Archipelagos of Apocalypse in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and *The Bone Clocks*

Claire Larsonneur

Abstract
In two of his novels, *Cloud Atlas* (2006) and *The Bone Clocks* (2014), British author David Mitchell introduced apocalyptical worlds situated either just before the catastrophe or sometime after. Islands such as Ireland, Iceland, Hawaii and England feature prominently in those stories, where they spell out both entrapment and refuge; together they build up an archipelago of interconnected narratives and symbols. I wish here, following Deleuze's account of desert islands and Sloterdijk's analysis of spheres to study the specific psychogeography of those extreme islands, focusing on their value as experimental space and as mirrors of the self. Drawing upon the numerous echoes between Mitchell's fiction and *A Jangada de Pedra* by Jose Saramago, we will also explore their status as untethered locations, aloof from continents and their peculiar relation to history. Time cracks up on those islands where chronology is disrupted, where nostalgia for the origins is rife and myths are revisited. Iconic exploratory travels such as James Cook's fated journey into the Pacific are one essential reference but Mitchell also integrated the point of view of indigenous islanders into his narratives, counterbalancing the colonial approach and suggesting apocalypse may not be the end of the road.

Key-words: archipelago, apocalypse, David Mitchell, psychogeography.

1. Introduction

David Mitchell famously described his body of work as a single "house of fiction" or macro-novel[1]: although his six novels to date span an eclectic array of locations and periods of history, they range from the 18th century to a distant future and encompass almost all

[1] For instance in the interview with Wyatt Mason "David Mitchell the Experimentalist", *The New York Times* June 25, 2010: "each of my books is one chapter in a sort of sprawling macronovel".

continents. Recurring characters that cross over from one novel to another, such as Marinus or Mo Muntervary, are the most obvious instances of the extensive networking Mitchell revels in, but not the only ones. There is also a subtle overlay of spatial references in which islands stand out: England, Japan, Ireland, Hawaii, Iceland crop up time and again, suggesting an archipelago of fiction. Most key characters are islanders (Jason in *Black Swan Green*, Holly Sykes in *The Bone Clocks,* Eiji in *Number9dream* or Orito in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*) and islands provide the settings of the greatest number of stories. As the narration shuttles from one story to another, the reader experiences a measure of the interconnectedness of our globalised world. But beyond their function as referential anchors, one may read them as a semiotic system endowed with its own internal logic, in line with Sarah Dillon's analysis of Mitchell's body of work where "textual interconnections occur at the micro and macro levels, ranging from the microscopic repetitions of motifs and phrases to the macroscopic repetition and intersection of characters, plots and themes" (2011: 2).

This article is focused on two of Mitchell's stories, the central chapter of *Cloud Atlas*, "Sloosha'Crossing an Ev'rythin'After" and the last chapter of *The Bone Clocks*, "2043", both of which belong to the genre of the apocalyptic narrative. Here the sense of extremity is to be read both as physical – standing on the brink of the abyss –, as temporal – reaching the end of the world –, and as existential – human extinction looming. It chimes in with Deleuze's paradox in *Desert Islands and other texts*: "On s'étonnera toujours que l'Angleterre soit peuplée, l'homme ne peut vivre sur une île qu'en oubliant ce qu'elle représente. Les îles sont d'avant l'homme, ou pour après". (Deleuze 2002: 10). Islands appear to be the ultimate loci, extreme insofar as they spell the possibility of an in-human location. But is this really what Mitchell proposes? We will try to charter how Mitchellian islands play out interconnectedness, a sense of apocalypse and an inquiry into the nature of mankind.

2. Archipelagos

One way of reading *Cloud Atlas* would be to follow the multiple journeys stretching from England to the Pacific. The first story, entitled "the Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing" and set in the 19th

century, opens up on a rather programmatic statement: "If there be any eyrie so desolate, or isle so remote that one may there resort unchallenged by an Englishman, 'tis not down on any map I ever saw" (Mitchell 2004: 3). Opening on the promise of unlimited exploration, Mitchell locates the central story of the novel, which is also chronologically the last, on a faraway island called Ha-why. Like Hawaii with which it shares recognisable landmarks such as the volcano Mauna Kea, Ha-why comprises several islands. Two are real and one fictitious: Big Island, Maui and Prescience (p. 310). But Ha-why is also a hybrid of Australia, as suggested by the presence of dingoes (p. 279) and mozzies (p. 289). Mitchell describes Big Island as a place turned partially feral yet keeping pockets of civilisation, which the lead characters Meronym and Zachry will eventually flee aboard kayaks for Maui (p. 323).

In keeping with the general interconnectedness of Mitchell's fiction, Ha-Why in *Cloud Atlas* and Ireland in *The Bone Clocks* function as mirror images one of the other. They share the same plotline – survival through flight –, compound realistic references and science-fiction and provide fairly open endings. In *The Bone Clocks*, Holly Sykes and her grandchildren have fled England to Ireland, which they will in turn leave for Iceland. Elements of familiar geography such as place names like Cork, Ringaskiddy, Kilcrannog or typical features of the Irish landscape contrast with a dire forecast of our near future: Ireland has become a Chinese Concession, a sanitary Cordon shut off from the rest of the world, endangered by the intrusions of armed gangs and unmanned drones.

The same mirror effect connects Iceland to Maui: they both stand as the ultimate refuge, yet are never described. The portrayal of Iceland by Holly Sykes emphasises it could be just a tall tale, mostly a rumour. The list of amenities she fantasises about is general enough to be placeless, common enough to reinforce the dark irony of her comment. Labelled as Technotopia, Iceland has been relocated into a list of lost Edens and impossible paradises.

> Or was it that friend of a friend who met an Asylumite[2] outside Youghal who swore on his mother's life that he'd found a Technotopia where they

[2] 'Asylumite' is the name given to refugees in *The Bone Clocks*.

still have twenty-four-hour electricity, hot showers, pineapples and dark chocolate mousse, in Bermuda or Iceland or the Azores?'
I think about Martin's remarks about imaginary lifeboats. (Mitchell 2014: 546)

The descriptions of those four islands recall most of the themes Sarah Dillon identified as central in Mitchell's fiction such as incarceration and isolation, "hope that the actions of individuals can quell the tide of human predacity; the role of memory and story in creating identity; cultural dislocation; language and miscommunication; reincarnation; fate and causality" (Dillon 2011: 13). Rather than focusing on the specificities of these extreme locations, Mitchell triggers a systematic circulation of tropes between Hawaii, England, Ireland and Iceland, creating a fictional archipelago thematically rather than geographically bound. The archipelago pattern also enables him to repeat narratives of escape, characters deserting one island after the other, to seek refuge in yet another.

3. Spheres of the self

Central to these representations and narrative strategies is the equation between the island and the self. This is suggested in another of Mitchell's novels, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. When one of the characters, a slave, muses on what remains his own in this life of servitude, he calls up the image of the island:

Eelattu said that I can own my mind, if I choose. I said, 'Even a slave?' Eelattu said, yes, if the mind is a strong place. So I created a mind like an island, like Weh, protected by deep blue sea. […] When I am on my mind-island, I am as free as any Dutchman. (Mitchell 2010: 316-317)

English homophony indeed suggests islands are places of the self, the "I-lands": Mitchell underlines this by nicknaming Big Island "Big I". Furthermore and contrary to the mainland, islands appear as self-contained entities: they may be best symbolised by circles where the shore would stand for the circumference and their highest point of altitude for the centre[3]. Homophony and geometry thus fuel the

[3] To enrich the interpretative value of an island's centre, one may turn to Jean Paul Engélibert's analysis, which resonates with the Observatory scene: "On partira

analogy between island and self, a point further instantiated by the homophony between island and eye-land and the long-established metonymy between the eye and the self.

An analogy between geography and psychology, the quest for knowledge and the symbolic value of sight may all be easily conflated into one coherent semiotic network and this is precisely what Mitchell draws upon in the scene where Meronym and Zachry embark on an expedition to the top of the Mauna Kea volcano:

> Inside that dreadsome place at the world's top, yay, the wind hushed like a hurricane's clear eye. […] Meronym spoke, marv'lin' as much as me, they wasn't temples, nay, but observ'trees what Old'uns used to study the planets'n'moon'n'stars, an' the space b'tween, to und'stand where ev'rythin' begins an' where ev'rythin' ends. (Mitchell 2014: 289)

The real-life reference to the astronomical Observatory atop Mauna Kea is combined with a reminder of the eyrie featured at the beginning of the novel. The scene suggests the power of knowledge but, instead of a place of revelation, describes an abandoned compound where dust has settled on the corpses of scientists and where Zachry is beset by hallucinations. Even though Mitchell chose to treat it as a dystopia, he still takes up the same organic link between life, thought and spheres Sloterdijk analysed at length in his trilogy. Sloterdijk focuses on the psychic drive that leads human beings to create self-contained worlds in order to inhabit them: following upon Plato's analogy between life, thought and spheres, he suggests human beings have a precise need for circular forms from which they can relate to the outside world.

> The sphere is the interior, disclosed, shared realm inhabited by humans –in so far as they succeed in becoming humans. Because living always means building spheres, both on a small and a large scale, humans are the beings that establish globes and look out into horizons. Living in spheres means enacting the dimension in which humans can be contained. (Sloterdijk 2011: 28)

---

de ce qui est souvent dénié à l'île, la complexité, pour montrer que toute fiction insulaire repose sur une mise en abyme de l'espace, l'île celant, comme le château son donjon, un centre secret auquel il faut accéder pour comprendre son mystère". (Engélibert 2003: 24).

His proposal gives a new impetus to the long-standing hypothesis of an equation between the island (seen as a sphere) and the self by avoiding the isolation hinted at by Deleuze's desert island and the phantom of Robinson Crusoe. To the contrary, Sloterdijk emphasises the organic link between spheres and human social nature. We have seen already how Mitchell revives the equation between self and island. Far from being empty spaces, Ha-Why and Iceland enable the fantasies of perfect communities, attested in the following dialogue between Meronym and Zachry:

> I asked her straight, What's it like, the Hole World, the offlands over the ocean?
> Her mask'd not slipped right off tho'. What d'you reck'n?
> So I telled her my 'maginin's o' places from old books'n'pics in the school'ry. Lands were the Fall'd never falled, towns bigger'n all o'Big I, an' towers o' stars'n'suns blazin' higher'n Mauna Kea, bays of just not one Prescient Ship but a mil'yun, Smart boxes what make delish grinds more'n'any'un can eat, Smart pipes that gush more brew'n'any'un can drink, places where it's always spring an' no sick, ni knuclyin' and no slavin'. Places where ev'ry'un's a beautsome purebirth who lives to be one hun'erd'n'fifty years. (Mitchell 2014: 284-285)

Mitchell here turns the tables on traditional colonial representations, where Europe stood as the moral beacon and source of progress, and remote islands were strongholds of savagery[4]. Instead Ha-Why becomes the point of focalisation, the last refuge of civilisation; continents are figured as dreamlands, impossible utopias. Europe or America are described as off centre (the offlands), possibly empty figments of the imagination, as the truncated adjective suggests ("Hole World"). The features of those imaginary paradises listed by Zachry echo a litany of want and his use of superlatives emphasises their hypothetical character. In Mitchell's narrative economy, remoteness becomes a transferable trope that applies alternatively to far-away islands and the mainland.

[4] The case of North Sentinel Islands, as highlighted in Bonnett (2014: 59-68), shows the enduring power of such representations. Cut off from the rest of the world, they are described and treated as a pristine/primitive location, feral and best kept at bay.

4. Prodigies and experimental spaces

The remoteness of Ha-why or Iceland is not just a geographical fact: it partakes of a symbolic economy of destruction, experimentation and renewal. Indeed, the mainland may embody the continuity of heritage and the constraints of shared boundaries whereas the aloofness of an island allows for a complete overhaul of rules and behaviours, as underlined by Jean Paul Engélibert in his analysis of islands.

> S'opposant au continent par définition, elle est l'ailleurs, le négatif du monde connu, le territoire de l'impossible. Les îles fonctionnent dans les fictions comme des dispositifs favorisant et fixant l'altérité, des territoires privilégiés ou terribles où se déploie et s'abrite une réalité autre. (Engélibert 2003: 23)

Islands will consequently offer an ideal location for experimentation as witnessed by Prospero's magic, Moreau's crossbreeding experiments or More's test of public policies. Out of the very rich intertextual body of island literature, I'd like to focus on José Saramago's *A Jangada de Pedra*, which echoes a number of themes in Mitchell's fiction. Written in 1986, the novel recounts how the whole Iberian Peninsula detaches itself one day from the rest of Europe and drifts freely into the ocean. The fantastical nature of the opening events (voiceless dogs barking, a rift opening in the Pyrenees) and mythological references to Cerberus or Ariadne emphasise the extraordinary quality of this new island. A peninsula coming loose may be read as the actualisation of a sea-longing fantasy, one often shared by those who live on the furthest tip of a continent. Breaking off with geographical boundaries may lead to a departure from social and psychic constraints as suggested by Saramago's play on words (p. 18), between the content (*o conteúdo*), the continent and the container (*o continente*): "*não bastavam os quatros enigmas já falados, este nos demonstra que, ao menos uma vez, o conteúdo pôde ser maior que o continente*". ("what more than the four mysteries already mentioned, this shows us that, at least once, the content may prove bigger that the container"[5]). Becoming an island has

[5] My translation of course cannot convey the Portuguese pun between container and continent.

unleashed the potentiality of the peninsula's "content", and radically transformed the lives of the characters and their view of the world. Saramago's narrative ends on another prodigy, the simultaneous pregnancies of all the women on the peninsula. Contrary to McCarthy's *The Road*, or even to Saramago's own *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, *A Jangada de Pedra* is thus not a realistic account of post-apocalyptic life[6]: it creates a thought experimentation that combines the fantastical and the mundane, revives some of our oldest myths[7] and suggests renewal. Creating an island that is neither desert nor deserted but drifting allows Saramago to combine those elements, echoing Deleuze's analysis of their potential for regeneration:

> Rêver des îles, avec angoisse ou joie peu importe, c'est rêver qu'on se sépare, qu'on est déjà séparé, loin des continents, qu'on est seul ou perdu – ou bien c'est rêver qu'on repart à zéro, qu'on recrée, qu'on recommence[8]. (Deleuze 2002: 12)

We find much the same combination of prodigies, everyday life and open ending in Mitchell's novels. Prodigies are linked to science or rather forgotten technologies in *Cloud Atlas*. The Orison, originally a common numerical egg-shaped device for storage and display, becomes over time an instrument of power and magic in the hands of various shaman-like figures because it appears to summon the spirits of the departed and the gods. In *The Bone Clocks*, the list of prodigies includes Holly Sykes's psychic prowess, the eternal life bestowed on some characters and "temporal hotspots"[9]. The myth of metempsychosis Mitchell spectacularly revives is combined with a flurry of mundane facts (the killing of hens by a fox, insulin shots). Again the focus is on the behaviour of a few characters that

[6] For a further analysis of the apocalyptic theme in Saramago, see Engélibert (2013: 153-175).

[7] For instance Saramago mentions the crossing of the Styx or Ariadne's thread.

[8] The 2011 translation is: "Dreaming of islands –whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter– is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone- or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew".

[9] Mitchell explains this in his March 3rd, 2016 interview with Richard Lea in the *Guardian*: "a person who is endowed with a kind of 'temporal hotspot' which means their own personal time moves at a different velocity to everyone else's", www.guardian.co.uk, last accessed March 4, 2016.

have been unwittingly plunged into unchartered territories, the picture of self that emerges and a qualified sense of hope for future generations.

Islands in Saramago and Mitchell are not extreme because they are remote but because they are radical: extremity here has more to do with standing on the brink of destruction, being symbolically and practically shoved to the shoreline, than with geographical location. Choosing islands as the main set-up for their narratives is consistent with their literary strategy of radicality since, by virtue of their self-contained nature, islands allow for a condensation of events and consequences. The content does indeed exceed the container, as suggested by the intricate networking of past and future eras and all the time loops of Mitchell's house of fiction.

5. Apocalypse and time loops

The list of events leading to the ultimate catastrophe is strikingly similar in *The Bone Clocks* and *Cloud Atlas*: gigastorms and deluge (2014: 524), crop failure and Net crash (p. 532), the imminent meltdown of a nuclear reactor. In both novels collapsed economic networks of production and distribution have given way to a large-scale system of bartering; with the disintegration of the state, looting raids by brutal gangs of militia or tribesmen have multiplied. Both novels equally stage the resurgence of prophets such as the Abbess (p. 257) or Muriel the religious fanatic (p. 552). Both narratives describe at full length the short-term survival strategies to secure food, shelter and medicine. Yet, and though the two novels function here again as mirror images, they are not set in the same time frame. The events in *Cloud Atlas* take place a few generations – no clear indications of time – after what Meronym describes as "the Fall" in the following excerpt:

> Now the Hole World is big but it weren't big 'nuff for that hunger what made Old'uns rip out the skies an'boil up the seas an'poison soil with crazed atoms an' donkey 'bout with rotted seeds so new plagues was borned an'babbits was freakbirthed. Fin'ly', bit'ly, then quicksharp, states busted into bar'bric tribes and the Civ'lize Days ended, 'cept for a few folds'n'pockets here'n'there, where its last embers glimmer. (p. 286)

The point of view is slightly different in *The Bone Clocks*, which is focused on the demise of western civilisation during a pre-apocalyptic era called the Endarkment (p. 533) and compared to the *Book of Revelation* (p. 556, p. 577). A precise time frame is provided, from the 2030s to 2043. Within Mitchell's "house of fiction" the events depicted in *The Bone Clocks* stand at the root of the situation on Ha-Why yet it would be a mistake to go for a linear, chronological reading. Speaking of the *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, another apocalyptical novel by Saramago, Maria Manuel Lisboa writes:

> And in Saramago, too, knowledge comes in the flavour of the proverbial poisoned apple: as the world recovers its sight, it is left with the consciousness that all it took was the temporary removal of the restraining binds of civilisation for the primeval brute to resurface in the average citizen. (2012: 197)

In Mitchell's fiction as in Saramago's, the most interesting feature of the Apocalypse lies not in the destruction it unleashes, but in the upheaval of time, Chaos disrupting Chronos. Apocalypse does not spell the end of times; instead it repeats the same story of predation and resistance under "a gaze gravid with the ancient future" (2004: 510): this has been described as "cyclical forms of subjectivity and ontology" by Heather Hicks (2010: abstract). Iceland for instance may be read as a figure of origins: indeed because of its history of cultural isolation, the Icelandic language is very close to Old English and Nordic sagas stand at the roots of English literature (see *Beowulf*). Going back and forth in time is a staple of Mitchell's narratives and one linked to his overarching treatment of history: "*Cloud Atlas* offers a timely literary staging of this impasse: iterations of the biologically-driven narrative of human predacity […] coexist with the promise of a transhistorical and transmigratory community that resists the will-to-power" (Shoop, Ryan 2015: 94). In *The Bone Clocks* the farewell scene (pp. 557-558) for instance, in which Holly Sykes connects for the last time over the Internet with her brother in England, revolves entirely around the superposition of various periods: she remembers him from twenty years ago; he mentions "care standards are pretty Middle Ages, by all accounts" in Exmouth; she has a premonition they will never meet again and

remarks that "what Brendan said is on imperfectly remembered, non-stop shuffle-repeat". Her memory conjures up "a woman lying at a crossroads in an impossible labyrinth".

Ireland and Ha-why therefore constitute "time hubs" where the main characters discover a palimpsest of connecting eras[10]. Jonathan Boulter's analysis of temporality in *Ghostwritten*, an earlier novel by Mitchell, opens up another line of reading:

> We must, in other words, attend to the possibility that Mitchell's novels offer another way of conceiving of the historical subject, what I initially term the post-human partial object and then, turning to Virilio, the 'traject'. The subject in Mitchell can only be fully comprehended as an instantiation of various traces of incompatible, because traumatised, temporalities. (Boulter 2015: 19)

Indeed the apocalyptical times described by Mitchell are traumatic, yet quite like Saramago again, his novels suggest a glimmer of hope. The blind are cured in the *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, the *Jangada da Pedra* ends with miraculous pregnancies; both *Cloud Atlas* and *The Bone Clocks* suggest future generations have survived. Though I do not fully agree with the notion of incompatible temporalities, the reference to a 'traject' does chime in with the last paragraph of *The Bone Clocks*, the scene of the children's departure seen by Holly:

> I'm waving back until I can't make out the figures in the noisy blue murk any more, and the white wake from the outboard engine is widening behind the launch … but not for long. Incoming waves erase all traces of the vanishing boat, and I'm feeling erased myself, fading away into the invisible woman. For one voyage to begin, another voyage must come to an end, sort of. (Mitchell 2014: 595)

Self, island and journey, all coincide in this scene written around the Icelandic ship that has come to rescue the children. This particular equation of tropes here again echoes Saramago's intuition of the

[10] *The Bone Clocks* has a linear storyline going from the 1980s to 2043, yet allows for numerous flashbacks. The structure of *Cloud Atlas* is based on the Russian doll model: six storylines, chronologically ordered, each end on a cliff-hanger which will be solved as the second half of the novel progresses in reverse order.

peninsula turning into a sailing vessel, which leads us to the final avatar of extreme islands.

6. Islands/ships

Going back a few pages in *The Bone Clocks,* we find almost the same description in the scene of the Icelandic ship's arrival:

> 'You're not making a whole lot of sense,' I say. 'Ship?'
> 'That!' He points out at the bay. I can't see, but Lorelei goes over, looks out and says, 'Jesus'. At her astonishment, I hurry over, and Mo hobbles behind. At first I see only the bluish, greyish waters of the bay, but then see dots of yellow light, maybe three hundred metres out. 'A patrol boat,' says Mo, at my side. 'Can anyone see a flag on it?' (Mitchell 2014: 583)

Indeed Mitchell's rendering of the first sighting of the vessel could very well apply to sailor's first sighting of land: this suggests an equation between ship and island. Another obvious reference is to Noah's Ark, the Prescient's ship carrying survivors and their knowledge in search for land to settle. Ships are first and foremost rescue ships; they act as counterparts, even doubles of the refuge islands. The narrative hints at another layer of meaning since the Flotilla bearing the ancestors was not only their means of escape from the Fall but also the vessel for their colonial settlement of Ha-Why (Mitchell 2004: 255). The following account by Zachry echoes a very familiar collective narrative in the British Isles:

> Nay the Ship ain't no mythy yarnin', it was real as I am an' you are. These here very eyes they seen it ooh, twenty times or more. The Ship'd call at Flotilla Bay twice a year, near the spring an' autumn half'n'halfs when night'n'day got the same long. Notice it never called at no savage town, no Honokaa, not Hilo, not Leeward. An' why? 'Cos only us Valleysmen got 'nuff civ'lize for the Prescients, yay. They didn't want no barter with no barb'rians what thinked the Ship was a mighty white bird god or sumthin'! The Ship was the sky's colour was cos you cudn't see it till it was jus'offshore. It'd got no oars, nay, no sails, it din't need wind nor currents neither, 'cos it was driven by the smart o' Old'uns. Long as a big islet was the Ship, high as a low hill, it carried two-three-four hundred people, a mil'yun maybe. (p. 258)

This passage suggests a further historical reference to James Cook's exploratory journeys in the Pacific between 1768 and 1799. The

periodical return of the ship, a possibly religious interpretation ("a mighty white bird god"), the reference to superior technology correspond point to point to Cook's third and fatal journey to Hawaii[11]. The character of Meronym could be read as later-age version of Cook for she is an explorer scientist, a mapmaker, an ethnographer and a writer. The islands of Maui and Iceland have become the object of "mythy yarnin'" because they are fantasised paradoxes. This mirrors Cook's account of his discovery of the Pacific islands, which combined elements of Paradise (bountiful nature, the noble savage) and of Hell (cannibalism and murder). However the power play, the racial divide and the legacy of cargo cult[12] are all reversed: Meronym is dark-skinned, Europe has been colonised by the Chinese through the Pearl Occident Company, the Prescients seek help as much as they provide it.

7. Conclusion

The abundance of intertextual references and the circulation of tropes within Mitchell's archipelago of islands bear witness to their symbolical value as time hubs, correlatives of the self and experimental locations. They are extreme in so far as they harbour radical upheavals in keeping with Deleuze's intuition of the theoretical potential of islands yet never give up hoping for the community, quite like Saramago. Mitchell does not picture a tabula rasa, emptied out islands, but condenses on his fictional archipelago a number of archetypal figures. His work echoes Deleuze's musings, in such fine detail one may wonder if the two texts are not organically linked.

> Si bien qu'à la question chère aux explorateurs anciens "quels êtres existent-ils sur l'île déserte ?" la seule réponse est que l'homme y existe déjà, mais un homme peu commun, un homme absolument séparé, absolument créateur, bref une Idée d'homme, un prototype, un homme qui serait presque un dieu, une femme qui serait une déesse, un grand Amnésique, un pur Artiste, conscience de la Terre et de l'Océan, un énorme cyclone, une belle sorcière, une statue de l'île de Pâques[13]. (Deleuze 2002: 13)

[11] More on this reference to Cook in the article I have published in Larsonneur (2015: 141-143).

[12] *Cargo cult* describes the reaction of some indigenous population to the arrival of Western ships. See Lawrence (1964) and Lindstrom (1993).

[13] To that question so dear to the old explorers – "what creatures live on deserted

References

BONNETT, ALASTAIR, 2014, *Off the Map: Lost Spaces, Invisible Cities, Forgotten Islands, Feral Places, and What They Tell us About the World*, Aurum Press, London.

BOULTER, JONATHAN, 2015, "Posthuman Temporality: Mitchell's *Ghostwritten*", *SubStance* 136, Wisconsin U.P, pp. 18-38.

DELEUZE, GILLES, 2002, *L'Île déserte et autres textes*, Editions de Minuit, Paris. English translation by Michael Taormina, 2004, *Desert Islands and other texts*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles.

DILLON, SARAH, 2011, "Introducing David Mitchell's Universe", in Sarah Dillon (ed.), *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, Gylphi, Canterbury, pp. 3-23.

ENGELIBERT, JEAN-PAUL, 2003, "Problèmes de l'insularité: la clôture et la fente dans *Le Château des Carpathes, L'Île du docteur Moreau* et *L'Invention de Morel*", *Revue de littérature comparée* (305), pp. 23-34.

ENGELIBERT, JEAN-PAUL, 2013, *Apocalypses sans royaumes. Politique des fictions de la fin du monde (XX^e^-XXI^e^ siècles)*, Classiques Garnier, Paris.

HICKS, HEATHER J., 2010, "'This Time Round': David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and the Apocalyptic Problem of Historicism"., *Postmodern Culture* 20 (3), http://www.pomoculture.org, last accessed March 14 2016.

LARSONNEUR, CLAIRE, 2015, "En l'espèce ? Variations sur l'humain chez Mitchell et Winterson", *Otrante (n°38), Mutations 1 corps post-humains*, Kimé, Paris, pp. 131-144.

LAWRENCE, PETER, 1964, *Road Belong Cargo,* Melbourne U.P., Melbourne.

LEA, RICHARD, March 3, 2016, "David Mitchell's strange new tale and the art show that inspired it", *The Guardian*, www.guardian.co.uk, last accessed March 4, 2016.

LINDSTROM, LAMONT, 1993, *Cargo Cult: Strange Stories of Desire from Melanesia and Beyond,* Hawaii U.P., Honolulu.

MANUEL LISBOA, MARIA, 2012, "Millennial Endings and Old Beginnings in José Saramago, H.G. Wells and John Wyndham" in Kathy Bacon and Niamh Thornton (eds), *The Noughties in the Hispanic and Lusophone World*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 189-202.

MITCHELL, DAVID, 2004, *Cloud Atlas*, Sceptre, London.

islands?" – one could only answer : human beings live there already, but uncommon humans, they are absolutely separate, absolute creators, in short an Idea of humanity, a prototype, a man who would almost be god, a woman who would be a goddess, a great Amnesiac, a pure Artist, a consciousness of Earth and Ocean, an enormous hurricane, a beautiful witch, a statue from Easter Island. (Deleuze 2011: 11)

MITCHELL, DAVID, 2010, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, Hodder & Stoughton, London.
MITCHELL, DAVID, 2014, *The Bone Clocks*, Hodder & Stoughton, London.
SARAMAGO, JOSE, [1986] 2002, *A Jangada de Pedra,* Caminho, Lisboa.
SHOOP, CASEY and RYAN, DERMOT, 2015, "Cloud Atlas and the politics of Big History", *SubStance* 136, pp. 92-106.
SLOTERDIJK PETER, 1998, *Sphaeren 1,* English translation by Wieland Hosan (2011), *Bubbles*: *Spheres 1 Microspherology*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles.