boundaries of natural law in his consumption of human flesh. In colonial discourse, labelling the indigenous population as cannibalistic has long been used to justify the oppression or extermination of that society. David Mitchell, however, like many of his contemporaries such as Margaret Atwood, Alasdair Gray, and Kazuo Ishiguro, depicts cannibalism (and the cannibalistic practice of organ harvesting in healthy bodies) as it is ingrained within capitalist political systems. Focusing on Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and borrowing from Slavoj Žižek’s conceptions of violence, this paper will argue that the novel’s portrayal of ‘systemic cannibalism’ is the natural consequence of centuries worth of exploitative practices committed against disempowered members of society. There is nothing personally vindictive or subjectively violent about the consumption of the cannibalised in *Cloud Atlas*; it has become normalised, standard practice, an integral part to the smooth functioning of society. Cannibalism is no longer merely the justification of oppression against marginalised groups, it has become the very means of annihilation. There are obvious parallels between the dehumanising treatment of the fabricants in ‘An Orison of Sonmi~451’, and the colonial slave characters of the ‘Adam Ewing’ narrative and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. The policy of literal anthropophagy within Nea So Copros has become the natural progression from the traditional bodily exploitation of slavery and labour and the metaphorical cannibalism inherent within colonial and capitalist enterprise.

Biography

Leanne Brown has a BA in English Studies from the University of Stirling and is currently studying for an MLitt in The Gothic Imagination at the same institution. Her research interests lie in contemporary literature, especially the gothic and the fantastic. She is the recipient of Stirling University’s Merit Scholarship for postgraduate study, as well as some undergraduate prizes including the Wells’ Award, the Edward and Thomas Lunt Prize and the John Drakkakis Prize.

Beyond the Sense of an Ending: Time in David Mitchell's Fiction

Diletta De Cristofaro, De Montfort University, England

Time is such a prominent theme in David Mitchell's fiction that a recent special issue of the journal *SubStance* (2015) was entirely devoted to the exploration of his "Labyrinth of Time". This paper focusses on a specific aspect of Mitchell's treatment of temporality: the subversion of the sense of an ending.

In his seminal *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Frank Kermode identifies a correspondence between narrative plots and the apocalyptic conception of history. In both, the end gives meaning to the sequence of events, *revealing* – this being the etymological meaning of *apocalypse* – a concordance between the beginning, the middle, and the end of the sequence itself. Mitchell's novels are haunted by the spectre of the apocalypse: from *Cloud Atlas's* and *The Bone Clocks's* dystopian post-apocalyptic futures, to *number9dream's* closing major earthquake, to the Cold War and the comet looming over *Black Swan Green* and *Ghostwritten*, respectively. Yet all these apocalypses are hardly sense-making: like the final empty chapter of *number9dream*, they signify incompleteness and lack of meaning, subverting the utopian teleology central to the traditional apocalyptic paradigm. By the same token, Mitchell's non-linear, fragmented, iterative, and recursive narrative structures defy the sense of an ending, which is further complicated by the network of intertextual references that links his novels together. Focussing both on Mitchell's representations of apocalypse and on narratological features of his novels, this paper provides an overview of what I argue is Mitchell's essential concern with challenging the sense of an ending to make space for unwritten, non-teleological futures, which are key to agency.

Biography

Diletta De Cristofaro is a Lecturer in English at De Montfort University, having previously taught at Harlaxton College, the University of Lincoln, and the University of Nottingham. She is working on her first monograph, based on her PhD (University of Nottingham, 2015) on time and history in the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel. Her primary specialism is in late twentieth-century and twenty-first-century North American and British fiction, and her research takes place at the intersection of literary studies and philosophy to interrogate the way in which contemporary narratives construct time and history. She is co-founder and vice-chair of the Contemporary Studies Network.

From Multiverse to Mitchellverse Undoing the Apocalyptic Lacuna in David Mitchell's Recent Works

Scott Dimovitz, Regis University, USA

“Anticipating the end of the world is humanity’s oldest pastime.” *Cloud Atlas*, p. 453

In the beginning, David Mitchell’s early postmodern fictions staged the impossibility of rendering the End. In each of his first three novels, Mitchell creates eschatological narratives that lack the moment of destruction: *Ghostwritten* points elliptically to the coming comet that an artificial intelligence, Zookeeper, will allow to destroy the earth; *Number9Dream* ends in a chapter that literally lacks letters, leaving a stark blank page after a quasi-apocalyptic earthquake hits Tokyo; and *Cloud Atlas* frames the event of the apocalypse without ever depicting the events that led to the deadlanding of most of the planet and the obliteration of most of humanity. This deferral of representation points to a postmodern problematic in apocalyptic figuration—a Lacanian lack at the center of representing the real, when that reality is reality’s own undoing. This postmodernist focus should come as no surprise. Mitchell received an M.A. in 1987 from the University of Kent in comparative literature focusing on the postmodern novel, and these first three works often employ the themes and problematic tensions raised by the theories dominant during the rise of continental philosophy in Anglo-American graduate programs during the 1980s and 90s. This essay considers how Mitchell’s more recent works’ development have retroactively extended, transformed, and undermined the significance of the earlier works’ figurations of postmodern apocalypses. *The Bone Clocks* (2014), *Sunken Garden* (2015), and even *From Me Flows What You Call Time* (2016/2114) collapse the unfigurable, indeterminate eschatologies that Mitchell had established in the early works, like a literary quantum superposition collapse in the Schrödinger’s cat thought experiment. At first, it had seemed that the universes of *Ghostwritten*’s noncorpa and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*’s samurai soul vampires had nothing in common. His recent works, however, have denied the individual autonomy of the universes in each narrative, thereby establishing a retroactive Mitchellverse—a shared world that undoes the postmodern indeterminacy of the unfigured apocalyptic moment in favor of a growing mythopoeia, first established in *The Bone Clocks* and crystalized in *Slade House*. As this essay will argue, this collapse continues Mitchell’s further distancing of his works from the postmodern epistemologies they have played with and subverted across his career.

Biography

Scott Dimovitz received his Ph.D. in modern and postmodern literature from New York University, and he is now an Associate Professor of English Literature at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, where he specializes in postmodern literature, psychoanalytic theory, and gender studies. He has written extensively on authors such as David Mitchell, Paul Auster, and Alison Bechdel, and he has published several works on Angela Carter, including *Angela Carter: Surrealist, Psychologist, Moral Pornographer*, which was released in 2016 from Routledge Press.

Close-Reading *Cloud Atlas* with Computers

Martin Paul Eve, Birkbeck, University of London, England

Reading literature with the aid of computational techniques is controversial. For some, digital approaches apparently fetishize the curation of textual archives, lack interpretative rigour (or just, interpretation), and are thoroughly 'neoliberal' in their pursuit of Silicon Valley-esque software-tool production (Allington et al. 2016). For others, the potential benefits of amplifying reading-labour-power through non-consumptive use of book corpora fulfils the dreams of early twentieth-century Russian formalism and yields new, distant ways in which we can consider textual pattern-making (Jockers 2013).

In this paper, I bring a range of computational stylometric approaches to bear on David Mitchell's genre-bursting novel *Cloud Atlas*. In particular, I focus on the micro-linguistic changes between the different generic sections of the novel. Specifically, I demonstrate that it is possible to discern between all-but-one of the novel's chapters purely on the frequency clustering of the six most-frequent words and ignoring all others: "the", "a", "I", "to", "of", and "in". Usually such granularity would be seen as an unconscious feature of an author's writing, but in *Cloud Atlas* Mitchell's stylistic virtuosity goes beyond regular expectations.

To understand how and why this subtlety of language mutation could be so pronounced, I also present the results of various part-of-speech trigram analyses that I have conducted on the text and give an extensive presentation of the linguistic make-up and mimetic language-accuracy of the Pacific Diary section. In so doing, it is my attempt in this paper to begin to understand the link between Mitchell's formalist language approaches and the generic effects that the text so deftly engenders. For, if we want to understand novels, then we need to understand the functions of words and language. And, as Mitchell himself puts it in *Cloud Atlas*: what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?

Biography

Professor Martin Paul Eve is Chair of Literature, Technology and Publishing at Birkbeck, University of London. He is the author of four books: *Pynchon and Philosophy* (Palgrave 2014); *Open Access and the Humanities* (CUP 2014); *Password* (Bloomsbury 2016); and *Literature Against Criticism* (Open Book Publishers 2014). His most recent journal article on the version variants and publishing history of *Cloud Atlas* attracted substantial press attention and featured on the homepage of the *Guardian*.

Intertextuality in David Mitchell's Fiction

Noelle Hewetson, University College Dublin, Ireland

David Mitchell's novels are generically diverse but overall they may be classified as postmodern metafiction and as such they are inherently intertextual (Hutcheon), they are also intertextual in that they are deliberately linked to one another by repeated themes and metaleptic characters to constitute a giant Ubernovel (Mitchell). Even more important is Mitchell's use of 'marked' intertextuality: his novels contain over four hundred specific references to works across a variety of genres: books, films, music, TV series, comics, newspapers and art. These references play an indispensable role in his fiction. They enhance the complexity of his characterisation, historicise his characters by situating them in a specific social and cultural milieu and play an important part in thematic development in his work.

This paper explores Mitchell's range of intertextual allusions. It shows how they contribute to meaning-making in his texts. Examples range from the simple mention of a newspaper that codes the cultural background of a character (Barthes), to the name of a song playing in a scene that suggests a character is pregnant before she realizes it herself, to the extract from William Butler Yeats' poem that thematises a character's dilemma, torn between his ordinary-world demands of responsibility and the desire for escape (Ryan).

Probably the ultimate intertextual reference is the serious transposition (Genette), in which the plot and themes of a novel are transposed to a new setting. In "An Orison of Sonmi-451" (*Cloud Atlas*, 2004), Mitchell takes the basic elements of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), personal oppression, consumerism and ecological destruction and reworks them in a new global diegesis. He also develops *Brave New World's* trope of a character educated by literature. In creating Somni-451 a clone who becomes a fully developed, ethical, human being solely through reading literature Mitchell points to a theme that underlies all of his work: a belief in the importance of literature as positive moral and ethical force.

Biography

I practice as a medical doctor while continuing my research on David Mitchell's work (PhD Candidate, University College Dublin, Ireland). My thesis takes a narratological approach exploring the relationship between form and meaning in his novels. It explores such narrative tropes as metalepsis, coincidence plot, intertextuality and unnatural narrative, analysing how they contribute to his themes of power and interconnectivity in a global world and to the ethics of responsibility that underpins all his work. I have presented a number of papers at the annual meetings of the ISSN and the biannual meetings of the ENN. I have also been accepted as a participant at SINS, the summer school in narrative run by Aarhus University, in 2014 and 2016.

Is it time to Queer David Mitchell?

Courtney Hopf, New York University in London, England

In the corpus of criticism on the work of David Mitchell, there is yet to be a study of what his 'biblioverse' might mean for gender, sexuality, or queer theory. Perhaps this is for good reason; love, when it appears at all in his novels, generally strikes young male narrators with a case of long-distance longing (see *number9dream's* Eiji, *Cloud Atlas's* Frobisher, *Black Swan Green's* Jason, *Jacob de Zoet's* Jacob, et cetera), and though each of these representations is evocative and wrenching in their own way, the sexual desires of straight, white males is hardly the stuff of great theories of otherness.

At the same time, Mitchell is building a literary universe at the centre of which is a hidden war fought by immortal beings, some of whom alternate, from life to life, between male and female bodies. Marinus, arguably a central cog in an expanding and (so far) asymmetrical plot machine, was last seen as the female psychiatrist Dr Iris Marinus-Fenby (*The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House*), and previously appeared as Lucas Marinus in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. In *The Bone Clocks*, we get the first extended description of Marinus' history, including her time as Klara Koskov in 1800's Russia. Such gender swapping and body hopping recalls Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, yet in-text, Mitchell's concerns continually veer away from the implications of gender and sexuality, as opposed to the way in which Woolf makes them central.

Thus, this paper poses the question of what it would mean to queer Mitchell's work, and investigates what inroads might be worth exploring. In addition to looking at other critical attempts to 'queer' white cisgender authors, I will draw upon Marinus, Mitchell's female characters, and his many 'body-hopping' creations to argue that queer readings can provide fruitful avenues of research, particularly when they intersect with theories of globalization and narrative ethics.

Biography

Dr Courtney Hopf is Lecturer in English and Writing at New York University in London, and currently the campus's Acting Assistant Director of Academics. She is the author of 'The Stories We Tell: Discursive Identity Through Narrative Form in *Cloud Atlas*' in *David Mitchell: Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2011) and is currently co-editing *David Mitchell: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* for Bloomsbury (2017), in which she will have a chapter on *Black Swan Green* and disability studies, as well as an interview with Mitchell. She specialises in twentieth century literature and narrative theory, and regularly teaches *Cloud Atlas* in her English classes.

***The Bone Clocks* and the “Lego Novel”**

Chris Koenig-Woodyard, University of Toronto, Canada

In this paper, I read David Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks* as an example of the “Lego novel” and articulate the aesthetics and conventions of the genre and its prevalence in his corpus. In interviews, Mitchell routinely employs Lego as a metaphor for describing his creative process and novelistic practices. When asked, for instance, about the genre of his works— are they “short stories or do you just consider everything as narratives rather than different genres?”—Mitchell comments that “words are made of letters, sentences are made of words, paragraphs are made of sentences, scenes are made of paragraphs, chapters are made of scenes and novels are made of chapters. Lego, novels are built of Lego.” From the moment of inception until the printed and bound book, Mitchell’s creative process is comprised of a combinatory—a Lego-ic—aesthetic.

Lego stands at the heart of one of the key scenes in *The Bone Clocks*: the death of Crispin Hershey, a character who Holly Sykes, the novel’s protagonist, forms a deeply rewarding friendship with. Before his death, Crispin reflects on the practice he and his son have of exchanging Lego mini-figures as “jokey presents” —“I’m up to five: spaceman, surgeon, Santa, Minotaur—bugger. Who am I missing?” Here, Mitchell’s use of Lego infuses the scene of Crispin’s death with a Postmodern, meta-aesthetics, revealing it as a *mise en abyme*.

Lego captures in miniature the methodology of Mitchell’s character development and world building, and the wider issue of his handling of genre. The realistic and fantastic nature of the five mini-figures—spaceman, surgeon, Santa, Minotaur, and pirate—replicate his treatment of the realistic and fantastic poles that characters move between with humans, on the side, and the near-immortals, the Anchorites and Horologists, on the other. Moreover, Lego captures micro- and macro- elements of Mitchell’s writing, from diction choice to genre. The combinatory aesthetics of Lego underscores Mitchell’s maximalist and *über*-novel style (“Basically I write novellas and I line them up and Lego them together to turn them into something bigger”) as well as his world- and character building (as Marco notes of another character in *Ghostwritten*: “Nancy did not get sprung from the Lego box yesterday”).

Biography

Chris Koenig-Woodyard teaches at the University of Toronto, and is co-editor of *Transatlantic Romanticism: An Anthology of American, British, and Canadian Literature, 1767-1867* (Longman); *Sullen Fires across the Atlantic: Essays in British and American Romanticism* (Romantic Circles); is a contributing editor to *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*; and is editor of a special issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* on “Monster Studies”. He has published on British, American and Transatlantic Romanticism, the pedagogy of literary studies, the digital humanities and the gothic, and has an article on David Mitchell, the *bildungsroman* and the Anthropocene forthcoming in *David Mitchell: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Bloomsbury). His current research focuses on Posthumanism and Monster Studies.

Oblique translations in David Mitchell's works

Claire Larssonneur, University Paris 8, France

Translation crops up in Mitchell's work both as a fictional theme and as a personal practice. It is one of the defining features of key characters in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), namely Ogawa Uzaemon and Jacob de Zoet; it is also a crucial part of the plot. In *The Reason I Jump* (2013), a non-fiction project, Mitchell and his wife translated the autobiography of a young Japanese autistic boy, echoing here their own personal experience of autism. Translation appears thus to be closely linked to the theme of (auto)biography which Mitchell has been exploring throughout most of his novels: one may think of *Black Swan Green*, or the Sonmi chapters in *Cloud Atlas*, or recall that *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* is loosely based on the 19th century memoirs of Hendrik Doeff. However the autobiographical theme is always transposed (Jason as an almost-double for Mitchell), translated onto another plane (interviews recorded and archived) or handed over to another narrative voice: the concept of devolved testimony developed by French historian Emmanuel Bouju may help understand Mitchell's strategy of "revoicing the autobiography" and its collaborative process. Translation thus chimes in with Mitchell's interest in the form of narrative relay, and the work of ghostwriters featured in *Number9dream* or *Ghostwritten*. The complex interplay between translation, ghostwriting and narrative, beyond its aesthetic qualities, appears to be endowed both with strong ethical aspirations and historical awareness, rooted in the will to hand over precious knowledge to future generations. Yet translation is also a process fraught with mistakes and mishaps, taking on byways, at times getting lost, and Mitchell also capitalises on this. The obliquity of translation, as underlined by José Saramago in *Historia do Cerco de Lisboa*, and captured in professional techniques such as compensation, transposition, equivalence, adaptation or reduction, provides a very stimulating path both for the writer and the reader, which Mitchell fully draws upon.

Biography

Claire Larssonneur is a Senior Lecturer in Contemporary British Literature and Translation Studies at University Paris 8, and a translator. Her research focuses on contemporary British authors (David Mitchell, Graham Swift, Jeanette Winterson, Ian McEwan, Rana Dasgupta, Ned Beauman) and Digital Humanities. Recent articles include: "Viralité et humanité: la figure du non-corpum chez David Mitchell", *Epistémocritique* (forthcoming 2017); "Archipelagos of Apocalypse: Extreme Islands in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and *The Bone Clocks*", *Textus* (forthcoming 2017); "Weaving myth and history together: illustration as fabrication in David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green* and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*". *Image (&) Narrative* 17.1, 2016, pp. 24-33; "En l'espèce? Variations sur l'humain chez Mitchell et Winterson", *Otrante* n°38, Mutations 1: corps posthumains, 2015, pp. 131-144; and "Revisiting Dejima (Japan): from recollections to fiction in D. Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*", *Substance* vol 44 issue 136, 2015, pp 136-148.

Mapping the Ineffable II: Visual Representations of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

Barry Lewis, University of Sunderland, England

“What wouldn't I give now for a never-changing map of the ever-constant ineffable? To possess, as it were, an atlas of clouds.” (‘The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish’)

David Mitchell is one of the most exciting contemporary British fiction writers thanks to his structural innovativeness. *Cloud Atlas*, in particular, has forced critics to re-evaluate the distinction between novel and short story cycle. It features a sophisticated intertwining of characters, themes and genre in chapter-length narratives that are both self-sufficient and part of an integrated whole. In other words, the novel consists of stand-alone modules that are interdependent. The complex structure of *Cloud Atlas* is often described in terms of a Russian Doll or *Matryoshka* pattern of organisation. In the presentation I gave at the first David Mitchell conference at St Andrews in 2009, however, I considered *Cloud Atlas* as an example of a new form. I claimed that the meshing of multiple narrators and settings with a variety of genre pastiches goes beyond the precedents set by Joyce in *Ulysses* and Calvino in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* . . .

At the second David Mitchell conference in June 2017, I would like to pursue further the analogy suggested by the novel's title. A cloud atlas classifies clouds by type (e.g. cirrus, stratus, cumulus, nimbus). It differs considerably from an atlas of geographical territory, in that the entities it names are not stable but transitory and transformative. Similarly, attempts to chart the elements of David Mitchell's novel must take into account the difficulties of 'mapping the ineffable'. The presentation will offer examples of maps and mapping in the six modular stories that comprise the novel. In particular, I will use visual representations created on two software programmes (*Storyspace* and *StoryView*) to demonstrate the multifarious strands that comprise what Patrick O'Donnell terms the “fractal structuring of *Cloud Atlas*” through which each narrative is “bound to the others by chains of inscription and circumstance having thematic consequences.” (Patrick O'Donnell, *A Temporary Future: The Fiction of David Mitchell* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.81).

Biography

Barry Lewis earned his B.A. in English and Philosophy at King's College, Cambridge, and his doctorate in postmodernist American fiction at the University of Sunderland. A senior lecturer at the University of Sunderland, he also has held posts at the University of Newcastle, the University of Trondheim, and Stavanger College in Norway. Lewis is the author of *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester University Press, 2000) and *My Words Echo Thus: Possessing the Past in Peter Ackroyd* (University of South Carolina Press, 2007). He is the joint-editor with Sebastian Groes of *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Mind the Gap(s): Holly Sykes's Life, the Horologist's War, and the History of the Future in *The Bone Clocks*

Jo Alyson Parker, Saint Joseph's University, USA

David Mitchell has spoken of his various novels, short stories, and libretti as participating in one “sprawling macronovel.” The macronovel’s implied narrative trajectory extends—so far—from seven millennia in the past to several hundred years in the future, with each individual narrative occupying discrete temporal spaces on it. This grand trajectory is necessarily full of gaps—although new additions to the macronovel may fill in some of these. Yet gaps are also integral to Mitchell’s project. The structure of his 2014 novel *The Bone Clocks* is, in fact, built around gaps, and it is these gaps that I wish to explore.

Ostensibly less experimental in its treatment of time than the boomeranging *Cloud Atlas*, *The Bone Clocks* nevertheless features a complex temporal scheme. Critics have discussed it in terms of labyrinthine time and resurrection time and as an allegory of mortality. I propose to discuss it in terms of elided time, the breaks in temporal continuity or ellipses that it so prominently highlights. Although what we might qualifiedly call the main narrative covers Holly Sykes’s lifetime, most of that span is not narrated. Within that null narrative time, however, significant events in Holly’s life play out, a crucial but largely invisible war between two sets of immortals takes place, and the world descends into a dystopic nightmare. Drawing on George Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* and George Mitchell’s *Don’t Even Think About it: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*, I explore how, through its narrative ellipses, *The Bone Clocks* offers a story of complacent disregard as the world spirals into decline. I argue that the novel thereby cautions us to mind the gaps—to pay attention to the “slow violence” of attritional environmental destruction that, to our peril, we so often and so easily ignore.

Biography

A professor of English at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, I teach courses in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel, narrative, and literary theory. My publications include *The Author's Inheritance: Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and the Establishment of the Novel* (1998), *Narrative Form and Chaos Theory in Sterne, Proust, Woolf, and Faulkner* (2007), and essays dealing with narrative and time. With Michael Crawford and Paul Harris, I co-edited *Time and Memory: The Study of Time XII* (2007), and, with Paul Harris and Christian Steineck, I co-edited *Time: Limits and Constraints: The Study of Time XIII* (2010). I am the Managing Editor of *KronoScope: Journal for the Study of Time*.

Postcolonial melancholia in *Black Swan Green*

Ella Reilly, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

In the decade since David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green* was published, critical responses have noted the historical-political settings of the Falklands War and the Cold War but tend to emphasise the latter. Conscious of this, I wish to offer an interpretation of *Black Swan Green* where the imperially-driven Falklands War is taken as the novel's main historical-political referent, rather than the Cold War.

My reading of *Black Swan Green* takes its direction from Paul Gilroy's concept of postcolonial melancholia, where he notes Britain's inability to acknowledge and "mourn" its diminished empire and associated loss of prestige and sureness in its global role. Consequently, British culture dwells in times where Britain was surer in its sense of itself, namely during the Second World War, a spirit which Margaret Thatcher tried to recreate during the Falklands War. With this in mind, I argue that *Black Swan Green* toys with the historical novel's capacity to explore recent memory by registering the postcolonial melancholic state of Britain in the early 1980s, in the moment where Thatcher's Britain crystallises.

Print media captured, reflected and helped to fuel this zeitgeist, as well as cultivating a desire to remain stranded in the moment they evoke, which emerges as a strong motif in *Black Swan Green*. This is illuminated by Jason's archiving impulses during the Falklands War. He is consumed by news of the war, collating clippings and anticipating that that the war will be remembered throughout the world in the same vein as the Second World War. The sense of postcolonial melancholia is further reinforced at the local rather than national level after the war has ended and a Black Swan Green local was killed in it. The presence of the village's local paper is specially noted at the village's 'crisis meeting' over the prospect of a permanent settlement for the traveller community nearby. Thus, paying specific attention to these and other moments generated by Britain's diminished empire in *Black Swan Green*, I suggest, enables an examination of the novel's engagements with the legacies of British imperialism.

Biography

Ella Reilly is an MA student in the School of English, Film, Theatre, and Media Studies at Victoria University of Wellington in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her thesis examines representations of 1980s Britain in contemporary British fiction, specifically looking at novels by David Mitchell, David Peace and Alan Hollinghurst. She completed her BA in English and History and BA (Hons) in English at the University of Auckland.

The Postcolonial David Mitchell

Ranu Samantrai, Indiana University, USA

This essay places *Black Swan Green* in conversation with postcolonial theory to read the novel as invested in the work of decolonization: a text that depicts the world shaped by the West's encounter with the rest, and that grapples with that legacy to sketch a path toward a post-imperial future.

The England of *Black Swan Green* is saturated with violence. 1982, the year when the novel's protagonist, Jason Taylor, transitions from childhood to early manhood, is also the year of the Falklands/Malvinas war. The novel's international and domestic frames overlap to suggest that imperialism is the very stuff of Englishness, inscribed deeply, for instance, in a masculinity fitted for imperial conquest. As apprehended by Jason, that masculinity is embodied in the figure of the bully and writ large in a world structured by bullying. The war is bullying on an international scale; on the domestic front second wave feminism exposes gender inequity to be another kind of bullying. But in a nation long past its imperial prime the masculinity celebrated by empire appears impoverished, fragile, and residual. If the child's access to a stable gender identity is simultaneously induction into the social, then Jason's coming of age is made perilous by the obsolescence of his reference points.

Mitchell is not alone in identifying the 1980s as a time of unraveling. Numerous filmmakers thematize England's de-industrialisation via masculinity in crisis. Mitchell joins them in looking to the aesthetic as an alternate source of male prowess. But because his England is always part of global flows, each character bears the weight of national history. As Jason crafts a viable gendered mode of being, he participates in the creation of a potentially post-imperial public. Gender, then, serves as Mitchell's device for enacting decolonization in the heart of England.

Biography

Ranu Samantrai is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University. She is the author of *AlterNatives: Black Feminism in the Postimperial Nation* (Stanford University Press, 2002) and essays on British and postcolonial literature and culture, and co-editor of *Interdisciplinarity and Social Justice* (SUNY Press 2010).

Of Mitchellverse Omnivores and Common Readers: Empowerment of the Reader in David Mitchell's Fiction

Eva-Maria Schmitz, University of Trier, Germany

Empowerment as the capacity to take control over and shape one's own life is on everybody's lips. Closely linked to notions of power, authority and emancipation, the concept has been enriching postcolonial, feminist and gender studies for years. Although not obvious at first sight, David Mitchell's growing "Über-book" provides ample ground for the analysis of empowerment on different levels, such as narrative structure, the lives of individual protagonists and the stance of readers, the latter of which will be in the focus of this paper. In the semester from Oct 2016 – Feb 2017, I will explore *Black Swan Green*, *Cloud Atlas* and *Slade House* with college students in a seminar on "David Mitchell's Fictional Universe". Our discussions of the novels in context will not only address the effects of form and content, but also in how far the narratives interact with us as readers. Trying to come to terms with how Mitchell's novels may achieve a feeling of empowerment in the reader, possible questions could include: Do we perceive Jason Taylor's attempts at coming of age in *Black Swan Green* as empowering experiences? Which food for thought does *Cloud Atlas* leave us with? Why are some of us haunted by its intensity while others consider it unreadable? Which effects do *Slade House's* origin as a Twitter short story and its anxious fifth and final character tweeting as "I_Bombadil" in the weeks prior to publication have on us? Does tracing and connecting the bits and pieces of Mitchell's fictional universe work as positive reinforcement? Do we, in fact, become addicted to reading more, wanting to become masters of interconnection? Drawing on reader-response criticism and actual student responses, I will present my work-in-progress on why and how readers may, or may not, feel empowered when reading David Mitchell's works.

Biographical note

Eva-Maria Schmitz is a lecturer and PhD student in the Department of English Studies at the University of Trier, Germany. Her research and teaching interests include David Mitchell, literature in the 21st century, utopian and dystopian/speculative fiction and philosophy in literature. She is currently working on a PhD thesis investigating empowerment in the fiction of David Mitchell, looking at how the narratives themselves, individual protagonists and readers are empowered in different ways. She has presented on Mitchell's fiction in Trier, Lincoln and Maribor and is currently organising a conference on "Empowering Contemporary Fiction", which will take place in Trier in June 2017 (www.ecf-2017.com).

**“Some magic is normality”:
Fantastical Cosmopolitanism in David Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks***

Kristian Shaw, University of Lincoln, England

David Mitchell’s most recent novel, *The Bone Clocks* (2015), seemingly echoes the historical struggles of *Cloud Atlas* (2004) in pitting active ethical agency against cannibalistic rapaciousness. And yet, the trans-universal war between a band of peaceful ‘Horologists’ and predatory ‘soul-decanter’ demonstrates how fantasy fiction offers alternative perspectives not only for socio-cultural models of diversity and difference, but for cosmopolitical power struggles being played out at supranational levels.

As David Gooderham points out, ‘fantasy is a metaphorical mode’ that describes ‘not so much a collection of marvels which divert readers from ordinary concerns, but a [...] fruitful way of speaking about just these concerns’ (Gooderham 1995, 173). With this in mind, *The Bone Clocks* opens up subversive spaces through which to think about threats facing the twenty-first century, from migration and xenophobic nationalism to ecological degradation and planetary destruction. In attempting to “redraw what is possible” (Mitchell 2015) through the interrelationships of human and supernatural entities, the novel gestures towards fantasy literature’s unique capacity to extend future discussions of cosmopolitanism in new and innovative directions.

As Nowicka and Ravisco argue, cosmopolitanism involves an engagement ‘with the otherness of the other and the oneness of the world [...] and the possibility of a more just world order’ (Nowicka & Ravisco 2009, 2). While the presence of cosmopolitan theory has received much critical attention in Mitchell’s earlier fiction, this paper will suggest that the decidedly antinomious approach and speculative nature of *The Bone Clocks* is important in demonstrating the concept’s continuing capacity to serve as a critically-utopian form of imaginative cultural protestation and social polemic. The paper will also discuss the consistent use of fantasy and science-fiction in Mitchell’s body of work to highlight the “bizarre act of self-mutilation” (Mitchell 2015) in English studies to separate these genres from the canon of ‘serious’ literature.

Biography

Kristian Shaw is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Lincoln. He released his first monograph with Palgrave in 2016 entitled *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-First Century Fiction* funded by the AHRC and has recently completed a chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to British Postmodern Fiction*. He is currently starting his second monograph entitled *Contemporary Immigrant Fictions* and is working on a Leverhulme funded project on Spatial Justice. He serves as a reader and editor for *C21 Literature* journal and is contributor for Oxford Journals’ Year’s Work in English Studies for Fiction 2000-present.

**In Praise of Shades: Time, Space and Subjectivity in
*The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet***

William Stephenson, University of Chester, England

Taking its title from Junichiro Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*, this paper aims to trace how the spaces of David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* are constructed so that absent people or objects are made to appear present, or vice versa, creating an uncanny relationship between the familiar and the strange. This relationship penetrates inner space; the subjectivities of Mitchell's characters are rendered complex by fractal, evolving patterns of (mis-)recognition and estrangement, through whose action the known is revealed as problematic and fractured by repression and erasure, and the unknown is shown to be intimately connected to the subject. I will conclude that Mitchell's novel offers complex, fractal subjective spaces in which the problem of contemporary subjectivity in a globalized world can be successfully dramatized, creating a subtle social and political critique.

Biography

William Stephenson is a Reader in English at the University of Chester. He is author of *Gonzo Republic: Hunter S. Thompson's America* (Continuum, 2011) and numerous articles on contemporary fiction including contributions to *David Mitchell: Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2011) and the forthcoming *David Mitchell: Contemporary Critical Interpretations* (Bloomsbury, 2017). His poetry collections are *Rain Dancers in the Data Cloud* (Templar, 2012), *Source Code* (Ravenglass, 2013) and *Travellers and Avatars* (Live Canon, forthcoming 2017).

"The Soul is a Verb": The Ghost of Descartes in the Novels of David Mitchell

Rachael Sumner, State Higher Vocational School in Racibórz, Poland

"The soul is a verb...not a noun." So states Marinus in David Mitchell's fifth novel, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. Of all Mitchell's characters, Marinus is perhaps the truest embodiment of that very concept: a ghost in the machine. Encountered here as physician to a Dutch trading post on a Japanese island, he later appears in *The Bone Clocks* as a Spanish surgeon, a Russian savant and a Chinese psychiatrist: a soul with no fixed abode, both object and agent of its own history. Above all, a soul which exists not as essence but as act, both the manifestation of René Descartes' mind/body split and a living, walking, talking critique of that very concept.

Whether as malign spirit or as phantom of the Enlightenment, René Descartes continues to haunt the literature and cinematography of the twenty-first century. From postmodernist scepticism to mind/body rifts in science fiction films such as *The Matrix* or *Inception*, Descartes' Cogito lies behind a perceived division between human consciousness and the physical world surrounding it. That same dynamic re-emerges in David Mitchell's novels in the form of trans-migratory souls or 'atemporals' who inhabit 'host' bodies: the human form a mere transport option for its time-travelling occupant. Yet, while Descartes summons the idea of mind through the logic of the Cogito, linking it in essence to the Divine as a product of pure reason, Mitchell's atemporals often prove fallible, world-weary and ultimately mortal. This paper will explore the ways in which Cartesian dualism – a lynchpin of the Western humanist project – is stretched to its cultural limits in the shifting, globalised realities of novels such as *Ghostwritten* and *The Bone Clocks*.

Biography

Rachael Sumner studied English and European literatures at the University of Essex before completing an MA in twentieth century British and American literature at the University of York. She has lived in Poland since 2003 and lectures on British and American culture at the State Higher Vocational School in Racibórz. In 2013 she completed her doctorate at the University of Opole, writing on the application of postcolonial theory to Irish literature. Rachael's main areas of academic interest concern contemporary British literature, and postcolonial literature and theory.

Stammering as dis/ability in *Black Swan Green*

Claire Tupling, University of Derby, England

Black Swan Green can be used to locate dysfluency, or stammering, within the locus of dis/ability studies. In popular culture stammering is rarely represented as a dis/ability, and is more likely reduced to a storytelling device signifying a character's nervousness, dangerousness or moral weakness. Similarly, stammering has also been employed as a comic device, the humour resting on the stammerer's inability to successfully finish the word they are trying to say, while simultaneously testing a listener's patience. This paper will consider the ways in which *Black Swan Green*, a semi-autobiographical novel, offers the reader an alternative way of experiencing and understanding stammering. *Hangman*, described by the author as a "sort of shady homunculus", is the personification of 13 year old Jason Taylor's stammer. Expressed in the text as the words that *Hangman* suppresses, we see evidence of an *interiorised* stammer, where the outward signs of stammering, such as repetition, are less evident as the person who stammers substitutes the challenging words for ones of a similar meaning but easier to say, thereby concealing (to some extent) the stammer. The paper draws on St. Pierre (2012) to discuss three ways in which we can read Jason's stammer as dialogic. Firstly, the stammer is constructed by both Jason and the listener/reader, for example in reactions such as facial expressions. Secondly, the stammer is embodied, as Jason describes *Hangman's* attempt to strangle his words. Finally, the stammer is liminal. It is both a *disability* as well as revealing Jason's *ability* with language. Deleuze's (1997) work on stuttering is useful in considering this, whilst Mitchell's portrayal of stammering may present a challenge to Deleuze. The liminality of Jason's stammer is also revealed in his therapist's advice to arrive at an accommodation with his stammer. The paper considers the role of *Black Swan Green* in promoting a positive, realistic representation of stammering.

References

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St. Pierre, J. (2012) 'The Construction of the Disabled Speaker: Locating Stuttering in Disability Studies', *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 1(3), pp. 1–21.

Biography

I am a Sociologist and am currently senior lecturer in education at the University of Derby. My work is mainly focused on educational inequalities. In working with, mainly, post-graduate students I am keen to draw on a variety of everyday discourses in encouraging the problematisation of everyday assumptions about education, frequently drawing on popular culture to facilitate this. My own stammer provoked my interest in the work of David Mitchell, and *Black Swan Green* specifically.

Slow Time Zones

Evening reading: David Mitchell and Paul Harris, Loyola Marymount University, USA

In a modular 60-minute session, David Mitchell and Paul Harris explore different modes of inhabiting slow time. Mitchell will treat the audience to three unpublished short stories featuring familiar characters, in which the experience of time is stretched in different ways. Harris's presents work on "Slow Time Zones," gardens which express a philosophy and poetics of slow time.

Biographies

Award-winning writer David Mitchell is the author of seven novels (*Ghostwritten*, *number9dream*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Black Swan Green*, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, *The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House*), two libretti for the operas *Wake* and *Sunken Garden*, and over twenty short stories. His work has been shortlisted twice for the Booker Prize, and longlisted four times; his awards include the John Llewellyn Rhys, Geoffrey Faber Memorial and South Bank Show Literature Prizes. He has also previously been chosen as one of *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists – and named as one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time*.

Paul Harris is Professor of English at Loyola Marymount University, where he teaches interdisciplinary courses on themes such as Wonder, Chaos, Time, and Nothing. His scholarly interests include the interdisciplinary study of time, literary theory, constraint-based writing, and contemporary literature. He is co-editor of *Substance* and edited a special issue of the journal dedicated to David Mitchell's fiction. His current projects include "Slow LMU," an initiative at his university for which he has installed "Slow Time Zones" in collaboration with artist Richard Turner, and a collaboration with Richard Turner and Adam Nocek on "slowness" installations at Arizona State University.