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David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas: “Revolutionary or Gimmicky?”

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For Eva, Henry and Justin

Abstract

This thesis will examine David Mitchell's use of postmodern narrative structures and strategies in Cloud Atlas and how these relate to his overtly political concerns regarding relations of power between individuals and between factions. This will involve a discussion of debates surrounding the political efficacy of postmodern narrative forms.

I will consider Mitchell's prolific use of intertextual and intratextual allusion and his mimicry of a wide range of narrative modes and genres. These techniques, along with the complex structural iterations in the novel and the 'recurrence' of characters between its parts, appear to reinforce a thematic concern with the interconnectedness — indeed, the repetition — of human activity, through time and a fatalistic conception of being that draws on two central Nietzschean notions, eternal recurrence and the will to power. The vision of humanity and human relations of power that is expressed within Cloud Atlas is open to extended analysis in Foucauldian terms.

Against this apparently nihilistic backdrop, Mitchell appears to promote a notion of (albeit limited) individual agency and the capacity for creative narration and reinterpretation of the past as a means to devise new 'truths' and explore new 'meanings' for the present and the future. I will explore the ways in which Mitchell's metafictional self-reflexivity (and that of his protagonists), offers a vision of hope and political agency that counters the apparent (Nietzschean) fatalism of the novel.

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Introduction

David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas is a novel of tremendous scope and imagination. It comprises of six interconnected narratives that weave together to create a story covering vastly discrepant times, geographies, ethnicities, genders and philosophical beliefs thus offering a 'common' picture of humanity across distance and history. Underpinning the novel are two key theories articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche: eternal recurrence and the will to power. In an article in The Guardian Mitchell claims to have been "besotted by the philosopher's theory of the will to power" (Mitchell "Genesis" 1). Utilising often overt Nietzschean discourse, and alluding to theories developed by Michel Foucault, Mitchell examines the predatory nature of humans and the desire of both individuals and factions to consolidate and accumulate power regardless of the cost. As an exposé of the will to power across time, the novel examines some of the most atrocious crimes that sections of humankind have committed in order to maintain and increase their hold on power. It encompasses issues as diverse as colonisation and the enslavement of indigenous people; a predatory and mutually destructive personal relationship; assassinations that are sanctioned by the C.E.O. of a major multi-national corporation; the abuses of scientific and technological advances devoid of any perceivable ethical or moral standpoint; and portrays a 'potential' futuristic dystopia. In each narrative Mitchell interrogates the predatory nature of the will to power; a will that Nietzsche claimed underpinned human existence. It is my contention that Mitchell refuses to accept this nihilistic viewpoint and its seemingly inevitable end, the mass destruction of the human race. Instead, as this thesis argues, Mitchell posits the possibility for

individuals to imagine and create alternate 'meanings' and 'truths' which offer the potential to create not only a different 'present' but also an alternative 'future' by showing the reader not only the possibility but also the *necessity* of reinterpreting the 'meaning' of the past and the present — and so the future.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first will outline the form and structure of Cloud Atlas discussing its narrative complexities, Mitchell's striking use of different genres and the ways in which he exploits and subverts generic conventions to interrogate the theories of eternal recurrence and the will to power. The second chapter offers an exploration of Nietzsche's proposition of the will to power. Here I examine how Mitchell explores the operation of the basic drive for power from the mid-nineteenth century to a post-apocalyptic future, thereby investigating the predatory nature of humans. The time frame of the novel suggests the persistence of human beings' hunger and desire for the accrual of power across time: it explores this in acts of colonisation, personal or familial relationships, cannibalism and varying levels of corruption.

The third chapter elaborates on Mitchell's use of postmodern narrative structures, especially his use of metafictional strategies and their relationship to what I argue is his vision of political ethics. I suggest that Mitchell's use of postmodern metafictional narrative techniques foregrounds the possibility of narrating alternative realities and of new ways of interpreting the world (and ourselves). At the same time, metafiction draws attention to the constructedness of apparent 'reality' and 'truth'. Mitchell suggests that despite the many determined aspects of our lives we possess a limited capacity to determine our existence through choice and reinterpretation. In this way

one may create new and different 'meanings' and 'truths'. Metafiction invites reader (and textual) self-reflexivity that Mitchell uses to counter the nihilism inherent in Nietzsche's deterministic philosophy and instead offers a vision of hope that counters the apparent fatalism of the novel. It suggests, in short, the limited capacity of individuals to become agents in their own self-narratives. In Foucauldian terms, there is some ability for 'choice' within the structures that inform and shape our world — or rather our knowledge and understanding of it.

Fundamentally, then, the thesis argues for the capability and capacity of a postmodern novel to carry and communicate political significance. It is my contention that David Mitchell utilises the strategies of postmodern fiction — often dismissed as mere 'play' — to serve a serious political end. Through the exploitation of genre and generic expectation, by exposing the 'fictionality' of history and by foregrounding what Toni Morrison calls 'rememory' he endeavours to confront and question convention and complacency. He carefully — and brilliantly — exposes the potential cost to humanity of 'forgetting' and failing to remember the past and its lessons for the future. Cloud Atlas enunciates a political vision in which relations of power co-exist alongside the potential for change through retrospective and recontextualised interpretation.

Chapter One

A 'sextet for overlapping soloists': piano, clarinet, 'cello, flute, oboe and violin, each in its own language of key, scale and colour. In the 1st set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the 2nd, each interruption is recontinued, in order. Revolutionary or gimmicky?

(Mitchell Cloud Atlas 463).

i) The composition of Cloud Atlas

David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas parallels the "Cloud Atlas Sextet" composed by the young musical composer of Mitchell's creation, Robert Frobisher. Like the six major protagonists of the six stories created by Mitchell, each instrument in Frobisher's magnum opus introduces a theme, or motif, that together amalgamate to create a work of art in which each is inextricably entwined with the other and, without each theme, the piece of music, or in this case the narrative, would be incomplete, unfinished. While each story can be read independently, each is also connected to and invites reinterpretation of the preceding narrative. Each story is startlingly different and unique despite repeated thematic concerns. The genres of each vary markedly as does the narrative method employed: journal entries written in the nineteenth century while on a voyage back from the Pacific, a set of letters written to a lover, a 'cheap airport-thriller' chock-a-block with 'goodies' fighting 'baddies' in an attempt to prevent a potential nuclear catastrophe at a nuclear plant, a picaresque written as a memoir, an interview between a State archivist and a convicted traitor, and the spoken history of a man living in a futuristic dystopia. Settings range from a nineteenth century colonial voyage to the Pacific Islands by a young American notary, to a chateau located in rural Belgium sandwiched

sometime between the two World Wars, to Reagan's America with its rise in corporate capitalism, to a nursing home for the elderly set in present-day Hull, to a consumerist society in Nea So Copros (geographically located in what we today call Korea) and finally a post-apocalyptic tribal society in Hawaii.

From beginning to end, David Mitchell constructs a "roller coaster" narrative structure around the concept of the Russian doll, or the *matrioshka*, so that each individual story forms the container for the following story, with the central character reading or viewing the story that came before (Byatt). The reader is plunged into extremes of emotions, experiencing 'dips' and 'swerves' and occasional red-herrings, and flung headlong into disorientating contexts and experiences as she or he tries to impose sense and meaning on to the pages of the book. The *matrioshka* structure is aligned with one of the predominant themes evident throughout the pages of Cloud Atlas, the nature of predation. Each novella is swallowed and "eaten by its successor", only to be "regurgitated by the same" when each story is told to completion in the second half of the novel (Mitchell "Genesis" 1). David Mitchell cites Italo Calvino's If on a Winter's Night a Traveller as the inspiration behind his use of this structure (Mitchell "Genesis" 1). However, instead of leaving each narrative incomplete as Calvino did, Mitchell resolves each novella in its turn through the course of the novel. Only one narrative, the sixth, is told to completion as a whole unit. This narrative, "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After", is at the centre of the work and acts as a 'mirror' from which point each story is then "regurgitated" by its successor and told to completion in turn (Mitchell "Genesis" 1). The narrative of Cloud Atlas is thus constructed as ABCDEFEDBCA, with each letter representing one (or part of

one) of the novellas. Not only does this structure operate to both underline and highlight the major theme of predation that so strongly permeates and infuses every aspect of Cloud Atlas, it also serves to introduce the thought of nineteenth century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, on eternal recurrence and his theory of the will to power.

Eternal recurrence is the name Nietzsche gave to his belief that the universe is constantly recurring and will continue to recur, in a self-similar form, an infinite number of times. In accordance with Nietzsche's notion that time is viewed as cyclical rather than linear, and in line with the idea of eternal recurrence, Mitchell's narrative ends where it began, in the Pacific Ocean with Adam Ewing. The Russian doll narrative structure further emphasises this notion through the key proposition it explores, that, as the young nuclear scientist Isaac Sachs writes into his notebook shortly before his assassination, there is just "[o]ne model of time: an infinite matrioshka doll of painted moments, each 'shell' (the present) is encased inside a nest of 'shells' (previous presents) I call the future but which we perceive as the virtual future" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 409). Sachs elaborates further upon this idea to suggest that each and every individual exists for a brief moment inside a series of shells (like a Russian doll) of virtual pasts, one of which is the real past, and another of virtual futures, one of which is the real future (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 409). This idea is suggested in the title of the narrative in which Sachs is a protagonist: "Half-lives — The First Luisa Rey Mystery". "Letters from Zedelghem" (the second narrative) is suggested as the 'real' past for Luisa Rey and "An Orison of Somni ~451" is ostensibly her 'real' future. The interrelation between the three narratives is suggested through the

comet shaped birthmark each bears and a sense of déjà vu — a memory of the ‘past’ — that haunts both Luisa and Somni. When Luisa leaves a hotel, after an urgent warning from Sachs to do so, she remembers “*Robert Frobisher doing a dine and dash from another hotel*” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 142; italics original).

When Somni and Hae-Joo Im are ‘on the run’ from Unanimity, the car they are in drives off the road she says “I remember the drop: it shook free an earlier memory of blackness, inertia, gravity, of being trapped in another ford; I could not find its source in my own memories” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 330). In fact, this memory belongs to Luisa Rey and relates to the incident in which the hired-assassin Bill Smoke successfully drives her off the road in an attempt to kill her (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 144).

What is alluded to in the above examples of déjà vu is Sachs proposition of the inter-relation between the past, the present and the future, and the notion that a definitive and concrete now is in fact merely a construct. This idea is also implied in the words of Zachry, the protagonist from the central narrative, as he completes his yarn: “[s]ouls cross ages like clouds cross skies, an’ tho’ a cloud’s shape nor hue nor size don’t stay the same it’s still a cloud an’ so is a soul. Who can say where the cloud’s blowed from or who the soul’ll be ‘morrow?” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 324). Regardless of this uncertainty, what remains constant throughout is the regular rhythm of time and the certainty that people will be born, will live and will die. It is my contention that unlike Nietzsche, Mitchell asserts a belief in the power of (self) creativity, and the ability of individuals to make informed choices, in full awareness of the past, the present and the possibilities a choice made today holds for the future; he advances the notion

that “every possible moment is contained in this moment, regressing on to infinity” (Sinclair). So, in opposition to Nietzsche, Mitchell promotes (a degree of) free will rather than the conception of a life that is wholly determined by the repetition of what has already occurred.

Each protagonist in the six stories is marked by a comet-shaped birthmark that links them (and as a result their stories) in much the same way as a musical motif is used by composers to link each instrument as it echoes the threads and the weave of a score. The recurrence of the distinctive birthmark also both draws attention to and, at the same time, calls in to question, Nietzsche’s idea of eternal recurrence: are the protagonists different reincarnations of the same soul, different forms of the same cloud molecules? Mitchell refutes the idea that the protagonists are destined to endlessly repeat actions and events already scripted and instead the characters are shown to have the (albeit limited) capacity to choose and therefore to alter outcomes. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Nietzsche’s idea of eternal recurrence stresses that ‘we’ (the human race), need to remember the past and the interrelatedness of all people. Accordingly, Nietzsche advocates that with this awareness and consciousness of the importance of human inter-relationships decisions should never be made in isolation or with ignorance of the potential consequences that may result in the future. However, Cloud Atlas is a novel that displays, and conveys, the power inherent in *individual* choice. In this respect it challenges the nihilism inherent in Nietzsche’s conception of eternal recurrence and ends on a note of hope that stresses the positive potential of individual decisions.

Cloud Atlas opens in the Pacific Islands where a young and naïve American notary, Adam Ewing, is sailing aboard the ship *Prophetess* en-route to America. His constant companion is his diary, the entries in which form the narrative: “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”. Throughout the duration of his voyage Ewing encounters many detestable characters and situations: he is led to believe that parasites are ravaging his brain as the result of a bogus diagnosis by a doctor who intends to slowly kill him by administering ‘remedial’ drugs, rescues the last living member of the Moriori people, and is then in turn rescued by the same. The second story of the sextet, “Letters from Zedelghem”, tells the tale of the young, ambitious and amoral Robert Frobisher who installs himself at Chateau Zedelghem in Belgium, in the “post of amanuensis” to the syphilitic Vyvyan Ayr, a great composer who, having been left blind due to his debilitating illness, is unable to notate the compositions that rage in his great mind (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 50). The two men embark on a mutually destructive and parasitic relationship of the most detestable kind as each feeds their respective vanity and narcissistic ego from the other. These two stories are linked through Frobisher’s discovery, and subsequent reading of the first half of Ewing’s journal in the Zedelghem library as he is looking for precious and priceless books to ‘on-sell’ to a notorious black-market dealer.

The narrative of “Letters from Zedelghem” is epistolary, consisting of Frobisher’s letters to “the true love of his life” Rufus Sixsmith (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 489). A much older Sixsmith then appears as a whistle-blowing nuclear scientist in the third story: “Half-lives — The First Luisa Rey Mystery”. Luisa Rey is a young journalist who, after her chance meeting with Sixsmith in an elevator, attempts

to unearth the 'truth' as to just what is occurring at a soon-to-be-opened nuclear power station, the HYDRA-Zero reactor on Swanekke Island. In the course of the two parts of the narrative Luisa acquires all of Frobisher's letters to Sixsmith and, in addition, a rare gramophone recording of Frobisher's final composition the "Cloud Atlas Sextet".

In the fourth story, Timothy Cavendish, a vanity publisher, is sent the manuscript of "Half-lives — The First Luisa Rey Mystery", a mystery-thriller, by its author Hilary V. Hush. It is only by chance that he starts reading the script while traveling north from London. Tricked by his scheming brother, Cavendish is locked away in Aurora House, a nursing home for the elderly in Hull where he is subjected to the worst humiliations of old age imaginable. He is drugged into believing that he is truly incapacitated, stripped of self-respect and dignity, though as a vanity publisher trading in narcissistic fancies it is questionable as to just how many of these honorable qualities he possessed in the first place.

In the penultimate story, "An Orison of Somni ~451", Somni~451 is a fabricant clone designed and created to the exact specifications of a 'Somni' designed to work as a server at Papa Song Corp, a takeaway restaurant in a futuristic city called Nea So Copros. This, we learn, is geographically situated in what is known today as Korea. This society derives its wealth from the "Enrichment laws", a set of laws that regulate the consumer culture to such an extent that "consumers have to spend a fixed quota of dollars each month", depending on the particular consumer strata to which they belong; "[h]oarding is an anti-corporatic crime" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 237). As a fabricant clone Somni~451 "imbibe[s] Soap" a food source that contains "amnesiads and soporifix" which suppress and

condition all of the fabricants 'thinking', or thought processes (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 205). After Somni's remarkable 'ascension' from slave clone to a thinking and questioning being (an anti-corporatic event), she is arrested by government forces as an insurgent, and it is her 'last request', before she is put to death, to watch the end of an old movie she had once watched the first half of, called "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish" (the first part of this forms the previous story). Somni's narrative is structured as an interview between Somni and an archivist for the State.

In the sixth story, "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After", the only story that is told to completion, Somni features as the (imagined) pagan goddess of the Valley Tribes, a post-apocalyptic people who exist in a primitive way following 'the Fall' of the modern, consumer world (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 286). Her image is preserved inside an orison, "a silv'ry egg" that holds inside it a hologram of the fabricant's recorded testimony to the State archivist (the first part of which we have read in the preceding story) (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 276). As Meronym explains to Zachry, "[a]n orison is a brain an' a window an' it's a mem'ry [...] *Its window lets you speak to other orisons in the far-far. Its mem'ry lets you see what orisons in the past see'n' heard, an' keep what my orison sees'n'hears safe from f'gettin'*" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 290; italics original). The orison belongs to the Prescients, a people who continue to possess knowledge of scientific advancement and social history from before 'the Fall'. The Prescients visit the Valley Tribes "twice a year" in their "Great Ship" to barter with Zachry's tribe (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 259). Zachry's narrative concerns the time when one of the Prescients, a woman called Meronym, stays with Zachry's family. Zachry is

charged with helping Meronym reach the ruins of an observatory, from the time before 'the Fall', perched high on the island of Mauna Kea. Following the conclusion of the sixth and central story, the five part stories we have read are then told to completion in reverse order so that Cloud Atlas finishes where it began, in the Pacific with Adam Ewing.

As noted, "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing" follows the sea-journey of the young titular San Franciscan notary through the Chatham Islands and finally to Hawaii. Ewing experiences and witnesses many of the predatory elements Mitchell explores throughout the novel: from the relentless sodomy of a cabin boy, which ends in the young boy's suicide, to the enslavement and virtual genocide of the indigenous people of the Chatham Islands, the Moriori, at the hands of the invading New Zealand Maori, and the destructive intervention of the Christian missionaries in the Pacific. Ewing is led to believe he has a parasite feeding on his brain, when in reality the actual parasite, the shipboard doctor, is feeding Ewing morphine in an attempt to murder him and to purloin the documents of substantial wealth that Dr Goose believes Ewing to be in possession of (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 10).

Like Hermann Melville's Billy Budd, Adam is naïve and, even more importantly, he is earnestly good, in the innocent biblical way of Adam, son of God. Evil is ever present (and serpent-like) in all of Ewing's encounters, whether it is with the "garter-snakes" aboard the *Prophetess* or Doctor Goose's diagnosis of the 'worm'-like parasites eating Ewing's brain. A missionary called Horrox explains to Ewing, supposedly a relatively enlightened son of the American Revolution, his idea of "God's ladder of civilization" that will extinguish those "lesser" races that

are unable to join the “mercantalism, diplomacy & colonialism” that mark European progress (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 507). At the end of the novel, Ewing comments on these ‘natural’ ideas of dominance as “the entropy written within our nature” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 528). He has saved the life of the last Moriori tribesman, Autua, whose peaceful family was destroyed by invading Maori warriors. Autua in turn saves Ewing from the malignant Doctor Goose. In this way, Mitchell posits individual acts of heroism and rescue across the narrative web he weaves, as he does in the other stories. With Adam Ewing pondering the future of the human race somewhere in the Pacific, he determines that on his return to America he will make his life one of honour and readies himself to become an abolitionist. He chooses to write a page for history, to liberate indentured slaves.

Throughout the novel, Mitchell emphasises just how crucial free will, and the choices and decisions one makes, are in determining the path of one’s life (the process of self-making), and the manner in which one lives that life. So, for example, Ewing chooses to save Autua from slavery, and Autua subsequently rescues Ewing from death. Meronym chooses to take Zachry from Big Isle, to save his life, albeit against the instructions of her superiors. In contrast, Frobisher chooses to ignore Sixsmith’s attempt to save Frobisher from himself and he commits suicide as a result. Lester Rey chooses to save the life of Joe Napier who then saves the life of Lester’s daughter Luisa. Similarly, Luisa Rey’s chance encounter with Rufus Sixsmith in the lift changes the course of her life. As a result of her meeting she makes a series of overt decisions in her attempt to uncover the ‘truth’ behind the HYDRA-Zero reactor, suggesting how the

individual, when confronted with a series of options, at least in part, determines the path of his or her life. In this respect, one's self-narrative does not lie wholly in the hands of the gods, or to some other external agency or social determinant. Arguably, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, the point of not just the Luisa Rey narrative, but Cloud Atlas as a whole, is that while an outcome may appear to be 'fated' (for example, the world may be heading towards a 'Fall' of catastrophic proportions), the path towards that *potential* outcome is not. Individual decisions and choices have the potential to create different stories with different endings. There is always will and the capacity for each individual to partially determine their particular path through life. Luisa Rey's choice to uncover the criminal activities occurring at the nuclear power plant on Swannekke Island is an individual choice made in accordance with her personal set of values and desire to expose the potential nuclear catastrophe and the assassinations that had been committed in order to safeguard the plant's future. Similarly, in other narratives, the choices that are made are particular to each individual. Mitchell's protagonists demonstrate that their 'choice' is often governed by their understanding and interpretation of their individual 'truth'. In the narratives of Cloud Atlas individuals make choices which alter the course of their life's experience. These are often choices counter to those advocated by those in power or articulated in prevailing discourses of knowledge. They are shown to be able to uncover and create their own version of 'truths' and make (limited) choices in accordance with them. As if emphasising this point, when the archivist asks Somni to tell her "version of the truth", she tells him that "[n]o other version of the truth has ever mattered" to her (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 187).

Luisa Rey's name alludes to Thornton Wilder's The Bridge of San Luis Rey, a novel about several interrelated people who die when the suspension bridge they are all standing on in Peru collapses, and of the events that led each person to be standing on the bridge at that same moment. Wilder asks the reader to consider whether there *is* a direction and meaning to our lives that is determined by forces that exist outside of an individual's own will, such as an omnipotent and omniscient agency that predetermines and directs human existence. In the course of the Luisa Rey story, Luisa describes to Sixsmith an interview she once conducted with film director Alfred Hitchcock, director of the classic cult-horror film Psycho, in which she "put it to the great man, the key to fictitious terror is partition or containment! So long as the Bates Motel [the setting for Hitchcock's movie Psycho] is sealed off from our world, we want to peer in, like at a scorpion enclosure. But a film that shows the world is a Bates Motel, well that's ... the stuff of Buchloe, dystopia, depression" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 95). This idea of separation from a portrayed 'reality' allows the reader, or in the case the viewer, to recognise their role as mere spectator and respond to Psycho from a (albeit disturbed) distance. Mitchell, however, disallows his reader the distance of spectatorship and instead the reader is encouraged to recognise their active role in imposing an individual interpretation on events and their construction of the story's 'meaning'. This occurs through the recognition of the text as a constructed artifact rather than mimetic representation as will be discussed in Chapter Three. In Cloud Atlas Mitchell reiterates the question of free will and determinism posed by Wilder, extending it to also exploit the idea of partition and containment, as discussed by Luisa when recounting her interview with Hitchcock. This encourages the reader to be aware of the distance between the

portrayed acts about which they read and the actual dramas and horrors Mitchell (and Wilder and Hitchcock) describes. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, this allows the reader to 'peer in' and 'see' everything that happens, but in such a way that what is witnessed is supplemented by 'footnotes' that take the form of additional information about both characters and events enabling the reader a wider scope for (re)interpretation than that available to the protagonists in each story.

As discussed, Mitchell also creates containers, or 'shells' for his stories, embedding each in the one that follows in the manner of a Russian doll, so that their relationship is determined through the individual 'choice' of each protagonist to read or view the story that has gone before — or perhaps other stories they have read. What is crucial is the emphasis on the interrelatedness of texts and their meanings, how one impacts on others: a later reading can result in the revision of an earlier text; or a text once read can influence another read in the future. As Frobisher declares at the end of his letters, shortly before his suicide, "*Sunt lacrimæ rerum*", tears for things (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 490; italics original); he is overcome by a set of similar and desperate feelings surrounding the futility and waste of human life that Aeneas experienced when viewing the Temple at Carthage in The Aeneid (Virgil 20). This idea is turned on its head, via allusive misquotation, in the second half of the Somni story when on the eve of Somni and Hae-Joo Im's visit to Papa Song's golden ark that is ostensibly to take the twelve-starred fabricants to Xultation, Hae Joo receives a code-line "THESE ARE THE TEARS OF THINGS" and the next day Somni witnesses for herself the futility of life when, at the end of an existence of servitude, that life only amounts

to waste (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 354; capitalisation original). The essence of human experience, it is suggested, is defined by the ever-present burden of frailty and suffering that humans have to bear: as Frobisher writes, “[a]nticipating the end of the world is humanity’s oldest pastime” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 471). However, Mitchell suggests that ‘the end’ is governed through the conscious decisions made by individuals who determine the path to it, not by predetermined fate. Interrelated choices made by individuals have far-reaching ramifications. No choice is made in isolation from the chooser’s environment, past, present and future. The adage of the butterfly effect, used to convey the idea of chaos theory, suggests that small differences in initial conditions (such as the flapping of a butterfly’s wings) can yield widely diverging outcomes in another time and another place. So too in Mitchell’s novel. We can never have total understanding of all possible consequences or permutations of an action or a choice. But perhaps if decisions are made based on knowledge acquired through reviewing our past and past events, by an awareness of our history, we may be able to make more informed choices for our present and our possible futures. I believe that Mitchell is suggesting that it is through an understanding of history and by reading the ‘texts’ of the past, individuals may make more informed choices that have the potential to impact on (and even possibly change the course of) the future. In The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Milan Kundera writes that “[h]uman life occurs only once, and the reason we cannot determine which of our decisions are good and which bad is that in a given situation we can only make one decision; we are not granted a second, third, or fourth life in which to compare various decisions” (Kundera 222). Mitchell offers a “second, third, or fourth life” in which his reader is asked to “compare various decisions”

made by the protagonists; to (re)interpret decisions and ‘meaning’ in light of the ‘reality’ and the butterfly effect produced for the past, the present and the future.

While each of the five preceding tales is written, filmed or recorded, at Cloud Atlas’s epicentre is the spoken tale of Zachry, an old goatherd who spins a yarn, concerning some pivotal events that took place during his youth, around a campfire. It becomes clear through the course of Zachry’s narrative that the disaster that ended “the Civ’lise Days” and shapes Zachry’s present life was foreseen from the beginning. Meronym tells Zachry that “[o]ld’uns tripped their own Fall”, because although they had the “Smart [that] mastered sicks, miles, seeds an’ made miracles ord’nary [...] it din’t master one thing, nay, a hunger in the hearts o’ humans, yay, a hunger for more” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 286; italics original). Yet Mitchell seems to suggest that it is storytelling that survives science at the ‘end’ and if anything can save us, perhaps it is our capacity for narration and the imaginative possibilities that it opens up to us. By ‘narration’ I mean not just the *writing* but the *reading* and *interpreting* of narratives, agential acts may alert us to our past and the impact of this past on the future. Awareness of this interrelation might result in the ability to imagine and create alternative narratives of both being and believing. As the wiser, more mature Ewing concludes at the close of the novel,

[i]f we *believe* that humanity may transcend tooth & claw, if we *believe* divers races and creeds can share this world [...] peaceably [...] if we *believe* leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable & the riches of the Earth & its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass [...] A life spent shaping a world I *want* Jackson [his son] to inherit [...] strikes me as a life worth living. (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 528; italics original)

So *belief* in an alternative future, and the power of the individual to ‘shape’ — create, narrate — a new world is posited as the locus of worth. Though to do

“battle with the many headed hydra of human nature” will pit one will against another, what may seem from the outset to be a futile endeavour to one person may seem a cause worth fighting for, to another (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 529). Cloud Atlas illustrates through its pages the creative decision-making of individuals when confronted with choice: individual choice determines individual ends and potentially new worlds. Some choose to fight for what they believe in, like Luisa Rey, Rufus Sixsmith and Adam Ewing, while others have to make the best of the ‘bad’ choices they have made, such as Timothy Cavendish and Zachry. Finally, there are some people like Robert Frobisher, who choose to end their life with a single bullet, unable to reconcile the apparent futility of living. The apocalyptic ‘end’ portrayed in the central story is positioned as a ‘mirror’ and, ironically, serves to challenge the vision of a pre-determined fate. It reflects back upon the capacity of the individual to create and construct their individual end, their individual ‘truth’, an alternative future, as each ‘earlier’ story is told to completion in light of the future knowledge it affords.

ii) Intertextual ‘truths’

Luisa Rey is plagued by a belief in her capacity as a journalist to write “[o]n behalf of the truth” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 432). But just exactly what this ‘truth’ is, is often compromised in the pursuit of it. In the end, it transpires, there is no one definitive ‘truth’. ‘Truth’ is peculiar to each individual and is rationalised

according to each individual's moral compass, the beliefs an individual determines to live by, and the decisions they make throughout their lifetime in accordance with these beliefs. Luisa is like Brother Juniper in Wilder's story of The Bridge of San Luis Rey, who is sentenced to death for his attempts to uncover a greater (higher) reason as to why all those people happened to be standing together on the bridge at the particular moment when it gave way, and why, in the end, they had to die. His use of scientific reasoning to explain a theological question ends without Juniper finding a satisfactory and definitive conclusion and, alleged to have committed heresy, he is sentenced to public humiliation and execution (Burbank 41). Luisa does not share Brother Juniper's fate; she is rescued. Contained within the title, "Half-lives — The First Luisa Rey Mystery", is the idea of the duality of life. In this third and tenth story, Rufus Sixsmith becomes the whistleblower, assassinated for his attempt to expose the 'truth' behind the HYDRA-Zero nuclear reactor, a 'truth' that Luisa herself finally exposes. In "Letters from Zedelghem", the second and eleventh story, Sixsmith is the ardent lover of Robert Frobisher, blind to Frobisher's numerous flaws and prepared to incriminate himself and sacrifice his own personal integrity to help the disinherited Frobisher with his 'half-cocked' schemes to get his hands on money. The Luisa Rey narrative, which follows/ precedes, illustrates the pervasive idea of half-lives, insofar as it suggests the double lives we lead. It also emphasises the idea of individual agency despite circumstantial determinism of various kinds. It is implied that as human beings we are not just cogs in a greater — pre-determined — scheme of things, but rather that as autonomous beings we have at least some ability to make independent decisions when faced with a set of choices. Sixsmith's choice not to remain silent about his report on the

potential hazard posed by Swannekke B leads to his assassination (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 114). His discussion with Luisa leads to Luisa's choice to uncover the 'truth' about Swannekke B which results in a government commitment to "root out the crooks who bring ignominy to corporate America" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 452). On the other hand, Frobisher is unable (or unwilling) to recognise his (limited) capacity for choice which could alter his future, and instead makes the brutal and definitive choice to end his life.

Mitchell continually stresses the impact of circumstances and social constructs on the choices we make and their ability to alter our decision-making. In this respect, he confronts the reader with contradictory ideas about free will, on the one hand ostensibly celebrating its existence and, on the other, suggesting it is purely an illusion. But of course, the debate is not simply an 'either' / 'or' one. Mitchell appears to advocate some capacity for choice within an existence that is significantly determined by social, historical, economic and genetic forces. One can give up and commit suicide, or one can recognise one's capacity to choose within limits and potentially alter outcomes. Mitchell explores these ideas through the disparate images, genres, locations and dialects in Cloud Atlas; he creates imagined worlds that are drawn from and built around the works, and worlds, of others. This serves to highlight the interconnectedness of life and the potentially far-reaching repercussions of individual choices for the present and the future. Timothy and Denholme Cavendish appear in Mitchell's earlier novel Ghostwritten, and Gwendolin Bendinks, who is the vicar's wife in his later novel, Black Swan Green. Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck also appears in Black Swan Green, and discusses her father, Vyvyan Ayr and Frobisher and plays the Cloud

Atlas Sextet on a gramophone to Jason Taylor. Apart from these recurring characters from his own fictions, all the other protagonists are recognisable from the works of other authors: Adam Ewing could be a character in Herman Melville's Moby Dick, the post-apocalyptic world of Sloosha's Crossin' is recognisable from Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake, and the character of Zachry could be traveling around Inland with Riddley, the major protagonist in Russell Hoban's Riddley Walker.

Mitchell's use of intertextual referencing presents a series of frames through which the reader's experience of Cloud Atlas is determined, at least to some extent, by our reading of other texts. As a result, both Mitchell's borrowing and subsequent transformation of other texts, and the reader's individual recognition, understanding and interpretation of these allusions, shape the experience of reading Cloud Atlas. In this respect, Mitchell appears to endorse an aesthetic such as that espoused by Roland Barthes where the experience (and meaning) of the text is one that resides with the reader, so that the work, as Julia Kristeva suggests, becomes a "mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" and each experience differs for each individual (Kristeva 37). Many postmodernist writers play with such notions, creating pastiche or bricolage in overtly textualised representations that deliberately challenge realist notions of mimesis (McHale 28). Such writing encourages the realisation that there is no possibility for a totalising meaning located, as conventionally imagined, in authorial intention; there is no definitive answer, and the final answer lies in the individual (and unique) interpretation of each reader. As Ian Gregson claims in his preface to Postmodern Literature, to

juxtapose texts which are not routinely discussed alongside each other defamiliarises these texts “so that they are seen from a refreshing angle” (Gregson xvii). The use of inter-textual referencing may also echo the self-aware and self-conscious manner in which a narrative unfolds and operate to emphasise the inter-connected nature of all life, of all existence. In effect, then the interlinkage is temporal; past reading impacts on present reading and interpretation and also on future reading and interpretation. Moreover, future reading means that we will retrospectively reinterpret texts we read in the past. A clear example of this is with Mitchell’s Black Swan Green which was written after Cloud Atlas. It invites reinterpretation of Frobisher, Eva and Gwendolin Bendincks in light of the new understanding of these characters and leads the reader to retrospectively reinterpret the original text.

Nietzsche proposed that the drive that is manifest in the will to power remains an activity that is common to everything in the world. Underpinning the will to power is the understanding that all things in the world are interconnected and that it is this interconnectedness that is crucial to their interpretation (Nehamas 75). Postmodernist intertextuality is often posited as political and conscious insofar as it functions, through the deliberate reference to other texts, to undermine the discourses and metanarratives that legitimate not only acts of interpretation but also structures of power that regulate meaning and value. In this way postmodernist writing interrogates a present ‘discourse’ or ‘presumed reality’ and questions the structures and institutions that uphold and legitimate that ‘reality’. It often does so by juxtaposing past and present discourses or ‘realities’, revealing their (social and political) constructedness. Julia Kristeva

suggests that intertextuality undermines the boundaries between perceived reality and its representations. It points to the constructedness of a reality that is normally perceived as *the* reality (Kristeva 37). As I will argue, Mitchell makes prolific use of both inter-textual and intra-textual referencing to examine Nietzsche's proposition concerning the interconnectedness of everyone and everything across the globe and across the annals of time. Furthermore, intertextuality and intratextuality reinforce the predatory theme of the novel insofar as allusion and borrowing is 'parasitic'. On Nietzsche's account, the will to power is an activity that aims to expand a particular sphere of influence, physical or mental, as far as it can possibly go. According to Alexander Nehamas, Nietzsche was adamant that a thing could not be distinguished from its various interrelations. As discussed, and will be discussed further, in Cloud Atlas artifacts and events from one narrative are re-discovered and re-interpreted in new and entirely different contexts in other stories. The discovery of each preceding story by the succeeding story's protagonist allows each to be reinterpreted and re-inscribed with meaning by the reader/ viewer within the text — and Mitchell's reader, without it. So, for example the re-appearance of the *Prophetess* in Luisa Rey's narrative as a vessel of respectable antiquity is greatly at odds with Ewing's experiences onboard the schooner. In consequence, within Cloud Atlas Mitchell's characters, like clouds, span a wide range of human experiences and time, and it is suggested that interpretation and re-interpretation, afforded by 'intertextuality' governs all human experience and has the potential to question the veracity of 'truths' and perhaps create alternative ones.

iii) Predation and Poisoning

Human experience is greatly influenced by the interrelationships between people and the dynamics of power involved. Nietzsche believed that, like a parasite, “life always lives at the expense of other life” (Morgan 62). At its most basic, a parasite needs another form, a host, to live off, to suck the life-blood from. The evil Dr Goose tells Ewing “the world *is* wicked. Maoris prey on Moriori, Whites prey on darker-hued cousins, fleas prey on mice, cats prey on rats, Christians on infidels, first mates on cabin-boys, Death on the Living. “The weak are meat, the strong do eat” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 523-4; italics original). But Goose neglects to realise the counteracting power inherent in human relationships and, in particular, the loyalty that can exist between individuals such as Ewing and Autua, which offers an alternative to the parasitic, predatory notion of the will to power, as both men act in ways that are not (apparently) determined by self-interest. Nietzsche explained moral valuation, prompted by his conception of the will to power, in the idea that “every society of the good posits gratitude as one of the first duties” (Kaufmann 157). So that if somebody does something for someone it is a motivated act; there is an implication that the grateful person is powerless and needed help. This automatically degrades the person who was helped in either his or her own eyes or in the eyes of the person who helped. Once the giver/ helper/ rescuer is thanked the power dynamic is reversed: the latter has done something for the rescued, as if the rescued was the powerful one and the other his servant. In that sense, gratitude may be considered to be a mild form of revenge and power (Kaufmann 157). Mitchell alludes to such ideas in his portrayal of the Swannekke Island security chief Joe

Napier, who was rescued by Lester Rey, Luisa's father, at a shooting on Silvaplane Wharf, and who tells Luisa that "[t]he most humiliating thing you can do to a man is to save his life" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 415). Napier in turn saves Luisa from the assassin Bill Smoke, fulfilling his "duty" to Lester Rey (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 450), but by his logic humiliating Luisa.

It is not just the dynamics of individual relations that are addressed in the novel. Throughout Cloud Atlas Mitchell stresses the malign role of capitalism and its impact on all the societies and characters that feature in the novel. In the Luisa Rey story, corporate America is exposed as corrupt, whether in the sweatshops filled with illegal immigrant workers, or in the power corporations wield to manipulate all situations in their favour and by whatever means possible. Capitalism is shown to be responsible for legitimising a whole multitude of controversial activities, such as the production of nuclear energy that creates the waste byproduct uranium, which through a process of enrichment has the potential to be used to make nuclear weapons that are capable of mass destruction. In the narrative of Somni~451, Mitchell examines one possible trajectory for scientific advancement that is ostensibly devoid of morality and exposes its social mores as repugnant to Mitchell's reader in 2010. The result is a society where genetic engineering is used to manufacture a whole race of fabricant clones to service the consumer driven industry of Nea So Copros. This drive to excessive consumption reaches its climax in the post-apocalyptic world of the Valley Tribe, in the central story, that is attributed as the work of humanity's senseless destruction and inability to gauge the potential consequences and ramifications of scientific 'advancement'.

The world of Somni, Nea So Copros, is slowly poisoning itself to death. Mitchell portrays a society in which, as Teresa Brennan asserts of our contemporary postmodern society, “the superseding of Nature to the activities of a consumer capitalism [...] is so destructive that it produces a culture which is mentally ill” (Gregson 119). Poisoning is not only a motif in this story but is a prevalent image throughout the book. In some stories it is not the world that is poisoned but individuals with several of the main protagonists consuming — by force or choice — mind-altering substances; others are subjected to the ‘poisonous’ power of suggestion, often without their knowledge. For Adam Ewing it is at the hands of the soon to be notorious Dr Goose. The gullible and naively trusting Ewing is misled into believing that a parasite is eating his brain and that the morphine which he has been prescribed by the ‘good’ doctor (and to which he subsequently becomes addicted) will purge the ‘worm’ from his body. In reality the doctor is poisoning his patient so that he can obtain Ewing’s valuables. Parasites exist everywhere aboard the *Prophetess*, a most pestilential vessel. Similarly, in the fifth narrative, the Withers poison Timothy Cavendish to ensure his sedate compliance to their regime of incarceration.

In Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, the book that Mitchell asserts inspired the Papa-Song fast-food restaurant chain (Sinclair), Schlosser claims “scientists now believe that human beings acquired the sense of taste as a way to avoid being poisoned” (Schlosser 122). So taste is like the acquisition of alternative forms of knowledge within a postmodern context. ‘Poisoning’ is the ‘force-feeding’ of a *certain kind* of knowledge. To remain in and retain power, poisoning can take many forms, be it the literal

poisoning of people, of the environment, or of thought; it is about the retention of power by whatever means imaginable. Poisoning of thought — of what people can think about — becomes the means to engineer a process of active forgetting; alternative knowledge is the means to overcome the forgetting that maintains structures of power. Zachry's world is altered through the ignorance of his tribe, who display the implications of forgetting the past and a failure to anticipate the future. Indeed, as Luisa Rey asks her young friend Javier, 'what if trying to avoid the future is what triggers it all?' (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 417). In the course of their conversation, Javier asks "can you change the future or not?" Crucially Luisa thinks "*Maybe the answer is not a function of metaphysics, but one, simply, of power*" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 418; italics original). Here, as elsewhere, Mitchell seems to advocate active remembering, through reinterpretations of the past which in turn allow for new ways of 'knowing' the present and future, as I will discuss in Chapter Three.

The 'poisoning' of the clones of Nea So Copros occurs through the fabricants imbibing 'soap', a food source that conditions them to exist according to the precise specifications for which they were created — it both numbs their senses and also acts as a soporific. The price of knowledge can be high; when Somni visits "Xultation", which she believes to be a retirement paradise, she discovers that soap is in fact produced through the reconstituted body parts of the murdered fabricants whose lives are extinguished (in a mockery of slaughterhouse procedure) after their twelve years of servitude to the corporation (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 347). Against their knowledge, then, the

fabricants are in fact the literal heirs of the metaphoric cannibalism explored in earlier narratives: the inevitable finale of capitalist greed and (self) consumption.

From the opening page of Cloud Atlas, the agents of capitalist economy are shown to profit from the ability to define (the world, others, themselves), as the group that holds the power within the coloniser discourse. This is specifically illustrated through the construction of the label of cannibalism, as a way to denigrate the indigenous people and endeavour to legitimise the colonisation process through the assertion of 'European superior morality'. The inherent irony is that Mitchell presents the colonisers as the cannibals — they 'feed off' their colonies, raping, pillaging and ultimately consuming them. Adam Ewing observes Dr Goose gathering teeth from the site of a "cannibal's banqueting hall" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 3). With his usual malign intent, Goose plans to fashion a set of dentures and with these enamels wreak vengeance, and public humiliation, upon a woman who injured both his pride and reputation in London: Goose may not 'eat' the colonised but he uses their body parts for his own gain. On the other hand, Frobisher and Vyvyan are consumed by their narcissism and vainglory at the expense of all awareness of the consequences of any of their actions and escapades. Ayrs is crippled by syphilis, an illness that has literally consumed him, left him blind and unable to compose music, or live a normal life. In all the narratives, Mitchell shows how, in the desire to retain power, people use 'poisoning' in many forms; whether it is the literal poisoning of people, or the environment, or of thought, it is about the retention of power, by whatever means imaginable.

The first half of Cloud Atlas, finishing with the central narrative “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”, maps the atlas of interconnected lives, and the trajectory of making the wrong decision when faced with choice. As Frobisher writes, “[a]nticipating the end of the world is humanity’s oldest pastime [...] The End is what we want, so I’m afraid The End is what we’re damn well going to get” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 471). But Mitchell appears to ask, and encourage his reader to ask, what if a different choice is made, a different ‘End’ sought? So, Luisa survives several assassination attempts to expose the dealings of corporate America, Timothy escapes from the regime of Aurora House to tell his story, and Ewing decides to devote his life to the abolitionist cause on his return to America. The insertion of “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After” at the heart of the tale provides the vision of the post-apocalyptic future that is the result of human kind’s poisonous, capitalist decision-making. Zachry’s post-apocalyptic world illustrates a possible trajectory towards which humanity is heading if people persist in making decisions, independent and in ignorance of both the past and the future. The societies that look into the text’s central mirror are all consumed by their desperate hunger to continue to both consolidate and obtain more power. Every decision made relates to this one drive, the will to power. Zachry’s narrative then reflects back to Mitchell’s reader a series of narratives where individual choices do occur showing that the future is not pre-determined and that there is always choice and the opportunity for individuals to consider alternative ‘truths’ and ‘knowledge’ discover their own ‘truth’ that can lead towards a different future, hopefully one with hope.

iv) Eternal Recurrence

What if one night a demon secretly followed you into your loneliest solitude and said to you: 'This life, as you are living it now and have been living it, you will have to live once more and an infinite number of times; and nothing will be new in it, but every pain and every joy, and all that has been trivial in your life or great must be repeated, and all in the same sequence [...] The eternal hourglass will be turned again and again — and you with it you tiny grain of sand among the sand'.

(Nietzsche The Gay Science 341)

Nietzsche wanted to address the question as to whether there was an outlook that would allow individuals to respond to the demon with jubilation when he posed his question. Nietzsche's answer was his theory of eternal recurrence, which he figured as an eternal hourglass of existence that turns over and over again. He appropriated and employed this notion in a pivotal way to explain what he saw as the larger and more fundamental nature of the common human sensibility, as the touchstone for the transformation of our basic disposition towards our lives and the world in which we live. Fundamentally, for all its suggestion of determinism, the idea of eternal recurrence expresses Nietzsche's affirmation of life, with *amor fati*, the love of one's fate, as its theme (Schacht 238). It has been argued that eternal recurrence is not a view of the world, but rather that it is a view of the individual self (Nehamas 150). Irving Zeitlin contends that Nietzsche believed that the theory invited the celebration of one's life rather than conceiving of it as a form of eternal damnation, an eternity of purgatory, with every moment of life being lived over and over again into infinity (Zeitlin 15). It has been argued by Zeitlin that instead of being a nihilistic proposition, Nietzsche's theory emphasises and encodes a 'morals' of individual

responsibility rather than a definitive external Morality that is derived from religious dogma. Interpreted in this vein, Nietzsche believed eternal recurrence to be celebratory insofar as it maintains that one should live one's life in such a manner as to welcome the thought of its eternal recurrence, and in fact embrace the idea (Zeitlin 5).

Walter Kaufmann claims that Nietzsche saw eternal recurrence as “the most extreme form of nihilism” (Kaufmann 282). In its most terrible appearance it becomes existence without sense and void of meaning, but inevitably recurring without a finale into naught. All events are repeated endlessly, there is neither plan nor objective to confer meaning on the past or the present life, and we are mere pawns in an absolutely futile game: “The eternal recurrence is the epitome of a tale told by an idiot [...] signifying nothing” (Kaufmann 282). Nietzsche himself claimed that “after the vision of the *Übermensch* in a gruesome way the doctrine of recurrence is bearable”; he perceived his two theories as a dual vision with the *Übermensch* (discussed below) providing a way to counter the bleak picture painted by the theory of eternal recurrence (Nietzsche The Gay Science 341). Nietzsche called his conception of eternal recurrence the “heaviest of burden[s]” (Nietzsche The Gay Science 341); it provides all acts with a moral weight for the straightforward reason that each and every decision made will be repeated for eternity.

Nietzsche was concerned with the impact of this idea upon individuals. What if all our worldly strivings and cravings were revealed, in the ‘logic’ of eternal recurrence, to be no more than illusions and that every contingent factor of creation and destruction was understood to have merely repeated itself without

end? What if everything that happens, as it happens, both re-inscribes and anticipates its own endless repetition? What would be the effect on our dispositions and, more importantly, on our individual capacities to strive and create? Would we be crushed like Frobisher? Or would we somehow find it liberating? Walter Kaufmann claims that eternal recurrence was Nietzsche's 'ethical' rule, and in the *Übermensch* he envisaged the 'ethical' culture of the future (Kaufmann 274). The concept of the *Übermensch* for Nietzsche is a utopian ideal of personal integrity; a model where each individual is conceived as an autonomous being with the ability to experience himself or herself as a unified and coherent subject. The *Übermensch* represented Nietzsche's supreme human being; one that is morally principled to the extent that he/ she creates his or her own set of personal values, and ethical and righteous enough to live without the consolation of traditional morality which is encapsulated in social and theological codes. According to Alexander Nehamas, Nietzsche suggests in Thus Spake Zarathustra, "a life can be justified only if it comes to be accepted in its entirety. The mark of [the *Übermensch*] is the desire to repeat this very life, and so everything else in the world [...] [for] eternity" (Nehamas 159).

In Cloud Atlas the composer Vyvyan Ayrs is obsessed with Nietzsche and liberally quotes him throughout this narrative (there are also, of course, numerous allusions to Nietzsche throughout the novel). He believes in the conception of eternal recurrence and the *Übermensch*, the idea of the perfect life, a life that keeps turning endlessly back upon itself. Ayrs wished to write a piece of music which he was going to entitle *Eternal Recurrence*, in honour of his "precious Nietzsche", and its backbone would be the music inspired by his dream

at the “nightmarish café, brilliantly lit, but underground, with no way out [...] [in which] the waitresses all had the same face. The food was soap” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 80). With the prophetic parallels to Somni’s time, Ayr’s dream reiterates Sach’s idea of a ‘real’ future as discussed earlier. However, while the dream does not represent the eternal recurrence of time, it does illustrate the will to power that Ayr’s so reveres, by means of which the *Übermensch* suppress an underclass through the control of knowledge, in order to be “civilization’s architects, masons and priests” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 82). This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Two. Nietzsche appears to contradict his own theory of the will to power through his idea of eternal recurrence. How can individuals live the idealised life of the *Übermensch* when, according to Nietzsche, all individuals are motivated by power, and it is this drive to accumulate power that overrides all other human motivations? I believe Mitchell seeks to answer this question in his characterisation of Ayr’s. Within Ayr’s (convenient?) misinterpretation of Nietzsche to justify why the “masses, slaves, peasants and foot soldiers” exist in the cracks “ignorant even of their ignorance” can be seen the same ‘misinterpretation’ that was used to justify the creation of the Third Reich and the campaign of ethnic cleansing that was undertaken (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 82). Ayr believes *he* can make a choice in his present, to compose a piece of music that will reappear in his future, even if its reappearance will be in a different form. He believes that there will be a future context for him, even if it is not a physical embodiment, a trace will remain of him, a memory. However, recontextualised, reinterpreted and placed in a different context the ‘meaning’ alters.

Nehamas draws attention to two difficulties with the idea of eternal recurrence; the first, as has just been discussed, is the suggestion that we have the power to control the future, and the second is that we have no control over our past. Therefore we are powerless against what has been done and will be repeated, and in this respect the will is an angry spectator of all that is past — in that “the will cannot will backwards” (Nehamas 159). However, the significance and nature of the past, for Nietzsche, lies directly and specifically in its relationship to the future. And since the future is yet to come, neither the significance of the past nor its nature and relationship to the future is as yet settled. So, if we take the events of our past as a given, on that basis we should try to accomplish something that makes us willing to accept our whole self and all it has done. We should accept all that we have done, and the events that have occurred and have befallen us, since every part of the past is by itself a necessary prerequisite and a precursor for what and who we are today. But acceptance, rather than refusal or denial, means our interpretation of the past is altered. Therefore the narrative that relates the past (self) to the present (self) is changed, until we impose a new interpretation, and even the accidents in our past can be turned into cognisant actions, into events for which we are willing to accept responsibility (‘thus I willed it’) and which we are willing to repeat in accordance with the thought of eternal recurrence (Nehamas 161). In the ideal case everything is redeemed in this way; one is reconciled with time. This resolution cannot be accomplished without realising that the significance of the past depends on its importance to the future. It is the inability to see this relationship that produces what Nietzsche describes as “the cheerfulness of the slave who has nothing of consequence to be responsible for, nothing great to strive for, and who does not value anything in

the past or future higher than the present” (Nehamas 161). Ayrns perceives Frobisher as his “aide-de-camp”, the assistant and environment through which he can attain the immortal recognition he desperately desires (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 84).

This ‘cheerfulness’ characterises the fabricants created by the corporations in Nea So Copros, a whole race who have been designed, bred in wombtanks, to serve and deal with the here and now, the ‘wants’ of the consumers they serve. The constitutional requirement of the consumers is to spend, throw away their toys when they no longer have use for them, and replace them with the newest model. The ‘soul’ has morphed to such an extent in this society that it has become the right to consumerdom bestowed upon the individual by the State in the form of a microchip that is implanted in the index finger of consumers; Somni wonders “how such an insignificant-looking dot confers the rights of consumerdom on its bearers yet condemns those lacking one to an existence of abject servitude or worse” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 335). So in Nea So Copros slavery has become two-fold; the mark of slavery to the regime has become technologised and inserted into the fabric of the body in the shape of a microchip, while the slaves of the regime are still marked by ‘lack’ and the inability to advance within society, to alter their circumstances; they are locked into a life of endless repetition where everything recurs in a self-same form day in day out.

Nehamas contends that a key metaphor used by Nietzsche was that of the world as a ‘book’ that is to be interpreted.

[I]f we consider that any human action, not only a book, is in some way or other the cause of other actions, decisions and thoughts; that everything that happens is inseparably connected with everything that is going to happen, we recognize the real *immortality*, that of movement — that which has once moved is enclosed and immortalized in the general union of all existence like an insect in a piece of amber. (Nehamas 164; italics original)

Within a narrative, like the fabricants in Nea So Corpus who live the same life everyday, the same words appear on the page every time the book is opened at that page. But Mitchell counters the idea that the words *mean* the same at each reading and advocates interpretation as a process without end. Since there can be no complete or total interpretation of even a single text, this model accounts for the fact that the examination of life (as narrative) with the purpose of uncovering ‘truths’ and ‘meanings’ — even if we assume that such a single perspective can ever exist — will have to go on forever. Nietzsche used literary characters as exemplars to illustrate his view; they do not exist outside of interpretation; they are nothing more and nothing less than what is said (or read) of them: “In the ideal case, to change even one action on the part of a character is to cause both that character and the story to which it belongs to fall apart” (Nehamas 164). So to maintain coherence, even a small change in a character would mean corresponding changes are made throughout the story, and that would in fact create an entirely new story. Mitchell clearly refutes Nietzsche’s desire to create a “coherent, self-sustaining, well-motivated whole” (Nehamas 164), and instead creates literary characters who, while similar or displaying similarities (eg. birthmarks), are not consistent, they are not ‘preserved in amber’. Different interpretations are constantly offered of characters, locations and events to the reader. Through the idea of fluidity that is introduced through the creation of narratives within narratives, Mitchell

embraces and exploits the rejuvenating and creative potential that exists within all individuals (and narrative): the power to both interpret and to make choices (Nehamas 165).

In Cloud Atlas, each protagonist bears a comet-shaped birthmark between his or her shoulder blade and collarbone. In this we might read a figurative emphasis on the idea of eternal recurrence, the eternal return. However, we could also read this as repetition with difference, recurrence in new contexts. The birthmark functions in the narrative to connect each character to both the 'historical' past and the 'anticipated' future. In this way it emphasises the importance of both remembering and reinterpreting the past when making choices the impact of which will be in the future (as each protagonist 'watches' or 'reads' or 'listens' to his/her earlier incarnation) and stresses the interrelatedness of humankind and human actions/ choices. Viewed in this way, seemingly individual decisions are never made in isolation but are always part of a bigger temporal scheme. Decisions, it is implied, must always be made with the full awareness of the past *and* of the potential permutations for the future, and the consequences that may never be felt by the individual who makes the choice. Arguably, this is why Mitchell inserts what I've figured as a mirror, in the form of the narrative "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After" told to completion, at the centre of his work. It is from this end-point, the post-apocalyptic, desolate, primitive existence, as the endpoint of scientific advancement and an amoral social code, that we must reflect back upon as we read and interpret the remaining 'half' narratives/ lives that follow. In effect, we read back from the future in the second half of the novel.

Both Frobisher and Ayr's are infatuated with Nietzsche's philosophical writings and Ayr's liberally quotes his "precious Nietzsche" throughout the narrative in which he figures (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 64). Both men are plagued by obsessive narcissistic visions of grandeur, wealth and public fame at whatever cost. In Black Swan Green, Mitchell's fourth novel published after Cloud Atlas, Ayr's young daughter Eva, the object of Frobisher's obsessive and ultimately self-destructive desire, returns as the elderly Eva van Crommelynck and explains to Jason Taylor, the adolescent protagonist, Frobisher's "obess[ion] of recurrence eternal. Recurrence is at the heart of his music. We live exactly the same life, Robert believed, and die exactly the same death again, again, again to the same demi-semi-quaver. To eternity" (Mitchell Black Swan Green 201-2). Rather than endorsing such an idea, Mitchell appears to suggest the self-obsessive narcissism inherent in Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence in his characterisation of both Frobisher and Ayr's. These individuals uphold a nihilistic, and ultimately destructive view of life, one that runs counter to the belief in self-creativity and moral agency that Mitchell appears to endorse through the second half of Cloud Atlas.

Mitchell's copious use of inter-textual referencing serves as a literary device to stress the eternal recurrence of things through the interconnectedness and continual appearance of people, objects and events, that are recognisable (from his own and other's writing), albeit in differing contexts. In this way, Mitchell demonstrates that while there is a universal character to people, and events, the infinite recurrence expressed by Nietzsche fails to account for the ability of

individuals to — sometimes radically — alter their environments, their relationships within it and the future.

Much in the novel can be seen to endorse Michel Foucault's idea of discourse, insofar as he believes "that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events" (Foucault "The Order of Discourse" 52). Those in power, in more or less overt ways control access to language and maintain various procedures that reinforce particular types of social power. These procedures "act to maintain control and sustain the ideologies that defend the existence and hierarchy" of those in power of the particular society (Slinn 9). Mitchell examines how discourse works to exclude people in a given time, only for the power relation to be reversed when the ostracised group holds the power in another time; discursive power is thus shown to be as fluid as the clouds. Somni~451, a slave in one time, morphs from a "freakbirthed human" into a worshipped god in another time, in a society that embraces an entirely different set of beliefs and values (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 291). The Prescient Meronym is asked by one of the men of the Valley Tribes why the Prescients are all coloured "brewy-brown'n'black". The Valley Tribes are told that "b'fore the Fall [they] changed their seeds to make dark-skinned babbits to give them protection" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 264). So in striking contrast to Mr Horrox's "Civilization's Ladder" on whose top rung stands the white-skinned Anglo-Saxon, the race placed above all others in the eighteenth century has been toppled, and dominance is accorded to

those they repressed for so long, in the post-apocalyptic future (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 506-7).

In Milan Kundera's discussion of Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence at the beginning of The Unbearable Lightness of Being, he claims that repetition is irrelevant, even meaningless, if it is not accompanied by recollection. Mitchell, appears to support Kundera's suggestion that "a life which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful or sublime, its horror, sublimity and beauty mean nothing", its recurrence makes it no more meaningful unless remembered and lessons learned as a result (Kundera 3). Kundera elaborates further to suggest that "[w]e need take no more note of [eternal recurrence] than of a war between two African kingdoms in the fourteenth century, a war that altered nothing in the world, even if a hundred thousand blacks perished in excruciating torment. It altered nothing in the destiny of the world" (Kundera 4). Mitchell shows how crucial it is that past events are reinstated in memory, to be interpreted and given meaning by remembering individuals, as each person in knowledge of history creates their individual 'truths' and interpretation of the world. To forget the history of colonisation, slavery, genocide and scientific and technological development void of any discernible ethical standpoint, is to resign the human race to a form of eternal recurrence which bears witness to the continual playing out of these horrors because there is no memory of the past, no memory of its repercussions in the present and for the future.

It was on the shores of Lake Silvaplana that Nietzsche experienced his epiphany concerning eternal recurrence: "Rather than looking towards a distant unknown,

bliss and blessings and reprieves, simply live your life in such a way that you would want to live that life again and again” (Nietzsche Thus Spake Zarathustra xxv). Mitchell alludes to the significance and importance of Nietzsche’s Silvaplana experience in Cloud Atlas in the representation of two life-changing events for two of his protagonists, Luisa Rey and Adam Ewing. Ewing embarks on his voyage to the Antipodes to perform his legal duties from Silvaplana Wharf, bidding farewell to his wife Tilda and young son Jackson, uncertain of just what his journey will bring him, much less if he will return, but firm in the conviction that he must carry out his duty as a young notary. Luisa Rey’s father Lester Rey loses his eye when, as a young policeman he answers a call-out to Silvaplana Wharf; a gang of thieves throw a grenade at him at the “Silvaplana Shootings” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 93-4). Here he also saves the life of Joe Napier, who in turn saves the life of Luisa Rey from the assassin Bill Smoke (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 450). The shootings at Silvaplana Wharf provoke Lester Rey into a life-changing decision to pursue a life of investigative journalism, determined to root out corruption and uncover lies and crime, a career that his young daughter then also chooses to pursue.

Nietzsche’s writing inspired Oscar Wilde to write “The Artist”, a prose poem that could be seen to offer a model for postmodernist intertextuality: you take a beautiful work of art, you then destroy it and, using the base materials, you remould and reform its essence into something new, something even more beautiful than the original work (Wilde). Frobisher becomes part of Ayr’s environment, and Ayr incorporates themes of Frobisher’s in his own work. “The Artist”, based on the work of Nietzsche, is a poem about an artist who melts a

former bronze to make a new bronze, “all men kill the thing they love” (Morgan 63). In these terms making music can be conceived as another “will to generation”; a way of making ‘children’; if the deepest desire of each individual life is “to create beyond itself”(Morgan 63). Frobisher’s “Cloud Atlas Sextet” becomes his mark to leave behind, his gesture towards immortality. As suggested in Wilde’s poem, Nietzsche holds that creation inevitably involves destruction: “life always lives at the expense of other life” (Morgan 63). The will to power, so understood, is essentially a creative force, an Eros that pervades all of nature. All men crave neither the preservation of their lives, nor freedom. What they desire is power itself, a life that is richer and stronger than their current one: a rebirth in beauty and perfection. Wilde’s poem suggests destruction is a necessary process for creation and, seen in this light, Frobisher’s death is an essential component of the beauty that exists within his Cloud Atlas Sextet. However, at its most basic the will to power is about both the consolidation and the increase of power, so that the creative and moral growth of individuals is corrupted by the continual pursuit for power. This continual pursuit for power is central to an understanding of Cloud Atlas and that will be the subject of Chapter Two of this thesis.

Chapter Two

The will to accumulate force is special to the phenomena of life, to nourishment, procreation, inheritance — to society, state, custom, authority [...] the only reality is the will to grow stronger of every centre of force — not self-preservation, but the will to appropriate, dominate, increase, grow stronger.

(Nietzsche The Will to Power 689).

This world is the will to power — and nothing besides!

(Nietzsche The Will to Power 550)

i) The Will to Power

The temporal breadth of Cloud Atlas (from the nineteenth century through to a post-apocalyptic future) suggests the persistence of human beings' hunger and base desire for the accrual of power throughout time, whether expressed in the realities and ramifications of colonisation, personal or familial relationships, or cannibalism, slavery and varying levels of corruption. In the nineteenth century Friedrich Nietzsche theorised a force in the human consciousness that functions to exercise power over others at any cost, which he entitled "the will to power" (Nietzsche The Will to Power 550). The will to power is the backbone of Nietzsche's thought (Kaufmann 157). As a theory, the will to power is a way to explain behaviour; Nietzsche suggested that it is a trait that exists among both the most powerful and the most impotent: both groups desire more power. It is not the possession of power that is enjoyed, but rather it is the pursuit for *more* power that is both enjoyed and desired (Kaufmann 159). Clearly David Mitchell draws extensively on Nietzsche's theory of the will to power in Cloud Atlas,

which can be read as an exploration of the human desire to obtain and then consolidate power. I will explore this idea in depth in this chapter.

According to Mitchell's interpretation of Nietzsche's theory, the will to power maintains that if we (humans) cannot acquire "this power for ourselves, through our own means, we will ally ourselves to a leader or faction who can" offer us access to it (Mitchell "Genesis" 2). As an exposé of the operation of power, and the pursuit of it, Cloud Atlas progresses through a series of "plot-and-character studies that show how individuals prey on individuals, corporations on employees, tribes on tribes, majorities on minorities, and how, in Mitchell's phrase, present generations "eat' the sustenance of future generations" (Mitchell "Genesis" 2). Through the creation of the Russian doll narrative structure each story can be seen to be "eaten' by its successor and later 'regurgitated' by the same" to mirror and underline the overarching theme of the novel, which is the nature of predation in the pursuit of power (Mitchell "Genesis" 2).

Nietzsche recognised the existence of only one basic principle in human nature: the will to power. Each of the six narratives that comprise Cloud Atlas operates as an exploration and critique of how human societies, regardless of time, race or location, attempt to control and condition their 'citizens' to become the 'foot-soldiers' that uphold the regime of those in power, further consolidating its supremacy and dominance. Mitchell examines power in its many guises and demonstrates the various manifestations of power in all the narratives: from the control of the dissemination of knowledge; to the discipline, punishment and enslavement of either the weaker members of society or those who oppose the regime; to the brute force of war, with its legitimisation of acts of horrific

violence; through to more subversive methods, such as neo-capitalism, scientific and technological advancement, colonisation and the Christian missionary projects in the Pacific. Mitchell utilises this wide gambit to form his arsenal in the examination and interrogation of just what power means, and how it shapes (and destroys) human nature.

Nietzsche's proposition of the will to power is at best a horrible theory of behaviour. More often than not, the will to power manifests itself in the most appalling and destructive ways. Many people dedicate their entire lives to the accumulation of wealth and power: nations make wars to enslave other nations, nations make laws to enslave their citizens (Kaufmann 222). Nietzsche's theory promotes the idea that ruthless individuals or, worse, races and even species, are constantly and continually engaged in relationships in which they overpower equally ruthless but weaker opponents. At its worst it is a picture of a universe in which everything, human and inhuman, animate and inanimate, is engaged in an unending struggle, trying to increase its power and to suppress everything that stands in its way by any conceivable means (Nehamas 75). For Nietzsche this is a primal drive that is common to every organism in the world. The will to power relies on a belief that all things in the world are interconnected and that it is this interconnectedness that is crucial to their character (Nehamas 79).

Fundamentally, one organism can only obtain more power through the suppression of another; power can only be enjoyed as superiority to another being. Cloud Atlas analyses how all-consuming this will to power can be, and the extreme lengths that both individuals and factions will go to acquire and then protect their power. The question Nietzsche posed about the will to power is the

one also asked by Mitchell through the novel: what exactly “is the enigma at the core of the various destinies of men” that drives this extreme hunger for power? (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 131-2).

According to Irving Zeitlin, Nietzsche saw the world as chaotic; for him the idea of a conscious, directing omnipotent agency, such as a god that directed and orchestrated events, was an unnecessary and also, for him, an unreal hypothesis (Zeitlin 6). Mitchell appears to endorse this idea, and extends it to illustrate that all human acts, however they may have been determined, have unforeseen consequences and, when analysed from a future perspective, can be seen to have generated outcomes that were never anticipated when the initial act was performed. Somni, then, can exist as a goddess for a post-apocalyptic tribe in Hawaii, the *Prophetess* can be restored as the “BEST-PRESERVED SCHOONER IN THE WORLD!” and the process of ‘enriching’ uranium to create weapons of mass destruction can become the “Enrichment Laws” that govern Nea So Copros (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 448; capitalisation original). For Nietzsche, the implications of Charles Darwin’s theories on evolution further verified his own thoughts and beliefs, in as much as life on Earth was devoid of any transcendent meaning. Nietzsche believed his era to be nihilistic, a time in which traditional meanings and values had ceased to make any sense and hold any influence (Zeitlin 6). Interestingly, given the overt postmodern narrative devices used in the novel, Ian Gregson situates the beginnings of ‘postmodern’ disbelief in this Victorian period (Gregson 1). As a result of Darwin’s theories on evolution and other scientific discoveries, this “disbelief grew throughout this period as the influence of science on perceptions of human knowledge and identity; the impact of

increasing urbanisation and mechanisation; the accelerating collapse of the social and cultural hierarchies which had traditionally dominated the West” (Gregson 1). In the face of what he perceived as a cultural crisis Nietzsche proposed that people should look back to the Ancient Greeks as a model for cultural development. He believed the answer was bound up in the Apollonian-Dionysian duality that involved perpetual strife between the two competing principles. The driving force behind the ancient Greek culture of Hellas was the *agon*, the striving to surpass. The creative force behind the *agon* was passion, but passion that was both harnessed and directed. Dionysus was seen as the explosive, ungoverned force of creation while Apollo was the power that governed and directed it. Interpreting Darwin in his own individual and particular way, Nietzsche proposed that “human qualities are of a two-fold nature, a nature that at once is capable of manifesting a capacity for high and noble powers but [which] at the same time holds the potential to possess cruel, murderous and destructive drives” (Zeitlin 6). Mitchell, too, examines the nature of these seemingly opposed drives to accrue power by inviting a reinterpretation of the past through the lens of a possible (likely) future, thus encouraging a reevaluation of the structure of power that operate in the present.

Nietzsche’s “destructive drives” are directed by the desire of human beings to consolidate power, and to continually create and accumulate more power. This is abundantly evident in Cloud Atlas. In the second narrative, “Letters from Zedelghem”, Morty Dhondt accompanies Robert Frobisher on his journey to visit the Zonnebeke cemetery, to see if Frobisher can find the grave of his brother Adrian, who was killed in Belgium during World War One. Frobisher asks

Dhondt why he is so convinced that another war will occur and Dhondt replies that “another war is always coming [...] they are never properly extinguished. What sparks wars? The will to power, the backbone of human nature. The threat of violence, the fear of violence or actual violence” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 462). Importantly, Frobisher’s narrative is set in the period between the two World Wars. Chateau Zedelghem was used as a command centre by the Prussians in World War One (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 59) and, as we learn from Mitchell’s later novel Black Swan Green, in World War Two a German airfield was built there and subsequently the airfield and the Chateau itself were bombed by the British and the Americans (Mitchell Black Swan Green 199). Ayrs’ composition, “Todtenvogel”, with its deconstruction of Wagnerian nationalistic themes, is interpreted by the German Republic to be an assault on its government (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 71). Vyvan Ayrs is decried as a “Jewish devil” but, despite the fact that he is considered to be a villain by the German Republic, he becomes a “célèbre” throughout the rest of Europe (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 71). This period in Western Europe, the early 1930s, corresponds with the time when Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party was beginning its regime of power that would lead the German Republic into the hostile invasion and occupations initially of Poland, that provoked World War Two, and the senseless fighting and ‘legitimated’ mass murder that occurred between nation states as a result of the threat of incursion, the loss of power and the genocide of the Jews and other ‘outsiders’, that was being carried out within the German state to consolidate and increase their hold on power.

Arguably, the threat to the power of a nation state, its borders and its right to govern its people, is a dominant cause of wars. The World Wars loom large in the present day memory as one of the most violent extensions of humankind's predilection for power and the preservation of power, at any conceivable cost. The proximity and relationship of the Chateau Zedelghem to war reiterates that the will to power is not just the backbone of individuals; it is magnified and at its most deadly when national sovereignty is threatened. On the car journey back from the unsuccessful attempt to find Frobisher's brother's grave, Dhondt tells Frobisher that "[t]he threat of violence, the fear of violence, or actual violence, is the instrument of this dreadful will. You can see the will to power in bedrooms, kitchens, factories, unions and the borders of states. The nation state is merely human nature inflated to monstrous proportions" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 462).

Forty years after the Second World War, in the third/ ninth narrative, Luisa Rey also considers the question of the future and one's ability to determine the future, or change the path of the future and decides that "maybe the answer is not a function of metaphysics, but one, simply, of power" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 418). As with World War One and World War Two, power is manifest in the drive to commit any act in order to preserve it. In the same narrative, just before the plane he is travelling on explodes, the young nuclear scientist Isaac Saachs notes down his understanding and belief that "*[t]he present presses the virtual past into its own service, to lend credence to its mythologies + legitimacy to the imposition of will. Power seeks + is the right to 'landscape' the virtual past*" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 408-9; italics original). So that what is remembered, and the point from which reinterpretation can occur in the future, has always been 'written' by the victor, the group that holds the power.

ii) Power, Knowledge, Truth

Michel Foucault's thinking owes a significant debt to Nietzsche and develops many of Nietzsche's ideas, despite also diverging from them. Throughout his work he insists, like Nietzsche, that the struggle for power is the "ultimate determinant of all action" (Wood 173). The fifth/ seventh narrative, "An Orison of Somni~451", and the holographic testimony contained inside the silver egg in the sixth narrative, can be read as a form of the "gallows speeches" discussed by Foucault in his seminal work Discipline and Punish: The Rise of the Prison. In particular, Foucault is concerned with the way social institutions work to consolidate power. Foucault contends that the traditional gallows speech allowed a convicted man to become a folk-hero, as it was an opportunity to state his beliefs and defend the crime of which he had been convicted (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 65). In particular, these speeches offered the opportunity to speak out at the regime that had convicted the condemned prisoners. In Cloud Atlas, the orison of Somni, recorded prior to her execution, acts in much the same way, in that it becomes the means for Somni to bring attention to the corruption of the consumer regime of Union, and draw attention to who the real enemy is. Ironically, the enemies of the state do not hear Somni's speech in her own time, it is archived and retrieved in a distant future. Mitchell creates a type of gallows speech where Somni's recorded testimony, contained in the orison, allows her to become a god in a post-apocalyptic future. Somni's version of history becomes the 'truth' for the Prescients, as it is the only 'textual' trace that remains preserved after 'the Fall' of the regime that executed her. Foucault writes that the gallows speeches were

popular because “rules were inverted, authority mocked and ‘criminals’ transformed into heroes” (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 61). But Foucault claims that the line between criminals and heroes tends to be blurred especially through the construction of ideological structures within society as forms of objective knowledge which work to establish norms and categories as though they were organic, universal and natural truths available in discourse (Gregson 7). The testimony of Somni’s is only heard in her time by the State archivist (and perhaps other agents of the State), but its *recording* enabled the testimony to be heard in the future, which in turn makes it possible for those in the future to reinterpret their present and also the past through Somni’s eyes. Much like the facescaper who alters the ‘truth’ of the faces of Nea So Copros consumers (to hide the signs of ageing, or to hide a past identity), or Sachs’s thoughts about landscaping the past (quoted above), the ability to alter knowledge about the past via (re)inscription enables the alteration of historical ‘truth’. Mitchell suggests that it is through reinscription and reinterpretation that we can create new knowledge of the past, present and future. The duality of roles Mitchell’s protagonists perform within the novel — as readers and writers, as villains and gods — underlines not only the possibility but also the importance of reinterpretation in both reconfiguring and redeeming ‘knowledge’ and the power structures it maintains.

There are many allusions within Cloud Atlas to the ideas of Foucault. According to Foucault, the notion of the soul is a human creation, a present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body:

[T]he historical reality of the soul (unlike Christian theology) is born out of methods of punishment, subversion and constraint. A ‘soul’ inhabits him

and brings him into existence, which is in itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy. The 'soul' is the prison of the body. (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 29-30)

In the Somni~451 narrative, Mitchell appears to allude to such a conception of the creation of the 'soul' as an instrument of power. In his hyper-consumerist society, in which citizens are now called consumers, the 'soul' exists as a tiny metallic egg which is implanted in the tip of the index finger, and its placement confers the 'rights' of consumerdom (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 335). The consumers souls are "debited [...] on the Tellers" when they purchase goods and services, so that the State can monitor the worth of the consumer's soul and similarly the State can take action when a consumer is not spending the amount required from them as a member of a certain (spending) strata (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 187). Conversely the absence of the 'soul' implant signals the absence of the 'rights' of consumers: it denotes life-long servitude to the regime, in effect the slavery of 'soulless' fabricants. So the Christian belief in the 'soul' as independent of the body is inverted; in the portrayed futuristic consumer society it is a commodity whose 'value' is dictated in monetary terms rather than in ones of moral virtue. Somni wonders "how such an insignificant-looking dot confers the rights of consumerdom on its bearers yet condemns those lacking one to an existence of abject servitude or worse" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 335).

Mitchell's narrative develops the idea of state surveillance in ways that correspond with Foucault's ideas. Foucault suggested that state surveillance was "most certainly and more immediately [...] an effort to adjust the mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals [...] and places under surveillance their everyday behavior, identity, activity, apparently unimportant

gestures” (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 77). In Nea So Copros the State is able to monitor the amount consumers debit on their souls. The fabricants are conditioned to believe that they need to recite vespers to a hologram image of Papa Song on his plinth (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 187). They believe Papa Song is watching them at all times and that they must repay, via unquestioning service, “the Investment” in them to be able to join their sisters in retirement on Xultation (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 190). Similarly in the fourth narrative, at Aurora House nursing home they have “state-of-the-art surveillance arrangements” consisting of “magnificent iron gates, opened and closed by a flash pneumatic stroke electronic gizmo [...] a surveillance camera and a two-way phone thingy”, all designed to keep the elderly from escaping into civilisation (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 375). The idea of ‘locking away’ the elderly in a type of prison is suggestive of the elderly as a type of social ‘deviant’ that challenges the notion of youth as the preserve of power and knowledge. Nea So Copros also models a society that strives for eternal youth with consumers regularly visiting the facescaper, and elderly-looking people have become another memory that has been ‘forgotten’.

Nietzsche believed people obey the laws that others impose upon them because they believe that this obedience is the way to get ahead, potentially to become influential and successful. In this regard, praise or reward is just as effective as punishment in consolidating power. Any infraction of social custom might cause the society to retaliate against the individual, to claim him/ her as a deviant or abnormal, and thus to diminish the individual’s power within that society. And conformity, on the other hand, resulted in reward and advancement. Most

importantly, Nietzsche believed that one would not put up with such 'rules' if one had the power to disregard social customs (Kaufmann 217). Similarly, Foucault suggested that there is confusion about "two types of power; that which dispenses and that which creates the laws (that sanction the power)" (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 79). According to Foucault the ultimate model of punishment would be one that would "insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body" rather than being a force that was exerted externally by an 'authority' (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 82). He developed a model where it would be the 'ordinary' people, citizens of the State, who would punish each other for stepping outside of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, as defined by those who hold the overall power within any society. Mitchell explores such ideas in Cloud Atlas. In the first narrative, for example, at dinner one evening at the Bethlehem Bay mission, after spending the day inspecting the operation of the mission, Ewing asks the missionaries, Mr and Mrs Horrox, " 'if the Indians worked of their own free will?' 'Of course!' exclaimed Mrs Horrox. 'If they succumb to sloth they know the Guards of Christ will punish them for it'" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 499). The Horrox's have created the Christ Guards, "certain natives who prove themselves faithful servants of the Church", to enforce the laws of the colony "in return for credit at [Mr Horrox's] store" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 498). They are thus used to punish any native who attempts to visit their (former) Marae and worship their "false idols", any native who attempts to keep alive their non-European beliefs and culture (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 506). Mitchell suggests another model of such 'ordinary' policing via citizens of the State in Cloud Atlas in Nea So Copros where the existence of the "*Üntermensch* slums motivate downstrata consumers by

showing them what befalls those who fail to spend and work like good citizens” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 332; italics original). The members of Nea So Copros society are not aware that the boundaries between consumers, *Üntermensch* and fabricants are in fact purely a social construction, designed by those in power to consolidate and strengthen their hold on power. All citizens (or consumers in this case) uphold the social laws as if on the orders of some omniscient god. Over time, these societal structures (conforming with Foucault’s ultimate model of punishment) have become ingrained and have taken on a reality of their own; they exist as if they are a ‘truth’. Societal controls are parodied on a much smaller scale in the fourth narrative, “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish”. The “elderly tribe” who inhabit the Aurora Nursing Home are controlled through a regime of ritual humiliation dished out to anyone who dares to question the regime of Nurse Noakes. Interestingly, again adhering to Foucault’s conception of the ultimate model of punishment, it is the residents themselves who are shown to maintain this regime through the reward or punishment of fellow inmates. Gwendolin Bendincks and her off-sider Gordon Warlock Willocks head the Residents’ Committee, a body set up to consolidate obedience to the rules and regulations and ostracise any individual who does not comply with the dictates of those who hold the keys (and the power to medicate at will) (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 382). As Mrs Bendincks tells Cavendish, “boat-rockers are not welcome here [...] Aurora House does not expel [...] but you will be medicated, if your behaviour warrants it, for your own protection” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 181). The young Mr Wagstaff, a member of the London Missionary Society on Raiatea, explains another model of the perfect army, as discussed by Foucault in

Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, to Adam Ewing in the second half of the first narrative. This he suggests to be modelled on:

a tribe of ants, called the slave-maker. These insects raid the colonies of the common ants, steal eggs back to their own nests, & after they hatch, why, the stolen slaves become workers of the great empire, & never ever dream they were once stolen [...] Lord Jehovah crafted these ants as a model [...] For them with the eyes to see it. (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 510)

As Morgan suggests in his discussion of Nietzsche, when one organism is unable to engulf the other it may “enslave” it and form a new subservient organism. In some cases, the weaker may seek to become parasites of the stronger and the stronger in turn may resist accordingly (Morgan 75): “Where I found life I found the will to power; and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be the master” (Morgan 65). Such ideas are clearly evident in Cloud Atlas. The Prescient Meronym tells Zachry from what she has witnessed it is clear that “the savage sat’sfies his needs now [...] his master is his will [...] the civ’lized got the same needs too, but he sees further [...] his will [is also] his slave” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 318). Human relations are characterised by the will to power more intimately than those of animals. History (and, indeed, the ‘history’ portrayed in Cloud Atlas) is the record of its struggles — individuals, families, cities, and empires, all wrestling for primacy. Likewise the activities of mind are bent upon mastery: the artist over his materials, the thinker over his subject and the priest over the souls of man (Morgan 67). For Frobisher, this is manifested as the desire for mastery over both his compositions and Ayrs, and for acknowledgement of his genius. For Luisa Rey, a ‘chance’ “brown-out” due to the energy crisis puts her in a lift with Rufus Sixsmith, but it is a drive to succeed her father, to reinterpret his life within her own, that compels her take up Sixsmith’s story and attempt to uncover the ‘truth’ behind what is going on at Swanekke B (Mitchell Cloud Atlas

98). In this respect, Mitchell seems to suggest, in line with Nietzsche that interpretation itself is also a means of becoming master of something (Morgan 68).

Not all residents at the Aurora Nursing Home are compliant. Ernie Blacksmith “was a certified boilerman once upon a time. [He] service[s] the workings for free, so the management turn a blind-eye to one or two little liberties” that he allows himself, like drinking whiskey; this also serves to maintain the regime as the “liberties” Ernie enjoys guarantee his compliance to Nurse Noakes’s regime (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 376). In Timothy Cavendish’s society the elderly are locked away, incarcerated inside a big nursing home in the country, left to die. The only use these people hold for society is the inheritance and wealth that their death could potentially bestow upon a relative, as is the case for the detestable Jupiter-red-Range-Rover driving, hamburger-franchise-owning Mr Hotchkiss, who only visits his mother in the hopes of discovering where she buried ‘the family jewels’, prior to the onset of her dementia. Much like his namesake the Christian missionary Mr Hotchkiss in “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”, this Mr Hotchkiss believes vehemently in the superiority of his ‘tribe’, and it is this arrogance that brings about his defeat when he claims the racial superiority of the English in a Scottish pub (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 401). That Mitchell uses the same (unusual) name in two of his narratives, invites his reader to make a link between the two men. Ernie Blacksmith claims that the elderly commit two offenses against society; in Foucault’s terms they are marked as ‘deviant’. The first is that they slow the world down; Ernie claims that the world will “do business with dictators, perverts and drug barons” but will not be slowed down,

by those who “drive too slowly, walk too slowly, talk too slowly” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 377). The second offense of the elderly is to be “Everyman’s *memento mori*”, a reminder of time and the certainty that every man must die; it is the one truth (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 377; italics original).

Elderly people do not exist in Nea So Copros — or at least not recognisably elderly people; they visit the facescaper, a plastic surgeon of the face, and, like Seer Rhee’s wife at seventy years of age, look only about thirty years old (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 194). In Mitchell’s sardonic depiction of the capitalist Endgame that is Nea So Copros, the “economy of illegalities” that Foucault proposed would be restructured within a capitalist society has been perverted to such an extent that the morals and ethics of the society have dissipated and reside only in the propositions of consumer capitalism (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 87). This society has become meaningless, driven by Unanimity’s Enrichment Laws which require “consumers to spend a fixed quota of dollars each month” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 237).

iii) Colonialism and Capitalism

Every aspect of Cloud Atlas is infused with Mitchell’s critique of capitalist society, in which wealth confers power. “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” witnesses the impact of colonialism, and the development of trading routes shipping newly discovered commodities from the colonies of the Pacific to the newly established gold-rush town of San Francisco in America (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 500). The development of the worldwide imperial mercantile trade in the 18th and 19th

centuries, and the opportunities for economic advancement open previously to only a very small and elite section of society, is arguably the point at which capitalism began. In the Chatham Islands, Adam Ewing witnesses a sermon conducted at the “Nazareth Smoking School” whose express purpose is to encourage tobacco smoking amongst the natives, with the aim of creating a “craving for this harmless leaf” in the natives (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 501). In this encounter Ewing witnesses both the beginning of a consumerist society and also a re-interpretation of Christianity and biblical scriptures to serve capitalist aims. By creating a need, through addiction to tobacco, the colonisers ensure the natives will have to learn to trade for the tobacco they require to feed this addiction; to trade they will need to work to earn the means through which they will be able to exchange. A missionary explains to Ewing, son of the American Revolution which was founded upon the premise that “all men are created equal”, his idea of a “ladder of civilization” that will extinguish those races positioned on “lower rungs” and who are unable to join progress, where progress is expressed as the manifestation of God (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 506). The anti-colonial sentiment of Ewing’s journal works to deconstruct the hegemonic assumptions upon which empire building was premised.

Edward Said, a founding figure in postcolonial theory and important scholar of colonialism, contends in Orientalism, that “he finds it useful to employ” Foucauldian notions “to identify Orientalism” as a discourse constructed by European culture (Said 3). He defines Orientalism as originating from “the late eighteenth century [...] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). This discourse imposes limitations on

all thought and actions in relation to the Orient and its binary opposite, the Occident. The relationship between power and access to knowledge is crucial to Said's analysis. It is this relationship that was vital to Said's later postcolonial studies, which focus on the political nature of representation and the ways in which Western hegemonic thought constructs images of non-Western cultures in which their 'otherness' is oppressively depicted as a sign of their inferiority or even their danger, and as a justification for the actions of those in power. 'Orientalist' texts then, "*create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe" (Gregson 92; italics original). The 'reality' of colonial discourse becomes an undisputed 'truth' around the Horrox's dinner table, and a means of justification for the imposed racial superiority of men like Preacher Horrox and his mission at Bethlehem Bay (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 507). But Mitchell inserts a counter truth (ironically) in the words of Dr Goose who points out the reason why the "white races hold dominion over the world" is not through enlightened reason, racial superiority, or superior mercantile skills but rather through their ability to utilise weaponry with a "Bang! Bang! Bang!" to obliterate opponents, or as a means of coercion (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 508). According to Dr Goose, on the scale of Horrox's Ladder "the Maori have risen to 'D-E-F' of mercantilism, diplomacy & colonialism" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 507). These indigenous people of New Zealand, it is claimed by the colonisers at the start of Mitchell's novel, prove themselves to be apt pupils of the English "in the dark arts of colonization", exterminating the indigenous people of the Chatham Islands, the Moriori (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 14). Mr D'Arnoq, the preacher whose service Ewing attends on the Chatham Islands, claims that the Moriori were a harmonious and peace-loving people for whom war was an alien concept; their

land had been ruled by peace. The Moriori did not submit to the Maori, or the coloniser's discourse they emulated, and so half their number were killed while the other half were enslaved to the Maori invaders (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 15). After surveying the wide-ranging impact of colonisation in the South Pacific, witnessing first-hand the brutal subjugation and the near extermination of the Moriori at the hands of the Maori and the destruction of their 'idols' and beliefs, Ewing vows that on his return to America he will "pledge himself to the Abolitionist cause" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 528). After his experiences on board the *Prophetess* and through his encounters along the way he ends his journal with these words:

He who would do battle with the many headed hydra of human nature must pay a world of pain and his family must pay it along with him and only as you gasp your dying breath shall you understand, your life amounted to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean! Yet what is an ocean but a multitude of drops? (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 529)

So the experience of 'other' knowledge and truths has encouraged Ewing to reinterpret the 'truths' that founded the American nation. Mitchell, through Ewing, seems to be suggesting that if enough people challenge and reinterpret hegemonic 'truths', then perhaps new and "limitless" 'knowledge' and 'truths' are possible. Mitchell, through Ewing's comment, crucially placed at the end of the novel, seems to suggest how far-ranging an impact a single drop, an individual choice, can have.

Within Nietzsche's schema, choices can only be made within the particular parameters of the given nature of individuals. Mitchell appears to endorse a notion of partial determinism in which there is still scope for free choice within circumstantial bounds. In the first part of Mitchell's fifth narrative, "An

Orison of Somni~451”, when “Yoona~939 chose death over slavery”, she ‘chose’ one option of the three ‘choices’ that were available to her (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 343). Her attempted escape from the confines of the Papa Song dinery was never a viable option for a fabricant that was bred in a wombtank to provide a specific service to the consumers of Nea So Copros. She did not have a State-granted ‘soul’, so life outside of Papa Song would have been impossible. Another ‘choice’ was to submit to the “amnesiads” present in the food source of soap, but the choice to submit to ignorance and servitude after a taste of free thought was not a valid option for a person who had learned to think and access knowledge freely. Somni recognises these constraints when she tells the archivist “free will plays no part in my story” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 364). Yoona~939’s final ‘choice’ was her death, and, paradoxically, it was her only real chance of escape and freedom — albeit in the willed termination of her life. Importantly, neither Yoona nor Somni’s ascension was a free ‘choice’; they were both fed the ascension-inducing soap as an experiment sanctioned by the State to create fear of a fabricant uprising in the population of Nea So Copros at large, and so to consolidate the rule of Union through the creation of an identifiable enemy. The apparent choices of other characters in the novel are similarly determined by circumstances and events. Luisa Rey also makes a ‘choice’ to pursue the story of the HYDRA-Zero Reactor on Swannekke Island, but her ‘choice’ is determined and governed by her belief in upholding her father’s “journalistic integrity” to uncover the truth at whatever cost — and by her chance meeting of Sixsmith (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 97). Ewing’s ‘choice’ to become an abolitionist on his return to America is also directed by his rescue from Dr Goose’s poisoning by Autua. Timothy

Cavendish's account of the Aurora Nursing Home, is reinterpreted by Somni in the future, as a place where "[e]lderly people waited to die in prisons for the senile and incontinent; no fixed-term lifespan, no euthanasium" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 244). His narrative of incarceration and 'medicated' senility open a window to the past which allows for Somni's later reinterpretation of 'truths' in light of alternative knowledge. This reinterpretation of the present through access to, or rereading of the past can, Mitchell appears to suggest, lead to social change as new 'truths' and 'meanings' are created. For this reason, perhaps, the past is the "zone [most] forbidden" in Nea So Copros (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 243).

The extreme trajectories of capitalist consumerdom and its relationship with structures of power are most disturbingly portrayed in the Somni narrative. Nea So Copros introduces a consumer society motivated by the *Übermensch* of Nietzsche's imagining; these 'Last Men' are motivated by nothing more than a life of complacency, apathy and their ultimate desire is for comfort. Everything can be bought, and can then be thrown away when a new model becomes available for purchase. Ironically, the *Untermensch* slums of Nea So Copros do not contain the people who frame Nietzsche's notion of acquiescent, accepting *Untermensch*. These slums, and the commune at the abbey where Somni goes into hiding, are where the people "who fail to spend" live, or else the people "who ha[ve] fallen foul of Corp politics" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 346). Nea So Copros's *Untermensch* exist on the margins of society yet some still manage to serve a function for 'society' either through working in the "ghoulish pleasurezones" or by "xchang[ing] healthy body-parts for euthanazing" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 332). Nea

So Copros is a society shaped by apathy and this is epitomised in the characterisation of Somni's "postgrad" student, Boom-Sook Kim, a model of an individual marked by the desire for money, and power, and by destructive complacency (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 217). Cloud Atlas insinuates that the post-apocalyptic future portrayed is the endpoint towards which the world is heading, a state of existence in which ethics and the value of human life are denigrated to a point where decisions are only made in relation to 'quick-fixes' and fabricated solutions or the continual accrual of power. The nature of this future state is already intimated in the earlier narratives. This is evident in Ewing's narrative, as discussed, but also in later ones. In "Half-lives — The First Luisa Rey Mystery", capitalism is shown to be inextricably linked with the greed that drives 'businessmen' to order the assassination of 'obstacles' in order to protect their accrual of power and wealth. The preservation of the HYDRA-Zero Reactor, with its potential nuclear weapons capability is exposed to be more important to the 'businessmen' than the lives that are destroyed and may be destroyed in the future. Frobisher, Ayrs and Cavendish are all consumed by a greed to accrue money and power. Frobisher is bankrupt and disinherited because of his spendthrift ways, Ayrs's is obsessed with the 'fame' of notoriety and Cavendish has to run away from the Hoggins' brothers for failing to honour his debts. Frobisher and Ayrs are consumed with narcissistic vanity while Cavendish trades in the egotistic vanity of others, through his publishing house.

iv) Access to Power

In the Papa Song diner, the fabricants are awarded a star upon the completion of each year of service; they are led to believe that upon the receipt of their twelfth star they will be retired from their lives of servitude and travel on board a ship to “Xultation”, a paradise retirement home located in Hawaii. In this lies a very simple and effective portrayal of Foucault’s notion, discussed in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, by means of reward and its opposites, discipline and punishment, work to consolidate power and control by making compliance and ‘deviancy’ equally visible to the people who are subordinate within the regime. As Somni tells the archivist, “If a server reports a sister’s deviance she is awarded one star from the deviant’s badge, and Xultation comes a year nearer”, and ironically, and outside of the knowledge of the fabricants, death comes a year nearer. “Destarring is an efficient deterrent” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 190). Destarring, semantically mistakable for deterring, is the means through which the ‘Seers’ (supervisors at Papa Song’s, the name itself suggestive of Foucauldian surveillance) prevent attempted ascension or unrest among the fabricant workforce (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 200). The physical (and violently brutal) removal of a star from a fabricant’s collar indicates that the punished fabricant is one year further away from their promised retirement at Xultation. Conversely, the fabricant that informs on the so-called deviant is rewarded with the star that has been forcibly removed, advancing the informant one year closer to Xultation, (and, ironically, their slaughter). Furthermore, ascension is quite clearly equated with the acquisition of knowledge; gaining knowledge will result in the desire to better one’s life and a realisation of the extent of one’s servitude to and

exploitation by the regime; to rise out of the life of servitude at Papa Song's, or any of the other service institutions in Nea So Copros. Knowledge is thus dangerous to the state and denied to the workers that sustain it. As noted, this society controls fabricants by means of incorporating additional mind-altering chemicals into their food source, and in the original genoming process so that only the characteristics desirable for the particular social role the fabricant will perform are incorporated into their molecular makeup. The fabricants are bred in wombtanks to the exact specifications required by their eventual 'employer' — a parody of the Marxist notion of worker servitude to state superstructure. As any society throughout time has controlled the knowledge its slaves — or even its workers — are allowed, and able, to access, so too does this futuristic society of Nea So Copros. Those with power control their fabricants' access to knowledge. This emphasises once again Foucault's central assertion regarding the direct relation of power and knowledge; the holder of knowledge is also the holder of the power, but power also determines, limits and allows the dissemination of knowledge. Foucault argues that those with power control both the right and the ability to access knowledge, the parameters surrounding the discourses of knowledge, and therefore the right to determine 'truth'.

Furthermore, power controls the right to access knowledge and therefore, circularly, who has the right to power. Access to knowledge is tightly monitored in Nea So Copros; the library is under surveillance by the State, so Professor Mephi is notified of the extensive material that Somni is reading. Similarly, in the Luisa Rey story, the Seaboard Corporation monitor access to the Sixsmith Report, and its unauthorised possession is labelled a "federal crime" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 142). The Prescients determine the distribution of their knowledge,

or “the Smart”, within the Valley Tribes (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 286). They decide when to intervene with the knowledge they possess from before ‘the Fall’, to the extent that they have the power to save lives, as in the case of Zachry’s little sister Catkin, and when to pull the trigger to extinguish lives (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 280).

Within Cloud Atlas not one of the protagonists holds sufficient ‘power’ to determine their entire ‘story’. However, contrary to Nietzsche’s theory of eternal recurrence, Mitchell promotes a world in which individuals have a capacity, albeit limited, to make choices that can alter outcomes, and change the path of their story. Moreover, through the emphasised interrelation and interconnection of individuals and stories within the novel he promotes the view that individual choices can, and do, impact on the stories of others (or rather how they are known and interpreted) — past and future. This said, protagonists’ choices are always constrained and to a large degree determined by historical, social, economic, genetic and scientific forces. Adam Ewing is an observer of a *part* of the colonial project; he is able to rescue Autua from the Maori chief Kupaka and introduce him to Captain Molyneux as an ‘able seaman’ aboard the *Prophetess*. (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 27). Robert Frobisher is disinherited from his family and inheritance due to his cavalier and careless behaviour and lives off the generosity of friends and the proceeds of the rare books he pilfers from the library at Chateau Zedelghem and ‘on-sells’ to Otto Jansch (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 74). Frobisher ‘chooses’ to offer his services as an amanuensis to Vyvyan Ayr, but he then becomes part of the environment at the Chateau and this impacts significantly on his behaviour and actions — and his final choice, suicide. Robert,

as a surrealist, cannot reconcile his belief in his 'uniqueness' with the realisation that he is shaped by his environment and possesses only a narrow capacity to determine his path, so he kills himself. Luisa chooses to pursue the story of the HYDRA-Zero Reactor and Sixsmith's Report, but it is other people that largely direct Luisa's life as she manages to evade successive attempts to murder her and in the end is rescued by Joe Napier who himself was rescued by Luisa's father. Timothy Cavendish finds himself 'imprisoned' at Aurora House as he needs to escape from London to avoid the Hoggins brothers who believe Cavendish owes them money from the publishing success of their brother's book "Knuckle Sandwich" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 155). He is continually a victim of circumstances; Ernie plans the successful escape from the old-age 'prison' and Cavendish is only included because he is supposedly able to drive, although he almost mucks this up too, as he leaves a map in his bedroom with the escape route coloured in (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 400).

Determinism and lack of individual choice is most powerfully portrayed in the Somni narrative. As a fabricant Somni is literally created by the State, her ascension is masterminded by the State, her subsequent escape and status, as an enemy of the State, is fabricated by its agents. Within the scheme of things, within her own time, she is powerless. And yet Somni does exercise power when her story is discovered — and re-visioned — in a time outside her own epoch. Somni is retrospectively reinterpreted, in the future, and accorded the title of goddess by the post-apocalyptic Valley Tribes. In the future her words are finally heard, and they are granted importance in a very different time and place from that in which Somni lived. Zachry has very little ability to determine his path in

his post-apocalyptic world, a world created by the folly of those who have gone before. A violent enemy tribe has destroyed his family and community and the Prescients decide how and when they will use their more advanced knowledge to intervene within the lives of the Valley Tribes. Zachry makes the choice to tell Meronym that they must not travel over the bridge across Polulu River. This choice saves their lives and instead the pursuing Kona fall to their deaths when the bridge collapses under their weight. Perhaps, then, Mitchell proposes an answer to the question posed by Thornton Wilder in The Bridge of San Luis Rey (to which this episode surely alludes) as to whether there *is* a direction and meaning to our lives that exists beyond individual free will. Mitchell doesn't offer the same conclusion as that reached by Brother Juniper. It was a series of circumstances and chance events that determined who would be on the bridge when it collapsed. Nonetheless, Zachry and Meronym made the choice not to cross the bridge so their lives were saved. A different choice *could* have led to a different ending.

Somni's ascension was not chosen by her. Professor Mephi and Somni discuss why fabricants, and her ascension, disgust the students at the University. Mephi suggests that perhaps it is the power of knowledge and the desire of those in power to withhold that knowledge from the dominated, the marginalised, in order to remain in power. He suggests that Somni acts as a "mirror [...] to pure bloods' consciences; what purebloods see therein sickens them. So they blame the mirrors." Somni then asks Mephi "when purebloods might start blaming themselves?" Mephi replies, "History suggests not until they are made to" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 231). Throughout the six narratives, it is those who hold

the power who will stop at nothing to preserve, and expand, their power within society. In “The Order of Discourse”, Foucault elaborates on his idea of discourse, and the power possessed by those who control social discourse and so knowledge-power. He suggests that those with power define the parameters around what is considered to be “within the true” of the society at that particular time. Moreover, those in control also possess the power to exclude and deny the right to alternative truths and knowledge within that society (Foucault “The Order of Discourse” 55). The Aurora House nursing home, within whose confines Timothy Cavendish finds himself incarcerated, uses similar methods of exclusionary deterrence to control the ‘inmates’. Punishment and ritualistic humiliation of perceived troublemakers is used regularly to deter other ‘residents’ from attempting to disobey Nurse Noakes (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 179). In a society where old age is to be withdrawn from the public eye — it doesn’t look good, or smell particularly nice — the elderly people have become second-rate citizens, an obvious extension of the binaries that influence power relations examined by Foucault. In this way, the binary of youth/ old age stands next to the binaries of madness/ sanity, forbidden/ permitted, deviant/ good citizen and black/ white. For behaviour that does not conform to Nurse Noakes’s desired mode of obedience, both synthetic and physical punishment is used liberally. As Foucault has suggested, for deterrence to be effective, those who have not committed the crime must feel the effect of punishment most intensely and fear it being exercised on them. This is the case for both “the undead of Aurora House” and the servers at Papa Song’s (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 179). The paradox Foucault offers is “that in the calculation of penalties, the least important element is still the criminal” (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the

Prison 95); it is the deterrence effects on others that matters the most. So that the finger-pointing at Cavendish's attempted escape, or his bottom being smacked by the gardener, operate to discourage any other would-be escapees to rethink their plans, and kowtow to the regime (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 179).

v) Manifestations of Power

'Politics' makes every aspect of society complicit in the maintenance of corporate, historical, economic, genetic and scientific forces. The mode of politics shown in operation in all the narratives in Cloud Atlas can be seen as a means of maintaining internal peace and order that seeks to "implement the mechanism of the perfect army" in its citizens (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 168). According to Foucault it is through the 'visibility' of the many manifestations of power that a society exercises its controlling systems of power and knowledge (or power-knowledge). This can be seen in operation throughout Cloud Atlas. A lack of knowledge, or access to the 'wrong' knowledge, is what each of the protagonists suffers from. Foucault suggests that in societies that operate rituals of exclusion, rather than the pure binary division (mad/ sane; dangerous/ harmless; normal/ abnormal) there is a much greater instance of overlap between both individuals and groups (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 198). When Somni and Hae Joo Im stay at the monastery with other outsiders to the Nea So Copros regime, Somni and the Abbess discuss the threat that the dissenting colony is perceived to pose to the State. The Abbess believes that

[i]f consumers are satisfied with their lives at any meaningful level [...] plutocracy is finished. That is why the colony offends the state so. Media compares them to tapeworms; castigates them for stealing rain from WaterCorp; royalties from VegCorp patent holders; oxygen from AirCorp. 'The day may come,' the Abbess speculated, 'when the Board decides we are a rival model for life outside corporatic ideology.' That day she feared the 'tapeworms' would be renamed 'terrorists', smart bombs would rain and the old abbey tunnels flood with fire. (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 348-9)

Instead the State has created its own internal 'terrorists' in the form of Unanimity and the real fear this 'fabricated' enemy engenders within the population at large serves to consolidate Union's power over its citizens. As Somni asserts in her fifth declaration: "in the beginning there is ignorance. Ignorance engenders fear. Fear engenders hatred, and hatred engenders violence. Violence breeds further violence until the only law is whatever is willed by the most powerful. What is willed by the *Juche* is the creation, subjugation and tidy extermination of a vast tribe of duped slaves" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 360; italics original).

It is not just the (neo)capitalist world that is under scrutiny in the novel. Mitchell's critique of the colonising mission explores, in order to critique, the missionary effort to bring both 'Christianity' and 'God' to the colonised world; progress is manifested as God. Cloud Atlas begins with the advent of capitalism, with the expansion in European trade and colonisation and reaches its climax in the end picture of a world devoid of recognisable social and scientific advancement within the post-apocalyptic world of the Valley Tribes. Mitchell's choice of diverse genres enables him to utilise their particular stylistic features to examine and interrogate the persistent thematic concerns of Cloud Atlas. In a discussion of genre, Frederic Jameson compares science fiction to the historical novel finding the two genres to be symmetrical opposites:

[f]or if the historical novel 'corresponded' to the emergence of historicity, of a sense of history in its strong modern post-eighteenth-century sense, science fiction equally corresponds to the waning or blockage of that historicity, and, particularly in our own time (in the postmodern era), to its crisis and paralysis, its enfeeblement and repression. (Jameson 284)

He argues, then, that in science fiction (or apocalyptic futuristic fiction) we see the similar redeployment of norms, and the reconstruction of a (plausible) futuristic 'reality' (Gregson 66). The continual links and associations between stories in the novel, as I discuss further in Chapter Three, underlines and demonstrates the radically transformed societies in different eras; yet at the same time the associations alert the reader to similarities, traces of their meaning in other worlds, times, another discourses. From the historical journal relating Ewing's adventures and the science fiction of Somni's world the subjugation of other human beings has mutated from the 'benign' imposition of civilisation's 'virtues' on racial 'others' into the mechanising of designed 'others' as a multitude of fabricant workers. For all their ostensible differences, the drive of the will to power and control of/ by knowledge, is evident. As noted, then, Mitchell's narrative trajectory tracks the development of the capitalist work force to its logical endpoint. By stressing the similarities between indigenous slavery in colonial times, the illegal immigrant sweat-shops of 1970s America, and the literal fabrication of an entire work force in Nea So Copros, Mitchell continually articulates a critique of instrumental reason and discursive power. He also stresses the importance of historical memory as a means of enabling us to reinterpret, inform and understand the present and the future. To forget the past, and to neglect to remember our collective history will only subject the world to the recurrence of the most despicable elements in humanity.

In Nietzsche's view the characteristic that most separates human life from the rest of nature is memory: "Everything organic is distinguished from the inorganic by the fact that it gathers experiences and is never identical with itself in its processes. In some sense the entire past of life lives on in every organism and cell" (Morgan 68). Nietzsche's position, as here summarised by Morgan, rests upon the correlation between biological heredity, the transmission of social traditions, and human memory and habit formation; all retain or re-enact the past in the present somehow (Morgan 68). Nietzsche believed that memory was a process of active "assimilation" that produced a series of stable "basic forms" or qualities that are transmitted with special emphasis, and which work together to form individual, social or racial character. The production of these forms is not entirely the work of internal forces; it also depends upon the recurrence of similar experiences that enable the gradual shaping of definitive structures (Morgan 69). Nietzsche held that these feelings, valuations and habits pass from one generation to another — and, in contradiction, therefore that the development of a seemingly new organism could be seen as a recapitulation of the past: another kind of remembering (Morgan 70). For Nietzsche, according to the doctrine of eternal recurrence, we are destined to relive the *same* life again and again. In this respect we cannot learn from the past, only repeat it. An alternative model is one in which a 'return' (via memory) to the past can enable different understandings and engender different choices. In this way, reinterpretation of the past allows for altered understandings which in turn can inform and influence both the present and the future. So, Somni's acquisition of knowledge is beneficial for the future re-interpretation by the Prescients of

Zachry's present, but it does not save Somni from her execution in the Lighthouse.

The 'rescues' of Adam Ewing (by the last Moriori), Luisa Rey (by an accessory to aggravated crime and murder) and Zachry (by a potential coloniser), change the course of their respective lives. The 'choice' to save them is made by someone else, but the rescue itself results in an awareness or even an obligation for the rescued individual to make decisions with the same consideration of their potential ramifications for others. Sixsmith attempts to save Frobisher from himself, but Frobisher is distraught and irreconcilable and chooses not to be saved. Frobisher's suicide, and his failure to rescue him, haunts Sixsmith for the rest of his life. The decision to rescue an outsider (Frobisher is marked as such by his bisexuality, among other things) is a step against the orders of those who hold the power within each of the societies where it occurs, emphasising the limited potential for individual 'choice', but also the potential inherent in choice. The slave owners and the corrupt corporate bosses, triumphant in their own time, are exposed and overpowered within the longer perspective of history — albeit a new order of brutality, slavery and corruption is birthed. The tide does turn, and what is 'within the true' at any given moment in time, is not necessarily 'in the true' at another time. Somni bears testament to this thought as her recorded orison, her "version of the truth" forms the 'Declarations' — a code of values to live by of another people from another time (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 187). As Foucault elaborates in his discussions surrounding the gallows speeches, when the public could ask the question 'why?' — or even consider asking this question — was the moment when true public scrutiny began (Foucault

Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 68). Luisa Rey survives to be able to expose Seaboard Power Incorporated, Cavendish escapes Aurora House and his memoirs are the basis of a screenplay for a film that exposes the abuse of the elderly to an audience in the future. While Luisa and Cavendish expose the illegalities within their own time, Somni's 'message' is relegated to a post-apocalyptic dystopia far removed from the world in which she lived. In each case, however, the protagonists are portrayed as encouraging others to question the power of existing authorities, and each does so through a form of narrative: Ewing's journal, Frobisher's letters, Luisa's articles on Swannekke B (albeit at the same time she is a fictitious character created by Hilary. V. Hush. *and*, of course, Mitchell). Somni 'exists' as an interview, and Zachry's vernacular discourse is offered to the reader: "Hold out your hands" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 325).

Whereas Mitchell emphasises the important, albeit limited, ability of individuals and groups to effect change, Nietzsche suggested that one should measure the health of both society and individuals through his conception of the *Übermensch*: An individual who has overcome his animal nature, and organised the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses and given style to his character, who has "disciplined himself into wholeness, [...] created himself and became the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength" (Kaufmann 274). He posited the idea of the *Übermensch* as the single goal of all humanity. However, the will to power, in the end, is always at war with the individual. The battle between reason and impulse is only one of countless skirmishes. The idea of self-overcoming, mastery over oneself, of self-making and the attempts at this idea of self-realisation interested Nietzsche immensely (Kaufmann 209). As Mitchell

demonstrates there is a very limited capacity to choose and alter outcomes within the framework of the will to power. Even the margin of society is created by and so consolidates the centre. In Nea So Copros, the resistance organisation Union proposes to engineer the ascension of six million fabricants who will be used to overthrow Unanimity (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 342). Union supposedly exists to free fabricants that they claim are enslaved. However, through the use of the fabricant clones as their foot soldiers what is proposed is just the installation of one regime in place of another. Union is a splinter group that is in fact the engineered army of Unanimity, who are the State. So the State-created margins work to define the centre — and its power. Nietzsche contended that the will to power motivates individuals, or nations, to such an extent that they will shun no sacrifice and will risk their existence to achieve their goal of more power. They do not shrink from violating the well-being of others, if it interferes with their aims, and so ‘independence’ is frequently to be had only after conflict and war (Kaufmann 213). But that ‘independence’ is not individual freedom or individual choice, rather it is the replacement of one powerful group by another more powerful group.

As noted, Nietzsche believed that the single goal of humanity should be the development of its highest specimens, which he called the *Übermensch* (Zeitlin 7). Mitchell examines both the idea of the *Übermensch* and its converse, the *Untermensch*, within each of the societies he writes of. Unlike Nietzsche, however, he does not endorse the notion of the *Übermensch* as an ultimate aim of humanity; instead he interrogates what atrocities occur when groups believe that the power they possess legitimates the attitudes and behaviour they

exercise against others in order to maintain their hold on power. What becomes evident in the course of Cloud Atlas is that those who possess the 'right' to name and to determine the rules of the discourse within a given society hold the power. For speaking out against a regime, or for calling into question a system of power, for being in debt, bisexual, elderly, a 'slave', one is marginalised and exists on the periphery, discarded by society, like the Abbess and her colony who live in the mountains outside of Nea So Copros (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 346). But speaking out as a member of the oppressed against those in power, within a regime, means to conform with the discourse of the governing group. Thus, for example, Somni's ascension is marked by her ability to speak and be understood in the language of the dominator. The Prescients can speak and understand Zachry's dialect, but he is disempowered because he has no access to their language. In Papa Song's, the servers have been effectively silenced through their fabrication. So the only language they know is that which enables them to take the orders of the consumers and respond to them in platitudes. Through the imbibing of soap, the fabricants consume suppressants that dulls their thought processes and turn them into virtual automatons to fulfill the roles they were designed for. Mitchell's overt examination of and reference to the *Übermensch* and *Untermensch*, underscores his concern with the perversion of those in power; the possession of power and the hunger for more will always corrupt.

As I have argued, despite the significantly determined lives of his protagonists, Mitchell also portrays the vital importance of the limited capacity of choice possessed by individuals. He emphasises the creative power of individual choice particularly when reinterpreting the past which in turn makes it possible to

envision an alternative present, and future. In this way, alternative voices and knowledge may have credence — even power — albeit across time. Choices can be made to question regimes of criminality and as history suggests, discourses, and the balance of power, can and do change. Mitchell's chronological exploration of the will to power makes all of history, and all people complicit in the destruction of our planet, our values and ultimately our selves. And yet he also suggests the capacity we have to create, via reinterpretation and through the lens of 'new' (that is perhaps 'old') knowledge.

Chapter Three

And he took the image he had fashioned, and set it in a great furnace, and gave it to the fire.

And out of the bronze of the image of 'The Sorrow that Endureth For Ever' he fashioned an image of 'The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment'.

(Wilde)

i) Metafiction

In the preceding chapters I have shown just how pervasive the operation of the will to power is *within* the imagined worlds of Mitchell's creation. In this chapter I will suggest how, via the use of a variety of postmodern narrative techniques and strategies, Mitchell offers his reader the opportunity to engage in alternative *ways of reading* that might work to counter the destructiveness of the drive theorised by Nietzsche. When reading Cloud Atlas the reader is continually made aware of the 'constructedness' of apparent 'reality' within each narrative. This understanding, fostered by a variety of postmodernist narrative techniques foregrounds the possibility of narrating alternative realities and of new ways of seeing and interpreting the world (and ourselves). As has already been discussed, each story is contained within the one that follows and all are nested within the sixth and central story, "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After", with the protagonists of each narrative reading (or viewing) the previous story. Acts of narration and interpretation are thus crucial in the novel and, I will argue, point to the advocacy of narratorial and reader creativity that invites a (re)interpretation that counters the deterministic 'recurrence' of Frederic

Nietzsche's will to power in both individuals and groups. Via its strategies of representation, then, Cloud Atlas enunciates a political vision in which relations of power co-exist — so relentlessly portrayed — alongside the potential for change through retrospective and recontextualised interpretation. The central story acts as an 'anticipated' future and interestingly its protagonist, Zachry, does not read or view the entire preceding narrative, "An Orison of Somni~451" (he only sees selected parts). By the time Mitchell's reader reads the central narrative, she/ he occupies the role of creative interpreter more fully than the protagonist. The reader is invited to interpret Zachry's story in full awareness of his/ her act of interpretation and then reconsider the five narratives as they are told to completion, in light of his/ her knowledge of the (undesirable) possible dystopic future scenario towards which they point. The reverse order of the narratives, as each is completed, invites us to read the (narrative) present 'back from the future'.

In Fabulation and Metafiction, Robert Scholes popularised the term 'metafiction' as an overall term for novels which depart from mimetic realism and instead foreground the role of the author in the invention of the fiction and of the reader in interpreting it (Scholes 8). Cloud Atlas is unmistakably metafictional; throughout, Mitchell incorporates within its narrative strands continual reference to the composition of the novel itself, so that the reader is encouraged to understand the work as a construct, an artefact, the means of which is open for interpretation and re-evaluation. This foregrounding of the novel as an artefact is vital insofar as it suggests the constructed (interpreted) nature of the 'meaning' of all existence, of history, of science and of the roles each of us play in

according meaning to our own (self) narrative, which is also part of a multitude of other interconnected narratives. By alerting his reader to the ways in which narration or interpretation confer meaning and value Mitchell draws his reader's attention to the constructedness of perceived 'reality'; ultimately this encourages the reader to question the existence of a totalising 'Truth', by emphasising the existence of the multifarious 'truths' — competing, alternative narratives and interpretations — that exist across time albeit often at the margins. The parameters of discourse and of knowledge maintain and authorise power and legitimise certain 'truths' that are not absolute, and can be reinterpreted. In Cloud Atlas, Mitchell suggests that these acts of reinterpretation can result in new and different 'truths' (themselves, of course, are just as constructed) that counter the nihilism inherent in the theories of Frederic Nietzsche.

The reader of Cloud Atlas is alerted to the function of genre, language and tonal play in the construction of meaningful narratives, and alongside this is also made aware of the ways in which societal constructions frame — no less than genre expectations — and influence our 'reading'. A 'frame' may be understood to be a "construction, constitution, build[ing]; established order, system [...] underlying support or essential substructure of anything" (Waugh 28). Metafiction foregrounds textual 'framing' and, by extension invites the realisation that the meaning of life, not just that of novels, is the result of the discursive and knowledge parameters that frame interpretation. By problematising, rather than deconstructing, the concept of 'reality', metafiction suggests that there is no straightforward dichotomy between 'reality' and 'fiction' (Waugh 29). So it is in Cloud Atlas.

What is 'typically' postmodern about Cloud Atlas is its concern with the politics of its modes of representation (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 5). In The Politics of Postmodernism, Hutcheon coined the term "historiographic metafiction" to explain a particular form of the postmodern novel which is intensely self-reflexive yet at the same time, incongruously, represents historical events and personages and works to reconceptualise history to its own ends (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 75). The plot action of Cloud Atlas revolves around many despicable acts committed by human beings across time: colonialism, slavery, corporate corruption, murder, sodomy, and potential events of the future, the apocalypse, and considers the ethics surrounding each. The recurrence, and prevalence, of these predatory actions through the 'history' of the novel ensures that each of these atrocities is framed by their particular predatory relationships. As has been discussed, this examination permits the consideration of power relations across time, enabling the reader to scrutinise the operation of the will to power and how power is apportioned across different societies. But the novel's metafictionality pushes this exploration further: "The postmodern novel [...] confront[s] the paradoxes of fictive/ historical representation, the particular/ the general and the present/ past [...] [T]his confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of the dichotomy yet it is more than willing to exploit both" (Hutcheon A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction 106).

Hutcheon suggests that "postmodernism's initial concern is to de-naturalise some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism,

patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural' constructs; made by us, not given to us" (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 2). The defamiliarisation of these constructs or assumptions permeates the pages of Cloud Atlas. In particular, this is achieved through the use of different genres and historical settings, inviting consideration in terms of Michel Foucault's conceptions of discourse and knowledge, so that what is 'within the true' at a particular historical moment is shown to be not necessarily so in another time. Patricia Waugh claims that it is this exposure of the instability of 'truth' that partly defines metafiction, in which the language of fiction merges with the instabilities present in the 'real' world (Waugh 2). Waugh further develops this idea to declare that "metafiction flaunts and exaggerates and thus exposes the foundations of this instability: the fact that novels are constructed through a continuous assimilation of everyday forms of historical communication" (Waugh 5). In Cloud Atlas, in the colonial setting of Ewing's travels, the idea of cannibalism is used by the colonialists to define the 'inferior' and less advanced races and by extension to confirm their own superiority. Yet through the course of the novel Mitchell's reader has to consider, and then reconsider, who the 'real' cannibals are — the colonised or the colonisers (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 507). By the time of Nea So Copros in the fifth narrative, capitalism's cannibalistic nature is laid bare. Through the mass-slaughter and literal consumption of the expired fabricants back into the food chain "to supply dineries with food and Soap", Mitchell exposes capitalism's willingness to consume others literally as food, metaphorically as disposable servants of the state. (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 360).

In part, the effectiveness of Mitchell's portrayal relies on the reader's ironic recognition of the repetition of the cannibalistic trope — and his critical inversion of colonial assumptions. In postmodern writing, irony often serves to create a critical distance for the reader from the written construct, and then sets out to both expose and interrogate the construct itself, encouraging the reader to do the same. This doubleness ensures that historical and political questions are not trivialised and that everything — including assumed 'truth' — is open for scrutiny. Mikhail Bakhtin referred to this process of "relativisation" or temporal contextualisation, exposing alternative possibilities outside the frame, as the "dialogic" potential of the novel. According to Bakhtin, dialogic novels rejoice in the impossibility of achieving a resolution of 'meaning' and 'truth' (Bakhtin 12). Metafictions make this impossibility explicit and in doing so foreground the essential mode of all fictional language: the creation of a 'truth' that is far from true. Cloud Atlas utilises a wide variety of discourses and genres, and each competes for privilege while foregrounding its contingency and the 'rules' (or 'procedures' in Foucault's terms) that govern it. Each "question[s] and relativise[s] the other" to such an extent that the "'language of fiction' is always [...] self-conscious" (Waugh 2). In other words, metafictional novels draw attention to the illusion that realist novels attempt to obfuscate. Metafictions create a fiction and at the same time make a statement about the creation of that fiction, drawing attention to the illusion of 'reality'. Cloud Atlas is full of overtly self-reflexive metafictional moments characteristic of metafictions. In one of these, Cavendish discusses his 'editing' of "Half-lives — The First Luisa Rey Mystery" and the necessity for "one or two things [...] to go: the insinuation that Luisa Rey is this Robert Frobisher chap reincarnated, for example. Far too

hippie-druggy-new-age. (I, too, have a birthmark, below my left armpit, but no lover ever compared it to a comet. Georgette nicknamed it Timbo's Turd.)" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 373). The two processes, the creation of the fiction and a statement about the creation, are held together in what Waugh describes as a "formal tension that breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction'" (Waugh 7). Cavendish's comment undermines the idea of eternal recurrence, discussed in Chapter One, by ridiculing the proposition of a birthmark as a sign of reincarnation, the eternal return (and yet he also reinforces it in the mention of his own birthmark). Cavendish's narrative 'conforms' to the 'self-conscious conventions' of metafiction. Cavendish, as author, continually seeks interaction, and complicity, with the reader: "dear Reader" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 147). Throughout the entirety of "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish", Cavendish liberally comments on the creation of 'his' memoir, and the screenplay and the subsequent movie he believes 'his' memoir will inspire. The existence of Cavendish, as narrator, editor and the central protagonist within the story draws the reader's attention to the *creation* of the narrative structure which in turn *is* the story.

In a formal sense this conforms with Waugh's claim that "the historical period we are living through has been singularly uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic. Contemporary fiction clearly reflects this dissatisfaction with, [a] breakdown of, traditional values" (Waugh 7).

Understood this way, contemporary metafictional writing can be understood as both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that

'reality' or 'history' are provisional: ours is not a world of eternal verities but rather it is a series of constructions, artifices and impermanent structures (Waugh 7). In Nietzschean and Foucauldian terms these impermanent structures (which delimit alternative truths of knowledge) are all designed according to the base desire of the will to power — the desire to accumulate more and more power. While the goal of the consolidation and accrual of power is consistently the primary motivation, the novel suggests that the structures and mechanisms of capitalism operate to maintain power for certain sectors/ races in society.

The overt self-consciousness of the novel is tied directly to the political issues that can be seen as spanning the mid-nineteenth century through to a post-apocalyptic dystopic future. As a result of Mitchell's portrayal of actual historical and political events in the first four narratives, the reader has to take into account issues that are contiguous to race, class, nationality, post-Enlightenment culture, industrialisation, capitalism, (post) colonialism and the rise of the modern 'individual' and Cloud Atlas attempts to denaturalise the values and assumptions that surround each. In the novel, the juxtaposition of apparent opposites results in the overt politicisation of representations (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 6). This is evident, for example, in the décor of Papa Song Corp "starred and striped in reds, yellows and the rising sun (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 187). Here Mitchell reappropriates existing representations of the American 'stars and stripes' flag, the reds and yellows and stars of the Chinese flag and the rising sun of the Japanese flag. The combination of recognisable national flags is effective

precisely because they are loaded with pre-existing meaning and putting them into new and ironic contexts [...] [E]xploiting the power of familiar

images de-naturalises and makes visible the concealed mechanisms which work to make them seem transparent, and brings to the fore their politics [...] the interests in which they operated and the power they wield. (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 42)

In consequence, Mitchell suggests the struggle for supremacy between major global powers and implies their complicity in the disgrace that is the 'cloning' of 'fabricants' as slaves — in the present day sweatshops of capitalist endeavour no less than the indigenous slaves in the colonies or the imagined serveries of the future. The mass slaughter of these fabricants, once their 'best-before-date' has expired, literally fuels the industry they work in as their lifeless body parts are re-worked to become both the soap the fabricants imbibe and the food that the consumers purchase from Papa Songs. As noted, this is clearly a gesture towards contemporary consumer practises in the global superpowers of the USA, China and Japan. The slavery and cannibalism of the fabricants also underlines the irrefutable power held by those who control discourse. Union, the government of Nea So Copros, hold the power and therefore the right to 'name' the fabricants, and decide their role in society; they also determine who constitute the underclass of the society, the *Üntermensch*. Union are the people exterminating and recycling the bodies, so that both these crimes are legitimated within the social structure of Nea So Copros. As Foucault contends, the "repertoire of techniques of power do not bear the distinctive emblem of the regime [...] that uses them". It is this "political invisibility of techniques of power [...] that makes them so dangerous" (Foucault Power xv). Mitchell's critique is not directly at an imagined future but at the operations of power, knowledge and discourse in the present day, and its 'potential' implications in the future. This is conveyed not only in the context he presents but in his representational strategies.

ii) Narrative Structure

The Russian doll recursive structure, or *matrioshka*, serves as a literary device for examining issues of narrative authority, reliability and unreliability and ultimately the circulation of knowledge. The field of Mitchell's *matrioshka* is widened by his choice of varied (and overlapping) modes of narration: an edited journal, a series of letters, an 'airport thriller', a memoir, a recording of Somni~451's testimony and a story told around a campfire. As I have stressed, the reliability of the portrayed 'reality' in each is undermined through continual (re)interpretation by subsequent protagonists *and* Mitchell's reader. Mitchell continually emphasises the role of his protagonists as readers or interpreters of preceding narratives. As many commentators note, postmodernist writing draws the reader's attention to the gaps and discrepancies that exist within narrative, between the story that is told, and the awareness that it is only one (edited) version of the story that *could* be told. New information, new emphases, different 'gaps' and different knowledge — all would result in a different story. Mitchell uses metalepsis and prolepsis devices to offer 'escapes' to other narrative levels or different ways of interpreting the meaning of narratives. His Russian doll structure nests each story inside each other, so that Cavendish 'reads' the 'past' story of Luisa and also the memoir of Frobisher, and by extension becomes aware of Ewing's 'historical' journal. But then Somni views Cavendish's 'story' in his 'future', her 'present'. It is suggested that Somni is linked through the comet shaped birthmark and a sense of *déjà vu*, and several instances of analepsis and prolepsis discussed in Chapter One, to Luisa and Frobisher. This overlapping of

and connection between the narratives highlights the links between the 'past', the 'present' and the 'future'. Each new narrative involves a change of genre, ontological level and a change of world that further unsettles the reader when similarities or repetitions are pointedly shown. Brian McHale suggests that it is the epistemological dimension of the structure which is foregrounded within the postmodern narrative, so that in 'nested' narratives each change in narrative level functions as a link in a chain of narrative transmission. Exploiting this device enables Mitchell to explore issues of narrative authority, reliability, unreliability and importantly the circulation (and withholding) of knowledge across the historical dimension (McHale 113). At the same time he underlines the interconnected and interrelated histories of human existence.

"An Orison of Somni~451" portrays a future world in which, conforming with M.H. Abrams definition of dystopian literature, "ominous tendencies of our present social, political and technological world are projected into" Nea So Copros, a nightmarish consumerist society (Abrams 337). The Papa Song Corp diner is a hyperbolic extension of any takeaway restaurant from the present-day. But not only does all the food look (and taste) the same, the servers are clones fabricated according to the precise specifications of the particular job they are required to do — literally fabricated. The consumerist world of Nea So Copros is a society motivated by 'wants', and these prove to be a potent force when government and the corporatist agenda conspire to legislate and direct the consumers' compliance to their regime. Value is consumption in this culture where everything appears identical, either through 'facescaping' or cloning, and to look the same is the ideal (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 337). As Linda Hutcheon

claims “[i]n a capitalist context [...] the preference of individualism (and thus of choice) is in fact proportional to the ‘liquidation of the individual’ in mass manipulation, carried out in the name of democratic ideals — the mask of conformity” (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 13). Mitchell’s postmodernist narrative decentres the Romantic notion of the individual to examine why and how a society of ‘liquidated’ ‘individualism’ could come to pass. It interrogates and exposes the production of culture — a production that is always politically motivated by the will to power. Mitchell explores the political efficacy of the ‘construction’ of a culture of (illusory) ‘individuality’, a culture which Foucault asserts, wields a “whole technology over the body” so, as discussed in Chapter Two, “[a] ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence [...] [t]he soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy” (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 30). The concept of the ‘individual’ is shown to be a construct of (social) power; individuals are effectively clones, determined by the power structures that exist within any given society.

In a discussion of J. M. Coetzee’s Foe Derek Attridge claims that the overt intertextuality in a novel can be regarded as an attempt to draw attention to the way the text, like any text, is *manufactured* from the resources of a particular culture in order to gain acceptance within that culture (Attridge 73). In Foe, Coetzee extends this idea to the manufacture of identity. His character Susan Barton is determined not by ‘herself’ but by the culture within which she exists. Coetzee exposes Susan’s delusional belief that she is the mistress of her own story on three levels. Firstly, Susan is the creation of the writer of Foe who ‘writes’ her by excising her from the (male) castaway narrative and inserting her

as the main character in the story of a fallen woman. But, also, Susan is shown to be Coetzee's fictional creation *and* one who will be (re)interpreted (thus written) by his reader. Mitchell employs similar textual play to expose the illusion of individuality in his characterisation of Somni~451. Not only does the State actually create Somni to the precise specifications required for her future servitude, it then later chooses to modify her ('poisoning' her food source), fabricating her as an enemy to serve its ends. For much of the narrative the reader is encouraged to see Somni as an individual who rebels against the State; however, it is later revealed that (like Susan Barton) both Somni's ascension and 'rebellion' have been scripted by the state from the beginning. Somni has never been and will never be the mistress of her story. Furthermore, not only has she been 'scripted' by the State but also by Mitchell who literally writes (invents) her and by the reader who 'reads' and imposes meaning on her. She is then later reinvented and reread by the Prescients/ Zachry. In all these ways, Mitchell challenges the reader's perception of what constitutes Somni's 'reality' and ostensible individuality or free will.

Mitchell uses a number of devices to show the artifice of each narrative in the first part — not least the suggestion that each story is mediated by the interpretation of the protagonist in the following story. As previously discussed, this focuses Mitchell's reader on his or her own act of meaning construction when reading the novel. Through the Russian doll structure we read each narrative in light of the knowledge gained in reading the prior stories. Each new narrative also mediates, and forces a re-interpretation of the narrative(s) that have come before. Therefore, our reading of the sixth and complete central

narrative is influenced by our knowledge of the five stories that precede it. “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After” also acts as a kind of conclusion for the five unfinished narratives — this is the apocalyptic end to which they are all heading. However, the narrative is *not* an ending, but rather it suggests a new beginning — a new story begins (itself incomplete) and a new world too. In consequence our ‘return’ to each of the five former narratives is altered — we (re)interpret each anew.

iii) Mitchell’s Reader

Through the act of reading Cloud Atlas’s six narratives the reader’s attention is continually drawn to the text’s status as a constructed artefact that is read and interpreted, not just by the protagonists of the following narrative, but also by other readers who will add their own layer of meaning. Each of the six generically different stories emphasises the relationship between creator and reader/ viewer. Mitchell adheres to the generic conventions of the narrative modes he utilises. Each genre provokes a different stylistic approach from Mitchell, and a different response and set of expectations from the reader. The overt and often destabilising shifts between different genres operates to highlight the constructedness of the narratives, and the impossibility of imposing a universal genre — a way of writing, a way of reading — to explain a universal ‘truth’ or ‘meaning’ of human experience. The shifts in genres, coupled with copious examples of both intertextual and intratextual referencing, allows

Mitchell to consider the interconnectedness of a world where, through a process of cause and effect, differences and similarities are highlighted through mutual relationships. The continual injunction to 'compare and contrast' underscores the possibility for multiple interpretations at any one moment. Simultaneously, however, the shift between genres allows Mitchell to represent the transformations in worldview over time; he interrogates the fissures that exist between genres (or 'frames'), in order to examine the gaps that exist between human knowledge and experience. Finally, because characters (re)appear in different narratives and are differently framed by the genres Mitchell employs, we are enjoined not to read them through a single totalising lens. In contrast to the preceding five narratives, Zachry's audience is undisclosed; perhaps Zachry's implied audience is the reader of Mitchell's novel. Conceivably, if the final audience is in fact Mitchell's reader, then perhaps Mitchell is offering this story to the reader to interpret, and to retell and to remember. The portrayal of a 'potential' post-apocalyptic future that is recognisably linked to the other narratives illustrates the interconnectedness of human existence and the importance of (re)interpretation of the present in light of 'past' and 'future'. This suggests the ability to recontextualise and write both a "history of the present" and a 'future of the present' so as to (re)interpret the 'meaning' of the present (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 31).

Halfway through "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing", supplementary footnotes alert the reader to the 'fact' that Ewing's son Jackson has edited the diary, so crucially the reader becomes cognisant of his or her role as reader of a mediated script. Their reading is superimposed on Jackson's — multiply distancing him or

her from the 'truth' of events. Footnotes to a 'life' journal also suggest the ways in which a life can be reinterpreted or rescripted in the future, with the 'facts' of the past altered by other textual traces. In Black Swan Green, a novel written after Cloud Atlas, the teenage protagonist looks up "Vyvyan Ayrs in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* at school" and discovers that this once great composer, introduced so comprehensively in Cloud Atlas, and who "was critically respected during his lifetime [...] is now rarely referred to outside the footnotes of twentieth century music" (Mitchell Black Swan Green 197; italics original). Retrospective interpretation of people and events changes according to the circumstances and contexts within which each interpretation, and subsequent interpretation, takes place. Somni becomes a goddess; Ayrs is relegated to the margins of musical history.

In his seminal work The Death of the Author, Roland Barthes suggests that the meaning of any text depends on its final 'destination', its audience. According to Barthes in the act of reading a work the author is no longer the focus of creativity: the "birth of the reader" signals the author's death. The author has become merely the 'scriptor', and as such this newly envisaged role must be clearly distinguished from the idea of the author as the final authority of a text (Barthes 150). The scriptor exists merely to create the text, not to explain the text or to grant final meaning to it. In this way, the scriptor who creates a text 'dies' once the text is complete. Robert Frobisher too dies once he, as composer, has finished his masterpiece, the "Cloud Atlas Sextet", and its "spectral" notes exist in the future to haunt the lives of those who hear it, but each interprets it individually and understand its meaning in their own personal and unique way

(Mitchell Cloud Atlas 425). When Luisa Rey hears the sextet “[t]he sound is pristine, riverlike, spectral, hypnotic [...] *intimately familiar*” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 425; italics original). For Jason Taylor the music is “[j]ealous *and* sweet [...] sobbing *and* gorgeous, muddy *and* crystal” (Mitchell Black Swan Green 192; italics original). In this way the sextet — or rather its ‘meaning’ — is continually reborn on each hearing and imbued with a new ‘meaning’ created by the person who hears it and responds to its notes in their own particular way.

Barthes maintains that every work is ‘written’ eternally here and now and that with each reading a new essence or origin is created for it. Hence Barthes suggests that the meaning of a text resides within language itself, with the ‘traces’ it carries, and the impressions made upon each reader. Writing, like music, exists in a multi-dimensional space where a meaning cannot be definitively extracted but new meanings are created on each successive reading, as each reader brings their own understanding, experiences, knowledge and beliefs to the text (Barthes 150). Mitchell plays with the malleability of meaning in his pointed portrayal of multiple interpreters of his text and its contained narratives. In Cloud Atlas, the disclosure that Jackson Ewing has edited his father’s journal immediately distances the reader from the assumption of the unmediated truth of recorded events, throwing doubt over the authenticity of the journal as a vehicle for the ‘true’ account of ‘actual’ events that occurred to Adam Ewing on his voyage. One effect is to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that she/ he always reads with hindsight and at a distance from what ‘really happened’. Indeed, it is Frobisher, as the later reader of Ewing’s diary, who alerts Mitchell’s reader to the fact that the “murdering confidence trickster” Dr Henry

Goose, has “been killing [Ewing] by degrees” with a combination of “arsenick & opiate” in an attempt to steal the contents of Ewing’s trunk (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 523-4). However, when the reader reads the first half of the Ewing narrative she/ he is blissfully unaware of Dr Goose’s machinations. So the reader’s initial response to Ewing’s narrative is radically altered as a result of Frobisher’s subsequent narrative. This new information compels the reader to reconsider the ‘meaning’ or ‘truth’ of what was initially understood on the first reading. This suggests that ‘meaning’ is only ever provisional or partial and that it is conditioned by both context, reader placement and through the acquisition of new information, knowledge that can supplement the initial reading. Frobisher also questions the authenticity of Ewing’s journal which to him “seems too structured for a genuine diary”, and comments on the posthumous publication of the diary by Jackson Ewing with the insinuation being that Jackson may have fabricated certain aspects of the story to portray his father as a helplessly naïve victim (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 64). In all these ways Mitchell asks his reader to consider where and what *is* ‘within the true’ at any given moment of reading.

As suggested, then, in Cloud Atlas, Mitchell asks the reader to question the idea of a definitive ‘truth’ and what in fact ‘truth’ is. In particular he questions whether or not perceived ‘truth’ relates to ‘facts’. Often perceived truth and facts relate only to an individual’s limited understandings. Alberto Grimaldi, CEO of Seaboard Corporation, believes Luisa “noosed Sixsmith” into leaking the Sixsmith Report because of her beauty, when in fact Sixsmith is a homosexual devoted to the two loves of his life, Frobisher and his scientific integrity (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 131). As André Brink claims in his account of historical narrativisation and

memory, “the individual constitutes and invents her/ himself through the constant editing and re-editing of memory” (Brink 30). Zachry tells his tribe that his father has been killed and his brother enslaved by the Kona, but neglects to say that it was he that led the Kona to his brother and father, and that it was cowardice that made him hide and watch, rather than attempt to save them from the horrors they endured. In this respect present ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth’ can also be conditioned by external factors. In Cloud Atlas, the reader constantly re-edits their ‘memory’ of both characters and history. As the result of changing knowledge, we perceive Dr Goose as a Bedlamite, then a honourable doctor, an outspoken dinner guest, then finally a poisoner, extortioner and attempted murderer. So that ‘history’ — individual and collective — is shown to be a fluid construct which can be continually modified through changing ‘knowledge’, through the revisions of ‘memory’. However, when ‘memory’ is conditioned by the discourses that condone colonisation, slavery and genocide, defining the identity of a people according to what they ‘lack’, memory can become “notoriously unreliable; we [become] not just what we remember but also what we (choose to) forget” (Durrant 2). Memory also changes radically according to different contexts in which we remember events and people — or wilfully ‘choose’ to ‘forget’ them. The silence that can be imposed upon the open expression of knowledge differs from the silence of true forgetting; it leaves a trace that survives to be remembered (Gregson 121). What is forced to the periphery at one historical moment, or silenced, or forgotten, can be reinterpreted — reheard, remembered — within a new context in a different age and this can alter how we ‘know’ the past and reimagine the future.

That the central story, "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After", is ostensibly told to Mitchell's reader and not read by a subsequent protagonist reiterates and extends upon Barthes' sentiments about the birth of the reader — Mitchell's reader — and suggests that the power of future interpretation resides with him or her. Through the (re)creation and (re)interpretation of the following narrative and the ones that came before, new 'meanings' and 'truths' can be made. The reader's awareness that 'meaning' is only ever partial and conditional upon the information that has been discovered, or uncovered, in the act of reading is emphasised. In "Letters from Zedelghem", in true epistolary style, Frobisher's letters create 'him'; the 'protagonist' of the story selects the words, and it is these words that direct the reader's attention to the thoughts and traits of, in this case, the narcissistic young composer. Within these letters, it is Frobisher who apparently holds the power to name, to construct and to interpret objects and events through his individual frame. We have no access to the thoughts or intentions of other characters. However, subsequent introduction to Sixsmith offers a new frame for interpreting Frobisher and his letters. As a surrealist Robert Frobisher seeks to revolt against what he perceives as the restraints on his free creativity: logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and norms, and control over the artistic process by forethought and intention. As a movement surrealism gave precedence to the state of 'deep mind' or unconscious from which 'automatic writing' ostensibly sprung. Surrealists exploited the world of dreams and of the states of mind experienced between waking and sleeping, so that in their work dreamlike sequences were juxtaposed with seemingly unrelated images (Abrams 319). Mitchell vehemently develops this idea in a proleptic textual moment when Ayr

comments on the inspiration for his musical annotations: “I dreamt of a [...] nightmarish café, brilliantly lit, but underground, with no way out. I’d been dead a long time. The waitresses all had the same face. The food was soap, the only drink was cups of lather. The music in the café was [...] this” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 80). In this case, Frobisher notates Ayrs’s melody ‘from the future’. In another overtly ironic metafictional moment, in the fourth narrative, Cavendish comments on his disapproval for “backflashes, foreshadowing’s and tricky devices” used by authors (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 152). Soon after, Mitchell indulges in a self-conscious play of foreshadowing when Cavendish, attempting to purchase a train ticket, comments that “the corporation breed them [employees of the train service] from the same stem cell” (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 170). The allusion to Nea So Copros is not apparent, of course, until the reader has read the fifth narrative at which point we are encouraged to reconsider what we have already read. This is one of many instances of foreshadowing retrospectively realised by Mitchell’s reader which all emphasise the importance of rereading. All, also, have a destabilising effect, suggesting the interlinking and interconnected nature of the various protagonists’ lives. This is further reinforced by the recurrence of the comet-shaped birthmark and the many highlighted acts of remembering the past in light of ‘new’ information. The implication is that it is in the reading of the ‘future’ that the meaning of the ‘past’ changes; we retrospectively reinterpret ‘meaning’ in light of subsequently acquired and ‘digested’ knowledge. We (re)read and (re)interpret the ‘present’ and ‘past’ narratives in light of ‘knowledge’ acquired from the future narrative(s) — and of course, in the second half of the novel we do the reverse, reading the ‘past’ in light of the ‘future’. Conceivably, the trick is that the reader

simultaneously recognises that Frobisher is ‘made-up’ by Mitchell, and that Cloud Atlas is in fact Mitchell’s ‘meaning’, so that Zachry’s story, the story to ‘pass on’, is open for the reader to imbue with their own particular ‘meaning’, their own particular ‘truth’.

iv) Knowledge, Memory, Truth

Shortly before he is assassinated, the nuclear scientist Isaac Sachs ponders his theory of the reality of the actual past and the virtual past — the actual past disappears into obscurity but the virtual past, “reworked from memories, papers, hearsay, fiction — in short belief — grows ever ‘truer’ [...]]t]he present presses this ‘virtual past’ into its own service, to lend credence to its mythologies” and its ‘realities’ (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 408). Toni Morrison’s Beloved suggests the possibility of a redemptive love, achieved by a re-membering the ghosts of the past, which might enable the reconstitution of humanity (Gregson 91). Adam Ewing similarly concludes his journal, at the close of Mitchell’s novel, with the proposition that

if we *believe* that humanity may transcend tooth & claw, if we *believe* divers races & creeds can share this world as peaceably as the orphans share their candlenut tree, if we *believe* leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable & the riches of the Earth & its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass. (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 528; italics original)

The social and ideological production of meaning, what is called ‘culture’, is exposed as the effect of social representations rather than their source. It is often argued that western capitalist culture shows a bewildering ability to normalise signs and images regardless of how disparate or unfamiliar they might appear

(Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 6-7). Mitchell develops this idea exponentially to highlight a potential future humanity is heading towards when twenty-first century characteristics are exaggerated to become a nightmarish future 'reality'. He offers a 'future' picture of the ultimate model of a consumerist society driven purely by 'want', a society where clones are fabricated to serve the state and trivialities become values. Cloud Atlas examines a society that forgets, because it has forgotten how (and what) to remember. Zachry's post-apocalyptic society has forgotten its past: "*names haunted their 'maginins' [...] Melbun, Orkland, Jo'berg, Buenas Yerbs, Mumbay, Sing'pore*" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 285; italics original). The Valley Tribes exist in a savage and primitive state, far removed from the scientific and technological advances that "*tripped the Fall*" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 286; italics original).

Robert Frobisher writes letters to Rufus Sixsmith fully aware that Sixsmith will read them and interpret them, infusing them with his own individual meaning. Frobisher's letters, as memoirs, express memories that are particular only to him. There is no interaction between characters, as a result of the epistolary narrative mode. All we read and know (until our later meeting of Sixsmith in Luisa Rey's narrative) is the Robert Robert pens, and the misinterpretations of both events and people that blights his life. His self-absorbed traits are illustrated most definitively in his double misinterpretation of Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck. Firstly, he believes that her chaperone is her lover, and secondly he considers that her declaration of love is for him rather than the true object of her affection, her fiancé Grigoire. Robert is only able to conceive that she loves him; his narcissistic self-consumption becomes literal, as his narcissism

consumes his life (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 469). Here, as throughout the narrative, the reader's attention is drawn to the potential for misinterpretation and misunderstanding that can occur between people. Frobisher writes of his own interpretative reading that "Ewing puts [him] in mind of Melville's bumbler Cpt. Delano" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 64). The allusion is apposite. Herman Melville writes in the opening of Moby Dick about the story "of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all" (Melville 5). Frobisher, like Melville's version of Narcissus, is literally disinherited from his past. He is unwilling to embrace and acknowledge that the 'self' is not exclusive, but rather inclusive of history: so that both the future and the present lead to his demise. Martina Hrubes suggests that this emphasis on the individual as unique and originating is an inherent trait of modernism's denial of tradition (Hrubes 79) — and that the decentring of such notions is a marker of postmodern critique. Frobisher is conceitedly dismissive of compositions from the past, arrogantly claiming that "the finest moments in 'Todtenvogel' are mine [...] The contrapuntal ingenuities [...] are mine"; he believes it is only he who has any original musical ideas to offer the world (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 474). In these terms, Frobisher is typically modern. Already disinherited from the past and his family, Frobisher's suicide resolutely disassociates him from both his present reality and the potential for a future. Suicide is portrayed as a 'choice' made by characters within the novel that cannot reconcile their life with their perception of the 'reality' of their world (Seer Rhee overdoses on 'soap', Denholme Cavendish drowns himself in his pool, and the

scientist in the observatory above Mauna Kea dies after observing the 'Fall'). Ironically, rather than an expression of unique individuality, it is in fact the end of the individual, the final expression of the loss of choice. But Mitchell suggests there are always other choices possible. The reader's understanding is altered through Frobisher's reinterpretation of Ewing, and then the reader's 'knowledge' of both Frobisher and Sixsmith changes markedly when Sixsmith appears in the Luisa Rey narrative and she/ we read Frobisher's last letters; similarly our interpretation of Eva (and Frobisher) changes when we read Black Swan Green. Frobisher's interpretation of Sixsmith as a devoted lover, blind to Frobisher's (many) faults, is greatly at odds with the characterisation of Sixsmith in the Luisa Rey narrative. Within that narrative Sixsmith is a man of scientific integrity, and steely determination (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 115). Similarly, the reader's response to Luisa and her bravery and integrity changes when, on reading the Cavendish narrative, we learn that her life-story is in fact a fiction, written by Hilary V. Hush, adhering to the conventions of an 'airport thriller'. Presenting these 'variations' of Sixsmith and Luisa in close succession serves to illustrate the significance of context in attributing meaning, the differences that exist between interpretations and, also, the different roles people play in relation to the lives/ narratives of others. Furthermore, the presentation of Eva Crommelynck, Robert Frobisher and Denholme and Timothy Cavendish across three of Mitchell's novels highlights the process of (re)interpretation and 'meaning' making as a continual process, one that constantly evolves in light of 'new' information from the past, present and future. Each subsequent narrative in Cloud Atlas — and beyond it — alters the reader's initial response to the 'original' characters and events, and changes their initial 'meaning'.

While each of the preceding tales is written, filmed or recorded, at Cloud Atlas's epicentre is Zachry, who spins his yarn around a campfire. "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After" foregrounds the inevitable conclusion towards which the worlds of Mitchell's creation are destined. The portrayed post-apocalyptic society has 'forgotten' the scientific advances and knowledge that led to the apocalypse; it is now a state a warring factions, prone to arm-to-arm combat and destruction, albeit on a pre-industrialisation scale. Zachry's narrative emphasises the dangers of forgetting the lessons of history. It becomes clear that the disaster that ended "the Civ'lise Days", and shaped Zachry's present, was foreseen from the beginning, and yet, after 'the Fall', it is storytelling that survives science, perhaps suggesting that if anything can save humankind from an apocalypse it is narrative, and the process of what Toni Morrison calls "rememory" in Beloved (Morrison 238). In Beloved, Sethe's ghost-daughter Beloved holds power over Sethe because her memory always lives. What haunts Sethe is not just the memory of events and of her daughter, but also fear of the reality of the past. Morrison implies that rather than remain a victim of traumatic memory, Sethe needs to actively "rememory" the past. What she advocates is not simply remembering as a repetition of past events but an active reinterpretation of those events, a reshaping of them into a new narrative. As a notion, rememory suggests the importance of the reinterpretation of the horrors in the past as a way of reconceptualising the present and future (Rody 101). The contrivance of a ghost-daughter who sits down at the table with real, 'living' characters and confronts the reader with the horrors and experiences of slavery in the flesh, rather than at the safe and comfortable distance of metaphor, is unnerving. In this way the character Beloved functions to suggest the need to incorporate the

traumatic past into the present narrative of self and nation. Morrison suggests that only in this way can one allay the haunting of the past. She suggests a way of envisaging a new future after slavery, a future that can only be 'lived' when the events of the past are acknowledged, understood and incorporated into the present. In Morrison's novel, then, *Beloved* is literally granted a voice that had previously only haunted the periphery of texts and lives in a nation where the horrors of slavery were silenced or subordinated to a national myth of progress. Like Morrison, Mitchell appears to endorse the idea that history is retrievable and (re)memorable: that the act of remembering is a vital part of the reconstruction of 'meaning' and identity in (and for) the future (Gregson 91). The nihilistic conclusion portrayed at the novel's centre is not the inescapable 'end' for Mitchell's reader; narratives that return us to the 'past' follow the central narrative. Arguably the knowledge of this 'inevitable' end/ future invites the reader to reinterpret both the 'past' narratives and the 'present' reality. In the light of this new and alternative future knowledge, perhaps the reader can envision a different present which in turn will enable a different future.

While pondering the circumstances that led to his incarceration at Aurora House, Timothy Cavendish wishes "for a never-changing map of the constant ineffable? To possess as it were, an atlas of clouds" that would chart the course of his life, rather than the reality of living a life that is not fixed and predetermined (Mitchell *Cloud Atlas* 389). The very name *Cloud Atlas* suggests an attempt to assign permanence to and fix meaning upon an intangible and fluid substance (Hrubes 150), and ultimately the futility and failure of that attempt. How could one chart the clouds? To possess a permanent atlas of clouds would be to impose

an individual script (interpretation) upon the clouds' ineffable changeability, to presume that an individual will or human nature is fixed, and thus, perhaps, to resign oneself to Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence, the eternal hourglass of existence. Instead Mitchell posits acts of creativity and new ways of envisaging, and reinterpreting the past, as a way of conceiving of new endings. Such an idea directly counters the apathetic and nihilistic endpoint advocated within the theory of eternal recurrence where events are 'seen' to happen over and over again *ad infinitum* and the only (moral) response can be one of acceptance.

Reading Cloud Atlas is an almost voyeuristic encounter where one is flung into different worlds inhabited by vastly different characters. But for all the immediacy of each narrative encounter there are always hints of the preceding (and future) narratives either by way of a reminiscent character or an echoed situation or a familiar document, that encourage the reader to question the presumed 'reality' that has been presented. Ewing's reported experience in the Chatham Islands invites interrogation of the assumptions of the colonising mission. What was its pretext? Was any part of it justifiable? To what particular part of European society was the mission palatable? Was it a civilising mission, bringing Christianity, enlightenment and progress? Or did pure greed and the mercantile trade motivate it? Ewing's experience with the Maori chief Kupaka (introducing him, and the reader, to slavery and the virtual genocide of the Moriori people), with the "garter-snakes" of the *Prophetess* (sodomy) and with the despicable Dr Goose (poisoner and extortioner), colour Ewing's interpretation of the events he encounters, just as the reader's interpretation of

each story is influenced through Mitchell's contextualisation within the narratives through the repetition of characters, situations and documents in subsequent narratives, albeit in slightly altered forms. But what would have happened if these influential experiences had not entered Ewing's 'world-picture' and irremediably altered his perceptions of truth and value? Just as Ewing's 'reading' of events is coloured by his (previous) experiences, so too is that of Mitchell's text and Mitchell's reader. As Italo Calvino suggests, at the start of If on a Winter's Night a Traveller, each reader approaches a text with different judgements and preferences; whether they read with their feet perched up on the couch, in solitude or with the television blaring in the next room, each reader's view is coloured before they sit down and open the pages (Calvino 3). In Cloud Atlas the reader's interpretations are also 'coloured' by the experience of reading each previous narrative and by the central narrative in light of which we read and subsequently reinterpret the conclusion of each story. The knowledge of other texts that form the copious number of intertextual references and other life experiences shape each individual reading, '(re)interpretation' and inscription of narrative 'truth'. Of course, such experiential frames shape every act of reading but a postmodernist narrative, such as Mitchell's text, makes these frames overt, disallowing the illusion of neutral absorption of textual 'fact'.

Jean-Francois Lyotard claims that what legitimates knowledge in the postmodern condition is how well it performs, or enables a person to perform in particular societal roles; this idea forms the basis of Lyotard's 'performativity' criterion. In such a schema, knowledge and decision-making are no longer based on abstract principles but rather on desired outcomes. This idea of

performativity removes any question of 'ethics', so that in the application of knowledge the equation becomes 'might makes right'. Particularly concerning to Lyotard was the operation of science in the service of performativity (as power). He sees this operation as leading inevitably to rule by terror (Gregson 62). Arguably, this is evident in the totalitarian regime of Nea So Copros in which citizens have become 'consumers' created by the State's discourse of knowledge-power. They have no right to question the State; they are controlled at every junction. Science has developed to such an extent and gathered a momentum that almost has a life, and justification, of its own. Fabricants are bred in wombtanks to service industry, consumers are bound to spend spend spend. Everything is for sale, and controlled by the State; they are even able to sell their child-quota. As "Catechism Seven [dictates to the consumers of Nea So Copros] states, 'A Soul's Value is the Dollars Therein'" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 341). The ultimate endpoint of science in the service of power, with no perceivable ethical standpoint, would be a major global catastrophe to the extent that it would bring 'the Fall' of humanity, such as Zachry's apocalyptic world on Ha-Why or the endpoint for the retired fabricants, Xultation.

The 'active forgetting' of the past social history and scientific technologies portrayed on Ha-Why provokes questions of how, if we only know our present through our past or through an imagined future, do we know which 'version' is correct? Within Cloud Atlas Mitchell's overt use of different genres, different settings, different characters and the same characters but in different contexts, encourages the reader to consume and 'chew over' his world and the 'meanings' and 'truths'. In A Poetics of Postmodernism, Hutcheon considers Salman

Rushdie's conception of the "chutnification of history" where "each chapter is like a pickle jar that shapes its contents by its very form" (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 64; Mitchell Cloud Atlas). Rushdie's image of pickles and preserves also stresses manufacture via combination, whereby ingredients can mutate to create a different product. If we extend this idea to the 'preservation' of memory and history, the narrative 'chutney' changes according to not only what is included in the 'text' and what is left out but *also* the form that text takes. Hutcheon asks "which facts and whose facts make it into history" (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 68) — and by extension, which and whose facts are left out? When Luisa Rey walks past the *Prophetess* moored at the marina, it is the "BEST-PRESERVED SCHOONER IN THE WORLD" (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 448; capitalisation original). Yet when Adam Ewing sailed on it in the nineteenth century, it was crewed by the most despicable type of villains and bore witness to scenes of great debauchery. This 'interpretation' is the one Ewing left the reader of his journal, a journal edited by his son, whose subsequent interpretation and power to alter the entries shape the diary and enable Jackson to promote and 'preserve' a certain image of his father. Somni's image is similarly 'preserved' inside the orison, allowing her 'meaning' to be continually reinterpreted in the future. Rushdie's idea of preservation holds that it is a blend of many factors including history, power, class and social structure that determines what shape the jar will be and what combination of ingredients to seal inside the jar therefore determines the resulting taste of the chutney, our present. Preservation also suggests the idea of memory that is bottled and removed from the reality of how it was created and what events (ingredients) led to the resulting product (and what was left out) — to be eaten later. Clearly,

not only narrative ingredients — what is included, what is left out and in what quantities — but also the container/ 'jar' (genre) in which they are combined, determines the resulting understanding of 'history', 'present' and 'reality'.

However, taste is determined by other factors, and so the 'consumer', in this case the reader, is also significant in determining meaning.

In postmodernist fiction there is a contradictory impulse to both question totalising narratives and the "'terror' that it is really someone else who is plotting, ordering and controlling our life for us" (Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 66). Arguably it is only when we are aware of the arbitrary and socially determined nature of representation, our societal defined 'truths', that we can begin to imagine alternative modes of representation and create, or at least imagine new narratives. Foucault suggests that the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another so that any growth in power can give rise within institutions to new 'potential' branches of knowledge. Thus the effects of power can be seen through the formation and accumulation of new forms of 'knowledge', through a refinement and readjustment of power relations (Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 224). But there is scope for challenge to prevailing discourses, however limited. Aotua refuses the narrative the Maori colonisers impose on him. His knowledge of life outside of slavery and of the Chatham Islands, as "a second-mate on a French whaler", makes different 'truths' available to him, and gives him courage to repeatedly refuse to succumb to a lifetime of servitude; he believes he has the right to 'determine' his own life, however illusory this might be (Mitchell Cloud Atlas 31). He escapes from the manacles of slavery to join the *Prophetess* and, even if the

conditions of his existence are not much improved, this act enables him to subsequently rescue Ewing from the wicked machinations of Dr Goose.

As a consequence of Mitchell's typically overt self-reflexivity the reader cannot succumb to the 'suspension of disbelief' that conventionally marks realist reading; she/ he is always aware of the narrative's self-conscious composition and manipulation of images. Mitchell continually foregrounds the master narrative that underpin capitalist modernity to cast suspicion on the operation of power-knowledge within each society. As a result, the reader is encouraged to question and continually reconsider the social and political representations and structures that function within his/ her world. Traditionally, the point of history has been to understand it in relation to successive events, to learn from the 'facts' of the past. But Mitchell asks us to recognise that history itself is a (partial) construct; in the words of Bertolt Brecht: "we must leave [histories] their distinguishing marks and keep their impermanence before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen as impermanent too" (quoted in Hutcheon The Politics of Postmodernism 70). What David Mitchell proposes is that the history of (Western) capitalism and 'liberal' ideology is part of a wider struggle of historical forces and human relations. In exposing the recurrence of this history *within* his narrative(s) he utilises postmodern narrative strategies to point to the possibilities for alternative future(s). Through his use of postmodernist metafictional narrative techniques Mitchell interrogates the possibilities of narrating alternative realities and new ways of interpreting the world. By drawing attention to the narratives' status as an artefact, and to the text as a construct, Mitchell positions his reader as an active interpreter, not just a passive

receiver of narrative 'fact'. This is not to suggest that the reader has an infinite capacity to (re)interpret 'meaning' and 'truth'. What Mitchell suggests is that she/ he has some (limited) role in determining 'choice' or creating 'meaning' to the text, and by extension to their own lives. Through the uncovering of new 'knowledge' and new 'fact', the reader can construct for themselves a new way of seeing the creative potential of narrative, a new perspective from which to view the past, present and future.

Conclusion — Cloud Atlas “Revolutionary [not] Gimmicky”

As an exploration of the predatory nature of individuals and collectives from the beginnings of modern capitalism to its (imagined) apocalyptic endpoint, Cloud Atlas successfully portrays and interrogates the fatalistic conception inherent in Frederic Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power. At its most basic the will to power is a bleak picture of a world in which the powerful suppress, oppress and brutally destroy any individual who attempts to stand in their way; it is a horrendous conception of a world ridden with corruption, murder, slavery and destruction. However, as I have argued, David Mitchell refuses to complacently accept the nihilistic post-apocalyptic dystopia represented in Zachry’s world, a world that, even as it ‘begins again’, repeats the history that led to the destruction of ‘civilisation’: a world in which individuals are similarly consumed by the hunger for power and its increase, a world that is an ethical and moral wasteland. Instead, I have suggested, he promotes the notion of (limited) individual agency and the capacity for creative narration and reinterpretation of ‘history’ as a means to conceive of new ‘truths’ and explore new ‘meanings’ for the present and the future, thereby countering the ‘inevitability’ of recurrence. Through his extensive examination of Nietzsche’s theories and of Michel Foucault’s conception of the relationship between power and knowledge, Mitchell interrogates the way in which societies, across time, utilise discourse and social institutions to consolidate power through the control and validation of discourses that legitimate ‘truths’ that maintain the dominance of those already in power.

I have argued that despite the significantly determined lives of his protagonists, Mitchell portrays their (limited) capacity for 'choice', figured as the capacity to narrate or speak in ways that challenge prevailing systems of belief and the social structures they uphold. Adam Ewing chooses to become an abolitionist on his return to America after his experiences of the oppression of slavery and the virtual genocide of the Moriori by Maori and the colonisation of Pacific Islanders under the guise of the civilising mission. He has witnessed the consumption of one culture and its beliefs by another that views itself as superior and this introduces a motif of predatory 'swallowing' that is developed in each of the narratives that follows. Luisa Rey fights corpocracy to expose the criminal acts committed to uphold the construction and expansion of Swannekke B. Timothy Cavendish writes his memoirs and exposes the maltreatment of the elderly, defined by society as a deviant group confined to the margins, out of sight. Somni, a slave in her own time is reconceived (renarrated) as a goddess in the future. Zachry's society is marked by forgetting and the loss of (much of) 'civilisation's' narrative, but Zachry himself survives to tell his story.

Mitchell emphasises the potential for individual choice conceived, then, as the ability to reconfigure new interpretations of our 'present', our 'future' and a reinscription of our 'past', acts of reinterpretation that are achievable through 'new' knowledge. For all this, he also presents characters, like Robert Frobisher, that cannot reconcile themselves to the interconnectedness of humanity, and the interrelated nature of history; paradoxically they conceive of their only 'choice' as the ending of their lives.

Each of the novel's six narratives emphasises the importance of both remembering and future anticipation as that which facilitates the creation of new 'meanings'. Mitchell encourages the reader to question and, more importantly to reconsider, the social and political representations and structures that function within the world. Without such questioning and reconsideration, he suggests, humanity *will* be resigned to the eternal hourglass of the eternal return, without a memory of the past and no cognisance of its repercussions in the present. Ignorance and lack of knowledge, overtly portrayed in Zachry's world but also shown to characterise all the novel's 'worlds', will, it is implied, simply result in the same decisions being made with no awareness as to the ramifications for the present and future.

Mitchell, however, does not simply *portray* the operation of the will to power or *tell* of the creative — and as I've suggested, ethical — capacity of narrative reconceptualisation as a means of countering the inevitability of materialist apocalypse and of the eternal recurrence of dominance and power. The very structure of and narrative strategies utilised in the novel *show* the ways in which narration and (re)interpretation can result in the reconceptualisation of meaning and truth. Mitchell's metafictional narrative strategies enable and encourage the reader to interrogate societal constructions of value across a broad historical spectrum. As a result of the novel's self-conscious foregrounding of its own construction, the reader is invited to consider the (social) construction of 'meaning' and 'truth' and understand these as potentially revisable narratives. Just as our understanding of Mitchell's embedded narratives and interlinked protagonists changes as we gain new knowledge as the result of our progression

through the text, so too, it is implied, might social narratives change in the light of new knowledge: new ways of reading might enable the envisioning of new narratives, new social roles and, even, new futures.

The repeated use of both intertextual and intratextual referencing is used to reveal how 'meanings' and 'truths' alter according to 'new' knowledge that becomes available to the reader. The *matrioshka* structure overtly highlights the revision of narratives through the lens of 'new' knowledge and the possibilities open to the reader to review the 'past' and the 'future' through new interpretation. Moreover, as a result of the novel's structure we read into the past and back from the future and, consequently, are asked to (re)read the (ostensible) present historical moment not only from the vantage point of its (capitalist, colonial, modernist) origins but also in light of its seemingly inevitable ethical end-point and apocalyptic conclusion.

I contend then, that the metafictional strategies used in Cloud Atlas are far from mere "gimmickery". They enunciate a political vision of the operation of relations of power, knowledge and discourse, certainly, but the text does more than offer (another) exposé of the ways in which the power to narrate and define functions to consolidate existing structures of social power. Rather, Mitchell uses a variety of metafictional strategies to *show*, perhaps paradoxically, the ways in which (new) narratives can in fact undermine and challenge what Foucault might call 'the order(s) of discourse' and result in the revisioning of past, present and future. As Mitchell continually displays throughout the novel, human beings possess a limited capacity for free choice: the world is not pre-determined by the will of the gods. Through willed narrative choice, individuals — like the author

and his reader — have the limited ability to create alternative narratives: new 'meanings', new 'truths', new 'endings'.

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