Mapping the Web of Language in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

by

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Abstract

Language plays an essential role in navigating the experimental fractured form of David Mitchell's 2004, Booker-Prize-shortlisted novel Cloud Atlas. The book is made up of six separate stories set in unique times and places ranging from Hawaii to Korea to England and from 1850 to a post-apocalyptic future. Though Sunday Telegraph reviewer Harry Mount famously refused to submit a review for the book, citing the "ludicrous olden-days dialogue" as a reason why it was "willfully confusing and impenetrable" (Sanderson), this thesis places the novel's language under closer analysis. By doing so, it examines exactly how the novel earned such polarized reactions.

After a relatively brief introduction to both the novel and some of the linguistic methods used in this analysis, this thesis will spend an entire chapter focusing on the main way in which language is used in the novel: to differentiate and characterize his six sections and their primary narrators, giving each section a distinct feel. Despite the attention drawn by the language of Cloud Atlas' final two sections due to their invented futuristic languages, Mitchell actually uses language as a technique to differentiate all six of his sections, albeit to different extents. Ultimately, each section's unique language can be traced back to both its setting/time period as well as more personal traits about each of the narrators. This thesis separates and categorizes language differences based on those two influences.

In the final chapter, the analysis shifts to ways in which language draws subtle connections throughout the six sections. Although seemingly paradoxical (how can language be a force of division and connection?), the dual effect of language comes from differences in scale. On its surface, the language of the six sections has major differences. But in ways that are barely noticeable, the language remains the same, connecting characters across sections in ways that support larger, non-linguistic connections in the novel. To conclude, this thesis meditates on the dual ability of language in the novel.

CONTENTS

Short Titles

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Introduction

> *Everything dies, baby, that's a fact. But maybe everything that dies someday comes back.*
>
> *-Bruce Springsteen, "Atlantic City"[1]*

At a reading during the 2011 Sydney Writers' Festival, an audience member stepped up to a microphone and asked a two-part question to David Mitchell, author of *Cloud Atlas*, about the "found links" in his books, or the reappearance of characters in different novels. "What was your aim in doing that?" he asked first, noting that Mitchell had claimed earlier to strive for originality in his works. "The second part of the question is: Why did you stop, in the last book [*The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*]?" (Mitchell, "SWF interview").

For Mitchell, the second question had a simple answer: "Aha! Actually, in [the book], there's about four links that I'm happy to say you've missed" (Mitchell, "SWF interview"). The audience took a moment to laugh before he listed some examples. "There's a character from *Cloud Atlas*—an old sea captain—he appears in the last few pages; there's a cat from *Black Swan Green*; and there's one or two others which I forget" (Mitchell, "SWF interview").

The first question, however, required a longer explanation. To answer it, he coined a makeshift theory of recurrence on the spot. His theory proposed that a positive byproduct of recurring characters was a property he called "transferrable concreteness" (Mitchell, "SWF interview"), or the idea that reappeared characters bring a sense of realism from their original book to the new one. As long as a reader would accept the reality of the original book, Mitchell supposed, the character would be inherently attached to that sense of reality. Using the example

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[1] The lyrics were sung by Mitchell in an interview with "The Book Catapult" in an attempt to explain why he brings back some of his characters for multiple novels. "It comes partly from the sense of not wanting to say goodbye" (Mitchell, "TBC interview").

of Sir John Falstaff, one of Shakespeare's recurring characters who appears in both of the *Henry IV* plays as well as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mitchell argued that "you know where he's been, you know how he dies; he [Falstaff] *imbues* that play [*The Merry Wives of Windsor*] with poignancy and sadness" (Mitchell, "SWF Interview").

The exchange reveals two very important facets of Mitchell's writing style. The first is his willingness to create extremely small or subtle connections between characters. The recurring cat stands as a an amusing yet important indicator of exactly how far he'll go to create these connections, as surely the idea to connect two pets located on opposite sides of the world is relatively original. Secondly, he uses characters as vessels for larger themes, moods, and ideas. His recognition that characters can transfer (or "imbue") parts of their original setting to another setting implies a significant concern for the multiple roles and purposes attached to each of his characters.

In *Cloud Atlas*, the focus of this thesis, I have determined that Mitchell mimics his own theory of recurrence in more self-contained ways. Instead of relying solely on *recurring* characters from other stories as a method of imbuing, he uses *reincarnated* characters from within the same novel. Because the book is divided into six sections, each with its own setting and characters, reincarnation through the form of nearly-identical birthmarks and déjà vu allows him to simulate the replication of the same character in multiple stories. While reincarnation as a trope has its limits (two reincarnations of a character are not *exactly* the same person), the byproduct of the literary device remains the same. Each reincarnation can transfer aspects of one section to another, creating connections that hold together an otherwise fragmented set of stories.

Everyone from literary critics to commercial reviewers to characters in the book itself point out that reincarnation is a major theme of the book, and they agree about its role in creating

the novel's sense of interconnectivity. In his review for *The New York Times*, the novelist Tom

Bissell sees "the strongly implied notion that every central character is a reincarnation of a

previous character" as one of the two "obvious connectors" (Bissell, n.p.) of the novel. Heather

Hicks argues that reincarnation gives the characters "a sense of solidarity with their other selves

across time" (Hicks, n.p.), while Fiona McCullouch extends the metaphor with the implications

that "each [birthmark] blurs into the other, connecting them all within Mitchell's spatiotemporal

tapestry and indicating that, as humans, we are all connected regardless of gender, sexuality,

ethnicity and so on" (McCullouch 149). Inside the book, Robert Frobisher even uses the idea as a

last attempt at connection before he commits suicide:

> Rome'll decline and fall again, Cortes'll lay Tenochtitlan to waste again, and later,
> Ewing will sail again, Adrian'll be blown to pieces again, you and I'll sleep under
> Corsican stars again, I'll come to Bruges again, fall in and out of love with Eva
> again, you'll read this letter again, the sun'll grow cold again. Nietzche's
> gramophone record. When it ends, the Old One plays it again, for an eternity of
> eternities. Time cannot permeate this sabbatical. We do not stay dead long. Once
> my Luger lets me go, my birth, next time round, will be upon me in a heartbeat
> (471).

A major problem with reincarnation is its believability; its mystical and supernatural

definition can lead to serious skepticism. Mitchell gives voice to the criticism through his

character Timothy Cavendish, who points out that "the insinuation that Luisa Rey is this Robert

Frobisher chap reincarnated, for example. Far too hippy-druggy—new age" (357). And while the

critic Jo-Alyson Parker points out that "the reader need not subscribe to this 'new age'

metaphysics in order to get Mitchell's message" (Parker 209), even momentary skepticism can

jolt a reader out of the reading experience, leading to "the beautiful, shimmering bubble of

fiction getting popped" (Mitchell, "SWF interview"). A few skeptical critics couldn't overcome

the flimsiness of the novel's major connector. *Sunday Telegraph* reviewer Harry Mount

famously refused to submit a review for the book at all, claiming that it was unreadable (Sanderson, "Literary Life).

By acknowledging (through the voice of his own character) the skepticism surrounding reincarnation, Mitchell attempts to sympathize with skeptic readers, inviting them back into the story. The direct effectiveness of this tactic is questionable. Bissell, for instance, sees through this tactic, saying that "self-mockery as self-protection is a very old gambit, certainly, but it is beneath a writer as brilliant as Mitchell" (Bissell, n.p.). Bissell would be right, except Mitchell uses more than a birthmark motif and the occasional moment of déjà vu to connect the characters in *Cloud Atlas*. My argument states that the theme of reincarnation is supported closely by how Mitchell uses language in the novel.

Generally, the language of *Cloud Atlas* attracts attention for the opposite reason from reincarnation: it changes greatly between the six sections of the novel, becoming one of the main indicators for how characters are different, not connected. Mitchell creates the language of his sections with an incredible amount of care, as he invents two different futuristic dialects as well as multiple levels of a historical fiction dialect he jokingly calls "bygone-ese" (Mitchell, "SWF interview") due to its melding of certain archaic words and phrases with a modern dialect.[2] Within these settings he then admits to creating differences between different classes, cultures, genders and so on in an attempt to provide each character with his or her unique and fitting voice. "You have to have 'bygone-ese' for the British, 'bygone-ese' for the Dutch, 'bygone-ese' for the Japanese," he lists as he counts off on his fingers, "and then you have to have a 'bygone-ese' for the educated classes, a 'bygone-ese' for the 'oiks' . . . a 'bygone-ese' for the male

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[2] Some of the major features of "bygone-ese" that Mitchell mentions are the use of subjunctive verbs instead of "if," the replacement of "will" with "shall," and the tendency to avoid using contractions. The contractions will be analyzed in greater depth in Chapter 3.

Japanese characters, a 'bygone-ese' for the female Japanese characters" (Mitchell, "SWF interview").

However, the language of different characters occasionally shows subtle similarities. These similarities are rarely as blatant as the ways in which the language differs, but they exist nevertheless. In this thesis, I will argue that these similarities do more than just exist: they create connections between characters that complement the existing connections of reincarnation. Mitchell is an author highly concerned with language, as he says that "although a writer must sometimes pretend to use language lightly, he must never actually do so" (Mitchell, "BW interview"). For this reason, it is illogical to treat these similarities as mere coincidence or overlooked mistakes. Instead, they transgress his self-created sectional boundaries, creating a web of connections that stretches across the entire novel.

The first chapter will begin with a basic introduction to the novel and its structure. After providing a concise summary of the six narratives—a necessary subsection due to the complexity of the story and its lack of a single, unifying narrative—I'll move to an in-depth analysis of the novel's structure. Although the thesis's focus is language and its interaction with the theme of reincarnation in the novel, the novel's structure shapes the novel so strongly that it warrants its own explanation. Furthermore, an analysis of structure is important for its own sake in any of Mitchell's works, as he claims that structure is the area in which he can contribute the most to the evolution of the novel as an art form (Mitchell, "SWF interview"). The structural subsection concludes with the idea that the structural divisions of genre and time are enforced by differences in the language. Finally, the chapter will summarize the methods of linguistic analysis used in the later chapters of the thesis.

The second chapter explores the conclusion of the structural argument that language is a defining characteristic of each section. It begins by pointing out that, unlike the assumptions of other critics, who often focus on the eccentricities of the language of the future sections, the language of the sections set in the past and present differs greatly from section to section. The chapter divides the six sections of the novel into three pairs based on their temporal setting (past, present, and future), as these pairings allow for an analysis of language that is relatively similar. The differences highlighted by this method of analysis illuminate a secondary part of this argument; the language not only differentiates the sections by time, space, and genre but also works to characterize the narrators in specific ways.

The third chapter begins by pointing out the crossovers in language that disrupt the theory of language as solely a differentiator for the six sections of *Cloud Atlas*. I'll argue that smaller "indicator" features of language can be analyzed to determine the ways in which characters are connected across the sectional boundaries of space, genre, and time. By utilizing four case studies, I show the breadth of ways in which language connects characters as well as a few of the extremely specific and nuanced ways these linguistic features enhance the interconnectivity of the novel. While reincarnation explicitly connects the novel's six protagonists, this web of connections extends some of the work of reincarnation to minor characters.

Chapter 1 – Mapping *Cloud Atlas*

> *What you would like is the opening of an abstract and absolute space and time in which you could move, following an exact, taut trajectory; but when you seem to be succeeding, you realize that you are motionless, blocked, forced to repeat everything from the beginning.*
>   *-Italo Calvino, If On a Winter's Night a Traveler p. 27*

Cloud Atlas' unavoidably representative feature is its conceptual structure. Put briefly: the novel is a six-part epistolary narrated from different perspectives that reaches forward through time and then back again, exploring different settings as it goes. That the result feels connected at all is remarkable; Tom Bissell describes it in his *New York Times* review as a "deliberately difficult book" akin to "James Michener's 'Alaska' with an I.Q. transplant" (Bissell, n.p.). The innovative structure has even inspired critical analysis dedicated solely to parsing its various intricacies. Jo Alyson Parker's essay in the collection *Time: Limits and Constraints* stands out in this field, composing various charts and graphs that record the novel's curvy trajectory through time. "With its embedded narratives, suspensions of closure, boomerang trajectory, and five-hundred-year-plus range," Parker argues, "*Cloud Atlas* plays audacious games with one's mind" (Parker, n.p.).

Though the novel stands unique in its structure, Mitchell is usually quick to note that he drew inspiration from Italo Calvino's experimental novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Calvino's book begins nine different stories but neglects to finish them, creating a loose collection of unfinished stories. In an interview with *Book World*, Mitchell remarks that he "wondered what a novel might look like if a mirror were placed at the end of the book like Calvino's so that the stories would be resolved in reverse" (Turrentine). This idea eventually grew into *Cloud Atlas*, which tells the first half of six different stories in succession before

turning around and completing the stories in the opposite order in which they were started. Thus, after completing the first half of the sixth story, Mitchell immediately tells its second half. Next, he gives the second half of the fifth story, and so forth until finishing with the first story.

Mitchell aligns the stories chronologically, easing some of the comprehension difficulties that could arise from a fragmented structure. The six stories, or sections, of the novel appear in order from past to future, spanning from 1850 in the first to an undetermined date in the 2300's for the final section. The second half of the novel reverses the order, making the temporally oldest section a frame around the other five sections. Mitchell provides a schema for understanding the structure through his character Isaac Sachs, a physicist who muses about the nature of time. "One model of time:" Sachs proposes, "an infinite matryoshka doll of painted moments" (393). Each section resembles one of his ideal "presents," or moments; it both is "encased inside a nest of 'shells' (previous presents)" and "likewise encases a nest of presents yet to be" (393).

The metaphor compensates for the relative disjointedness of the six sections, which occur decades or centuries apart from each other in different parts of the globe. Though the sections carry certain thematic similarities—Mitchell himself admits that "one of my serial repeating themes is predacity" (Mitchell, "BW interview")—the sections as a whole lack a unified, overarching plot. Instead, each section functions independently with minimal crossover of characters and settings. Reviewer Jeff Turrentine freely calls them "novellas" (Turrentine, "Fantastic Voyage"), which points to the fact that they could all be plucked out of the novel and be presented on their own without much trouble.

Six Narrative Summaries

(1) "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing" (*Pacific Journal*)
Narrator: Adam Ewing   Date: 1850 CE   Form: Diary

The first section revolves around Adam Ewing, a naïve American notary returning home on a sea voyage from Australia. The three main plotlines revolve around predacity: Ewing saves a Moriori slave from death at the hands of the conquesting Maori; a young sailor Raphael is brutally sodomized by his fellow sailors until he commits suicide; and Ewing's British travel companion Henry Goose poisons and robs him. Ewing finds himself at odds with the sailors frequently due to his upper-class status and their treatment of indigenous populations, eventually deciding to devote his life to the abolitionist movement.

(2) "Letters From Zedelghem" (*Zedelghem*)
Narrator: Robert Frobisher   Date: 1931 CE   Form: Letters

Zedleghem introduces a college-age, British, bisexual composer named Robert Frobisher who flees his country to escape his debts. In his letters to his lover Sixsmith, Frobisher describes his journey to Belgium, where he becomes amanuensis to the crippled composer Vyvyan Ayrs, seduces Ayrs' wife Jocasta, and falls in love with Ayrs' daughter Eva. He composes his own piece named the "Cloud Atlas Sextet," but Ayrs attempts to blackmail him into relinquishing rights to the piece, leading Frobisher to suicide. The narrative borrows scenes from *Delius as I Knew Him*, the autobiography of Frederick Delius' amanuensis Eric Fenby.[3]

(3) "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery" (*Half-Lives*)
Narrator: Luisa Ray and others   Date: 1975 CE   Form: Fiction manuscript

The third section is the manuscript of a mystery thriller written by the fictional author Hilary V. Hush. Its protagonist is the reporter Luisa Rey, who investigates the murder of Dr. Sixsmith and his report about the dangers of a new nuclear plant in southern California. Extremely short

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[3] The most notable of these scenes is one where Ayrs screams unintelligible notes at Frobisher and expects him to transcribe them as Frobisher panics helplessly. The same scene occurs almost word-for-word in *Delius*, including the onomatopoeic note screaming (Fenby 32). Mitchell admits to these "debts of inspiration" in his "Acknowledgments" section.

chapters and omniscient third-person narrating allow the perspective to jump back and forth between characters such as security officer Joe Napier and physicist Isaac Sachs—two men trying to make moral choices—and villains such as Bill Smoke—the hit-man who believes himself a divine instrument of death.

(4) "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish" (*Ghastly Ordeal*)
Narrator: Timothy Cavendish   Date: 2015 CE   Form: Memoir

Cavendish's memoirs are the farce of the novel, as they revolve around his accidental placement inside of a nursing home in Hull, England. A struggling publisher, he achieves temporary fortune when one of his authors kills a famous critic, greatly boosting the sales of the author's book. When the author's family comes after him for their share of the money, Cavendish runs away, ending up in the nursing home by mistake. Cavendish believes that he is intellectually superior to everyone and snobbishly looks down on the lower classes. However, his escape from the home forces him to work with a Scottish mechanic and his two friends, resulting in a final scene where he is embraced and defended by the ruffian patrons of a Scottish bar.

(5) "An Orison of Sonmi-451" (*Orison*)
Narrator: Sonmi-451   Date: 2144 CE   Form: Testimony/Interview

Sonmi-451 is a fabricant (or clone) sentenced to death in Nea So Copros, a futuristic and corporatized version of North Korea that presumably exists as the sole remaining world power. She tells her interviewer, an inexperienced "archivist," the story of her life, which ranges from an enslaved restaurant server to post-grad test subject to escaped fugitive. Throughout all of her life she feels a lack of agency due to the oppressive behaviors of Unanimity, the government, but she finally achieves power by writing a manifesto named "Declarations" about the ideal rights of fabricants and humans in her society, which results in her being worshipped as a goddess in the final section.

(6) "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After" (*Sloosha's Crossin'*)
Narrator: Zachry   Date: c. 2350 CE   Form: Oral narrative

The final section is the recounting of the life of Zachry, a goat-herder living on the big Hawaiian island about a century after "the Fall" has wiped out most of the human race. Though Zachry and his tribe of "Valleysmen" live peaceful, primitive lives, they struggle to resist not only the warlike Kona tribe but also the simple diseases and accidents that lower their lifespans. After an advanced, "pre-Fall" group of boat-people (the "Prescients") install a woman named Meronym as a sort of ambassador in his home, Zachry goes on adventures that reduce his hostility towards other tribes. Eventually the Kona massacre his people and the Prescients die of radiation poisoning, but Zachry and Meronym find a home amongst another tribe.

Embedding

Though the narratives of the six sections remain largely distinct, a system of embedding creates a link between adjoining sections. Each section exists as an artifact encountered by the characters of the following chronological story. Thus, Robert Frobisher, the narrator of the second section, finds and reads the journal written by Adam Ewing that makes up the entirety of the first section. Luisa Rey, the protagonist of the third section, then reads the collection of Frobisher's letters to his lover Rufus Sixsmith that comprises the second section. The process repeats until the sixth and final section, which has no following story in which it can be embedded. As the only uninterrupted section of the novel, this section represents the smallest and final matryoshka doll nested entirely inside the rest of the sections.

Interestingly, the characters also experience interruptions as they read the works of their predecessors. Frobisher can't find the second half of Ewing's journal until the second half of his own story; Luisa doesn't read the second half of Frobisher's letters to Sixsmith until she meets

Sixsmith's niece at the end of her own section. Timothy Cavendish has to wait until his own epilogue to receive the second half of the manuscript of Luisa's story, and the fabricant Sonmi-451 finishes the movie version of Cavendish's story[4] once her own "narrative is over" (349). Even Zachry is interrupted by a video call after he stumbles onto the futuristic recording device, or "orison," that contains Sonmi's testimony.

Through these interruptions, Mitchell sympathizes with readers who were frustrated by the sometimes abrupt cliff-hanging transitions between sections. "To my great annoyance," remarks Frobisher about Ewing's journal, "the pages cease, midsentence, some forty pages later, where the binding is worn through" (64). Eventually the mirror structure will satisfy the curiosity of all readers, but Mitchell must circumvent the possible irritation created by the long, indirect path that leads to the conclusions. He thus allows his characters to act on their curiosity and go to great lengths to find the second halves of the various sections. In Frobisher's case, he tells Sixsmith to search for and purchase a copy of the journal for him despite being so poor that he steals and sells other rare books. "A half-finished book is a half-finished love affair" notes Frobisher (64), indicating a nagging desire to finish the story.

The embedding also acts as a way to reinterpret the surrounding stories in medias res, as it reveals future perspectives of a section before that section has even concluded. Frobisher points out the otherwise unnoticeable treachery of Dr. Henry Goose in the first section, changing him from Ewing's ally in the first section to a secret villain. In later sections, the embedding goes as far to show the impacts that one section has on the next. N. Katherine Hayles details how this process works in the fifth and sixth sections, noting that the sixth narrative, "strategically placed to intervene between Sonmi's escape and her subsequent adventures, reveals that Nea So Copros and indeed the entire world have fallen into darkness" (Hayles 60). The knowledge of

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[4] Sonmi asks the archivist for "a certain disney I once began, one nite long ago in another age" (349).

civilization's collapse gives a sense of foreboding doom to Mitchell's hyper-corporate vision of the future. For "readers that have the context that the Valley people lack," Hayles argues that the embedding creates an "urgent necessity for imagining the strategies and that will open for us and our descendants a different kind of future" (Hayles 61).

The direct connection between the corpocracy in *Orison* and its fall in *Sloosha's Crossin'* extends to the other four sections as well, as *Sloosha's Crossin'* is technically embedded inside of all of the other sections. Because each section both impacts and envelops the next section, the fall of society found in the sixth section is the result of a domino effect stretching all the way back to *Pacific Journal.* Parker connects the cause-and-effect system to recurring themes of the sections, arguing that "Mitchell shows us the dire future that present action (or inaction) may trigger and therefore drives home a message about the global consequences of immediate gratification" (Parker 202). Similarly, Mitchell's self-professed theme of predacity, the direct cause of many of the traumas in the individual sections, can be seen as the abstract cause of the larger trauma that nearly ends civilization. Only the preservation of stories of goodness provides an optimistic counterbalance to the recurring destructive forces. The survival of Sonmi's testimony, for instance, "is an appeal for Sonmi-451's critique of power, her critique of injustice, to continue beyond her" (Boulter 138).

In a jointly-written article, Celia Wallhead and Marie-Louise Kohlke extend this argument, making the case that *Pacific Journal* deserves a spot of primary importance due to its status as the largest frame story of the novel: "Mitchell attributes equal and arguably *more* importance to the looking back to the Victorian age from his position of living and writing in the late twentieth, now early twenty-first century" (emphasis in original, Wallhead and Kohlke 218). Interrupted by every other section, Ewing's story carries the lessons and perspectives of the

entire rest of the novel into its second half. A more traditional arrangement of the sections in unabridged chronological order would lose this sense of "looking back."

Cloud Atlas' embedding structure also supports the importance of past events due to its reversal of the usual framing structure. In the "Sheherezadian tradition of embedding" (Parker 205)—named after the storytelling protagonist of *The 1001 Nights*—each embedded story is a retelling of a past event. The lessons of the past events then inform and change the story and characters of the chronologically future frame story. *Cloud Atlas* instead manages to embed future events due to its movement through the sections.
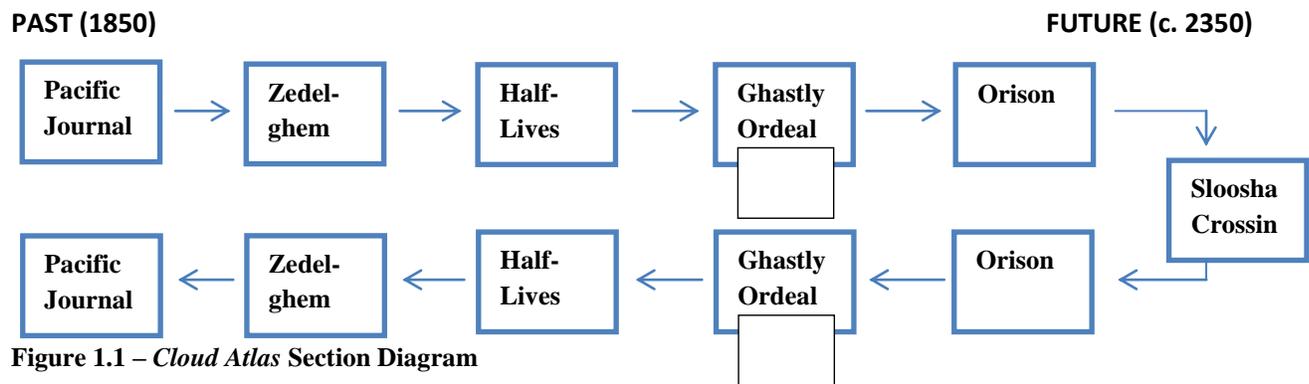
PAST (1850)   **FUTURE (c. 2350)**

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Pacific   →  Zedel-  →  Half-   →  Ghastly  →  Orison  ┐
Journal      ghem       Lives      Ordeal                │
                                                          ↓
                                                      Sloosha
                                                      Crossin
Pacific   ←  Zedel-  ←  Half-   ←  Ghastly  ←  Orison  ←┘
Journal      ghem       Lives      Ordeal
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Figure 1.1 – *Cloud Atlas* Section Diagram

The parallelism between *Cloud Atlas* and a traditionally embedded story (which would begin on the right-hand side of Figure 1.1) imply the somewhat troubling conclusion that the future sections can somehow directly influence the past ones. Parker, however, points out that this structure merely affects the presentation of the novel, as it "troubles the temporally linear transmission implicit in traditional embedded stories, thus suggesting that history can be not only recounted but reworked, *at least within the constraints of fiction*" (emphasis mine, Parker 206). The characters are still unaware of future events, only reading the stories of past characters.

The contradictory elements of embedding at play in the novel—artifacts of past stories are found in future sections, yet future sections are physically enveloped by the past sections—complicate the idea of a cause-and-effect relationship between the six sections. Heather Hicks connects the structure to the idea of linear time:

> The sequence invites us to infer and attempt to decode causality from the series of narratives: somehow the events taking place in each era may have, sequentially, or in the aggregate, created the conditions of global catastrophe. In this sense, the superficial fragmentation of the novel may belie a deeper, coherent structure, and, at least up to its midpoint, it could be argued that the novel has a linear and historical perspective. Yet such causality remains hypothetical, and the reader is left to contemplate how each story or set of circumstances may relate to the others. In this respect the novel rejects the more direct forms of cause and effect that are associated with linear history (Hicks n.p.).

Hicks points out an important caveat in the idea of embedding: the story artifacts found in successive sections only imply *assumed* connections between the sections. Sonmi's "Declarations" may have led to the downfall of Nea So Copros, or her testimony may have been preserved coincidentally.[5] Interestingly, while each story is "read" in some way by a following character, the knowledge of the past doesn't change the future character's actions at all. Frobisher still commits suicide after reading Ewing's journal; Zachry still worships Sonmi as a god despite seeing her in human (or fabricant) form.

Without an explicit overarching narrative to connect the six sections, any connections between them will necessarily be shrouded in slight ambiguity. Yet the lack of overarching narrative also gives the connections special importance; because each of the sections is a relatively independent story, the interactions between the sections become focus of the novel as a whole. Thus the themes of language change and reincarnation, two ways in which the sections

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[5] Other tribes of Valley people, incidentally, worship different gods in addition to or instead of Sonmi (Mitchell 285).

interact, become exceptionally important in analyses of *Cloud Atlas*; they embody a couple of the major ways in which the sections differentiate from and connect to each other.

Methodology

In order to analyze the language of the six sections of *Cloud* Atlas, this thesis borrows multiple tools of linguistic analysis. The second chapter, for instance, relies on the historical usage patterns of specific words, determining when a word was commonly spoken by certain demographics. These patterns can be estimated by corpora of dated historical texts, which provide large samples of written language. Searching for individual words allows one to make charts that track the number of times a word appears in the corpus. From that result, the statistical laws governing sample sizes allow for judgments to be made about significant differences in a word's relative usage. For American characters, the premier corpus available is BYU's *Corpus of Historical American English* (*COHA*), which contains four-hundred-million words dating between 1810 and 2009 CE. For British characters, I relied on Google's "Ngram viewer" available through Google Books, which has a separate corpus made entirely of British-English books.

These corpora provide more useful evidence for our arguments than a historical dictionary. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), which provides definitions and examples of words dating back almost a millennium, cannot adequately determine the commonness of a word at a certain point of time. In the *OED*, definitions can only be marked with the ambiguous THINGS "rare" or "obsolete," which are significantly less informative than quantitative data showing exactly "how rare" and "how obsolete" a word is. Still, because corpora don't take into

account multiple definitions of a word or provide any historical context, the analysis in the later chapters will use the *OED* to supplement and add nuance to the raw numbers of the corpus data.

The third chapter performs exhaustive searches on usage patterns within the novel. To count words by hand would be infeasible as well as error-prone; therefore the chapter relies on software written by Laurence Anthony named "antconc." After converting the novel into a text file, the software operates on a basic level as a search function for words and phrases. More interestingly, antconc can determine lists of the most common words and groupings of words in the text, a feature that allows for the analysis of frequent clusters of words. While I will compress the data into more relevant and user-friendly charts, an example of the raw data of the word "cannot" is below in Figure 1.2:

Figure 1.2 – antconc Basic Search Results for "cannot"

By breaking the novel's text file into six separate files based on each individual section, antconc can be used to provide visual representation of where each usage occurs in the novel. In Image 1.2, each vertical line represents a point in the text where the word "cannot" was used. The visual representation of the usage patterns illuminates oddities to the data that would not be apparent otherwise. Both the traditional representation of the data (shown in Figure 1.2) and the visual representation show that the word "cannot" doesn't appear in *Sloosha's Crossin'*, the sixth and final section of the novel. However, the visual representation reveals something more: the usage of "cannot" appears in clumps instead of being uniformly distributed.

These methods of linguistic analysis do not make up the entirety of my analysis, as each method has its own limitations. The fact that "cannot," for instance, is clumped around certain areas in the text is merely an interesting piece of trivia if it is not investigated further. Only close readings of the passages that include the clumped language can determine why the clumping exists, as well as the effect that it has on the rest of the novel. The two methodologies work conjointly: the comprehensive statistical and linguistic analysis runs the numbers, providing the quantitative overview of the text, while close reading and textual analysis adds context and interprets the data, providing the qualitative and nuanced arguments of the thesis.
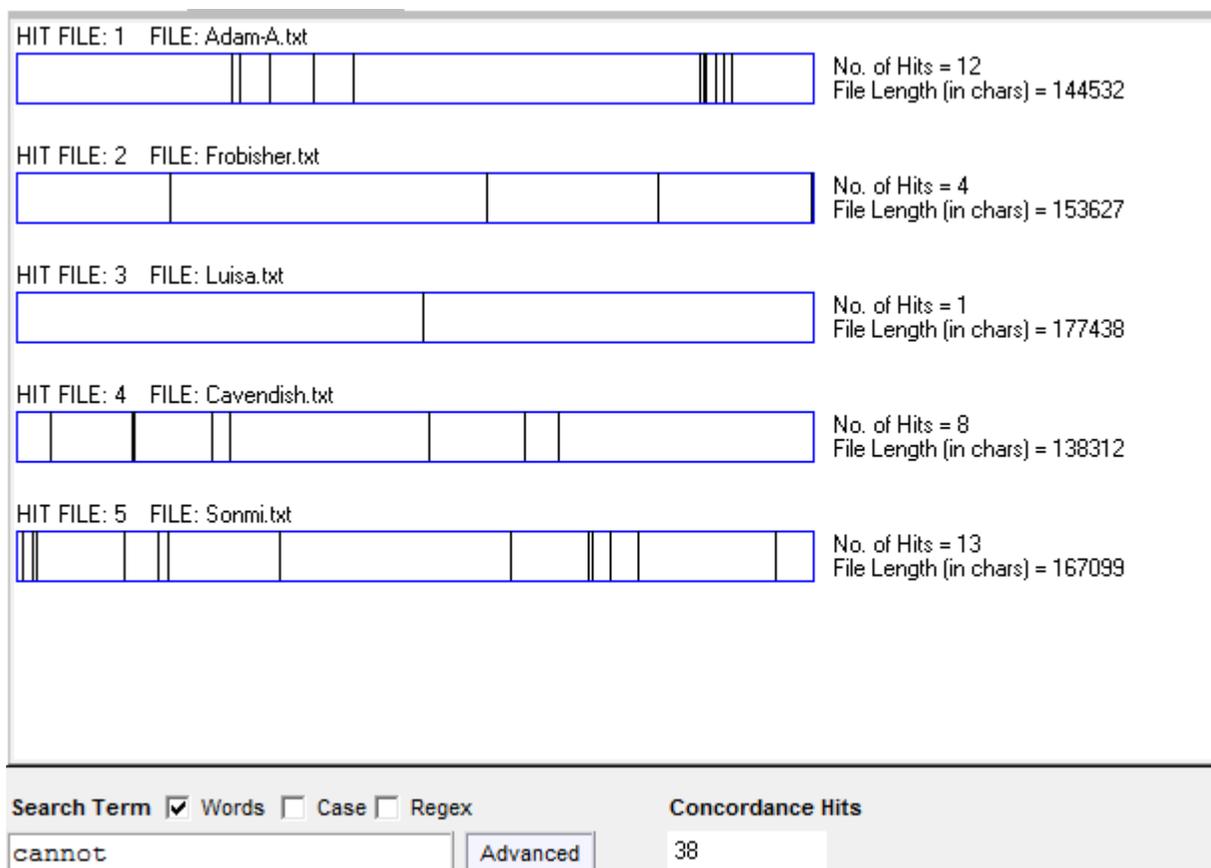
Figure 1.3 – antconc Graphical Representation of "cannot"

Neglecting either type of methodology leaves potential holes in any language-based reading of *Cloud Atlas*. Surprisingly, however, critics generally avoid any linguistic analysis of the novel that goes beyond examining an odd word or two. Even Fiona McCullouch, whose essay in *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Fiction* provides a basis for much of the argument in the second chapter of this thesis, rushes to a judgment on the language of *Cloud Atlas* after analyzing a single example. Claiming that Zachry's world "uses a language system that is phonetically rudimentary such as 'comfy mem'ryin,'" McCullouch concludes that the language "is grammatically disjointed" (McCullouch 154) based off of two words. While her larger argument that "the birthmarked characters feel at odds with their worlds, and, in turn, are missing

fragments of each other" (McCullouch 154) ingeniously connects language and reincarnation, it does so at the expense of oversimplifying the richly complex Valleysmen dialect.

In contrast, a purely statistical analysis would be dry and trite. Despite the potential fittingness of its name, I refuse to include with this thesis a "*Cloud Atlas* Word Cloud," or any other artistic yet superficial representation of the novel's language. Data and numbers can tell most of a story, but one must work more closely with the text to tease out subtler thematic resonances at work in the language. In Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, the novel that Mitchell based *Cloud Atlas'* structure on, a writer character runs into a woman named Lotaria who performs eerily similar linguistic analyses as the later chapters of this thesis.

> She explained to me that a suitably programmed computer can read a novel in a few minutes and record the list of all the words contained in the text, in order of frequency. "That way I can have an already completed reading at hand," Lotaria says, "with an incalculable savings of time. What is the reading of a text, in fact, except the recording of certain thematic recurrences, certain insistences of forms and meanings?" (Calvino 186)

Despite preceding antconc by three decades, Calvino does an excellent job predicting the role of a computer in linguistic analysis. Lotaria continues to explain more technical details that sound exceptionally familiar:

> "An electronic reading supplies me with a list of the frequencies, which I have only to glance at to form an idea of the problems the book suggests to my critical study. Naturally, at the highest frequencies the list records countless articles, pronouns, particles, but I don't pay them any attention. I head straight for the words richest in meaning; they can give me a fairly precise notion of the book" (Calvino 186).

Though Calvino frames Lotaria in a satirical form, making her notions of reading seem ridiculous compared to the traditional views of the narrator, the last sentence of the previous passage indicates that she uses some sort of textual close reading in her analyses, as she uses the

computer program to point out where she should "head" instead of being content with her list of

results. Still, the evidence suggests that she gives too much weight to her list of words and not

enough to the examination of them; I aspire in this thesis to provide more than a "fairly precise

notion of the book." Instead, this thesis has more in common with Calvino's narrator, the

skeptical and traditional writer who sees more fanciful uses for the antconc-like program.

> Perhaps instead of a book I could write lists of words, in alphabetical order, an avalanche of isolated words which expresses that truth I still do not know, and from which the computer, reversing its program, could construct the book, my book. (Calvino 189)

This thesis won't hold its "lists of words" sacred as Lotaria does. Instead, it will reverse-engineer

the lists of words, determining what and where the words "richest in meaning" are. From there I

can construct a reading of the book that expresses all of the subtler truths and themes of the

novel.

Chapter 2: Establishing the Different Languages of *Cloud Atlas*

> *Spent the fortnight gone in the music room, reworking my year's fragments into a 'sextet for overlapping soloists': piano, clarinet, 'cello, flute, oboe, and violin, each in its own language of key, scale, and color.*
>
> *-Mitchell, p. 445*

Frobisher's own "Cloud Atlas," the sextet that shares its name with the novel, serves as one of a few self-posited models for the novel's structure. The structural similarities are exact: "In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recontinued, in order" (445). Beyond that basic connection, however, the "Sextet Model," as I'll dub it, extends the metaphor in ways that other models, such as the short-lived physicist Isaac Sachs' "Matroyska Doll" model, does not. Unlike a set of shrunken yet similar dolls that fit inside one another, the six soloists of Frobisher's sextet play entirely different instruments, "each in its own language of key, scale, and color" (445).

With this line, Mitchell creates an analogy that the language in each one of the six sections, or "soloists," is as different from the other sections as a flute is to a cello. Both can hit the same notes, as a C is a C regardless of what instrument plays it. However, a listener would certainly hear differences in "key, scale, and color." Similarly, as even though the six sections are all stories of predacity, the language of each section can vary in word choice, typology, syntax, and so on.

Critics have noticed this analogy at work in the sixth and final section of *Cloud Atlas*: *Sloosha's Crossin'*, which uses a unique dialect of post-apocalyptic English invented by Mitchell solely for the novel. Some fans of the novel have gone so far to create guidebooks and dictionaries to help others decipher parts they may have trouble with. "Of all the intermingling

plotlines in *Cloud Atlas*, perhaps the most daunting is [*Sloosha's Crossin'*]" claims Forrest Wickman in "The Cloud Atlas Phrasebook: Your Guide to Yibberin' the True True," a website that lists definitions of unfamiliar words from the section. "What makes it daunting, even frustrating, is the Valleysman way of speaking" (Wickman).

Some critics have pointed out that the analogy goes further than the language of a single section. Reviewer George Gessert argues that Mitchell creates not one, but "two languages of the future, one for a genetically engineered slave of a Korean corporation, and another . . . for a goatherd after the collapse of technocratic civilization" (Gessert, n.p.), referring to *Orison* and *Sloosha's Crossin'*, respectively. Expanding the analogy from two to six sections, Fiona McCullouch invokes the Sextet Model and claims that the entire novel uses "different linguistic styles to map the sociohistorical inflections and geopolitical climate of its spatiotemporal journey" (McCullouch 142). In sum: every time Mitchell changes the date, location, or political climate, he changes the language accordingly.

My argument isn't opposed to the extensions made by Gessel and McCullouch. Instead, this chapter follows up on their arguments, providing systematic evidence for Frobisher's musical metaphor. A careful linguistic analysis with a full breakdown of the language changes in each section can not only provide rigorous proof for the metaphor but also twist every last bit of meaning out Frobisher's musical metaphor. For instance, solos played by musical instruments would indeed sound different due to the unique timbres of each instrument; however, only the most uncreative composer would force the soloists to all play the same solo. Even the amateur Frobisher would give his soloists unique flourishes and melodies to take advantage of the characteristics of each instrument.

The truth is that language characterizes each section in ways beyond the mapping or dating that exists. Mitchell has certainly written his language in a method that differentiates each section based on its setting; words appear in the chronologically earliest sections that are out of date by the modern sections, let alone those set in the future. However, the language also takes on qualities that relate to the narrators of each section. Ewing, the person who sees everything and understands nothing, writes overly verbose descriptions. Zachry struggles to express himself but understands many things intuitively, so his language handles abstractions well despite its limited and concrete vocabulary. Neither of these two facts relate to time or genre; they highlight the narrator's unique perspective on the common theme of predacity.

This chapter will focus on examining both how language differentiates the sections spatiotemporally and how it characterizes the sectional narrators. Breaking up the sections into three pairings based on their chronological order, I examine how Mitchell varies language based on the idea of time. Inside each temporally-similar pairing, the thematic differences in language will show how each section varies in ways unexplained by the chronology of the sections. Thus, I'll begin with the older sections, *Pacific Journal* and *Zedelghem*, which share an antiquated and highly-educated vocabulary but differ in the scope and style of their descriptions. Second will be *Half-Lives* and *Ghastly Ordeal*, which do not have remarkably dated language due to their modern setting, instead exploring language based on clichés and extensive metaphors, respectively. Finally, I'll conclude with *Orison* and *Sloosha's Crossin'*, which use invented language for two different purposes—one to create Orwellian ideals where language is power and the other to express complex ideas through seemingly-simple words.

Describing without Seeing: The Past Sections

The language of *Pacific Journal* portrays Adam Ewing as a highly educated yet naïve American traveler of the mid-19th century. Frobisher notes that Ewing "puts me in the mind of Melville's bumbler Cpt. Delano in 'Benito Cereno'" (64), a notion that Mitchell confirmed in an interview with *Book World*, admitting that he meant for Adam to be "(pretty obviously) Melville, but with shorter sentences" (Turrentine).

Sentence length notwithstanding, Ewing's vocabulary and word choice are indeed Melville-like in their age. "I hurried *thitherwords*," he writes (8, emphasis mine), using a word which has barely been used at all in the 20th and 21st centuries.[6] A more likely modern phrasing would be "towards the house." Furthermore, Ewing uses an outdated spelling, as modern dictionaries note that the word is spelled "thitherwards," an incident that words such as "alas" (491) prove isn't isolated. As another example, Ewing uses the antiquated word "thrice," which was used ten times more frequently in the 19th century than it is today, instead of saying "three times," the much more modern version (*COHA*, *thrice*). In this case, changing the word doesn't change the meaning, as illustrated here:

> Actual version: "*Thrice* he asked of strangers, "Where doctor, friend?" *Thrice* he was turned away (emphasis mine, 505).
> Hypothetical version: "*Three times* he asked of strangers, "Where doctor, friend?" *Three times* he was turned away.

Tellingly, no other character in the book ever uses the word. "Three times" is used by both Luisa and Cavendish. A further sampling of the numerous examples is as follows (antique words in italics):

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[6] According to BYU's Corpus of Historical American English, the word "thitherward" peaked in usage around 1860, where it was used approximately 0.82 times per million words. Since the turn of the 20th century, however, the word has almost disappeared entirely, showing only a handful of sporadic usages (and none since the 1970's).

"'Mr. Ewing,' *beseeched* this urgent whisper" (25).
"'Did you *pilfer* this garment from below?'" (34).
"Homer lulls me to sleep with dreams *a-billow* with sails of Athenians" (37).
". . . my craving for *vermicide* makes it difficult to ingest all but the plainest fare" (Mitchell 489).
"Sir, do you know George Washington? (*Alas*, no)" (491).

Beyond the word Ewing's language contains some syntactical differences from the other sections. One example is his occasional lack of do-support in simple negation phrases. "I slumber not" (22), he ends his entry on November 13th instead of saying "I do not slumber." By the 19th century, negation with do-support had generally taken over for simple negation phrases, the popular style of the Early Modern English. However, speakers in Ewing's time could still use negation without "do" sparingly as a way to add emphasis, as he does here, where he emphasizes the seriousness of his disease. The older construction, despite being absent from the other sections, appears several times in *Pacific Journal*:

". . .we knew not what the noise signified" (6)
". . . the Moriori dreamt not" (11).
"One needs not be. . ." (17).
". . .ignorant sailors can show hostilities to maladies they know not" (36)
". . . he knew not where to turn" (485).

Pacific Journal also contains differences in typography. The most frequent example is the use of the ampersand to replace all but sixteen instances of the word "and."[7] Though Ewing, or "Mr. Quillcock" (7), as the sailors nickname him, writes his journal by hand, he also works as "a notary from San Francisco" (64). A man whose specialty is paperwork would surely know of the time-saving symbol. That he alone of the six narrators uses the symbol not only dates him as

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[7] The sign, originating from a joining of the letters in the Latin word "et," meaning "and," first started appearing when Latin dominated Western Europe roughly two millennia ago. Eventually it grew more common in the medieval period because of its space-saving properties (Stamper) peaking around the 19th century until it fell out of usage as modern style guides relegated it to the formal names of companies (AP Style).

a non-modern writer (where ampersands are considered improper by most style guides[8]), but also characterizes him as a man who spends his day scribbling and writing.

Eighty years removed from *Pacific Journal*, *Zedelghem* lacks the same level of historical language. Chronologically, the section lies closer to *Half-Lives* and *Ghastly Ordeal* than it does to the Ewing's Melville language. Still, Frobisher lives early enough in the century that his language contains unfamiliar language for a modern reader, albeit in smaller amounts: "Those who didn't die in action were mostly *pauperized*" (61, emphasis mine) says Frobisher about Ayrs' relatives where a modern speaker would more likely say "went broke."[9]

More notably, Frobisher's language locates him geographically, as Frobisher uses phrases and words that stand out for their British nature as well as their age. "If Ayrs ever asks me to leave," Frobisher says in one such instance, "I'll be *scuppered*" (emphasis mine, 57), a word brought into temporary prominence in England due to the naval battles of World War I (indicated by Figure 2.1 below, which shows the Google nGrams chart for "scupper" in British English). Ewing, as an American, wouldn't use the word, and Cavendish, as a modern speaker, is also significantly unlikely to say it; thus the word differentiates Frobisher in time and space. Certain phrases have a similar effect, such as when Frobisher remarks that Eva Ayrs' "awful directness—for a girl—quite *knocked the bails off my wicket*" (77, emphasis mine). The idiom comes from cricket, a sport never widely accepted by Americans, further emphasizing his British identity.

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[8] The AP Stylebook claims that the ampersand should only be used for company names and composition titles (*AP Stylebook*)

[9] *COHA* indicates that both "pauper" and "pauperize" have greatly shrunk in usage in the past 100 years, with "pauperize" falling out of usage entirely

Figure 2.1 – Google nGrams Graph of "scupper"

Another distinguishing feature of Frobisher's language is the lack of translation for French phrases and dialogue. Eva Ayrs often speaks to Frobisher in French, leaving a reader who doesn't speak French to guess at her dialogue using context. This context is sometimes imperfect: "'Avez-vous dit à ma mère ce que vous avez vu?[10]'" Eva asks Frobisher before he replies that "no, I had not told anyone, yet" (76). Working backwards from the answer, a reader could guess that Eva had asked Frobisher if he had told anyone; however, the reader would miss that Eva specifically asked Frobisher about her mother.

Frobisher wouldn't have to worry about mistranslation due to the form of his writing— letters to Rufus Sixsmith, "the sole love of my short, bright life" (470)—and the extremely specific audience that this form entails. As is typical of Cambridge-educated Englishmen at that time period, both Sixsmith and Frobisher could speak and read French. Unlike the later sections, where the narrators must make the writing accessible to a wide audience, Frobisher's language

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[10] In English: "Have you talked to my mother about what you saw?"

can be tailored due to its form. He anticipates Sixsmith's reactions and occasionally addresses

them. "Don't be hatefully jealous, Sixsmith," he writes after describing an emotional

conversation he shares with Ayrs' daughter at the top of the Bruges clock tower, "You know

how it is" (452).

A major grammatical oddity of the section follows from the nature of Frobisher's one-on-

one correspondence. Specifically, he omits the subject in the majority of sentences, assuming

(like the untranslated French dialogue) that Sixsmith will be able to infer the missing part of each

sentence. To aid him, he follows a consistent guideline: In every case, the subject withheld is

"I." The following sentences are all from the first paragraph of *Zedelghem* (emphasis mine, 43):

> *Dreamt* I stood in a china shop. . .
> Deliberately now, *smashed* a figurine of an ox. . .
> *Glimpsed* my father totting up the smashed items' value. . .
> *Knew* I'd become the greatest composer of the century. . .

The other four narrating protagonists[11] would always add an "I" before the verb in each of those

sentences, as in "I dreamt I stood in a china shop. . ." But Frobisher writes with this unique style

that fits his personality: informal and quick to match his unconventional thinking and impatience.

This particular language change isn't entirely one of time, culture, or form; it's personal about

Frobisher.

The musicality of Frobisher's language similarly characterizes him. Musical acumen is

very important to him, as he considers it a skill to constantly improve. When he hears music he

diagnoses it quickly in an attempt to figure out how to improve. For instance, he tells

Verplancke, a policeman who sings an opera song for him, that the amateur singer had a

"pleasant enough voice in the lower registers, but his breathing needed work and his vibrato

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[11] *Half-Lives* uses a third-person perspective that follows many assorted characters.

quivered like a backstage thunder board" (49). However, this critical attitude spreads outside of music. He's quick to pass judgment on anything, so quick sometimes that he can leave out part of a sentence. "Food a disappointment," he says about dinner at the van de Veldes' house, withholding a verb. "Dry trout, greens steamed to a sludge, gateau simply vulgar" (449). The list sounds akin to his notes to Verplancke: precise, honest, and eviscerating.

Music also dominates Frobisher's perception and description of every setting he encounters. Towards the beginning of the section, before he fully immerses himself in his sextet, it starts with small descriptions. He notes when the "engines changed *timbre*" (46, emphasis mine) on the ship to Belgium; he goes on "a *lento* walk with V.A." (84, emphasis in original). As his various crises "send me running into music" (457), these musical descriptions become more elaborate and specific. A pause between him and Eva Ayrs becomes the highly-specific "10 bars of silence in 6/8" (455). When he sees her, he feels as if there is "a tonic pedal . . . resounding in my chest cavity" (462). By the end of his story, he embraces the music so much that he believes "boundaries between noise and sound are conventions" (460). He even personifies the music eventually. "Only music matters to me now," he tells Sixsmith at the end of his penultimate letter. "Music clatters, music swells, music tosses" (468).

Ultimately, Frobisher's highly aural language mimics his own symbolic transformation into music. Describing himself as "emptied" (469), Frobisher pours his heart and soul into his sextet, which "holds my life, is my life" (470). Fittingly, he receives a similar fate as his deceased brother Adrian, who is barely mentioned in the story save Robert's single paragraph description of his letters:

> Adrian's letters were hauntingly aural. One can shut one's eyes but not one's ears.
> Crackle of lice in seams; scutter of rats; snap of bones against bullet; stutter of

machine guns; thunder of distant explosions, lightning of nearer ones; ping of stones off tin helmets; flies buzzing over no-man's-land in summer. Later conversations add the scream of horses; cracking of frozen mud; buzz of aircraft; tanks, churning in mud holes; amputees, surfacing from the ether; belch of flamethrowers; squelch of bayonets in necks (442).

Not being a musician, Ewing rarely uses aural language. Instead, he describes the surface details of a scene thoroughly yet completely misses the subtext of everything going on around him. Frobisher, who spots Dr. Goose's treachery after reading only a few pages of the journal, notes that Ewing "is blind to all consipirators" (64). As a professional notary, he records enough information for Frobisher to quickly make the inference, but he can't make the leap himself. He also never lacks for a hyperbolic description, even though he tends to "lose [his] eye in lanes of sea phosphorescence & the Mississippi of stars streaming across the heavens" (38), emphasizing how foreign the seafaring world must appear to a bookish American notary.

Ewing's verbose and musing descriptions lie in stark contrast to Frobisher's brief summations. What Ewing describes as "no more tatterdemalion a *renegado* I ever beheld" (emphasis in original, 9) is, to Frobisher, simply "a crazed dog" (458). Unlike Ewing, he has no time to dwell on lengthy descriptions; he evaluates and describes a scene quickly. He does not continue to talk about the "quadroon" (9) as Ewing calls it; instead, he moves immediately on to action: "Passed the old lodge, took the Bruge Road" (458).

Ewing's overdone descriptions represent his eagerness to make sense of his foreign surroundings. When he stumbles across Autua, the Moriori slave whose escape attempt from his Maori master has just failed, Ewing feels disgusted to watch Autua being whipped and "swoon[s] under each lash" (6). However, because he doesn't understand the situation, he goes to great lengths to describe every detail, even the more gruesome ones:

His body shuddered with each excoriating lash, his back was vellum of bloody

runes, but his insensible face bespoke the serenity of a martyr already in the care

of the Lord (6).

Per usual, Ewing reaches an incorrect conclusion; Autua is not enduring the punishment because

of his faith in God, as his "slumped head" (6) indicates a reluctant acceptance of his miserable

fate. His serenity likely comes from the fact that whipping and pain are nothing new to him, and

his gaze with Ewing isn't one of knowing but of opportunity. Autua desperately wants to escape.

Ewing puts the clues into his writing, but, naturally, he can't see them.

"I think I've Seen This Before": The Present Sections

Half-Lives abandons the intimate storytelling forms of letters and diaries for the present

tense of a "generic airport thriller" (*Book World*). This present tense lends more immediacy to

the action of the story than the other sections, which emphasize the fact that the story's described

events and the act of writing about them are happening at two different points in time. In

Frobisher's final letter, he dates the time of writing it at specifically "quarter past four in the

morning" (468) before beginning with the described event of the letter: "Shot myself through the

roof of my mouth at five A.M. this morning" (Mitchell 468). As clearly as he describes it, the

moment of his suicide must be imagined by the reader.

Compare this narration with Sixsmith's death, also caused by a bullet to the brain, but

told in the present tense of *Half-Lives*. The reader reads directly that "the silenced bullet is

already boring through the scientist's skill and into the mattress" (112). Instead of Zachry telling

his audience that "nothin' so ruby as Pa's ribbonin' blood I ever *seen*" (emphasis mine, 241), the

reader watches as Sixsmith's "blood soaks into the thirsty eiderdown" (112). The present-tense version is unfiltered; no narrator explicitly imprints an interpretation or judgment onto the details of the scene.

The result of the present tense narration is a directness of description unparalleled in the other chapters, a directness which is furthered by the addition of onomatopoeic sound effects into the language. Mitchell uses verbs with a specific sound when he can. "Its motor *whines*, its cables *grind*" (91, emphasis mine) he writes about the elevator that Luisa and Sixsmith get stuck in. But with more obscure sounds, such as when the elevator jams, he resorts to onomatopoeia: "between the tenth and ninth stores a *gatta-gatta-gatta* detonates then dies with a *phzzz-zzz-zz-z*" (91, emphasis in original). The transcription of the sound gives a very literal and unfiltered description that is unlike the more metaphorical descriptions in other sections. "Bird lilts sound like blades bein' sharp'ned" (301), claims Zachry while he debates slitting a Kona warrior's throat. The description forces the reader to imagine the sound of blade-sharpening and then twist it into birdcall, a much less direct process.

The other major distinguishing feature of *Half-Lives* is that it relies heavily on "the clichés of the Chandler world of good cop against bad power" (Byatt, n.p.). The characters freely use tired idioms of the detective genre, and they generally recite them with straight faces. "Lester was a piece of Swiss cheese" (399), Joe Napier tells Luisa about her dad jumping in front of a grenade. If Lester is the good cop and the grenade is the bad power, then "Swiss cheese" is an entirely inappropriate yet clichéd way to describe Lester's physical dismemberment. That is, unless the entire section is written in similarly clichéd language, in which case the description fits. A partial survey turns up the following:

"'They traced your last call to the Talbot Motel'" (107)
"'I got a lead, Dom'" (117)
"They Rey woman might be imagining we rubbed out Mr. Sixsmith" (127)
"It's in the bottom of the deep blue sea . . . fish food" (396)
". . . strings could be pulled at my insurers" (416)
"'I was put out to pasture yesterday'" (427)

The language mimics a story where most of the characters are common detective stereotypes, from the plucky heroine searching tirelessly for her first break to the doomed whistleblower who gets her attention, to the corrupt CEO and his near-silent, murderous henchman. It has a cranky newspaper editor as well as a grizzled security officer who dies just after retirement

Other lines play off of the clichés by using dramatic irony thinly veiled by the tropes of detective fiction. In front of a hoard of cameras, political rivals Lloyd Hooks and Alberto Grimaldi "grasp each other's forearms in a gesture of fraternal love and trust" (104) that is actually filled with muttered insults and threats. "You'll only wrangle your way onto this company's board over my dead body, you venal sonofabitch!" (104), Grimaldi tells Hooks. As it does in countless detective novels, this boastful cliché becomes prophetic, and Hooks successfully arranges Grimaldi's fiery death via airplane-bomb before assuming chairmanship of Seaboard.

With its descriptive language and repeated lines, Mitchell has found what Bissell calls "the hidden beauty of cliché-filled prose" (Bissell, *NYT*). He squeezes what humor he can out of his supply of clichés by taking them to absurd extremes where even the other characters notice the clichés and comment on their ridiculousness. In the following scene, for instance, one of Bill Smoke's "ape-men" (423), Bisco, has Napier and Luisa pinned at gunpoint (426):

> Bisco hollers back, "Don't bother, Napier. Last words"
> "I can't hear you! What did you say?"

> "What—are—your—last—words?"
> "Last words? Who are you? Dirty Harry?"
> Bisco's mouth twitches. "I got a book of last words, and those were yours."

The barb at *Dirty Harry* pokes fun at both the movie and the ridiculousness of the cliché outside detective stories, where no one keeps track of last words. Admittedly, the situation feels somewhat contrived, but, as Hitchcock tells Luisa in a fictional interview, "all thrillers would wither without contrivance" (95).

Cavendish sees the lack of contrivance in his life as a problem, lamenting the ordinariness of his experiences. Instead of clichés, however, his storytelling style manifests as a plethora of metaphors and allusions, which are curious choices for someone who bemoans the dullness of books like so: "Hero goes on a journey, stranger comes to town, somebody wants something, they get it or they don't, will is pitted against will. 'Admire me, for I am a metaphor'" (169). But Cavendish has spent his life among books learning firsthand what makes a "well-written, gutsy fictional memoir" (151), and, more importantly, what makes one sell. If he believes metaphors are a staple of a successful book, he'll use them. The sense of exhaustion towards literature indicated in his venting speech seems to reverse over the course of his story due to his experiences and the manuscript of *Half-Lives*. Cavendish transforms from bemoaning that "it would be a better book if [fictional author] Hilary V. Hush weren't so artsily-fartsily clever" (162) to fantasizing about the absent second half of the manuscript and envisioning how to make it better. "The second half is even better than the first," he imagines, "but the Master will teach his Acolyte how to make it superb" (370).

The metaphors shape Cavendish's language in multiple ways. The following passage illustrates the effect (356):

> Gwendolin Bendincks organized paper-chain drives to which the Undead flocked, both parties oblivious to the image. The Undead clamored to be the Advent calendar's window opener, a privilege bestowed upon by Bendincks like the Queen awarding Maundy money . . . Being Nurse Noakes's [sic] sheepdog was her and Warlock-Williams's [sic] survival niche. I thought of Primo Levi's *Drowned and the Saved*.

Three main metaphors populate the paragraph. The first, Cavendish's dubbing of the fellow patients at Aurora House as the Undead (even though they are very much alive and breathing), is one of his regular metaphors, as he uses it more often than more literal descriptions such as "fellow patients" or "tenants." The metaphor greatly increases Cavendish's sense of terror and danger, as it fills Aurora House with brain-dead monsters unresponsive to his attempts at communication. Naming Bendincks the "Queen" of the ceremony is a one-time metaphor that gives a simple compliant tenant the wild power of a monarch. And the comparison of the entire scene to Primo Levi's Holocaust memoir casts a dreary, hopeless light on the entire scene. Combined, his simple nursing home seems more like an asylum than a place where "meals get provided, all your laundry is done. Activities laid on, from crochet to croquet" (179).

In reality, Cavendish's life is rather banal and ordinary. *Ghastly Ordeal* opens with two scenes that highlight how disappointed he is with his life. He is embarrassingly beaten up by a group of teenage girls, a story that he admits isn't even relevant to his main narrative. The next scene takes place at a book award ceremony, where his knighted colleagues strut around and receive cash rewards. Professionally his life is mediocre, and romantically the love of his life, Ursula, settled with someone else. To Cavendish, his best trait is his confidence in his own "superior powers of language" (179), which manifests as the ability of his "dear Reader" to follow him. "You've probably spotted it pages ago" (175), he tells his audience about the previously-unstated fact that "Aurora House was a nursing home for the elderly" (175). Byatt is

correct when she claims that "Cavendish is nasty,"[12] but equally so when he describes him as "snarling with wit about disasters of transport and bodily malfunction" (Byatt, n.p.).

Allusions such as "my Divine Cleopatra" (163), "a Rastafarian in Holbein embers" (170), and "the common Maginot Line against the Unconquerable Führer" (355) in relation to a college hook-up, a dreadlocked man with a joint, and the board game Scrabble, respectively, show Cavendish's desire to exaggerate his ordinary experiences. He wants to spice up his life both because he wants his book to sell and also because he feels some regret about the way his life has gone. As an experienced publisher, he knows that even his nursing-home narrative, the most interesting event in his long life, hardly matches up to the events of a thriller novel such as *Half-Lives*, which involves murder, espionage, and wide-scale corruption/conspiracies. He sums up the discrepancy when discussing the theme of reincarnation in *Half-Lives*: "I, too, have a birthmark, below my left armpit, but no lover ever compared it to a comet. Georgette nicknamed it Timbo's Turd" (357). He stares his literal connection to the other sections directly in the face, but, due to a difference in importance, can't see himself as a reincarnation.

Making Something Out of Nothing: The Future Sections

Orison is the first of the two sections set in the distant future, and, like *Sloosha's Crossin'*, it includes some invented spelling changes to represent the passage of time. The first is a shortening of "ex-" to "x-" for all words that begin with that morpheme. The change can even take place after a common prefix such as "in-" or "on-", as illustrated in the following question that Sonmi asks her archivist: "Why has my case been assigned to an apparently inxperienced

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[12] "I'm not a racialist," Cavendish claims, "but I do believe the ingredients in so-called melting pots take generations to melt" (170)

corpocrat?" (Mitchell 189). The archivist's response includes two more examples (or "xamples,"

as Sonmi would write): "*I am an xpedience—and yes, an undewdrugged xpediance, still in my*

twenties. The xecs at the Ministry of Unanimity insisted. . ." (189, italics in original[13]).

Inference leads to the conclusion that "inxperienced" refers to "inexperienced";

"xpedience" refers to "expedience"; "xecs" refers to "execs." While technically foreign to the

reader, the spellings don't greatly hinder interpretation, as the changes are easily recognized.

David Crystal's appropriately-named book *Txting* discusses similar language changes in modern

texting dialogues. Though texting and the language of *Orison* vary greatly, they have both

stumbled into what Crystal calls "a basic tenet of information theory: that consonants carry much

more information than vowels" (Crystal, "Gr8 Db8," 26). *Orison*'s dropping of initial an initial

"e" may be unique among the sections, but it isn't more difficult to understand than a modern

teenager with a cellphone.

Mitchell's other spelling changes are very recognizable. A specific example is the

changing of words such as "night" and "light" to "nite" and "lite," respectively. After Sonmi

looks puzzled at how Yoona manages to illuminate a darkened storeroom, Yoona tells her that

the brightness is "only lite, from a flashlite" (191). Other words that fit the same conditions make

the same change, as when the archivist asks Sonmi "about Xi-Li, the young pureblood killed on

the *nite* of your *flite* from Taemosan?" (348, emphasis mine). This specific change seemingly

violates Crystal's ideas of information theory, as it drops two consonants from the original

words. However, Crystal notes in an article published prior to his book on texting languages that

words such as "rite" are an exception, as they "are likely to be recognized," (Crystal "Texting"

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[13] Mitchell differentiates between the dialogue of Sonmi and the archivist by putting the archivist's dialogue in italics.

80). Other spelling changes, such as "thoro" (215) instead of "thorough" and "thruout" (198) instead of "throughout," similarly focus on silent vowel sounds.

Similar to the first pairing, where *Pacific Journal* contains a higher degree of older language than *Zedelghem*, *Sloosha's Crossin'* includes considerably more spelling changes than *Orison* due to its further distance from the present. Some, like the changes in *Orison*, don't change the pronunciation at all, remaining extremely recognizable. Words such as "couldn't" and "though," for instance, lose consonants to become "cudn't" (241) and "tho'" (240), respectively.

More interestingly, some of the letter-dropping in *Sloosha's Crossin'* affects the actual pronunciation of words, causing a change to how the language sounds—a change not found in the simpler omissions of *Orison*. For instance, any internal /ə/ sound in a polysyllabic word has been replaced by an apostrophe, and sometimes a connected, unstressed "r" is dropped as well. As an example for both cases, Zachry says the following after reaching his dead father's body: "I cudn't grief *prop'ly* yet nor nothin', *ev'rythin'* was jus' too shock'n'horrorsome, see" (241 emphasis mine). "Properly," the latter case, has lost both letters, while "everything" has only lost an "e." The sentence also includes an example of another frequent omission: "and," which always loses the "d" and sometimes loses the "a" depending on the words surrounding it.

An overabundance of conjunctions shows that the language of *Sloosha's Crossin'* also differs from the other sections due to its reliance on parataxis, or sentences that opt for coordinating conjunctions between clauses as opposed to subordinating conjunctions. The following sentence illustrates the concept:

> Mister Lardbird he slipped thru my fingers *an'* skipped off, *but* I wasn't givin' up, nay, I chased him upstream thru bumpy'n'thorny thickets, spring-heelin' dead branches'n'all, thorns scratched my face diresome, *but* see I'd got the chasin'

fever *so* I din't notice the trees thinnin' *nor* the Hiilawe Falls roarin' nearer, not till I ran schnock into the pool clearin' *an'* giddied up a bunch o' horses (emphasis mine, 240).

The sentence feels as if it's a run-on sentence partly because of its length, but also because it uses six coordinating conjunctions as well as commas to connect the similarly-shaped clauses. The result is what writer Constance Hall calls "a sense of things piling up, a rush of ideas, a fast-moving narrative" (Hall, n.p.) on the language blog *Lingua Franca*. A side effect is a tendency for the language to be seen as more informal, as it lacks subordination, a method viewed as more formal and academic due to its use of logic-based conjunctions between clauses.

The sentence also contains a couple examples of invented or informal words that add to this feeling of informality. "Schnock," for instance, is an invention, though it bears some resemblance in its usage to "running *smack* into the pool clearing." A verbal phrase such as "giddied up" comes from the literal command for a horse to "giddy up," but it isn't used a transitive verb in modern language. Both choices are thus recognizable to a modern reader, but both also should appear very colloquial, as if they were words that a person might use in informal speech (a fitting characteristic of an oral retelling of a narrative).

In *Orison*, a few words also seem slightly unfamiliar—most likely because they don't exist in modern dictionaries. Still, the words share similarities with existing words, making their meaning possible to infer. "Corpocrat" (189), for instance, a relatively superficial change from the word "bureaucrat," reflects a setting where corporations run the public sector instead of governmental bureaus. "Corpocracy," Sonmi points out to the archivist, using another altered word, "funds your Ministry of Archivism" (234). The influence of an extremely capitalistic society has even changed the names of words of products to their brand names. Movies, for instance, have become "disneys" (349); televisions, "sonys" (191). Capitalism has even replaced

the religious and historical language of the Gregorian calendar with ten-day weeks and secular

names such as "ninthnite" and "fourthmonth" (199).[14]

While certainly noteworthy for establishing a futuristic atmosphere, these changes are

relatively superficial compared with the way the section uses language as a signifier of power.

Several changes invoke an Orwellian sense of twisted language. The Ministries of Archivism and

Unanimity may even be direct ties to *1984*'s Ministries of Truth, Love, Plenty, and Peace. In

both, the names have been twisted to obscure the true function of the ministries. The Ministry of

Archivism, outwardly "dedicated to preserving a historical record for future ages" (234), actually

restricts the access to historical materials. Similarly, the Ministry of Unanimity is run by the

"Beloved Chairman" (344) and the Juche, an all-powerful board of executives. The word, drawn

from the leading party of the North Korean government, doesn't exactly suggest a governing

body where the decisions are made with everyone's consent.

Unanimity's control of language goes beyond altering its own image, as they use it to

disempower the "fabricants" at an extremely fundamental level. As a working fabricant, Sonmi's

necessary imbibing of "Soap," the food-substance designed for fabricants, fed her with

"amnesiads designed to deaden curiosity" (186). Linguistically, she was taught a limited

vocabulary to be able to function in her job as a server, but the Soap prevents her from learning

any new words, as it "erases the xtra words we acquire later" (188). In the language of *Orison*

this phenomenon appears in the form of Sonmi's early naiveté. The flashlite that Yoona must

identify for her initially exists outside of her vocabulary. "A white blade sliced the black," she

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[14] The names resemble those of the French Republican Calendar, a similar attempt to replace the Gregorian Calendar with a more secular version. Unlike the FRC, however, the calendar of *Orison* does not use decimal time.

says of the lite emitting from the tool, "a miraculous moving knife that gave form to the stuffy nothing" (191).

These linguistic chains are imperfect, however. After twelve years of service, fabricants begin to remember words. Sonmi notes that she was "shocked to hear new words fly from my own mouth" (188), and she suffers from no linguistic deficiencies as she narrates her story to the archivist. Unanimity deals with this problem by executing all fabricants after their twelfth year of service. The execution process, which is referred to as "Xultation" in another moment of doublespeak, is hidden from the general public, who believe that the fabricants are "paid for their labor in retirement communities" (344). Here the power of language strikes again, as the fabricants envision the tropical paradise of Xultation until the very moment they are killed.

When Sonmi refers to Fabricants as slaves, the archivist rejects her statement, claiming that "the very word *slave* is abolished throughout Nea So Copros" (189, emphasis in original), but this statement has a double meaning beyond being another image alteration for Unanimity. Sonmi and the other fabricants endure a status beyond mere slavery—a linguistic crippling that left them powerless. They cannot foment dissent and disorder if, in the words of the archivist, "fabricants have difficulties threading together an original sentence of five words" (188). To fabricants, the word "dissent" is simply a "noise devoid of meaning" (188), or an erased portion of their lexicon. It is fitting that Sonmi's act of rebellion—writing an entire treatise of "Declarations" (346)—is a verbal rather than a physical one.

Though Zachry is perfectly able to convey every part of his story, he does lack some vocabulary that would seem commonplace to a modern reader. Often his vocabulary gaps appear when he encounters "Smart" (248)—technology that pre-dates the apocalyptic that occured a

century prior to his story. He doesn't have a word for automobiles, for instance, as he imagines "flyin' kayaks an' no-horse carts wheeling' here'n'there" (285) in Honokaa, a town built on pre-Fall ruins. Prescient technology can also trip Zachry up, as he initially calls Meronym's orison[15] both a "big silv'ry egg" (263) and the "Smart egg" (276) before asking what the device "true-be-telled" (276). And nothing confuses Zachry more than the various technologies of the observatory, or "observ'tree" (276) that he visits with Meronym. "Describin' such Smart ain't easy," he admits (276).

Based on Zachry's historical context, any difficulty describing complex ideas shouldn't be a surprise. The Valleysmen live without guns, electricity, or modern medicine, creating an agrarian society with low literacy levels and short lifespans.[16] Their language omits letters, uses informal words regularly, and relies on parataxis instead of coordinating conjunctions. If any of *Cloud Atlas'* settings predisposes its characters to avoid talking about complex and abstract ideas, it is the naturalistic setting of post-apocalyptic Hawaii.

Still, Zachry manages to cobble together a completely adequate description of his futuristic surroundings. He can use it to deal with complex emotions and decisions, as when he lacks the words to directly explain why he felt compelled to lie about his role in his father's death. Instead of mentioning abstractions such as shame and fear and the poor decisions of youth, he invents an explanatory metaphor:

> Lies are Old Georgie's vultures what circle on high lookin' down for a runty'n'weedy soul to plummet'n'sink their talons in, an' that night at Abel's Dwellin', that runty'n'weedy soul, yay, it was me (242).

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[15] A handheld holographic recorder and communication device used by the Prescients.
[16] Zachry explains that "normally by forty we're prayin' Sonmi to put us out o' misery an' reborn us quick in a new body" (253).

By using an animal (the vulture) to represent an abstraction (the lie), Zachry has translated the idea into words he can understand.

Although they reach it in different ways, Sonmi and Zachry prove that great works of language can come from those with humble linguistic beginnings. Both characters complete their pinnacle work towards the end of their lives, too. In Sonmi's case, her *Declarations* only found "say-so over purebloods'n'freakbirths' thinkin's" (277), though they had so much of an effect that the Valleysmen believed she had "been birthed by a god o' Smart named Darwin," elevating her to deity status.

Zachry's major contribution—a third model for understanding *Cloud Atlas* that he posits at the end of his story—doesn't have the same wide-reaching effect inside the world of the novel, instead applying metafictionally to the reader's understanding of the novel. Similar to Frobisher, who presents his model in terms of the music that dominates his life, and Sachs, the well-read physicist who speaks in abstractions such as "a virtual past" (392) and "a virtual future" (393), Zachry's model exists firmly in his own language, using a simple description of his natural surroundings to explain a complex idea. In a final nod towards the surprising aptness of Zachry's descriptions, Mitchell allows this model to fit closely with the title of the entire novel:

> Souls 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? Only Sonmi the east an' the west an' the compass an' the atlas, yay, only the atlas o' clouds (308).

Even as reincarnation and the more subtle connections explored in the third chapter show how the book's characters "cross ages," the model acknowledges that something timeless about each character stays the same. Ewing remains a naïve character prone to over-description; Frobisher always sees the world through a musical lens. Clichés dominate Luisa's life just as

much as metaphors and exaggeration dominate Cavendish's. And Sonmi is locked in a power struggle and a fight to be heard just as much as Zachry wants to be understood. As the third chapter will show, when each of these souls crosses the skies of the novel, the web of connections imbues parts of these inherent qualities on other portions of the novel.

Chapter 3 – The Ever-Present Web

The world is a web, and that's what makes it so fascinating as well.
                                                  -Mitchell, "SWF interview"

As we've seen in Chapter 2, Mitchell uses language to simultaneously distinguish the six sections of *Cloud Atlas* and characterize the narrators that inhabit them. "Language, too," muses a momentarily self-aware Cavendish, "will leave you behind, betraying your tribal affiliations whenever you speak" (180). As the great differentiating power of the novel, language gives uniqueness to each of the six "soloists" that make up the sextet that is the novel.

In *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell plays with the fact that, even though the language is meant to differentiate, it also naturally overlaps across the sections. These overlaps don't undo the work of language to differentiate between the six sections; instead, the language similarities often exist at a subtler level. They are often the unnoticed connections: single words, phrases, and examples of syntax that appear in multiple points of the novel.

Although the ways in which language remains similar at its most bare-bone levels may not seem as illuminating as the larger ways in which it differs, it is important to remember each language choice, no matter how small, has a web of effects on the surrounding story. None of the stories exist in a vacuum, as Mitchell uses birthmarks and déjà vu to create tangible ties between the sections. Metafictionally, the novel seems aware of its own interconnectivity, as each story is embedded inside the other stories, meaning that each character comes into direct contact with the language of his or her predecessor. So, even though language works to differentiate them, the contact will ensure that the sections leave an impact on each other. Though Frobisher remarks about Ayrs, "Watching him use counterpoint and mix colors refines my own language in exciting

ways" (61), the comment could also describe his relationship with the characters of other sections.

Due to the subtler nature of the connective language, the results of this analysis won't have broad, deterministic patterns that paint a larger picture about each section. The changes are instead meant to be measured as a sort of biological indicator, or trace elements of a larger system that prove something depending on their existence or absence. The larger argument is not that language builds connectivity on its own; a combination of effects (including the birthmarks, déjà vu, et cetera) builds it one layer at a time, each in different modes and magnitudes. As a set of subtle connections, language may not be the most significant force of connective glue between the six sections of the novel. However, it adds another layer, and it is worth studying how this layer impacts the overall connectivity of the novel.

The following chapter is divided into four sections, each documenting a different case study of a subtle language change. The first two will follow single words, "ain't" and "sir," investigating the ways in which each word denotes class differences in different sections. The third section will turn to an investigation of clusters, or clumps of words, in order to identify frequently grouped words and phrases. Specifically, the section will focus on the surprisingly common cluster "I don't know" and the various ways it is translated in the different sections of the novel. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a section about contractions and their irregular usage patterns in different sections of the novel.

"Savages Ain't Always Bad Folks, Nay"[17]

The raw usage numbers of the word "ain't" point toward the conclusion that the word is a major differentiating factor for the final section, *Sloosha's Crossin'*. Of the 112 times that the word occurs in the novel, 96 of them happen in *Sloosha's Crossin'*, where the word has completely replaced the absent forms "isn't," "is not," "am not," "aren't," and "are not." The usages are scattered across the section equally, being used by the narrating Zachry as well as, presumably, most of the people with whom he interacts.

Though the word is undoubtedly a key feature of Zachry's language, the fact that it occurs elsewhere, even in smaller numbers, means that the word both indicates and creates subtle connections. Tellingly, the word doesn't appear uniformly throughout the other five sections; it clumps around specific characters and types of characters.

The word appears six separate times in *Pacific Journal*, each time being spoken by a sailor. Three sailors each have one use of the word, as Pocock, Rafael, and Newfie all say it in their especially limited number of lines, while Autua, the Moriori stowaway that earns his keep as a master sailor, makes up the other half of the instances. The word serves as a marker of their status as uneducated "Visigoths of the Sea" (477), or men that Captain Molyneux refuses to bring ashore to missionary islands. At one point Autua faces a test of his sailing prowess after revealing himself as a stowaway. The captain attempts to trick him, intentionally naming the mizzen mast incorrectly, but Autua spots the trap "'Sir, this mast ain't midmast'" (35), he points out, identifying himself as a trained sailor not only through his knowledge but also his vernacular.

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[17] Zachry says this quote about other people living on the Big Island (286).

Progressing forward chronologically through the sections, the users of "ain't" shift from sailors to service-industry workers. A "silver-haired black janitor" in *Half-Lives* tells Luisa that Sixsmith "ain't been around a week or two" (105), and the "stony matriarch" at Sixsmith's hotel comforts Luisa's fake tears by telling her "they pass over, but they ain't gone" (115). Later, an employee of the Chord Music Store warns her "cheap, it *ain't*" (emphasis in original, 119) about the lost record of Frobisher's "Cloud Atlas Sextet." Not only do these characters belong to a starkly different class than the CEOs, editors-in-chief, and scientists that Luisa normally talks to, but they're also all people that Luisa manipulates in order to learn more information about the life and death of Rufus Sixsmith.

The users of the word in *The Ghastly Ordeal* both exist in one scene: Cavendish's attempt to board a train on his escape northward from London. The two users—the ticket saleswoman and the policeman who comes to her defense—both stand in his way as he unsuccessfully tries to buy a ticket. "I ain't selling you a ticket for today," the ticket saleswoman tells him (159), and the policeman dismisses his complaints about already going through the line by saying "this gentleman says you ain't" (160). Cavendish remains frustrated to the day of the writing of his memoirs about their supposed stupidity, and, regardless of their actual intelligence, they exist in the service jobs similar to the characters from *Half-Lives*.

To be clear, the connection of "ain't" between Zachry and various minor characters can't be stretched too far. Though the usage of "ain't" follows the same patterns throughout the characters, the language around it varies. Zachry's confession that he "cudn't describe 'em cos there ain't the words no more" (287-8) contains words unique to *Sloosha's Crossin'* such as "cudn't," "cos," and "no more"; yet "ain't" still replaces "aren't" just as it does in Rafael's cry of "There! Ain't they a marvel, sir?" (495). Characters can use the same nonstandard word without

speaking a single, completely-unified "nonstandard dialect." The argument that service

characters have been fully reincarnated as Zachry, that they make up "all the lifes my soul ever

was till far-far back b'fore the fall" (287), would require more evidence than a shared word.

Yet the word indicates firsthand that the sections are not only "connected by the hint of

genetic and cultural inheritance" (Jaszczolt 72); linguistically, a hint of inheritance exists as well.

Regardless of the history of Zachry's soul, the linguistic connection supports Wallhead and

Kohlke's reading of the *Cloud Atlas* that uses John Donne's Meditation XVII, saying that it

"'bind[s] together' the 'scattered leaves' of historically distinct traumas, so that different

narrative selves and traumas 'lie open to one another'" (Wallhead-Kohlke 225). Through "ain't,"

Zachry and the minor characters are not just bound together; the word opens up the characters to

each other. Though maybe not as blatant as the effects of reincarnation (or Mitchell's recurring

characters, for that matter, as discussed in the introduction), these characters can imbue each

other with aspects of their lives and settings.

The sailors/service workers and their historical context can then be used as a lens to

interpret Zachry and his invented future. The status of "ain't" as a historical vulgarism[18] is

relatively well-known, but the direct tie in *Cloud Atlas* between its usage and historically lower-

class characters emphasizes this facet of the word. Through the "opened-up" parallel between

Zachry and the lower-class characters, his usage of "ain't" makes Zachry appear primitive

compared to the technologically advanced Prescients. Autua, for instance, surrounds his usages

of "ain't" with other grammatical mistakes, suggesting an uneducated upbringing and a class

status well below the proper Ewing. "I ain't good slave" (29), he says, omitting an article in what

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[18] A history of "ain't" and its controversial inclusion in *Webster's Third* can be found in David Skinner's *The Story of Ain't.*

Ewing calls his "broken pidgin" (29). Similarly, well before Meronym reveals her orison or pistol, the prevalence of "ain't" in Zachry's language indicates a difference between the two characters. "She ain't like you," he tells a valleyswoman, "she's got so much Smart *in her head* she's got a busted neck" (255, emphasis mine). The parallels between Zachry and Autua are especially important, as the two characters are both peaceful Pacific Islanders saved from genocide by the timely intervention of an educated seafarer. Through Zachry, Mitchell comes much closer to giving a voice to Autua's inner dialogue than Ewing's narrative process ever could.

More interestingly, the "opening up" process can run both directions due to "the palindrome structure of the novel," which Wallhead and Kohlke claim "means that the nineteenth-century section both feeds and *feeds off* . . . the subsequent traumas" (Wallhead-Kohlke, 227, emphasis in original). Placing *Sloosha's Crossin'* in between the other sections invites the reader to reapply Zachry's qualities of bravery and good-natured curiosity to the minor characters as each section concludes in the second half of the novel.

Nowhere does this effect play out more powerfully than the tragedy of Rafael, who uses the word soon before he commits suicide. After spotting a pod of whales, he points them out to Ewing, remarking "ain't they a marvel, sir?" (495). The word recalls not only Zachry's sense of wonder, but, by connecting back to *Sloosha's Crossin'*, it also connects tortured Rafael to the "sorrysome child" sodomized by the brutal Kona warriors (292). Through this subtle connection, the tragedy of Rafael can be conveyed despite the ignorance of his narrator Ewing. Although Ewing feels guilt and anger after the rape occurs, the added perspective of a fellow prisoner, "drained by hunger'n'pain an' the mozzies from the slopin' pond" (292), gives insight into Raphael's terror that Ewing lacks.

"He Told Me to Call Him Professor Instead of Sir"[19]

"Sir" stands out as a connective tissue of language in *Cloud Atlas* for a few reasons even though it might appear overly simple and straightforward in its usage. Generally, the usage of "sir" marks a character as a subordinate addressing a superior. One character in *Zedelghem* uses it when he talks to Frobisher: "'Wise of you to travel light, *sir*'" (46, emphasis mine). In *Half-Lives*, a second character tells Sixsmith, "'Not a prayer, *sir*,'" when he asks something of her (209-219). "'An ideal night for Moon Tower, *sir*,'"a third character advises Hae-Joo in *Orison* (226), the section where Sonmi uses the word so many times that Boom-Sook nicknames her "I-Do-Not-Know-Sir-451" (209). Even without context, each of the three characters[20] indicates a subordinate relationship through their usage of "sir."

As with "ain't," the usage patterns of "sir" vary from section to section despite the fact that its meaning does not, making it another indicator of how language is used similarly and differently in various sections. However, "sir" also contains some fundamental differences—it doesn't replace another word, and it is also nonessential to the syntax of a sentence. These two facts make the word ideal for studying, as it narrows down the possible cases to two: "sir" is either used or omitted. And unlike "ain't," which has a history of mainly marking its user with a variety of class identities, "sir" speaks to the relationship between two people. While it may not be a groundbreaking revelation that certain characters show formality to others, even the seemingly-simple word "sir" is used in several unique ways. Connecting these methods of using "sir" does reveal more complex intersectional relationships.

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[19] Sonmi says this quote about Boardman Mephi (220).
[20] A steward boy talks to Frobisher; an airport boy talks to Sixsmith; and a taxi driver talks to Hae-Joo.

Usage of "sir" peaks in *Pacific Journal*, which has thirty-two of the fifty-three total

usages[21] of the word in the book. This pattern fits historical trends, which show a steady decline

of the word "sir" throughout the past two centuries. However, it also fits the section's

preoccupation with formality. Ewing, the American "gentleman," feels out of place amongst the

ruffian sailors. His status causes Captain Molyneux to bring him along when they visit

missionaries, however, as his language causes him to fit in with "civilized" society. Notably, the

captain adds the word "sir" to his language when on dry land, telling Preacher Horrox that his

ship is "'neither as godly nor as unsinkable as your church, *sir*'" (477). Inside the rigid hierarchy

onboard the ship, where everyone is strictly subordinate to the captain;[22] even the first-mate

Boerhaave must tack on the word when he asks him, "'makes you think, eh, sir?'" (476).

No one uses the word more in the novel than Dr. Goose, but a closer analysis of his usage

tendencies reveals something curious: all but one of the times he says "sir" occur within the same

two-page conversation with Adam. The conversation, a relatively one-sided rant about his need

for the teeth of deceased cannibals, occurs when he first meets Ewing. Throughout the rest of

Pacific Journal, Goose speaks to Ewing regularly—covering an entire gamut of seriousness from

philosophical discussions to sarcastic quips—but he never calls him "sir" again.

> Teeth, *sir*, are the enameled grails of the quest in hand.
> But these base molars, *sir*, shall be transmuted to gold.
> Do you know the price a quarter pound will earn, *sir*? (3, emphasis mine)

Nothing about these sentences calls out for a marker of formality. The reason behind his usage

derives from the context; Goose has just met Ewing and uses politeness to create a decent first

impression. Though Ewing is scared off initially by his "eccentricities" (5), he appreciates the

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[21] To clarify: I will not be analyzing the usage of "sir" as a formal title attached to a character's name, such as Sir Hubert or Sir Felix. I consider this usage to be a distinct case, and, while worthy of separate study, it falls under a different discussion involving names and titles.

[22] The second mate tells Ewing that "'the only statute book on the *Prophetess* is the Old Man's Whim'" (34)

fact that Goose "is the only other gentleman on this latitude" (5). The formality of "sir"

undoubtedly helps Goose win this distinction, giving him a foot in the door in the goal of earning

Ewing's trust and friendship.

Goose's usage pattern is mimicked by Frobisher, creating one of a couple of more

specific connections between *Pacific Journal* and other sections. The majority of times when

Frobisher uses "sir" occur in a single scene where he meets Ayrs for the first time. Frobisher

knows that his first impression is important; if he doesn't convince Ayrs to at least consider

taking him on as amanuensis then he'll be immediately sent back whence he came. Polite,

deferential language then becomes essential until he finds a chance to "be intriguing" (50) by

revealing his hatred of his former college dean. Up to that point, he uses the word "sir" four

times in a few short lines of dialogue:

> Robert Frobisher, *sir*, from Saffron Walden . . .
> A labor of love, *sir*.
> I know, *sir*, but you need one . . .
> Frankly, *sir*, he loved me (50, emphasis mine).

The technique works as a method of buying Frobisher time, as Ayrs "didn't dismiss [Frobisher]

out of hand" (50). Once Frobisher taps into Ayrs' hatred of British composers by insulting his

own college dean, he begins to lower his level of formality, beginning with "sir," which is only

used once more my Frobisher in the entire novel. That instance, which occurs after Ayrs

demands to know whether Frobisher is having an affair with his wife, again requires Frobisher to

be in complete control of his language in order to manipulate Ayrs. "Let my voice stiffen,

masterfully," he narrates to Sixsmith before noting his response: "'No, *sir*, I don't believe I do

know your meaning'" (80, emphasis mine).

In that second and final usage by Frobisher, he uses "sir" not as an introduction, but a means of placation. Again, the method has precedent in *Pacific Journal*, where multiple characters find the need to smooth over a potential conflict with Ewing. Autua adds a "sir" onto his plea for Ewing to remain quiet when he reveals himself as a stowaway in Ewing's compartment. "Do not fear—Mr. Ewing—no harm, no shout, please, sir," he pleads (25), and the politeness successfully causes Ewing to listen, admitting that "reason, at last, rallied against my fear" (25). For Autua, a non-native English speaker who speaks in an "uncut language," to use "sir" effectively indicates a pervasiveness of the word in *Pacific Journal's* setting. Though the young missionary Wagstaff laments that the native pacific islanders can't adopt the nuances and intricacies of the English language,[23] Autua's interaction with Adam provides evidence that the case of "sir" is an exception.

Zachry, the pacific islander of the future, also uses "sir" to placate the Prescients, the technologically advanced seafaring culture that considers the valleysman culture to be primitive. Upon discovering Meronym's orison, the communication device that connects her to other Prescients, he enters a conversation with a male prescient who reprimands him for searching through Meronym's possessions. Ashamed, he tells the Prescient that his name is "Zachry, sir" (264), after which furious Prescient stops shouting and calms down. Tellingly, this usage is the only time he specifically uses the word in his entire story, although he does mention that his tribe will generally use the word when talking to Prescients who come to trade (248). Four centuries after Autua's life, his ability to use "sir" lives on, connecting two characters on the far extremes of the wide-spanning novel.

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[23] "'Oh, they say 'Please, sir,' an' 'Thank you, sir' prettily enough, but you feel *nothing*'—Wagstaff pounded his heart—'here'" (483, emphasis in original).

"I Don't Know Why It Is"[24]

Language similarities can extend beyond a single word to common groupings of multiple word segments, also called "clusters." These clusters are relatively rare: approximately 5% of the 100,000+ three-word clusters in *Cloud Atlas* are recurrent, and only 5% of those 5,000 repeating clusters appear more than two or three times. Still, due to the sheer size of the sample, several high-occurrence clusters are available for us to study. A list of the eight clusters with greater than fifteen occurrences[25] appear in Figure 3.1:

Cluster	Occurrences
Back to the	26
I did not	22
One of the	19
A pair of	16
I was a	16
I could not	15
I don't know	15
The first time	15

Figure 3.1 – Common Clusters

On the first impression, many of the clusters are perfectly expectable: context-lacking groupings of articles and prepositions that could fit into any part of narrative without seeming out of place. The most frequent cluster, "back to the," fits this description, as do "one of the" and "a pair of." For instance, at different times, the novel mentions pairs of "garter snakes" (475), "fuckups royale" (424), and "icenikes"[26] (217), to name just a few. A second trend—common verbs attached to pronouns—fills out most of rest of the list with common clusters like "I did not" and "I was a."

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[24] Zachry says this quote about the guilt caused by secrets (302).
[25] I'm excluding 3-word names such as "Nea So Copros"
[26] This word probably refers to a pair of boots.

I must emphasize that the specific numbers are far less important than their relative order of magnitude. The difference between two clusters used 15 and 20 times, respectively, can be explained by random variation and chance. The fact that the two clusters are both in the 99.9th percentile of occurrence holds much more importance. For this reason, it makes less sense to try to analyze the cluster data holistically; what does it matter that "I did not" was used seven more times than "I could not"? Instead, the chart supports the case-study method, picking out clusters that might seem out of place and attempting to determine the context responsible for them.

Perhaps the most interesting cluster is "I don't know" due to its inclusion of the verb "to know" instead of the more common "to be" and "to do." "To know" is attached to "I don't" fifteen times—or twelve more than the second-most frequent combination of "I don't" and another verb.[27] The disparity indicates that personally admitting "not knowing" must be relatively important somehow in the book, a theory supported by the similar and also-common clusters "I din't know" (9 occurrences), "I did not know" (5 occurrences), and "I didn't know" (4 occurrences).

Opening up the comparison to include all versions of "I don't know" reveals a few spots where most of the occurrences occur. Generally, the phrases connect pensive, curious characters that lack the brash confidence of some of the other characters. Frobisher, for instance, rarely admits that he doesn't know something, and he dismisses his lack of knowledge as trivial when he has to admit it. "Don't know how you wire money," he tells Sixsmith, "but you're the scientist, you find a way" (57), implying that such knowledge is beneath that of a gentleman composer. The one major thing he finally admits to not knowing is the source of his music: "I don't know where it came from. Waking dream" (470). Notably, he doesn't elide his "I" here,

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[27] "I don't think" and "I don't want" both appear three times in the novel.

perhaps because of the seriousness of his confession. Of course, Frobisher only admits this lack of knowledge on his deathbed, the fitting place for him to confess the results of his section- and life-long pursuit of the source of his music.

Sonmi follows an opposite progression, transitioning from someone who openly does not know things to the person who claims to see through the various "mistruths" (185) perpetrated by the leaders of Nea So Copros' dystopian corpocracy. Sonmi accounts for four of the five occurrences of the cluster "I did not know," all of which happen as she freely admits the lack of knowledge she had during the earlier portions of her life. Some of her knowledge gaps are embarrassingly basic (e.g. "I did not know what a window was" (204)), but she asks anyway, realizing that "to understand such a limitless world . . . I also needed knowledge" (207). The questioning begins as soon as she first emerges onto the surface of the world, as she admits to Chang that she "did not know the word" (200) when he tells her that he is a chauffeur. At the university, admitting her ignorance "became so habitual, Boom-Sook nicknamed me I-Do-Not-Know-Sir-451" (209). This questioning serves her well; by the end of her life, she is the only person who can "detect the hairline cracks in the plot" (348) devised for her by Unanimity.

Ewing, too, fits the model of a character searching for knowledge. The numbers agree: he uses the cluster "I know not" all four times the phrase is used. Similar to Sonmi[28], four occurrences may not seem like much, but *Pacific Journal* generally has very few clusters. Whereas other sections have multiple clusters with double-digit numbers of occurrences, the most frequent clusters in *Pacific Journal* have only five occurrences. Relatively, "I know not" appears often, mimicking Ewing's frequent philosophical and practical musings. "Is not ascent

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[28] Sonmi's nickname implies that there were many more occurrences that simply went unmentioned for the sake of eliminating redundancy in her story.

[the Moriori's] sole salvation?" he asks himself on the philosophical end of the spectrum, "I know not the answer" (492). On the other end, he also admits that "how Henry & others sleep through this din of debauchery & blasphemous caroling I know not" (497). At the end of his tale, he has gained a better understanding of his more philosophical questions, as he takes off to become an abolitionist despite his father-in-law's strongly dismissive response.

Not every narrator is the main source of these clusters in a section. *Half-Lives* doesn't include a lot of "not knowing" clusters, as Luisa, like Frobisher, becomes sure of things before she even has definite proof, including intuitive feelings that are brought up through déjà vu. Just as Sixsmith believes that he's "known [Luisa] for *years*, not ninety minutes" (96, emphasis in original), Luisa repeatedly tells a music store clerk that "I *know* this music . . . I *know* it" (408) about a recording of Frobisher's "Cloud Atlas Sextet."

The majority of "not knowing" clusters in the section instead come from the supporting characters Isaac Sachs and Joe Napier, who both utter the clusters multiple times in their relatively limited lines. Both characters share similarities, both to each other and the other characters who use similar clusters. Initially part of the cover-up around the faulty nuclear plant, both characters are wracked with indecision as they decide whether to help Luisa uncover the plot. "I—I don't know what I want to do" (133), Sachs tells her at dinner as he debates giving her Sixsmith's report. Napier struggles with the lingering guilt from an incident when Luisa's dad saved his life. "We just shook hands and I left," he says about the experience, "I didn't know what to say" (399). Questioning their own actions causes them to make a highly moral decision, but helping Luisa comes at the expense of their own lives. Similar to Sonmi and Ewing, the introspective and modest cluster correlates with an ultimate decision to make decisions for more than just physical survival.

Important to note is the way in which these clusters showcase the ability of language to simultaneously differentiate and connect portions of the novel. The "I don't know" cluster connects these characters on a subtle level that transcends the literal boundaries of each section, yet on a surface level these boundaries still exist. The cluster varies based on the section it takes place in, from Ewing's antiquated "I know not" to Sonmi's contraction-free "I did not know" to Zachry's compressed "I din't know." Though it seems paradoxical, neither view of language is invalid; the effects of language are complex enough that it can work to two seemingly opposing ends at the same time

Trends of this cluster usage generally match a possible grouping of introspective, moral characters, as the cluster serves as both an indicator of this connection as well as one of the many small details that factor into the creation of this grouping. Mitchell counterbalances his motif of human predacity with the reincarnating protagonists, who act as beacons of hope through their generally noble actions. Connections such as "I don't know" offer further hope, as they extend list of moral characters beyond the protagonists to minor characters like Napier and Sachs, who give their lives for a moral cause without the happy ending and accolades that Luisa receives. At the close of the novel, Ewing's father-in-law scoffs at Ewing's desire to join the abolitionist movement, warning him that his life would "amount to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean!" (509). Ewing's response, the final line of the novel, succinctly reminds the reader of the presence of other moral characters: "Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?" (509).

"I Was Not Genomed to Alter History"[29]

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[29] Sonmi says this quote to the archivist towards the end of her narrative (327).

Cluster analysis can also be applied on a section-by-section level. In the previous section, cluster analysis revealed that clusters such as "I did not" appear frequently. Breaking down the results by section shows that the occurrences mostly exist in *Pacific Journal* and *Orison*. Alternatively, contracted versions of the same phrase, such as "I didn't" and "I din't" are almost entirely absent. Testing other verbs confirms that this example is no mere exception; Ewing and Sonmi rarely contract any of their verbs, as seen in Figure 3.2.

Verb (uncontracted/contracted)	Ewing usage ratio	Sonmi usage ratio
"did not"/ "didn't"	16/0	29/2
"do not"/"don't	9/0	10/0
"was not"/"wasn't"	11/0	10/0
"cannot"/"can't"	11/0	12/0

Figure 3.2 – Contracted Verbs

Contractions have become fairly common in English, especially those of negation, which have largely replaced the original combinations that they stand for, at least in speech.[30] Negation contractions and their expanded versions both exist in formal and familiar language (with the exception of "ain't," which is generally unusable in formal circumstances). Occasionally, a speaker can choose not to contract as a method of emphasizing the negation. "I was lucky," Joe Napier tells Luisa when he recites the story of her dad and the fragmentation grenade that he saved Napier from, "Your dad, of course, *was not*" (emphasis mine, 399).

Ewing's contraction-free language puts him at odds with the sailors on the *Prophetess*. While Ewing alone uses "do not" and "was not" 9 and 11 times, respectively, the sailors never use those words at all. Rafael, for instance, uses "does" and "do" interchangeably, but he still

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[30] The biggest style guides support this claim, as the AP Stylebook states that contractions reflect informal speech and the Chicago Manual of Style claims that contractions sound more natural. More tellingly, the U.S. government's Plain Language manual says specifically states that "'Write as you talk' is a common rule of writing readably, and the best way to do that is to use contractions." This isn't a new phenomenon either, as even some fifty-year-old style guides say that "the more contractions you use, the more your writing will resemble idiomatic, spoken English" (Flesch, "The ABC of Style," 1966).

knows to contract both of them: "'God lets you in, *doesn't* he, if you're sorry . . . no matter what you do, he *don't* send you to . . . y'know'—here the 'prentice mumbled—'hell?'" (emphasis mine, 497). Contractions are so common in his speech that he even contracts "you know" as "y'know" in this quote, a rare joining in the context of the book. Ewing's contraction patterns fit more closely with Dr. Goose and various missionaries, or fellow members of the educated, Western upper-class. "A wise man," Goose tells Ewing, "*does not* step betwixt the beast & his meat" (7, emphasis mine)

Sonmi almost never uses contractions either, choosing to separate her verbs. In raw numbers, she uses "did not" and "could not" five and thirteen times as often as she uses "didn't" and "couldn't," respectively. Not once does she use the contractions "can't" and "wasn't." Similar to Ewing, she stands out from a general trend of contraction in the section; however, the lack of any fellow contraction-free speaker indicates that she is even more of an outlier in this regard. Ewing stands out because he is immersed in a relatively homogenous group of contraction-free speakers. Back home in San Francisco or privately with Dr. Goose, his contraction-free speaking doesn't stand out. In Sonmi's case, she comes into contact from people that run the gamut of society: clones, spoiled students, taxi drivers, black market makeup artists, rebels, archivists, et cetera. All use contractions almost exclusively in their language.

Sonmi's turn back to a contraction-free language mimics the largest source of her of language abilities. Having learned a majority of her English through books and reading, she emulates the historical speakers that she was able to gain access to—"Orwell and Huxley, and Washington's *Satires on Democracy*" (211). The "deviational material" of these older writers, books and treatises to which the archivist "wouldn't get such security clearance in his dreams" (234), empowers her with rhetoric to create her "Declarations." Zachry believes her to be

"birthed by a god o' Smart named Darwin" (277), and, due to her linguistic connection to Ewing (a fellow 19th-century, upper-class Western traveler), it seems likely that she actually sounds like him.

Sonmi's language stands out from her contemporaries[31], as the language of her world is completely controlled by Unanimity. The word "slavery," for instance, "is abolished throughout Nea So Copros" (189), despite the fact that Sonmi claims that "corpocracy is built on slavery, whether or not the word is sanctioned" (189). If she were to fight back against slavery using the language of her time period, her results would surely be miniscule, as humans, or "consumers" feel that fabricants are merely personality-free clones. "This sense of fabricants' redundancy," explains Hicks, permits the human consumers "to be indifferent to the fate of the fabricant" (Hicks, n.p.).

The use of contractions shows how Sonmi can actually fight Unanimity's control over language; her historical language "appropriately resurrects nineteenth-century discourses of anti-slavery and worker's rights" (Wallhead-Kohlke 243). By stubbornly insisting on using words like "slavery," Sonmi refuses to follow the guidelines of Unanimity. Her contraction-free language is certainly subtler and less conscious, but it does go against the trend of contracting that exists in every section after *Pacific Journal.*[32] Her language takes her much further back in time with the gentleman of the 19th century, "escaping from the cycles of brutality that Cloud Atlas recurrently depicts" (Hicks, n.p.) by doing so. Physically the clone of a server, she has

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[31] Even the archivist uses contractions regularly: "I didn't know fabricants have birthmarks" (Mitchell 198).
[32] The heavily contracted language of *Sloosha's Crossin'* provides further evidence that, even in the future, the English languages of *Cloud Atlas* will include significant contraction.

linguistically become a clone of a pre-skirmish[33] thinker/activist, moving even the subtle parts of her language back in time in an effort to resemble them.

Again, language is doing strong connective work—this time linking a single character and an older ideal she wishes to embody. In each linguistic signal we see an echo of a larger thematic movement, and though the movement is larger than the linguistic clues that signal it, the language consistently underlies these larger processes. By operating on multiple levels, language can simultaneously connect and divide the novel, as the subtle connections work differently than the broad divisions discussed in Chapter 2. And similar to the "elastic moment" that Luisa encounters when she sees Ewing's *Prophetess* at dock in Beunas Yerbas, one can grasp for the ends of these elusive connections, "but they disappear into the past and the future" (430).

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[33] "Pre-skirmish" is the term used to refer to the time before the even that presumably gave Nea So Copros control over most of the hospitable world.

Conclusion

> *When we first read David Mitchell's book, I thought it was an unbelievable*
> *examination of incredibly varied perspectives, and also the relationship between*
> *the responsibility we have to people we have power over, and the responsibility*
> *we have to the people who have power over us.*
>   *-Andy and Lana Wachowski (Robinson)*

Internet websites dedicated to the preservation of memorable book quotes highlight a

particular one from *Cloud Atlas*: "Our lives are not our own. We are bound to others, past and

present, and by each crime and kindness we birth our future. –David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*"

(Goodreads.com). Like many others, I like this quote. It eloquently summarizes the

interconnectivity of the novel; the characters are bound to each other through reincarnation and

language in order to showcase the eternal struggle of predacity and morality.

This quote comes with an unfortunate problem: it never appears in David Mitchell's

Cloud Atlas. It's a quote from the 2012 film adaptation directed by Tom Twyker and the

Wachowski siblings. Rather than become irritated at the widely circulated error, however, the

better option is to embrace the unintentional symbolism of the misquoting. After all, the book

cherishes interconnectivity so strongly that the erroneous connection between book and movie

seems oddly fitting. One could fancifully argue that the quote is a reincarnation of the novel's

ideas told in the language of the film.

Even though Mitchell was reportedly happy to allow the film's directors to adapt his

novel into a new creation as they saw fit, it speaks to the strength of his novel's interconnectivity

that, even in other forms, interconnectivity still dominates the story. The film made headlines for

using actors in multiple parts, symbolizing reincarnation-esque connections, but the

interconnectivity extended to an even more fundamental level. In the early stages of production, the directors were deciding whether to market the movie as a mainstream film or an art film, thinking that they would have to separate the art from the action. As Lana Wachowski explains, "David Mitchell basically said, 'I don't believe in that, I don't want to separate anything. I want everything in one thing'" (Andy and Lana Wachowski, "A.V. Club interview").

That quote, while significantly less eloquent, summarizes *Cloud Atlas* just as well as the previous one. Mitchell may appear to separate six widely disparate novellas, giving each of them their own language and tying them together with the reincarnation implied through birthmarks and déjà vu. The truth is that even language, the great differentiating force of the novel, works in subtle ways to tie together the fragmented structure of the novel. Fortunately, Frobisher actually does pen a fitting quote as he puts the finishing touches on his sextet, and it actually does appear in the novel. "All boundaries are conventions," he writes to Sixsmith.

The multiple and seemingly contradictory uses of language as a connecting and differentiating force in the novel only become apparent if critics make the choice to perform both linguistic and close textual analyses of the novel. Separating the two approaches, as Mitchell would argue, isn't as effective as putting "everything in one thing." In the second chapter, the statistical analysis reveals how the sections inherently differ from one another in language, but only openness to closer readings allows for the realization that each section's language characterizes its own narrator. Similarly, the third chapter relies on highly quantitative linguistic techniques to identify the subtle web of connections in the novel, but only a case-study approach to these subtle connections allows for adequate explanation of how and why these connections impact the novel.

Although Frobisher's definition of boundaries is an effective metaphor for the novel on many different levels, perhaps its most interesting application is a mantra that guides any criticism of the novel. Confining one's analysis to one single method won't provide a reading of the book that adequately interprets the numerous interacting forces. Fortunately, Frobisher offers some rare encouragement for any reader who attempts cross boundaries: "one may transcend any convention, if only one can first conceive of doing so" (460).

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