

Human generosity is boundless': Ethics and Interconnectedness in the Oeuvre of David Mitchell

Lotte Kok
Masterthesis
08-03-2019
Master Letterkunde: Europese Letterkunde
Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen
Begeleider: Dennis Kersten
Tweede lezer: Frederik van Dam

Abstract

In dit onderzoek staat het werk van de Britse schrijver David Mitchell (1969) centraal. Kenmerkend voor zijn oeuvre is de grote onderlinge samenhang tussen de romans. Deze verwevenheid wordt door het herhaaldelijk optreden van een grote verscheidenheid aan personages aanzienlijk versterkt. Zij zijn meer dan alleen een soort cameo of verrassende *gimmick* voor de lezer. In het Mitchelliaanse universum dragen deze personages een karakteristieke ethische visie uit die in belangrijke mate hun houding tegenover (levens)kwesaties als temporaliteit en sterfelijkheid bepaalt. Een belangrijk wederkerend personage is Marinus. Hij verschijnt op cruciale momenten in bijvoorbeeld *The Bone Clocks* (2014) en *Slade House* (2015), maar speelt ook een bijrol in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010). Meerdere malen stuurt hij het verhaal een 'ethische' richting op door in te grijpen wanneer onethisch gedrag de overhand dreigt te krijgen. Ook protagonist Holly in *The Bone Clocks* kiest op grond van een 'ethics of love' in de eerste plaats voor haar familie. Andere personages zoals Enomoto in *Jacob de Zoet* en The Grayer Twins in *Slade House* – overkoepelend 'Carnivoren' genoemd – tonen een tegenovergestelde ethische visie. Zij proberen de aloude wens om eeuwig te leven te vervullen door onethische methodes te gebruiken ('ethics of survival'). Hun egocentrisme staat in scherp contrast met het onbaatzuchtige optreden van Marinus of dat van Holly. Toch hebben personages altijd de mogelijkheid hun morele koers te veranderen. Ze kunnen andere keuzes maken die niet alleen hun eigen leven maar ook dat van anderen positief kunnen beïnvloeden. Hugo Lamb in *The Bone Clocks*, Zachry in *Cloud Atlas* (2004) en Adam Ewing (idem) zijn daar goede voorbeelden van. Deze personages zijn niet alleen verbonden door hun wederkerende optreden in verhaallijnen en romans, maar ook door hun ethische visie van mogelijkheid ('ethics of possibility'). Door het herhaaldelijk optreden van bepaalde personages met hun bijbehorende karakteristieke (ethische) eigenschappen en handelingen wordt het verweven karakter van Mitchell's oeuvre vergroot en de verbondenheid versterkt. Om dit aan te tonen zullen drie boeken centraal staan: *The Bone Clocks*, *Jacob de Zoet*, en *Slade House*. Hun onderlinge samenhang met als ijkpunt en sleuteltekst *The Bone Clocks* wordt via *close reading* behandeld. *Cloud Atlas* zal geregeld dienen als referentiepunt.

Key words: David Mitchell, interconnectedness, ethics, temporality, recurrent characters

Table of contents

Abstract	2
Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: The Metalife of Marinus	18
1.1: The many lives of Dr Marinus.....	18
1.2. Marinus, the rebirthed saviour	21
1.3. The confrontation: Marinus versus the Carnivores.....	24
Chapter 2: An ethics of possibility, an ethics of love: Holly and Hugo	30
2.1. Holly's character development and flourishing of virtues	31
2.2. Hugo: an ethics of possibility.....	35
2.3. Holly and her family: an ethics of love	41
Conclusion	46
Bibliography.....	51
Appendix.....	54
List of abbreviations	54
Figure 1: 'Crowd Atlas'	54
Figure 2: The virtues and vices within the oeuvre of Mitchell	54
Figure 3: Circles of life	55
Figure 4: Holly within the Mitchellian rhizome	55
Figure 5: Another example of a Mitchellian rhizome.....	56

Introduction

(...) Dad dashing up from the bar just to tell me, ‘Sleep tight, don’t let the bedbugs bite’
– Holly, aged 15, (BC: p. 34).

“Sleep tight,” I tell Aoife, like Holly tells her. “Don’t let the bedbugs bite.”
Ed Brubeck to Aoife. (BC: p. 268)

‘Sleep tight, Gran. Don’t let the bedbugs bite.’ Dad used to say that to me, I used to say it to Aoife, Aoife passed it on to Lorelei, and now Lorelei says it back to me. We sort of live on, as long as there are people to live on in.
– Holly, aged 73 (BC: p. 542).

At the ending of *The Bone Clocks*, written by celebrated British contemporary author David Mitchell (1969), the main character Holly finds herself in a dystopian mess of a world which she will not be able to escape. Mitchell does not seem to paint an optimistic picture of the future, which is more often the case in his future narratives. Think for example of the dystopic and postapocalyptic future in the storylines ‘An Orison of Somni-451’ and ‘Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After’ in his acclaimed novel *Cloud Atlas*.¹ By the year of 2043, when Holly is in her mid-seventies, Europe has entered a new phase of the Anthropocene that is called ‘Endarkenment’. As Holly describes it, ‘People talk about Endarkenment like our ancestors talked about Black Death. But we summoned it. With every tank of oil we burnt our way through.’ (BC: p. 550).² European countries are at the mercy of superpower China’s grace and humanity as a whole finds itself on the brink of global environmental collapse.³ Almost given up all hope and being at the brink of her death, Holly finds consolation in knowing the story of her (grand)children can commence after the conclusion of hers. This makes it easier to accept her imminent death.

The Bone Clocks could be interpreted as a novel-long reflection on mortality.⁴ The title by itself already refers to the ephemeral life of a mortal individual with its ‘bone clock’, the chronometer of the body that measures its demise with each tick of the clock.⁵ The narrative shows the life of Holly, such a bone clock, whose life span from a rebellious fifteen-year-old in 1984 to a woman in her seventies fostering her granddaughter Lorelei is broadly covered. Although it commences and concludes with

¹ Mitchell 2004: p. 185-365.

² I will make use of abbreviations for referring to my primary sources (see Appendix). When referring to specific quotes I will use parentheses in the body text instead of footnotes. For example: ‘Hugo, what’s a shit like you doing in a nice place like this?’ (BC: p. 165). In all other cases I will make use of footnotes like these.

³ Shaw 2018: p. 14.

⁴ O’Donnell 2015: p. 8.

⁵ Ibidem.

Holly, the perspective shifts to other characters as well, ranging from her husband Ed Brubeck, who is a journalist and ‘war-junkie’ (BC: p. 284), to the writer Crispin Hershey who later becomes one of her dearest friends and Holly’s child psychiatrist Iris Marinus-Fenby. For *connoisseurs* of Mitchell’s oeuvre, the name of Marinus-Fenby will immediately ring a bell. This character popped up in earlier novels like *Jacob de Zoet* (2010) as Dr Marinus and appears again in Mitchell’s most recent novel *Slade House* (2015). In interviews Mitchell is even hinting at a ‘Marinus Trilogy’⁶ and he has also appeared in non-literary art forms, being the opera’s *Wake* (2010) and *Sunken Garden* (2013) of which Mitchell has written the libretto.⁷

David Mitchell’s oeuvre is defined by its interconnectedness of themes, characters and places. His novels take place in the same ‘Mitchellian’ universe that shares the same past, future, events, ethos, laws, problems, causes, and consequences.⁸ The texts within this universe are thoroughly connected. His oeuvre should however not be considered as a series like *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings*, but as chapters in the same so-called ‘übernovel’. In an interview for *New York Times* Mitchell acknowledges that “I’ve come to realize... that I’m bringing into being a fictional universe with its own cast, and that each of my books is one chapter in a sort of sprawling macronovel”.⁹ Other terms that are frequently used besides ‘übernovel’ are ‘metanovel’ and ‘macronovel’ in for example texts by Peter Childs and James Green¹⁰ and Rose-Harris-Birtill.¹¹ The ‘metanovel’ is ever-growing and ever-expanding. In his interview with Pulitzer prize winning-journalist Kathryn Schulz, Schulz also points out: “The *Über*-book, in short, is shaping up to be very big. But size is only half the point. The other half is the increasingly dense connections among Mitchell’s novels.”¹²

One of the main techniques in building bridges between the chapters in this metanovel, is the reoccurrence of characters throughout his oeuvre. The transmigration of characters is not just some postmodern gimmick. They serve a larger goal than just being enjoyable Easter Eggs. Schulz eloquently described it as follows:

Old characters walk into new books carrying all of their backstory, and all of our affection for them. The best re-entrances feel nearly miraculous, like friends we gave up for lost after years of no news who suddenly show up at our door. (...) It wasn’t smugness I felt when I recognized Marinus and Mo Muntervary in *The Bone Clocks*; it was happiness. And even the slightest of them serve Mitchell’s larger vision. By expanding the scope of the book beyond its own borders,

⁶ “There’s something called The Marinus Trilogy in my head,” [Mitchell] says. “Jacob de Zoet is part one, The Bone Clocks is part two, and part three will be”—I cannot in good conscience finish that sentence; it gives away too much about the current book.” (Schulz 2014).

⁷ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 170. In this thesis however, these non-literary works will be left out of the discussion.

⁸ This Mitchellian universe is also lovingly called the ‘Mitchellverse’ by fans and scholars alike (for example in Harris-Birtill 2018: p. 6 and Dimovitz 2018: p.1).

⁹ Mason 2010.

¹⁰ Childs and Green 2011: p. 5.

¹¹ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 174.

¹² Schulz 2014.

these recurrent figures make the world feel bigger. In their familiarity, they make it feel smaller.¹³

Schulz is right: this distinctive use of recurrent characters is what gives Mitchell's art an unique touch (see Figure 1 for her overview of recurring characters). The coherence in his fictional world almost feels reassuring and consoling for the reader. Characters who reappear carry with them all of their backstory. Marinus for example pops up from time to time and is always there for a comforting talk when death is near (at the end of *Jacob de Zoet*) or to save the day when 'evilness' is about to take the upper hand – most prominently at the ending of *Slade House*.¹⁴ Marinus is also the saviour of Holly's grandchildren, when he makes a *deus ex machina* appearance to ship them off to Iceland where they will have chance to lead a 'Pre-Endarkenment'-life.

Marinus can be seen as a 'literary reincarnation', appearing at crucial moments in multiple novels. At these moments he does not refrain from giving his clear, steadfast view on matters of life and death. The ethical vision that underlies this view, can be regarded as ethically 'right' according to the laws of the Mitchellian universe. He is linked with positive values like selflessness and integrity and embodies an almost saint-like goodness. Through doing this, the novels show a certain vision on what is perceived as ethically 'right' behaviour but also implying what is unethical and 'wrong'. The research question that will therefore be the focal point of this thesis is:

How does the ethical vision that recurrent characters represent in David Mitchell's oeuvre contribute to the reflection on mortality and temporality issues?

There has been chosen for using 'representation' over 'personification' because the latter could result in reducing characters to having just these specific characteristics which is not the case – like 'real' people they are in constant development and forever-evolving. Before it is time to delve deeper into the inexhaustible source material of Mitchell's fiction, it is wise to zoom out for a moment to give a short overview of what is to be expected.

The focus will lie specifically on characters who carry out virtuous behaviour, like Holly and Marinus. Hugo, a rather ambiguous and virtuously questionable character, will also be discussed, but in his case the attention will first and foremost be on his better side and the ethics of possibility he embodies. It is impossible to examine virtues and omit their binary counterpart. Vices will only be explored in direct relation to the virtuousness of the characters Marinus (chapter 1) and Holly (chapter 2). Marinus appears in multiple (yet to be published) novels. He stands at the centre of attention in the first chapter called 'The Metalife of Marinus'. 'Evil incarnates' like antagonist Enomoto in *Jacob de Zoet*

¹³ Schulz 2014.

¹⁴ Although being aware Marinus does not have a fixed gender throughout his multiple lives, for the sake of consistency and clarity male prefixes will be used when referring to him.

and Anchorites like Elijah D'Arnoq in *The Bone Clocks* represent ethically abhorrent behaviour and stand in stark contrast with Marinus. Together with the antagonists of *Slade House*, Norah and Jonah Grayer (strongly resembling the Anchorites in *The Bone Clocks* in their behaviour) will be discussed in the first chapter in direct relation with Marinus.

Although Holly only appears in *The Bone Clocks*, her ethics on mortality and temporality issues and her archetypical character are recurrent elements in the fiction of Mitchell. She will be analysed in the second chapter called 'An ethics of love, an ethics of possibility: Holly and Hugo'. Although one might argue the importance of Hugo, he is the only character in the metanovel so far that *becomes* immortal during story-time. His 'unethicalness' is furthermore more ambiguous than that of evil incarnates like the Anchorites and Enomoto. All these characters are always in direct connection with others within the Mitchellian universe. It is therefore inevitable, even necessary, to occasionally refer to other characters within the interconnected oeuvre of Mitchell.

This thesis will not be a novel-per-novel analysis. Through close reading specific passages of the novels, the spotlight is first and foremost on the characters. It might be superfluous to mention, but this thesis thus proposes an asynchronous reading of his works. Unfortunately the time and space that have been given for this thesis do not allow to study Mitchell's complete body of work, so the focus will be limited to the (re)appearance of these characters in the following novels: 1) *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), 2) *The Bone Clocks* (2014) and 3) *Slade House* (2015) Considering *BC* is the only novel in which Holly, Marinus and Hugo appear, it will be at the core of the discussion. Side references to *Cloud Atlas* (2004) will be made too, because the ethical vision on mortality that is made clear in this novel ties in with the vision of some vital characters as mentioned above. In doing so, the interconnectedness of his oeuvre will be emphasised which will prove how recurrent characters strengthen the ethical view that is carried out with regard to mortality and temporality issues.

Research on Jacob de Zoet (2010), The Bone Clocks (2014) and Slade House (2015)

The majority of academic research that has been done on Mitchell's oeuvre focuses on his most popular novel *Cloud Atlas* from 2004.¹⁵ Rose Harris-Birtill supports this claim by noting that of the 124 published English language journal articles, books and book chapters on Mitchell's work published between 2002 and 2017 'eighty-one (65%) feature *CA*, either discussing this text alone or alongside other works'.¹⁶ In a special issue from literary and theoretical journal *SubStance* on the author's work, four out of ten articles focus on this novel in particular.¹⁷ On more recent novels like *BC* (2014) and *SH* (2015) research

¹⁵ Hereafter *Cloud Atlas*, *Jacob de Zoet*, *The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House* will be abbreviated, see the Appendix for an overview.

¹⁶ Harris-Birtill 2018: p. 3.

¹⁷ The four articles on *Cloud Atlas* are: 'The Sound of Silence: Eschatology and the Limits of the Word in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*' (Scott Dimovitz), "'Gravid with the ancient future": *Cloud Atlas* and the Politics of Big

is understandably still scarce – especially when it is combined with the theoretical framework of characters as carriers of certain virtues and vices. *JZ* is most often read from a historical, postcolonial perspective, laying bare the East-West dichotomy, focusing on neglected or overlooked histories and the treatment of history as “minor” – partial, temporalized, both visible and (as yet) unseen, composed of many indeterminate relationalities’.¹⁸ Both Harris and O’Donnell devote an article to Mitchell’s *BC*, respectively arguing a ‘fractal imagination’ of the book drawing connections with the structure of *CA* and broadly analysing temporality and mortality issues of the novel.¹⁹ In another special issue on Mitchell in literary journal *C21* Kristian Shaw touches upon ethical issues in *BC* regarding power struggles, migration, xenophobic nationalism and ecological degradation categorising the novel within the genre of ‘fantastical cosmopolitanism’.²⁰ In the case of *SH* no academic research has been done so far.

Mitchell’s novels are often treated in isolation, merely focusing on close reading a specific novel thus failing to make direct interconnections in the broader Mitchellian universe. Without exception all of the authors that contributed to the *Substance* special issue as well as Patrick O’Donnell in *A Temporary Future* chose to examine his work novel per novel – with the occasional cross references.²¹ Luckily, there have been some scholars brave enough to bridge this gap. Welcome exceptions are Eva-Maria Schmitz, Peter Childs and James Green. Schmitz traces functions of the island motif in *Ghostwritten*, *CA*, *JZ* and *BC* in the article she wrote for *C21 Literature*.²² Peter Childs and James Green consequently discuss *NumberNineDream* (2001), *Ghostwritten* (1999) and *CA* pointing towards textual and thematic echoes in their contribution to *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, edited by Sarah Dillon and likewise in *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First British Novels*.²³ Unfortunately, *BC* appeared after the publication of their articles, needless to say making it impossible to incorporate this vast and rich novel into their discussion.

Research on Mitchell’s oeuvre: temporality

Because Mitchell transcends boundaries of genre, his oeuvre at first seems an incoherent whole. In solving this apparent discrepancy, it is more fruitful to look for themes and motifs that reoccur than categorise his fiction in terms of genre. These can be the ‘big themes’ like ‘human greed, exploitation,

History’ written by Casey Shoop and Dermot Ryan, ‘Cannibalism, Colonialism and Apocalypse in Mitchell’s Global Future’ by Linda Ng and ‘From Time’s Boomerang to Pointillist Mosaic: Translating Cloud Atlas into Film’ from Jo Alyson Parker. (Dimovitz *et al.*: 2015: p. 71-135).

¹⁸ O’Donnell 2015: p. 130 and Larsonneur 2015: p. 136-147.

¹⁹ Harris 2015: p. 148-153 and O’Donnell 2015: p. 155-180.

²⁰ Shaw 2018: p. 1-19.

²¹ O’Donnell 2015: p. 8-21 and p. 155-180.

²² Schmitz 2018: p. 1-25.

²³ Childs and Green 2011: p. 25-48 and Childs and Green 2013: p. 127-158.

colonialism, mortality, historical inevitability, or historical change' that Patrick O'Donnell speaks of, one of the most notable 'Mitchell-scholars'.²⁴ According to O'Donnell, Mitchell sounds these big, heavy themes 'in seemingly light stories'.²⁵ One could extend this list by adding themes like love, power, oppression and freedom and last but not least, time. Time or 'temporality' is omnipresent in Mitchell's work and plays a crucial role in understanding how his novels work and become interlinked. It is more than just a theme or motif, or the fabric that glues his oeuvre together. In Mitchell's own words:

...time can either ('merely') be the fabric within which a narrative occurs, or it can be seen as a primal element of the narrative, along with character, plot, style, structure and theme, and as such can alter the nature of the narrative itself.²⁶

Time is therefore a rich object of thought when studying Mitchell's house of fiction. In academic research it is a broadly covered perspective. *SubStance* named its special issue 'David Mitchell in the Labyrinth of Time', edited by Paul A. Harris, and Patrick O'Donnell wrote *A Temporary Future: The Fiction of David Mitchell* in the same year, covering all six novels published so far. His analysis stretches from time travel in *CA*²⁷ to the discussion of overlooked or neglected histories in *JZ*.²⁸ O'Donnell's approach is closely related to that of Harris *et al.* He prefers 'temporality' over the rather ambiguous use of 'time', defining it as '[t]he relation between past, present and future, and the quanta of these categories'.²⁹ This thesis will follow O'Donnell in using 'temporality' rather than 'time'.

O'Donnell further elaborates on temporality by referring to the cosmopolitan, interconnected character of Mitchell's books.³⁰ According to O'Donnell Mitchell builds labyrinths in space and time by mixing timescales and creating an 'assemblage of contact zones, migratory (and transmigratory) routes, minor histories, and contrasting and overlying systems'.³¹ He calls Mitchell's style 'planetary' because it is conscious of the earth as a planet, 'not restricted to geopolitical formations and potentially encompassing the non-human as well as the human'.³² The article 'Toward a Theory of Experimental World Epic: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*' by Wendy Knepper expresses a similar view.³³ Knepper has done more extensive research on the 'global' character of the novel *CA* and Mitchell's work in general. It is only a small step from 'planetary' and 'global' to 'cosmopolitanism' and cosmopolitan writing practices, on which Berthold Schoene has written thoroughly in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* and articles

²⁴ O'Donnell 2016.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Harris 2015 (c): p. 10.

²⁷ O'Donnell 2015: p. 69-102.

²⁸ O'Donnell 2015: p. 123-154.

²⁹ O'Donnell 2015: p. 141.

³⁰ O'Donnell 2015: p. 14.

³¹ O'Donnell 2015: p. 11.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Knepper 2016: p. 93-136.

like 'David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* and the Cosmopolitan Imagination'.³⁴ Schoene claims that Mitchell is creating a new cosmopolitan *modus operandi* for Twenty-First British novelists. In *Ghostwritten* for example Mitchell 'constitutes an acutely fragmented, yet at the same time smoothly cohesive composition strategically broken up into small-récit mosaics of divergent perspectives that together span and unify the globe'.³⁵ Humanity is imagined as a global community and the reader is invited to become a part of that imagined community. His definition of 'cosmopolitan' writing strongly resembles that of O'Donnell's planetary and Knepper's global writing. Whatever term one prefers to use, it is clear that Mitchell's fiction resists easy classification in terms of genre and writing style.

It might sound contradictory, but precisely this planetary style is what strengthens the interwoven, interconnected aspect of Mitchell's stories. There is no fixed time or place where his narrative (should) take place. In the introduction to the *Substance* special issue, Harris aptly points out that the plots and structures of his novels 'move around in history and bridge time-scales with seeming ease and fluidity' which create a sort of 'temporal dynamism'.³⁶ O'Donnell agrees with this. Although Mitchell's novels depict 'hybrid localities and cultures', he argues that they are 'relatable via the different identities that traverse them, either corporeally or virtually'.³⁷ According to him, Mitchell's novels are 'iterations in a fractal imagination' meaning that:

[e]ach text marks a recursive movement—both returning to familiar sites and opening new terrains—that simultaneously fleshes out and fills in more and more of his fictional universe. With each textual iteration, the overall shape and contours of his übernovel become increasingly clear and its constituent parts more densely interwoven.³⁸

Besides strengthening the interwoven character of the übernovel, his later novels cause his earlier ones to 'shape-shift', as Schulz calls it.³⁹ This calls to mind Hans-Georg Gadamer's fusion of horizons.⁴⁰ Gadamer interprets the 'horizon' as the socio-cultural glasses through which a reader is forced to see a text. This horizon can fuse however ('Horizontverschmelzung') with that of the place and time of the written text making it possible to broaden one's perspective.⁴¹ This theory could be applied to Mitchell's texts and the shape-shifting idea of Schulz. When re-reading his novels, the presupposed meaning of the novel in itself tends to 'shape-shift'. It all depends on which questions the interpreter asks about the text. The meaning of the text can be broadened and enriched via reading and re-reading his novels.

³⁴ Schoene 2009 and Schoene 2010: p. 42-60.

³⁵ Schoene 2010: p. 50-51.

³⁶ Harris 2015 (c): p. 14.

³⁷ O'Donnell 2015: p. 11.

³⁸ O'Donnell 2016.

³⁹ Schulz 2014.

⁴⁰ Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney 2008 (2006): p. 271-275 and Gadamer, H.G. *Wahrheit und Methode*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1960.

⁴¹ Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney 2008 (2006): p. 275.

In the übernovel, time is a plural concept. Rose Harris-Birtill speaks of this 'temporal plurality' in her article in *KronoScope*.⁴² She calls for 'alternative cyclical temporalities' and stimulates reading Mitchell's novels in a non-linear way. One of these non-linear ways of looking at the macronovel is as seeing it as a Deleuzian 'rhizome'. The rhizome is a web or network put forward instead of a tree-like structure with its central trunk, branching of leaves and deep rootedness.⁴³ Unlike a tree, the rhizome 'connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states (...) It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows'.⁴⁴ Childs and Green repeatedly draw Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's theory into their discussion of Mitchell's work, for example in their contribution to *David Mitchell: Critical Essays* edited by Sarah Dillon and again in *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels*.⁴⁵ They point towards the usefulness of the Deleuzian figure, 'for Mitchell's text progresses through a kind of textual spread and dissemination whereby individual narratives continuously exceed their boundaries and flow into other stories.'⁴⁶ His fiction is therefore forever-evolving. The concept of the rhizome will be used in this thesis in a different manner, namely to clarify in what way a multitude of characters is interconnected. They can be connected via meeting (descendants of) each other or because they appear within the same novel. For example, although never meeting in the flesh, Robert Frobisher and Adam Ewing are connected regardless because Frobisher gets acquainted with the latter through reading his pacific journal (for example *CA*: p. 489). Examples of such rhizome-like figures that show the interconnectedness of characters can be found in the Appendix (figure 4 and 5).

Back to Harris-Birtill. Her own suggestion of reading Mitchell's fiction non-linearly is through appropriating a 'spiralling gaze'. She is inspired by the image of being able to 'looking down time's telescope at myself', a metaphor conjured by character Hugo Lamb in *BC* (*BC*: p. 123).⁴⁷ This time's telescope makes it possible for the present self to look at his future self and to investigate the causal relationship between the two.⁴⁸ The sight line that is created is 'both linear and cyclical – a linear device that provides a means of cyclical self-observation'.⁴⁹ Harris-Birtill focuses on time from a Buddhist perspective to prove how a different, non-Western approach can help us to alter the 'end of history' narrative of global capitalism in the Anthropocene era. However Harris-Birtill refrains from analysing specific characters and their ethical choices, her article gives a rare example of linking a temporal vision

⁴² Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 163-181.

⁴³ Childs and Green 2011: p. 31 and 45.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari 1998: p. 21.

⁴⁵ Walton 2012: p. 287.

⁴⁶ Childs and Green 2013: p. 138.

⁴⁷ 'When I look at Brigadier Reginald Philby, I'm looking down time's telescope at myself.' (*BC*: p. 123).

⁴⁸ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 165.

⁴⁹ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 163.

with ethical issues that Mitchell's fiction raises. She will prove to be useful in regard to her non-linear vision on time that is applied in the novels.⁵⁰

Literary Ethics

To give the ethical aspect of this research more academic backbone, it is wise to specify how ethics and literature form a meaningful combination in both the Mitchellian universe and literature as a whole. The possibility of literature serving as a moral agent is a philosophical debate leading back to Plato and Aristotle, the founding fathers of (virtue) ethics.⁵¹ Here is not the time and place to recapitulate their philosophical quarrel, but what is important to know is that Plato regarded literature as dangerous to the republic and proposed to censor it while Aristotle reconciles literature and philosophy in for example his account of epic and tragedy in the *Poetics*.⁵² Since the 'Ethical turn' in the late 1980s numerous theorists within the field of Literary Ethics have pondered upon the question if art generally and literature specifically have the ability to engage in ideological and ethical critique.⁵³

Since the Ethical turn in the 1980's, ethical research is divided into two strands: Poststructuralist Ethics and Humanist Ethics. The latter group acknowledges 'Otherness' as an important factor for 'ethical engagement' and wants to draw attention to the importance of connecting across difference, looking past the dichotomies.⁵⁴ Martha Nussbaum's *Love Knowledge* can in retrospect be regarded as one of the foundational texts for Humanist Ethics.⁵⁵ Nussbaum moved ethics to a prominent place in narrative theory that eventually led to Adam Newton's claim in *Narrative Ethics* that the two domains are inseparable.⁵⁶

Up to this day, scholars within the field of Literary Ethics are strictly divided.⁵⁷ Some discard the importance of philosophy in – and through – literature altogether. Jacques Derrida for example denies that literature can be 'subsumed within presupposed values and conventional standards of conduct.'⁵⁸ A text cannot be an intrinsic bearer of values.⁵⁹ Speaking from a deconstructionalist tradition, Derrida believes the whole underlying model of language is unstable. Communicating meaning through the

⁵⁰ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 174.

⁵¹ On Virtue Ethics itself will not be further elaborated, because it will steer the discussion too far away from the literary tradition on this subject.

⁵² Elliot 2018: p. 244. In his overview, Jay Elliot also names Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Williams as important modern philosophers who underline a deep natural connection between (virtue) ethics and literature (Elliot 2018: p. 245).

⁵³ The 'Ethical turn' was part of a larger shift in humanities from structuralism to poststructuralism. (Phelan 2014.)

⁵⁴ "The art of the novel is first and foremost a performance of and education in the care we should have for alterity, particularity, complexity, emotion, variety and indeterminacy." (Nussbaum 1990: p.46).

⁵⁵ Nussbaum 1990.

⁵⁶ Phelan 2014.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Skilleås 2001: p. 121.

⁵⁹ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 126.

medium of language is deemed impossible, because language is nothing more than a system of signs devoid of any centre.⁶⁰ Martha Nussbaum's vision on the role of literature as an agent of moral issues stands in stark contrast with that of Derrida. She believes that literature is able to widen our experience and expand our moral imagination. In her essay 'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible' she goes even a step further in defending the claim that literature can be a paradigm of moral activity.⁶¹ Certain 'truths' about life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the 'language and forms characteristic of the narrative text', she claims.⁶² According to Nussbaum, literature shows us the sheer difficulty of moral choice. That is not necessarily a bad thing, though. Instead, its indecisiveness is what makes a text ethical rather than moralistic, which in the opinion of Hillis Miller adds to the 'literariness' of it.⁶³ According to Miller, an ethical text is 'infinite' and 'unresolved'.⁶⁴ According to Miller, reducing the ethics of a text to a singular moral message would bring a halt to the 'narratieve pendelbeweging' of a text, as Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck have translated it beautifully in their narratological overview *Vertelduivels*.⁶⁵ 'Naratieve pendelbeweging' could be translated as the 'narrative cadence or 'swinging movement' of a text. Spoken as a true deconstructionalist in the tradition of Poststructuralist Ethics, he furthermore argues that there simply cannot be 'a determinate ethics of the told' because of the nature of language.⁶⁶

Narratology

Narratology is a humanities discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation.⁶⁷ Narratology is not a singular theory but comprises a larger group of theories, of which structural (classical) and postclassical narratology will shortly be discussed.⁶⁸

The French Structuralist movement of the seventies brought forth leading names like Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Gérard Genette and A.J. Greimas. Their theories have been of great value in setting up user-friendly models for structuring literary texts.⁶⁹ Greimas' actantial model belongs to the absolute basics of narratology, categorising figures in *actants* like protagonist, antagonist, goal and

⁶⁰ Skilleås 2001: p. 66-7 and Phelan 2014.

⁶¹ Nussbaum 1985: p. 516-529.

⁶² Nussbaum 1990: p. 5.

⁶³ 'Ethiek onderscheidt zich van moraal doordat ze onbeslist blijft. Ze twijfelt tussen wet en overtreding, benadering en afwijking. Die twijfel maakt de tekst literair en maakt de lectuur ethisch in plaats van moraliserend.' (Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 130).

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ '[De ethiek reduceren tot moraal] zou de narratieve pendelbeweging tot stilstand brengen.' (Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 131 and Miller 1987: p. 38-9).

⁶⁶ Phelan 2014.

⁶⁷ Meister 2014.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 47 and 107; Meister 2014.

helper.⁷⁰ These roles should not be seen as characters *per se*, but rather as the abstract role these characters play within the interconnected network of relationships.⁷¹ To determine the position of certain characters in Mitchell's stories, Greimas' model will be referred to from time to time.

To determine the (meta)position of characters (or *actants*) within the story, Gérard Genette's theory is quite applicable. He has made a distinction between an 'extradiegetically' and 'intradiegetically' point of view, simplistically formulated as 'within' and 'outside' the story world. The distinction is a matter of hierarchy – if a character is telling the story without interference of a higher authority, the story is told intradiegetically.⁷² Related is the term 'focalisation', which in narrative discourse is used to describe which subject is perceiving the story or can be regarded as the 'centre of consciousness'.⁷³ It differs from point of view, which scholars regard as too visual.⁷⁴ First introduced by Genette in 1972, narratologists have since then been debating how to best use the term 'focalisation' and its effects.⁷⁵ Mieke Bal for example makes a distinction between 'perceiving subject' and 'perceived object'.⁷⁶ In this thesis, when referring to 'focaliser' the perceiving, intradiegetic actant is meant.

As said, classical narratology can be appropriately used as a structuring model. But this thesis is more ambitious than that. It does not just have the desire to structure Mitchell's texts but wants to do an in-depth research of a multitude of recurrent characters that has meaning on a larger, non-textual scale too. Herman and Vervaeck have argued that the influence of structural narratology is limited in terms of character exploration.⁷⁷ Furthermore, an approach that reduces characters to a bundle of character traits runs the risk of becoming static.⁷⁸ Postclassical narratological approaches on the other hand, suggest a more pragmatic approach, not just signalling problems but wanting to solve them too.⁷⁹ They do not fully discard structuralism but combine their concern for systematicity with 'a renewal of interest in the cultural and philosophical issues of history and ideology'.⁸⁰ This thesis again tries to look past the dichotomies, combining classical technicity with postclassical ideological interpretations.⁸¹ It is

⁷⁰ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 58.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 84-5.

⁷³ Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney 2008 (2006): p. 184.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ Phelan 2005: p. 214; Herman and Vervaeck 2009 (2001): p. 75-84; Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney 2008 (2006): p. 183-188 and p. 403.

⁷⁶ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 75. [Own translation].

⁷⁷ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 74.

⁷⁸ 'Een benadering die literaire personages ziet als bundels van eigenschappen, loopt het risico opsommend en statisch te worden.' (Ibidem.)

⁷⁹ Herman and Vervaeck use the term 'postclassical narratology' in accordance to David Herman's introduction and use of the term in *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Columbus: Ohio State University, 1999: p. 1-30. (Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 189).

⁸⁰ Meister 2014.

⁸¹ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 125.

structuralist because it minimises the role of the reader, centralising the text instead.⁸² But is it also postclassical, because this thesis is aware of the importance of ideology and opts for a more pragmatic approach. An example of such an approach is that of contextualist narratology introduced by Seymour Chatman.⁸³ It extends the focus from purely structural aspects to ‘issues of the narrated content’, relating the narrative to specific cultural, thematic and ideological contexts.⁸⁴ Instead of choosing to follow Chatman’s line of thought, it is important to keep in mind that the ethical approach of this thesis, being an ideological concept too, is indebted to his legacy.

Narrative Ethics

After the Ethical turn it became clear that Humanist Ethics and Poststructuralist Ethics have much more in common than initially assumed.⁸⁵ As in combining different narratological approaches, with regard to narrative ethics this thesis finds value in both Humanist and Poststructuralist Ethics.

The academic discipline of ‘Narrative Ethics’ is specifically concerned with the intersection of various formal aspects of narrative and moral values.⁸⁶ Narrative ethics regards moral values as an integral part of stories and storytelling because narratives themselves implicitly or explicitly ask the question, ‘How should one think, judge, and act—as author, narrator, character, or audience—for the greater good?’⁸⁷ Renowned narratologist James Phelan formulated a clear theory on narrative ethics. He focuses on three possible effects or dimensions of stories in *Living to tell about it: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*.⁸⁸ These dimensions are divided into the 1) cognitive (what do we understand and how do we understand it?; 2) the emotive (what do we feel and how do those feelings come about?) and 3) the ethics (what are we asked to value in these stories, how do these judgments come about, and how do we respond to being invited to take on these values and make these judgments?).⁸⁹

Phelan James speaks of narrative ethics in his handbook on narratology and of ethics and character narration in *Living to Tell about It and Narrative as Rhetoric*.⁹⁰ He distinguishes between four main research categories: 1) the ethics of the told, 2) the ethics of the telling; 3) the ethics of writing/producing and 4) the ethics of reading/reception.⁹¹ Most relevant for this thesis is the first

⁸² Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 122.

⁸³ Chatman, Seymour. ‘What Can We Learn from Contextualist Narratology?’ In: *Poetics Today*, Vol. 11: p. 309-328.

⁸⁴ Meister 2014.

⁸⁵ Phelan 2014.

⁸⁶ Ibidem.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ Phelan 2005.

⁸⁹ Phelan 2005: p. ix.

⁹⁰ Phelan 1996; Phelan 2005; Phelan 2014.

⁹¹ Phelan 2014.

category, which focuses on characters and events specifically, the conflicts they face and the choices they make to resolve them. The ethics of the telling, investigating text-external matters like the ethical dimensions of the narrative's techniques and how the use of these techniques imply and convey the values underlying the relations of storytellers (the narrators) and their audiences are implicitly incorporated in this thesis.⁹² It does not require further attention however, for theoretical legitimacy in this regard can already be found in the structural and poststructuralist narratology. Phelan also pledges for researching more from 'the inside out' than reading 'from the outside in'.⁹³ Both his 'ethics of the told' and 'ethics of the telling' focus on the text itself. In his emphasis on doing more research on the latter instead of concentrating on the possible (virtuous) effects on the reader, he differs from Nussbaum *et al.*, thus proving to be very useful in regard to answering the research question as posed in this thesis.

Relevance

Scholars fail to connect recurrent characters as bearers of ethical visions on issues like temporality and mortality. In the more general theoretical discussion of Mitchell's fiction no scholars whatsoever have attempted yet to centralise *characters* instead of novels.⁹⁴ There is obviously an academic void considering this kind of research in Mitchell's as well as in contemporary fiction more generally. This thesis will attempt to fill this theoretical gap to a certain extent by combining ethical issues on (im)mortality with an in-depth analysis of particular characters in Mitchell's oeuvre. In doing so, it will not only contribute to the academic discussion that Mitchell's fiction triggers, but also on to the debate on ethics in literature. The possibilities of researching ethics on a thematic level thereby incorporating characters as bearers of certain ethical visions are yet to be fully discovered.

Theoretical model

When looking at the role of the characters from a narratological point of view this thesis has used structuralist notions like Greimas' actantial model and Genette's narrative perspectives, but has also recognised the postclassical pragmatism and Phelan's theories on narrative ethics to look past the dichotomies of philosophy and literature. His overview, bridging the gap between narratology and literary ethics, has served as a reference point for the bridge between narratology and literary ethics. Herman and Verweck's guide book for narratology *Vertelduivels* has also been an important reference

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ This is proven in giving an extensive literary review of Mitchell's work. There is some popular debate on forums and blogs where readers stream-of-consciousness-like discuss the meaning of (re)appearing characters and share their interpretations, for example on <https://lithub.com/the-ever-expanding-world-of-david-mitchell/>.

point in discussing structuralism as well as postclassical narratology. Especially their chapter on narratology, ideology and ethics has been of great value.⁹⁵

In Literary Ethics, inspiration is found in the legacy of Humanist Ethics but also the Poststructuralists have made significant contributions in shaping the ethical arguments on characters and their development. Although Martha Nussbaum focuses mainly on the moral effects of literature on the reader, her theories have proven to be relevant anyway. She emphasises the importance of emotions like love and other ethical feelings in literature which makes her fit for discussion in relation to Holly and the 'ethics of love' she embodies. In this thesis, a combination of narratology and literary ethics will therefore serve as theoretical frame. Research on Mitchell's oeuvre will serve as secondary source, mainly the aforementioned articles by Patrick O'Donnell and the special issues on Mitchell that appeared in *Substance* and *C21 Literature*.

⁹⁵ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 122-133.

Chapter 1: The Metalife of Marinus

In his discussion with Paul Harris on *The Bone Clocks*, Patrick O'Donnell has fittingly described Marinus as being a 'wavering needle on the scale of protagonist and antagonist', (re)appearing in different shapes and sizes throughout Mitchell's stories. His position 'shape-shifts' when reading more about him in other novels within the Mitchellian universe, thus accumulating more knowledge about him.⁹⁶

In the review Ursula Le Guin wrote about the *The Bone Clocks*, she says that death is at the heart of the novel and that 'there lies its depth and darkness. [...] And in it, under all the klaxons and saxophones and Irish fiddles, is that hidden, haunting silence at the centre'.⁹⁷ This rather bleak, pessimistic view is argued in this thesis. This chapter shows that although death and more generally mortality *are* at the heart of the novel, its centre is not obscured by a 'haunting silence'. Instead, the way various virtuous characters deal with issues like mortality and death, the novel shows that the vicious side that exists within every person can be conquered through pointing towards an ethics of love and possibility. Marinus is an interesting case in studying specific virtues like generosity and selflessness. Thanks to his immortal state of being, he has had unlimited time to think about temporality and mortality issues which he abundantly expresses, mainly in the chapter 'A Horologist's Labyrinth' in which he gets the honour to focalise.⁹⁸ Firstly, Marinus's lives will be explored within the borders of the plot, explaining the stories and his role therein (1.1.). After that, his metaposition is explored from a narratological point of view (1.2). His ethical vision stands in stark contrast with that of vicious characters who show unethical behaviour, which will be discussed thereafter (1.3). Through their confrontation, his ethical vision becomes even more evident.

1.1: The many lives of Dr Marinus

The Bone Clocks has quite a complicated plot that is relevant in understanding the colourful character of Marinus. The novel tells of the epic battle between good versus evil. Two bands of immortal brothers and sisters, the Horologists versus the Anchorites, are battling each other. Both have a clear goal: to exterminate the other. The Anchorites want to continue to be forever young, but the Horologists want to prevent this because the Anchorites, who are referred to as 'soulsucking vampires' by Marinus multiple times (for example in *SH*: p. 195) are firm believers of a Machiavellian 'the end justifies the means'-ethos. They make human sacrifices to an icon of a heretical monk, who preached that the world was created not by God but by the devil and that all matter is inherently evil.⁹⁹ In return they are

⁹⁶ Schulz 2014, see also the introduction.

⁹⁷ Parker 2018: p. 16 and Knepper 2016: p. 97.

⁹⁸ Mitchell 2014: p. 396-535.

⁹⁹ Mitchell 2014: p. 445.

rewarded a substance that 'arrests their cellular development for three months.'¹⁰⁰ Marinus is a Horologist. Horologists can be divided into two categories: Sojourners and Returnees. Sojourners can choose to move to a new body 'when the old one's worn out' (*BC*: p. 444), while Returnees have to die first and are resurrected forty-nine days later in the body of a young child, before these youngsters have become too 'interwoven with their own souls' (*SH*: p. 233). Horologists could be seen as 'a spiritual memory-stick in search of a corporeal hard drive' (*BC*: p. 323). In their case their life does not end with death. Because 'soul is a verb, not a noun' (*JZ*: p. 155) their soul can live on in a new body whilst maintaining their memories of former lives. They live in a 'spiral of resurrections involuntarily' to infinity (*BC*: p. 444). Put aside their differences, the Horologists and Carnivores are collaboratively called 'Atemporals' and are united in their prolonged life – albeit by choice or because they are 'sentenced to eternity' (*SH*: p. 229).

Dr Lucas Marinus, Klara Koskova, Dr Iris Marinus-Fenby

As can be seen in Schulz's (incomplete) overview of recurrent characters in Mitchell's oeuvre (Figure 1 in the Appendix), Marinus mainly appears in Mitchell's more recent work. Especially when *SH* is added to her overview, a pattern becomes visible: from the list of characters that is most relevant for this thesis (Hugo Lamb, Holly, Enomoto, Elijah D'Arnoq, etc.) he is the only character that makes an entrée in *JZ*, *BC* and *SH*. In *JZ* he is a psychiatrist named Dr Lucas Marinus. He is only at the margins of this story however and is only sporadically mentioned. The story takes place at the end of the eighteenth century on the artificial island Dejima in the harbour of Nagasaki, Japan. He does not make a good first impression on protagonist Jacob de Zoet, a red-haired, pious clerk from Walcheren, Zeeland who has come to Dejima to work for the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company). When he tries to give the doctor the sheet music from composer Domenico Scarlatti as a welcoming gift, the doctor will not even receive him in his office and slams a trapdoor on him (*JZ*: p. 28 and 64). He later subtly apologises for his behaviour and admits 'irascibility occasionally gets the better of me' (*JZ*: p. 65). We later learn Jacob's gift did make an impact on the doctor. When they are both on the brink of death and Jacob asks him what Marinus believes in, he answers: 'Oh, Descartes's methodology, Domenico Scarlatti's sonata's, the efficacy of Jesuits' bark...' (*JZ*: p. 470). Centuries later, in his life as Iris Marinus-Fenby in *BC* and *SH*, he still plays the music to soothe himself in times of trouble (*BC*: 461).

After having been 'Lucas Marinus', he reappears as Klara Koskova: a poor, nineteenth century Russian peasant girl who in an American Dream-like manner succeeds in climbing up the social ladder within no time. This does not become clear in *JZ*, instead it is described in the pivotal chapter 'An Horologist's Labyrinth' in *BC*. Marinus (Dr Iris Marinus-Fenby) is focalising and reminiscing his past lives.

¹⁰⁰ Rosenberg 2014.

A more coloured and thorough character sketch of Marinus is given in this novel. His role on plot level is more substantial, which will be discussed momentarily. In the last chapter of *Slade House*, set in 2015, Marinus-Fenby shortly reappears. He becomes the hero of the story by exterminating Jonah Grayer, the less cunning half of the Grayer Twins, a pair of independent 'Carnivores' that very much resemble the Anchorites of *BC*. They do not bother Marinus that much, though: – 'They [Individual 'Carnivores'] tend to think they're the only ones, and operate as carelessly as shoplifters who refuse to believe in store detectives', as one of the Horologists reassures Holly (*BC*: p. 444). Marinus loathes being caught up in their 'War' with the Anchorites (*BC*: p. 500). He regrets not being able to save everyone who is involved in their War, especially innocent 'bone clocks' like Holly and others. He realises that the choices he makes in the War will not just affect him, but also influence the lives of his loved ones, colleagues and patients 'who will get scarred if my companions and I never come back' (*BC*: p. 461). He explains he has no other choice than to prosecute it:

'If we spent our metalives amassing the wealth of empires and getting stoned on the opiates of wealth and power, knowing what we know yet doing nothing about it, we would be complicit in the psychosoteric slaughter of the innocents.' (*BC*: p. 438).

Marinus's reincarnation

The idea of reincarnation and its applicability on a character like Marinus can be interpreted on multiple levels. First of all, Marinus is reincarnated into new bodies thus leading more than one life. He is reincarnated according to the 'Returnee'- principle each time he dies. This makes him a global citizen *pur sang*, because he never knows in which part of the world he is going to wake up next. In his own words: 'Each resurrection is a lottery of longitudes, latitudes and demography'. (*BC*: p. 425).

His literal reincarnation has influence on a metalevel too, because it gives him the possibility to be reintroduced in new storylines *n'importe quoi* the place or time in which the story takes place. In the 1800s he is Lucas Marinus (in *JZ*), but at the late twentieth and beginning of the twentieth-first century he reappears consecutively as Chinese Yu-Leon Marinus (*BC*: p. 20), African(-American?) Iris-Marinus Fenby (*BC*: p. 430/*SH*: p. 196) and Cuban Harry Marinus Veracruz (*BC*: p. 602-606).

Marinus does not see it as a privilege to be stuck in this endless cycle of life, death and rebirth.¹⁰¹ In his lives before 'Marinus-In-Klara' he has never met other Atemporals who, like him, have to carry the burden of the 'Ennui of Eternity' (*BC*: p. 503). When residing in St. Petersburg he meets Xi Lo and Holokai, who will introduce him to the Horologists movement:

'Until 1823 when Xi Lo and Holokai found me, my loneliness was indescribable yet had to be endured. Even now, what I'd call the "Ennui of Eternity", if you will, can be debilitating. But being a doctor, and an horologist, gives my metalife a purpose.' (*BC*: p. 502-3)

¹⁰¹ This cycle of life has strong ties with the Buddhist idea of *samsara*, of which Rose Harris-Birtill speaks elaborately in her article for *KronoScope* (Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 163-181) and her recently published book *David Mitchell's Post-Secular World: Buddhism, Belief and the Urgency of Compassion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

It cannot be definitively concluded from the novels if this encounter with Xi Lo and Holokai has changed Marinus from an irritable, bored doctor to the compassionate good guy he proves to be in his later lives. What *is* evident, is that by joining the Horology movement Marinus has found a clear purpose in life and his lives to come: to make the world a little bit better by being a little less ignorant. His metalife prevents him from having children – as he explains to Holly, his immortality comes with ‘terms and conditions’ (*BC*: p. 501). Marinus does not have his own family, and will never have one because he does not want to marry either (*ibidem*), but decides to care for the families of others. The next chapter will return to the importance of (Holly’s) family.

1.2. Marinus, the ‘rebirthed’ saviour

Marinus’s metarole

Besides the fact that Marinus himself acknowledges his ‘metalife’, as discussed in the previous paragraph, his metaposition can be understood on a more narratological level too. Pointing towards the importance of the meta-aspect of Mitchell’s fiction and its contribution to the great richness of his fiction, Harris-Birtill even compares it to being a ‘metadiegetic banquet’.¹⁰² In the following paragraph his life is examined under a narratological loop, laying bare his specific position in the story. It is shown how his distinctive position within, and even above the narrative influences the (ethical) view that is subsequently created of him.

It is remarkable that only in the chapter ‘A Horologist’s Labyrinth’ Marinus is focalising. Perspective can heavily influence the ethical vision of a character. Naturally, the richness of his character is expanded by experiencing the story from his point of view. It is of key importance for his likeability, because the reader is finally offered insight into his mind with its unspoken ideas, opinions and beliefs. Particularly in the case of Marinus, it makes him more human and less like a *deus (ex machina)* too: the reader finds out he does not know the answer to every question either and cannot make the impossible possible. At the ending of *BC* for example, Marinus cannot save Holly, apologetically saying ‘I know my limits’ (*BC* p. 609). He is more human than one would initially think given his immortal status and god-like qualities like mindreading, ‘subspeaking’ and performing acts that influences the will or conscious state of people called ‘Hiatus’ and ‘Suasion’. He often wants to emphasise his ‘humanness’ and the similarities between himself and ‘bone clocks’ like Holly: ‘What you feel for Aoife, that unhesitating

¹⁰² Harris-Birtill 2014.

willingness to rush into a burning building, I've felt that, too. I've gone into burning buildings, as well." (BC: p. 501).¹⁰³

A wavering needle on the scale of protagonist and antagonist

As mentioned before by O'Donnell, Marinus can be seen as a 'wavering needle on the scale of protagonist and antagonist'.¹⁰⁴ His position ranges from being a mere 'sidekick' to the titular character in *Jacob de Zoet*, making a *deus ex machina*-like appearance at the ending of both *SH* and *BC* to having a more important role in *BC* altogether.¹⁰⁵ In the latter he appears in multiple storylines and even focalises the penultimate pivotal chapter 'A Horologist Labyrinth'.¹⁰⁶ After his life as Iris Marinus-Fenby, he is resurrected in a Cuban orphanage as Harry Veracruz. (BC: p. 604). He crosses paths with Holly again in the chapter thereafter set in 2043 called 'Sheep's Head', when Endarkenment has prevailed over civilised Europe. According to Holly, who initially does not recognise him, Marinus is 'dressed like a pre-Endarkenment birdwatcher in a fisherman's sweater [...] who must be more influential than he appears' (BC: p. 602 and p. 604), because eventually he is able to saving Holly's grandchildren, Lorelei and her adoptive grandson Rafiq, from further peril, literally offering them a 'lifeboat to civilisation' (BC p. 608). He is part of a think tank called 'Prescient' resembling the 'Prescients' in the post-apocalyptic storyline in *CA* (BC: p. 607-8 and CA: p. 258-60). Mo Muntervary, one of the more minor characters in *BC* (but playing a bigger role in *Ghostwritten*), makes a remark on an intradiegetic level¹⁰⁷ about Marinus's metastatus, saying that: "There must be a lot of Icelandic nationals around the globe [...] praying for a *deus ex machina* to sail up to the bottom of the garden. Why Lorelei? And why such a timely arrival?" (BC: p. 603).¹⁰⁸ At the ending of *Slade House* for example his appearance is *deus ex machina*-like *pur sang*. He appears only in the last chapter, being the instigator breaking through the vicious cycle of the Grayer twins harvesting their 'psychosoteric' souls every nine years.¹⁰⁹ In his discussion with Patrick O'Donnell about *SH*, Paul Harris however wants to discard that Marinus operates as a *deus ex machina*, calling him 'a rebirthed saviour', '[...] a last-ditch interventionist embodying the unforeseen good luck of those who will not be destroyed by the Grayers in the future.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ In chapter 2 will be shortly reflected on this quote as well.

¹⁰⁴ O'Donnell 2016.

¹⁰⁵ The term *deus ex machina* originally stems from drama literature and refers to a plot device where an unexpected power saves a seemingly hopeless situation, turning the story into a different direction. (Van Bork, Delabastita *et al.*: s.d: P. 40. In: *Lexicon van drama en theater*. Via: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/dela012alge01_01/dela012alge01_02.pdf).

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell 2014: p. 397-535.

¹⁰⁷ Herman and Verveack (2001) 2009: p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ Mitchell 1999: p. 319-380.

¹⁰⁹ The chapter in which Marinus appears, is called 'Astronauts' and takes place in 2015 (*SH*: p. 191-233).

¹¹⁰ O'Donnell 2016.

His role as a 'rebirthed' saviour does not have to exclude his metarole as *deus ex machina*. It is therefore unnecessary to underestimate Marinus's metaposition. This role does not reduce his character, but instead enriches it by adding a new dimension to it. It shows that at specific moments he *is* a diegetic tool, his main goal being triggering certain emotions like hope, love and compassion, but at other moments his contribution is more plot-driven. His appearance comes in all its shapes and sizes and expands the richness and multi-layered-ness of his character.

Interestingly, a position Marinus has not yet occupied is that of main protagonist. He is always at the border yet never at the centre of the narratological attention. Marinus serves best at being on the margins, because otherwise it probably would harm the suspension of disbelief– it would be an overkill of heroicness. Think of the aforementioned conversation between Marinus and Holly in which Marinus wants to prove that they are more alike than she might think: "What you feel for Aoife, that unhesitating willingness to rush into a burning building, I've felt that, too. I've gone into burning buildings, as well." (*BC*: p. 501). In this rather stereotypical image of sacrifice, Marinus is going the extra mile in having actually saved people from burning buildings, and probably dying in the process too. At a certain point he has to admit that "Even a benign Atemporal cannot save everyone" (*BC*: p. 465). Dying is not the biggest sacrifice he can make, though – as a 'rebirthed saviour' as Patrick O'Donnell calls him, he will be reborn again to stop the Grayer's and Enomoto's of the future.¹¹¹ Consequently placing Marinus on the margins of the narrative, he is merely planting seeds of hope through which his kind of character flourishes the best.¹¹²

When Marinus wrongfully assumes he has defeated Norah Grayer, the reader knows she has nestled herself in the body of an unborn child, biding her time to avenge her brother (*SH*: p. 233). The ending of *Slade House* suggests that the battle between (im)mortals with opposing belief systems is probably as never-ending as their lives, but that is not the point. Although they might not literally be reincarnated, 'evilness' will survive, but as long as there are individuals like Marinus who feel the urge to suppress it, it will not triumph and that is the most important thing. It should always be there so it can challenge the 'tendency for predacity' that is according to Harris always present in humans.¹¹³

There is no light without the darkness: Marinus needs a (ethical) confrontation from time to time to realise what his purpose is in life. 'You need the unbending Churchills to save us from the mass-murdering Hitlers but, with no Hitlers around, the Churchills are annoying as hell', his namesake

¹¹¹ O'Donnell 2016.

¹¹² It will be interesting to see in what direction Marinus's story is heading in Mitchell's future novels, which will probably cause our ethical and moral view on him to 'shape-shift' and again to reconsider his (meta)role in previous novels.

¹¹³ Harris 2015 (b): p. 5.

comedian David Mitchell appropriately argued.¹¹⁴ It is therefore high time to incorporate the unethical 'bad guys' into the narrative.

1.3. The confrontation: Marinus versus the Carnivores

Marinus's ethical vision on life differs strongly from that of others characters with questionable morals. More than once Marinus finds himself in a head-to-head confrontation with Carnivores like Norah and Jonah Grayer (shortly the Grayer Twins) in *SH* and Elijah D'Arnoq and Hugo Lamb in *BC*. Through their conflicting ethical and moral visions, certain virtues like selflessness come to the forefront in characters like Marinus, but also their binary counterparts like selfishness in Enomoto and the Grayers.

Of course, 'evilness' in itself cannot be defined by a checklist of vices. However, in the narratives of *BC*, *JZ*, *SH* and *CA* among others, it is noticeable that some recurring character traits are consequently attributed to the antagonists. They have a deeply rooted fear of dying and lack an acceptance of death. Surely, this is not intrinsically evil. Many characters struggle with the shortness and unpredictability of their existence. Where the real 'evilness' lies is in their selfishness, their Machiavellian ethos of 'the end justifies the means', not shedding from subjugating others their own will and power, committing homicide, raping women and even committing infanticide. All these characters are united in placing the egoistic wish for immortality above ethically approved behaviour to attain this questionable goal.

'Evilness' hereafter shall be defined as this selfish wish for immortality, in practicing predacity to attain their goal, and in defending an ethics of survival when asked about the motives of their dubious desires. In Figure 2 an overview is given of how unethical, vicious behaviour of for example Enomoto and the Grayers stands in stark contrast with ethical, virtuous behaviour of characters like Marinus and Holly – the latter being discussed in detail in the second chapter.

Ethics of survival

Lord Abbot Enomoto is the main antagonist of *JZ*.¹¹⁵ He leads a nunnery at the top of a deserted mountain, where women serve as broodmares for the monks and whose new-borns are sacrificed as offerings to a heretical goddess in exchange for an eternal life (very much alike the Carnivores in *BC*). Enomoto, the Grayers and the Carnivores are not just guilty of homicide, but what Marinus refers to as

¹¹⁴ David Mitchell in *Thinking About It Only Makes it Worse*. London: Guardian Books, 2014: p. 14.

¹¹⁵ Although not appearing corporeally, Enomoto is also mentioned a couple of times, for example in *SH* when Marinus says to the Grayer Twins: 'I met Enomoto's grandfather in a former life. A murderous demon of a man. You would have liked him' (*SH* p. 229). Enomoto is also mentioned by the Grayers a couple of pages before: 'Enomoto Sensei spoke about 'vigilantes' with a pathological urge to slay Atemporals.' (*SH*: p. 223). In *BC* too, Enomoto is shortly brought up in a conversation between Horologists Xi Lo and Holokai and Klara Marinus Koskov (*BC*: p. 477). Marinus admits that '[Enomoto's] presence made my skin creep' (*ibidem*). It can be concluded from Marinus's lack of involvement in *JZ*, he probably has been unaware of Enomoto's evil practices.

'animacide' (BC: 518); the murder of a soul, which they 'decant' in a holistic ritual. This is possibly even worse, because that way a soul will never be able to Cross the Dusk to the 'Last Sea' (BC: 443) – which we can assume is a euphemism for the 'afterlife' or 'death'.¹¹⁶

Orito once worked as a midwife on Dejima, getting acquainted with Jacob de Zoet there, but ends up under the grip of Enomoto through a series of unfortunate events and becomes the enlightened innocent of the story by learning the truth about Enomoto's vicious deeds. When her love interest Uzaemon finds out what faith Orito awaits, he sets up a rescue mission. Unfortunately he fails miserably in his attempt and Enomoto kills him, but not before Enomoto has given him a sneak peek into his ethical vision on life and death. In this confrontation, Enomoto wants to emphasise how rational he is and how Uzaemon is like a gullible, stupid child who knows nothing and is led by his emotions: 'Can you hear how like a child trying to postpone his bedtime you sound?' (JZ: p. 338)

A propos, Paul Bloomfield has written on the viciousness of people in *The Virtue of Happiness: A Theory of the Good Life*, comparing their egocentrism to that of children.¹¹⁷ According to Bloomfield, vicious people are developmentally stuck in an egocentric view of the world, in which an item's value is determined solely by how it promotes or hinders what they want or care about.¹¹⁸ Ironically, this makes the greedy Enomoto wishing for an eternal life the childish one, not Uzaemon. He explains to Uzaemon why he does not hardly consider himself 'evil':

'Evil, evil, evil. You always wield that word as if it were a sword and not a vapid conceit. [...] Survival is Nature's law, and my order holds – or better, is – the secret of surviving mortality. Your Adam Smith would understand [...] Where is your evil?' (JZ: p. 338).¹¹⁹

Enomoto's nearly admirable attempt to justify child murder, rape, and all other things God forbade shows the tip of the iceberg of pointing towards the 'survival of the fittest' principal that is repeated endlessly by the Carnivores and other evildoers. In Adam Ewing's storyline in CA, Dr Henry Goose tries to kill Adam by slowly poisoning him, defending himself saying: 'The world is wicked. [...] The weak are meat. The strong do eat' (CA: p. 523-4.). Goose also points towards Adam's supposed naivety: 'You were no more gullible than my other patrons.' (CA: p. 524). In the same storyline, on board of the Prophetess, Adam Ewing meets D'Arnoq.¹²⁰ When Ewing asks D'Arnoq if such an ill as "too much civilisation" can exist D'Arnoq responds: 'If there is no God west of the Horn, why there's none of your constitution's *All men created equal*, neither, Mr Ewing.' (CA: p. 10). D'Arnoq and Enomoto both justify their behaviour

¹¹⁶ To compare the homicide and animacide of the Carnivores with the Horologists; they do not even kill animals because they are vegetarian: it is the 'body-and-soul thing' their warden Sadaqat explains to Holly. (BC: p. 442).

¹¹⁷ Bloomfield 2014. Bloomfield is also quoted in Elliott 2018: p. 252-3.

¹¹⁸ Bloomfield 2014: p. 149-50.

¹¹⁹ O'Donnell uses this same quote of Enomoto and further explores Enomoto's linear conception of temporality (O'Donnell 201: p. 142-43).

¹²⁰ It is unclear if the D'Arnoq Adam Ewing meets is the same D'Arnoq that appears in BC or if the latter is a descendant of the former.

by drawing a firm line between their 'humanness' and that of the others, placing that of the Other beneath their own. In *BC* a similar viewpoint is given, when at the wedding of Holly's sister in 2004 an Irishman refers to the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916, blaming the English for the escalation: 'They repeated the ageless macho mantra, "Force is the only thing these natives understand," so often that they ended up believing it.' (*BC*: p. 247). Enomoto and D'Arnoq arbitrarily claim that they are entitled to certain privileges while others, equally human, are not.

This is reminiscent of Bloomfield's view in the aforementioned book, arguing that 'complete moral development' involves coming to recognise that the value of one's own life and pursuits is 'inextricable from the value of human lives and pursuits as such'.¹²¹ Bloomfield argues that the 'vicious' cannot have self-respect, because those who do not respect others cannot respect themselves. Somni-451 in *CA* calls it a vicious cycle:

It is a cycle as old as tribalism. In the beginning there is ignorance. Ignorance engenders fear. Fear engenders hatred, and hatred engenders violence. Violence breeds further violence until the only law is whatever is *willed* is the most powerful.' (*CA*: p. 360-361)

If Enomoto, D'Arnoq *et al.* would try to be less ignorant and more selfless and open-minded, they can develop virtues like justice and generosity and as such respect the humanity of others (see Figure 2). They are not too eager though, to give up their current life style, that is based on an ethics of survival. After Marinus has killed Jonah Grayer in *SH*, Norah Grayer even admits that 'my love for survival is stronger than my love for Jonah' (*SH*: p. 226). Also in *CA*, composer Frobisher exclaims of his employer Vyvyan Ayrns that 'Men like Ayrns are ignorant, even of their ignorance.' (*CA*: p. 80-81).

The survival argument is repeated so often throughout Mitchell's oeuvre that even on an intradiegetic level characters start to express their opinion on it. Ewing criticises the 'Boerhaves and Gooses of the world' for not wanting to question the so-called 'natural order of things' – and exclaims at calling it 'the natural order of things': 'oh, weaselly word!'. (*CA*: p. 528). Their 'selfishness uglifies the soul', he vents about all the wrongdoers (*Ibidem*). Holly has a vision analogous to that of Ewing:

For most of my life, the world shrank and technology progressed; this was the natural order of things. Few of us clocked on that "the natural order of things" is entirely man-made, and that a world that kept expanding as technology regressed was not only possible but waiting in the wings. (*BC*: p. 583)

A special example of a character who expresses a very strong counterargument on this ethics of survival is, of course, Marinus. Shedding off his almost saint-like goodness in these moments, another side of his persona is explored: a passionate, fierce and at times irritated individual. Especially in *SH*, a glimpse of the pre-Horologist Marinus is shown – making clear the contours of the irascible doctor that is introduced in *JZ*. His confrontation with the morally questionable Grayer Twins takes place in the

¹²¹ Elliott 2018: p. 252.

ultimate chapter of *SH* called 'Astronaut'. When they try to justify their deeds to Marinus, he is unimpressed at their meek attempt:

'No', Marinus scrunches up her face, *'please, no. I've heard it so often. "Humanity is hardwired for survival"; "Might is Right is nature's way"; "We only harvest a few"*, Again and again, down the years, same old, same old...' (SH: p. 230)

On a metalevel hereby he shortly sums up all the overused arguments of unethical characters in Mitchell's oeuvre. When Norah accuses him that he denies the privileges he can endlessly enjoy himself, he answers that he does not see his immortal state as a privilege (as evident in the *'Ennui of Eternity'* quote as mentioned before), saying: 'You murder *for* immortality. We are sentenced *to* it.' (SH: p. 229). Mitchell's anger towards the Grayer's is 'controlled' but 'fierce' when he reminds them that their victims had families and lives too that will now have to live without them due to their animacide (SH: p. 222). In regard to Holly as well, having dragged her into their War against the Carnivores he feels guilt when looking at her, for he is not just seeing Holly, but also 'the mother, sister, daughter, widow, writer, friend'. Her probable death will not just be a personal tragedy but will make an impact on a wider scale of people too (BC: p. 513). When Norah Grayer, the cunning half of the Grayer twins sarcastically comments on Marinus's compassion ('What a lofty hill of divine compassion you sit on to care for every one of humanity's mewling, puking, rutting seven billion'), Marinus is again not impressed in the least, responding 'Ah, you people always say that.' (SH: p. 222) During the War, Carnivore Immaculée Constantin makes a similar remark, saying: 'Will nothing make you despise a person?' to which he answers 'Homicide and animacide work just fine...' (BC: p. 518). According to him, unethical people like the Grayers and other Carnivores have strangled their conscience and ethically they 'strike themselves dumb' (SH: p. 230). In relation to Hugo Lamb however, before the War is about to commence she texts him 'hugo lamb buried his conscience but it never quite died' which is indeed true. In the next chapter, Hugo Lamb will be discussed in relation to Holly and it is shown that he offers a more ambiguous look on 'evilness'.

As Jacob de Zoet has taught Marinus: 'Our friends show us what we *can* do; our enemies teach us what we must do.' (JZ: p. 468), which is true: he has decided to live for others, selflessly, unconditionally. His immortality among other things has made this possible:

'We serve the sanctity of life, Miss Grayer. Not our own life, but other people's. The knowledge that those future innocents whom you would have killed to fuel your addiction to longevity [...] will now survive: that's our higher purpose. What's a metalife without a purpose? It is mere feeding' (SH: p. 230).

Does this mean that once an individual becomes 'evil' he will stay evil for the rest of his life? No; although Figure 2 might suggest differently, the 'real' world as well as Mitchell's fictional is not binary and divided in 'good' versus 'evil' people. The good and the evil exist in every person: it all depends on the choices someone makes.

Ethics of possibility part I

In stark contrast with the ethics of survival stands the ethics of possibility. However, this ethics of possibility will be discussed again in the next chapter, it is important to already briefly touch upon this important issue that is represented by a multitude of characters in various ways.

BC carries out an ethics of possibility that according to Childs and Green is also key in *CA*.¹²² The novels show and explore options characters are given within their lifetime(s), but above all how they act upon these choices. Let us take Marinus as an example. He sees it as an obligation to actively act upon the knowledge he has of the 'psychoslaughter' of innocent ones, committed by the Carnivores (see quote p. 3). What underlines this significant quote, is that Marinus feels obliged not to bury his head in the sand because he has the knowledge and the (will)power to make a change. Nussbaum's argument in *Love's Knowledge* is compatible with Marinus's vision. Attaching great importance to emotion in an ethics of possibility, she argues that it is often not the lack of knowledge of what is morally right, but the will to do it.¹²³ In line with Nussbaum, Harris-Birtill wants to make clear that it is not at stake whether change is possible, but whether such changes will result in ethical progression or regression.¹²⁴ She believes that the characters in Mitchell's fiction have the choice, the obligation even, to act in a way that will avoid 'ethical stagnation' evoked by 'a self-centred postmodern nihilism'.¹²⁵ Marinus does not have to worry about a probable 'ethical stagnation': In his outspoken determination to shed from ignorance at all times lies an important character trait that embodies his virtuousness and further enhances his ethical 'righteous' behaviour.

Although the case of Marinus suggests otherwise, these choices do not have to be larger than life. It is essentially about having the belief that your deeds will lead to something good and make the world a better place, even if it is only on a micro-scale. *CA*'s Adam Ewing for example decides to join the Abolitionist cause because he owes his life to a self-freed slave, but realises how small this act of selflessness is, saying 'I have to begin somewhere.' (*CA*: p. 528). He reflects on how the course of history can be changed through simply believing that one's actions can eventually make an impact that will set off a chain of cause and effect: 'History admits no rules; only outcomes. What precipitates outcomes? Vicious and virtuous acts. What precipitates acts? Belief.' (*Ibidem*).

As discussed in the previous paragraph in relation to the unethical deeds of the Carnivores, it takes courage, honesty and integrity to take responsibility for one's own actions and consequently choose the 'right' path. What is morally the 'right' thing to do depends from person to person.¹²⁶ 'The' moral path does not exist. Mitchell's fiction does not pretend to show it. It lacks an omniscient narrator

¹²² Childs and Green 2011: p. 44.

¹²³ Nussbaum 1990: p. 156.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁵ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 176.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

or singular antagonist who could steer the reader in a certain (moral) direction.¹²⁷ As can be read in the introduction, the global character of Mitchell's fiction refuses to choose for one particular point of view. Instead it shows a wide range of different kinds of 'moralities' expressed through an extensive diversity of voices and (moral) opinions.¹²⁸ Think for example of pious characters like Jacob, from 'rebirthed saviours' like Marinus, to more down-to-earth type of visions like that of Holly, but also ambiguous ones like Hugo and Zachry and vicious ones like Norah Grayer. All these characters have focalised chapters within Mitchell's oeuvre. His fiction is indecisive and ever-expanding. The ethics of possibility thus serves a multi-layered role, both on a thematic, intradiegetic level and a metalevel.

It would be ironic and more importantly contradictory to explore an ethics of possibility within Mitchell's oeuvre and only pointing towards Marinus's (ethical) possibilities. Moral visions of Adam Ewing, Enomoto and some other Carnivores have already been mentioned briefly. To further prove this argument, it is necessary to incorporate other moral voices into the discussion that will be analysed more in-depth. In the chapter that is to follow, Holly's down-to-earth and Hugo's enigmatic personalities will be centralised.

¹²⁷ The global, cosmopolitan character of Mitchell's fiction has been discussed extensively in the introduction.

¹²⁸ 'Het ethische aspect van [literatuur] zit in de voortdurende afwisseling van beelden en standpunten en in de weigering te kiezen voor één standpunt.' (Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 131 and Miller 1987: p. 38-9).

Chapter 2: An ethics of possibility, an ethics of love: Holly and Hugo

Whereas Marinus has a strong overarching metaposition in Mitchell's oeuvre, Holly occupies a minor position in the macronovel. Unlike Marinus, Holly is a 'one-off' character who only appears in *BC*. Although this might not make her fit for discussion in regard to the research question as posed in this thesis, her 'reappearance' should be regarded in a different manner than has been the case with Marinus.

Holly's interconnectedness in the oeuvre is twofold: Through exploring her storyline in different phases of her life, Mitchell is able to show her character development in depth. She represents different kinds of Mitchellian 'literary archetypes'. Starting off as a struggling, often rebellious teen, she becomes an enlightened innocent by unwillingly getting involved in the 'War' of the Anchorites versus the Horologists. Like this, her *type* of character strongly resembles that of others, for example Eiji in *NumberNineDream* and the teenager Jason Taylor in *Black Swan Green* but also Somni-451 in *CA* and Orito in *JZ* when she also becomes involved in the War of the Anchorites versus Horologists. Her vision on how to deal virtuously with a mortal life reflects a more overarching albeit distinctive moral voice in Mitchell's fiction. On the other hand she stands in direct connection with a multitude of characters who *do* reappear in other novels. This tight rhizome-like web of other characters encompasses Hugo Lamb (who makes an appearance in *Black Swan Green*), Mo Muntervary (*Ghostwritten*), Crispin Hershey (*NumberNineDream*), and last but surely not least, Marinus (*JZ* and *SH*) among many others (see Figure 4 in the Appendix). These characters find themselves within a tight network of other characters, and so forth. The Mitchellian rhizome is forever-expanding and forever-evolving. In this organic web, life sprouts in unexpected, random places. If other characters who in this regard are more loosely connected to the principal characters of this thesis would be taken into account, the rhizome would shape-shift. Think for example of Frobisher, who stands in direct connection with Vyvan Arys and his daughter Eva Crommelynck, the latter re-appearing in 1982 as Jason Taylor's teacher. Or Adam Ewing, who has connections with D'Arnoq (who knows Hugo Lamb) as well as Boerhaave (who is Jacob de Zoets servant on his voyage back to the Netherlands, popping up unexpectedly six pages before the novels conclusion) (see Figure 5).

Because of her strong connection with literary reincarnations Marinus and Hugo, Holly's character will be seen in relation to them. The approach in this chapter will therefore slightly differ from the last chapters because Hugo *and* Holly will be central in the discussion. Hugo and Holly have a confronting vision on how to deal with their mortal state morally and ethically. In juxtaposing Hugo's life with that of Holly, an interesting tension between conflicting moral codes becomes visible. Incorporating them both in the discussion will furthermore add to the ethical character of Mitchell's fiction, because it will broaden the range of moral voices.

In the character (development) of Hugo Lamb an ethics of human possibility is even more apparent than in the last chapter in relation to Marinus. Pointing out some turning points in her life, it will become clear that Holly personifies a different kind of ethics. Especially in her appearance at the ending of *The Bone Clocks*, she demonstrates an ethics of love. Via this specific ethics, she shows a more 'mortal', down-to-earth vision on life than Hugo *and* Marinus. Lastly it will be shown where the significance of (her kind of) character truly lies: namely in passing on the message of love, directly to her family, indirectly to the reader, and to show that love has the ability to surpass mortal lifetimes. For this reason, her relation to her grandchildren Lorelei and Rafiq will also be clarified.

2.1. Holly's character development and flourishing of virtues

Holly's life could be seen as the thread that connects all the storylines in *BC*, although her narratological position shifts like that of Marinus. In her case it switches from being the protagonist in chapter one to having a supporting role in chapters two to five and back to being a protagonist in the last chapter. The focalisation makes a boomerang movement as well, beginning with Holly in first chapter 'A Hot Spell' and eventually returning to her in 'Sheep's Head'.¹²⁹

She is introduced at the very start of the novel as a rather naïve but decisive fifteen-year-old who runs away from her home in Gravesend after having had a terrible fight with her mother (*BC*: p. 7) because she wants to live with her twenty-four year old boyfriend (*BC*: p. 5). Only getting a peek in a three-day span of her life in less than one hundred pages, the reader is plunged into her world *in medias res*, getting to know her from up close because Mitchell uses an intradiegetic first-person narrative.

Just a few days after she has made her big decision, her brother Jacko disappears.¹³⁰ Immediately afterwards Holly is delivered the news by Ed Brubeck, her future husband, the story suddenly 'blacks out', returning to the perspective of Hugo Lamb seven years later – a brand new actant in a brand new setting; Cambridge in 1991.¹³¹ Hugo does not seem to have a direct connection with Holly, but crosses paths with her eventually in a ski-resort in Switzerland. This encounter seems to have been more meaningful for Hugo than for Holly, referring to him as 'a very brief, very ex-boyfriend' decades later in one of her first conversations with Marinus as Iris Marinus-Fenby (*BC*: p. 432). Cautiousness is important in this regard however, considering Holly is very skeptical at this point towards Marinus, not knowing if she can trust him. The opinion she gives about Hugo might be jaded and given

¹²⁹ 'A Hot Spell' (*BC*: p. 1-92) and 'Sheep's Head' (*BC*: p. 537-613). For a more thorough introduction on the novel *BC*, please consider the introduction and the prior chapter when discussing Marinus's metarole.

¹³⁰ During the Horologists-Carnivores War centuries later in 2025, it becomes clear that the soul of Xi Lo, one of the oldest Horologists had resided in Jacko's body since he was terminally ill at a young age. During the first War between the Horologists and the Carnivores in 1984, taking place simultaneously during 'A Hot Spell', Xi Lo dies through which Jacko's body ceases to exist. This means Jacko is never to return.

¹³¹ Herman and Verveack 2009: p. 60-61.

out of self-defense. A more in-depth analysis of the encounter between Holly and Hugo and its impact on Hugo will be given in paragraph 2.2: 'Hugo: an ethics of possibility'.

This is not the only temporal blank in the story. Parker even argues in his article 'Mind the Gap(s)' in *C21* that these gaps or 'narrative ellipses' are key to the story, because in the case of Holly's life, the most important events take place in them.¹³² O'Donnell also speaks in this regard of 'narrative intrusion'.¹³³ Although not necessarily agreeing with Parker, it does heighten the anticipation of Holly's story. In the following chapters the reader only gets glimpses of her fate, always via the point of view of other characters. The much spoken of chapter 'A Horologist's Labyrinth' in which Iris Marinus-Fenby focalises, is only but one example. Eventually, the perspective returns to Holly in the last chapter 'Sheep's Head', taking place in a village in Cork, Ireland, in 2043. By then, the world has become a 'plotless never-ending disaster movie' as she describes it (*BC*: p. 541). 'Sheep's Head' is most important in this discussion because it a) shows her character development from the rebellious teenager to the wise old grandmother she has become; (b) what the most important thing in her life is (her family) and c) her bleak but meek view on the dystopian world around her.

These three 'realms' are interrelated and equally important in proving how Holly's (virtuous) behaviour influences the ethical vision on the larger morality and temporality issues that Mitchell's novels carry out. Holly's personal traumas from which she has grown tremendously go hand in hand with the larger scale eco-crisis of the mid-twenty-first century. Visually, the realms can be seen as 'circles of life', Holly being the centre figure (a), but always standing in direct connection with her family, to which she constantly relates (b) and how she adjusts to the every changing world around her, broadly 'civilisation' or 'humanity' (c) (Figure 3, see Appendix). These circles represent life itself: if Holly dies, she will still live on in the stories of her family; when her family(line) will go extinct, there humanity as a whole will still exist with its overarching human narratives.

Her personal life has been one with extreme ups and downs which have altered the course of her life drastically. Besides the disappearance and presumable death of her brother Jacko, in 'Sheep's Head' the reader learns about the untimely death of both her daughter Aoife and son-in-law Örvar in a plane crash that is part of a larger 'Gigastorm of '38'', when 'Aoife and Örvar's 797 got snapped at twenty thousand feet, theirs and two hundred other airliners crossing the Pacific.' (*BC*: 539).¹³⁴ Standards of living have degenerated ever since. Shortages of all sorts of goods are commonplace, from razors and tampons to food, electricity and medicines. Medicines like insulin, which her diabetic adoptive son Rafiq desperately needs, are getting scarcer by the day. Holly is on survival mode and

¹³² Parker 2018: p. 1-6

¹³³ O'Donnell 2015: p. 159.

¹³⁴ In Crispin Hershey's chapter 'Crispin Hershey's Lonely Planet' taking place in 2017, Holly tells Crispin that her husband died when a missile hit his hotel in Homs, Syria, eight years before (*BC*: p. 331).

within the three-day narration span of her life, mirroring the structure of chapter one, her thoughts are mainly with factual day-to-day problems coated with nostalgic reflections on the days of yore. The future of 2043 is the painful reality for Holly and the rest of her direct circle (b), making even more impact in relation to the just read the fantasy subplot. Holly's reflections on her 'Atemporal' days are very factual and down to earth. She knows dreaming about 'psychoteric' solutions is not going to help her to solve daily life problems.¹³⁵

A mere ten pages before its conclusion, Marinus makes his *deus ex machina* appearance to collect Holly's grandchildren and ship them off to Iceland where they will have a chance on a 'pre-Endarkenment life' (BC: p. 607). Holly knows she cannot save herself, but finds great relief in being able to at least rescue 'My two treasures' as she calls her granddaughter and Rafiq, her adoptive son (BC: p. 610):

'My first thought is, Thank Christ, she's saved.
My second thought is, I can't lose my granddaughter.
My third thought is, Thank Christ, she's saved.' (BC p. 603)

The book concludes with this traumatic experience, knowing she will never see them again and waving them off until she 'can't make out the figures in the noisy blue murk anymore' (BC: p. 613). She can already feel herself being erased, 'fading into an invisible woman' (ibidem) but consoles herself with the thought that they will lead a better life in another place: 'For one voyage to begin, another voyage must come to an end, sort of' (ibidem). It has been a long and winding road from the recalcitrant teenager in the 1980s to the selfless seventy-year old she proves to be through quotes like these, but then again she has had a lifetime to grow. 'We sort of live on, as long as there are people to live on in', she says at their departure, and via her grandchildren, she lives on, 'sort of' (BC: p. 542). The double use of 'sort of' in her reflections shows her meek acceptance of her mortal state – it is all she can do. Likewise, in his *A Temporary Future: The Fiction of David Mitchell*, Patrick O'Donnell points towards Holly's sober vision on her approaching death saying that she 'signs off on her live and the novel with an acceptance of mortality – the shelf life of her own bone clock – not as a vehicle of extinction but of tenuous continuance as she watches Lorelei and Rafiq depart.'¹³⁶

Holly has known extreme pain losing dear family members like her brother, her husband and her daughter – above all the worst trauma of every parent – but she has always found a way to cope one way or another. It is through reflecting on pivotal moments like these that she learns to deal with her own vast approaching, inevitable death. In 'Sheep's Head' she recalls meeting a woman twice her

¹³⁵ As Harris-Birtill agrees: "After the previous chapter's psychoteric pyrotechnics, magical solutions are painfully absent in the starkly dystopic final section as the mortals left behind are reduced to the 'bone clocks' of the book's title, ticking towards death from starvation, Ebola, widespread violence, ecological catastrophe or suicide pills." (Harris-Birtill 2014: p. 133).

¹³⁶ O'Donnell 2015: p. 173.

age in an abortion clinic when she was sixteen, who told her “Sweetheart, you’ll be astounded by what you can live with.” (BC: p. 545). Decades later, she finally realises that life has taught her the woman was right (Ibidem).

Luckily, it is not all doom and gloom in Holly’s life. Part of her charm lies in her humour and down to earth-ness, with which she brings lightness to the story, right from the start to the very end. Even in her stubborn agitation towards her mother when they have the fight that will lead to Holly’s radical decision to move out:

“Live under our roof, you obey our rules. When I was your age—”
“Yeah yeah yeah, you had twenty brothers and thirty sisters and forty grandparents and fifty acres of spuds to dig ’cause that was how life was in Auld feckin’ Oireland but this is England, Mam, England! And it’s the 1980s and if life was so feckin’ glorious in that West Cork bog why did you feckin’ bother even coming to—” (BC: p. 6)

In retrospect, this is a rather ironic passage, considering she eventually ends up in that ‘West Cork bog’ herself. When Marinus comes to collect Lorelei, she asks him if there is room for Rafiq too: “Could you turn that one space to two spaces? Using your ... y’know ...” I do a spell-casting gesture with my hands.’ (BC: p. 608). Holly remains, after all, a simple ‘bone clock’, a mere human who is very aware of the fact that she will die one day without having the chance of a reincarnated life, like Marinus. Although she has accumulated knowledge about mor(t)ality issues over the course of her life, she does not always know the right thing to do or to say. When she tells Rafiq the importance of staying alive, for example:

[Rafiq’s] first duty is to stay alive. That’s what his family in Morocco would want. (...) Which maybe wasn’t the best thing to say, but If there was a book called *The Right Thing to Do and Say as Civilisation Dies*, I’ve never read it.’ (BC: p. 592)

Quotes like these emphasise her down-to-earthness and more generally her ‘humanness’. Towards the end of her life, she is not concerned with the personal gain her virtuous deeds will give her anymore. Her virtuousness is almost instinctive – it comes from having a good heart. In an argument Holly has with one of her radically religious neighbours, she says: ‘I didn’t give Rafiq a home because the parish admired me, or because, “the Lord” wanted me to – I did it because it was the right thing to do.’ (BC: p. 569). This is a seldom example of Holly expressing her concerns aloud. Most of her focalisation is inner dialogue, her anxieties hidden from her grandchildren. With regard to the future of Lorelei, who is soon becoming a woman, she points towards the importance of ‘civilisation’ because otherwise the whole system will collapse like a house of cards:

‘Men are always men, I know, but at least during our lives, women have gathered a sort of arsenal of legal rights. But only because, law by law, shifting attitude by shifting attitude, our society became more civilised. Now I’m scared the Endarkenment’ll sweep all that away. I’m scared that Lol’ll just be some bonehead’s slave, stuck in some wintry, hungry, bleak, lawless, Gaelic-flavored Saudi Arabia.’ (BC: p. 584)

She also assumes that 'Civilisation's like the economy, or Tinkerbell: if people stop believing it's real, it dies' (BC: p. 590).

Holly is realistic about her current, rather dreadful situation, but that does not mean she has abandoned all hope for a better future. She has every reason to have become pessimistic, but for the sake of her remaining family members admirably tries to keep the spirits high. According to Rose Harris-Birtill, precisely in her ability to adapt and survive lies the sense of hope, and not in the ability to 'freeze time or change history' (of which Marinus and other Atemporals are capable).¹³⁷ She remains resilient and apt for change.

Although it is good to know that Holly's survival instincts have not yet abandoned her, Harris-Birtill attaches too much value on this biological aspect of humanness. Holly does not have a choice but to function on survival mode, though it should solely be a temporary solution. Wanting to survive is purely that – which means there is no more room for development, neither on personal nor universal scale. In 2043, 'Civilisation' has stopped its development, even returning to a savage-state of lawless anarchy. It is in the small remarks in 'Sheep's Head' like Rafiq asking if universities will be open again when he has the age to enrol and Holly hearing songs on the radio that have to be at least five years old, from which the great importance of the continuation of progress or at least 'civilisation' speaks on a larger scale and to always have the opportunity to evolve on a smaller scale (See Figure 3 a-c). (resp. BC: p. 578; p. 542).¹³⁸ The sense of hope of which Harris-Birtill speaks therefore lies not in the ability to survive, but in the possibility that her grandchildren can have a better-educated life and will be able to start over again in a safer environment. (BC: p. 606). That they are granted the *choice* by an act of kindness of Marinus, is what gives the novel's ending its silver lining and strengthens on a metalevel its message of an ethics of possibility.

2.2. Hugo: an ethics of possibility

Let us invite a new player on the playing field, who will broaden the range of ethical voices and strengthen the interconnected character of the metanovel.

O'Donnell's wavering needle metaphor can also be used outside of the realm of narratology and the actantial position of characters. If we apply it to the morality of characters, Marinus has a steadfast moral compass pointing towards good and almost saint-like goodness, while Hugo Lamb is wavering more strongly between evil and less-evil-than-expected. He has rare moments of showing an

¹³⁷ Harris-Birtill 2014: p. 134.

¹³⁸ Maybe it is necessary for 'Earth' and 'humanity' that civilisation deteriorates before it can improve again, History can be reset, perhaps, circularly. Especially when regarded from a Buddhist view, the circle of life can start over again like a phoenix arising from its ashes.

unexpected good side, mainly towards Holly. He is an ambiguous character with a radical, but clear turning point in his life: choosing for Holly and 'rings, vows, joint accounts' and whatnot (*BC*: p. 179) or choosing to become an Anchorite and prolonging his youth eternally (*BC*: p. 191). His character shows an ethics of possibility *pur sang*.

Hugo is a charming but unscrupulous college student who makes a short appearance in *Black Swan Green* as the older cousin of thirteen-year old protagonist Jason Taylor.¹³⁹ According to narrator Jason, Hugo 'fits his body like a glove' which is a very apt description of his character because it captures Hugo's confidence, vanity and an undertone of his arrogance.¹⁴⁰ He is everything that Jason would want to be – eloquent, charismatic and confident. When Hugo visits him in the titular village, he makes his cousin smoke a whole package of cigarettes, making him 'vomiting up anything he'd eaten for the past six months' (*BC*: p. 181-2). Although Jason cannot count on remorse of his fifteen-year-old cousin, he later admits to Holly that his 'conscience goes "You bastard", whenever I think of it.' (*BC*: p. 182). When meeting Hugo again as a college student at the start of the nineties in *BC*, he has put his intelligence to use mainly to a) make as much money as possible, considering he is just a 'scholarship-boy' whilst his friends are all Old Money and b) to attract as much female attention as possible.

His character becomes extra intriguing experiencing his (inner-) world first-hand and intradiegetically. He has the privilege of focalising his own chapter called 'Myrrh is Mine, Its Bitter Perfume' in *BC*.¹⁴¹ This makes it easier to relate to him than for example in *Black Swan Green*, because even though his moral standards are a bit dubious, according to Wayne Booth a 'Jamesian center-of-consciousness narration and unreliable character narration tend to generate sympathy, even when used in the representation of ethically deficient characters.'¹⁴² The narrative gaps or 'Leerstellen' as Wolfgang Iser has called them, further enhance the multi-layered- and ambiguousness. The reader is forced to use his or her imagination to envision his thoughts and contemplate his possible future(s).¹⁴³ The myriad of possible interpretations this triggers, the reader is drawn into Hugo's world which goes hand in hand with the complexity of his character.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore he is the only *on stage* character who makes the transformation of mortal to immortal which makes his character development much more transparent than that of Carnivores like Immaculée Constantin and Enomoto who could as well have been evil all their live(s). Through his multi-layeredness, the richness of his character increases as well. Herman and Verweeck determine the

¹³⁹ In *Black Swan Green*, Hugo appears in the chapter 'Relatives' (Mitchell 2006: p. 53-83).

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell 2006: p. 53.

¹⁴¹ Mitchell 2014: p. 93-200.

¹⁴² Booth 1983 [1961]: p 377–98.

¹⁴³ Iser in Parker 2018 p. 6 and Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney 2008 (2006): p. 214-5.

¹⁴⁴ Additionally, the more interpretations the reader finds of a certain character, the more he or she is made cognisant of the 'magical power of narrative', according to James Phelan in *Narrative as Rhetoric* (Phelan 1996: p. 7).

'richness' of a character by using Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan's three axes: complexity, evolution and showing of the inside-world of a character.¹⁴⁵ Without a doubt, one of humanity's biggest fears is to be forgotten, whether it is to grow old, die, fade away, end up as a shadow of who one has once been. This is how Hugo's many unspoken doubts and fears about death increases not just his richness, but his likeability as well.

The turning point that will lead to his metamorphosis, which will lead to his conscience's needle to tremble and eventually turn to the 'evil' side, is very clearly described and an interesting case study that will be discussed shortly in the section 'ethics of possibility'. But first, it is important to further explore Hugo's vision on his mortal, temporal state and how this strongly influences his choice to join the Carnivores.

Hugo and his struggle with temporality

Hugo does not seem to have a direct connection with Holly, when she unexpectedly pops up working as a bar maid in a Swiss ski-resort which Hugo is visiting at the end of 1992. Whilst having a one-night stand with her, Hugo proclaims to have pulled her out of a 'seven-year period of mourning' over her brother (BC: p. 184). After she open-heartedly has told him the whole story of what happened in the summer of 1984, Hugo tells her it is rude towards Jacko to stop burying herself alive in guilt and spend the rest of her life 'as a self-blame junkie' (BC: p. 183-4). Understandably Holly is extremely offended – 'Half of me wants to hit you with something metal. So does the other half. So I'll go to sleep. You better leave in the morning' – (BC: p. 184). Hugo's words have made an impact though, because in the 2004 storyline, told from the point of view of Holly's husband Ed Brubeck, it becomes clear she works in a homeless shelter to help the other 'Jacko's' of the world (BC: p. 211).¹⁴⁶

Hugo has a deep fear of growing old which is expressed through for example the telescope metaphor as mentioned in the introduction ('When I'm looking at Brigadier Reginald Philby [a demented senior], I'm looking down time's telescope at myself', (BC : p. 123). Already as a fifteen-year-old, he quivers at the thought of one day looking in the mirror and seeing the reflection of his father.¹⁴⁷ He says that the elderly are guilty 'of proving to us that our wilful myopia about death is exactly that'. (BC: p. 119). Being at the prime of his life and the bloom of his youth, feeling 'intensely alive' (BC: p. 118), he wants to take his life and death into his own hands instead of having to turn into a 'veined, scrawny, dribbling...bone clock'. (BC: p. 516). He calls life 'a terminal illness' (BC: p. 167) and mortality a 'terrible disease' of which the Anchorites have cured him:

¹⁴⁵ Herman and Verveack 2009: p. 60.

¹⁴⁶ For Hugo's full motivational speech, please consult BC: p. 183-184.

¹⁴⁷ Mitchell 2006: p. 81-2.

'There's a lot of it about. The young hold out for a time, but eventually even the hardest patient gets reduced to a desiccated embryo, a Strudlebug ... a veined, scrawny, dribbling ... bone clock, whose face betrays how very, very little time they have left.' (BC: p. 516)

His lust for life is admirable but prevents him from maintaining meaningful relationships – until he meets Holly. Although boasting about the uselessness of love to his friends, claiming he is immune to it (BC: p. 147) and saying 'Who is spared love, is spared grief' (BC: p. 153) Hugo irrevocably falls in love with Holly after their brief meeting. He admires her for being 'utterly herself', which is something he cannot say for himself having created an alter ego called 'Marcus Anyder' to cover up for his dubious, 'morally repugnant' deeds, among them stealing the valuable stamp collection of the demented senior Brigadier Philby and luring a fellow student so deeply into debt that he drove himself off a cliff. (BC: 181 and p. 190-1. This is but the beginning of a livelong of sinning – he later does not shed from committing animacide and all other kinds of shady practices the Anchorites are guilty of.

The true impact of his love for Holly becomes visible in 'A Horologist's Labyrinth', thirty-three years later, after the War has been fought and Hugo and Marinus are the last men standing. They are in the titular 'Labyrinth' and their only escape route is a kind of one-man portal back to the 'real world' in the form of a material apple. Both Marinus and Hugo offer the apple to Holly. They know that means they will have to die, which really means dying in this case, without reincarnating into a new body (BC: p. 521). In the short but honest conversation they share, Hugo asks Marinus if Holly has loved him too:

'Hugo Lamb coughs. "Did she love me too, Marinus? I don't mean after she found out about my little ... dalliance with a paranormal cult that scarred her family and attempted to animacide her brother. I mean, that night. In Switzerland. When we were young. Properly young. When Holly and I were snowed in."' (BC: p. 534).

Up to this point, the reader knows only that Hugo has joined the Carnivores through a short appearance he makes in Crispin Hershey's storyline in 2019 (BC: p. 365). In the words of Marinus he has thought 'about nothing but himself for so many years'. (BC: p. 534). However, in opening up about loving Holly to Marinus, Hugo appears to have a good side. Although he tries very hard to not admit he has a conscience (before the War is about to commence, he texts Marinus that 'consciences are for bone clocks' (BC: 437), his moral compass has not completely lost its direction.

Ethics of possibility revisited

On a metalevel, Hugo is unknowingly a strong advocator of the ethics of possibility. In chapter one is shown that characters like Marinus can improve their ethical standards by making the 'right' choices when they are at a crossroads in life; in the case of more ambiguous characters like Hugo we see that humans do not always make the right choices (although he will have the chance to modify his former choice by eventually saving Holly during the War).

When residing in Switzerland over the Christmas Holidays at the turn of 1991, Hugo feels that his own life too, is about to start over. He comments on his impending metamorphosis himself in a conversation with Holly: 'I know my life's changing. Metamorphosis. That's the best word I've got.' (BC: p. 176) He can feel 'a compass-needle turning' (BC: p. 171), which in a moral light could be interpreted as his conscience's needle. At the turning point of his life, Hugo has mere minutes to decide to join the Carnivores or to have a (possible) future with Holly. He realises that 'Today is the day I either change my life or I don't.' (BC p. 187). When he is being 'groomed' by Anchorites Elijah D'Arnoq and Immaculée Constatin, he asks D'Arnoq for an outline of his new life. D'Arnoq says it does not work like that, because true metamorphosis 'doesn't come with flowcharts' and that he needs to take a leap of faith to initiate the change (BC: p. 192). Hugo's curiosity eventually wins, choosing for the Faustian pact of the Anchorites, because, in his own words, 'What's Faust without his pact? Nothing. No one. We'd never have hear of him.' (BC: p. 193). But also his soberness, a character trait he shares with Holly, leads him to disregard a possible future with her because his former mistakes will haunt him *and* Holly in the future, which leads him to come to the conclusion that 'Such narrative arcs make good movies but shitty existences.' (BC: p. 192).

Within the Mitchellian universe, Lamb is not unique in getting offered a chance to turn one's life into a 180-degree direction. The life choices they are faced with are quite radical in comparison with real life. The character Zachry from the postapocalyptic storyline 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' in *CA*, forming its narrative centrepiece, is a good counterexample of Hugo, steering his life into another ethical direction.¹⁴⁸ In the story, the 'Prescients' come to visit Valleymen like Zachry on a structural basis to 'barter' with them and to learn about their way of living. (*CA*: p. 259 and 261). One of them is Meronym, who is Zachry's antipole, expressed through quotes like 'Meronym knows a lot 'bout Smart an' life but Valleymen know more 'bout death (*CA*: p. 288) Meronym wants to emphasise their similarities instead, saying 'savages an' Civilizeds ain't devvied by tribes or b'liefs or mountain rages nay, ev'ry human is both, yay.' (*CA*: p. 319). They go on a quest together, which is too complex to explain in detail here. To summarise the most relevant part, Zachry gets the chance to save Meronym, after having memorised an 'augurin' or premonition from his local abbess. He gets the choice to follow three simple steps; 'Hands are burnin', let that rope be not cut. Two: Enemy's sleeping, let his throat be not slit. Three: Bronze is burnin', let that bridge be not crossed.' (*CA*: p. 258). Consciously acting upon these steps, they will alter the path of his life more than once (*ibidem*). It is important to note that Meronym first appears to be Zachry's antagonist but eventually turns out to be his helper, which means Zachry

¹⁴⁸ Mitchell 2004: p. 247-325. In the chapter 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' in which Zachry is focalising, 'Oxford English' does not exist anymore and is replaced with a new kind of dialect which Mitchell has created, reflecting the Valleymen's lawless, anarchy-driven society.

has to act on good faith. By acting virtuously and saving Meronym, he moves one level up on the ethical scale, leaving Hugo behind him.

Also in *BC* 'ethical choice' is a recurrent *topos*.¹⁴⁹ Compare with Holly saying to her husband Ed: 'You're at a crossroads, Brubeck. Choose.' (*BC*: p. 211) or Marinus saying at the ending of the same novel 'Only thirty minutes to settle Lorelei's future, Holly.' (*BC*: p. 608). O'Donnell points towards the importance of ethical choice in *A Temporary Future*, saying the novel *BC* can be seen to some degree as an allegory of the drama of moral choice:

"The plot elements of Part Two underscore the ethical choice faces by several characters in the novel, but most starkly by Hugo Lamb: to engage in acts of self-preservation that inevitably come at the expense of others or to sacrifice the good of the one for the good of the indeterminate many."¹⁵⁰

O'Donnell obviously does not have a high opinion on Hugo Lamb, saying that there are moments when he has glimpses into another future that involve love and commitment but even love 'has the ring of domination when he compares love to lust [...]'.¹⁵¹ Whether or not his final act of selflessness for Holly makes him likeable, sympathetic or even ethically more virtuous, it is clear that good and evil cannot simply be 'paired off in Manichaen binaries embroiled in an eternal battle for domination of the human world'.¹⁵² Saints and devils do not exist – although Marinus comes pretty close to the former in Mitchellian universe. Being human means being forever-evolving, not being a fixed essence. Hugo is aware of that too, saying 'What is possible *is malleable*' (*BC*: p. 200). Being malleable means having a choice, no matter if the change will lead to become morally 'better' or 'worse'. It is the *choice* to decide to act and do the 'right' thing in every singular occasion that matters. This is how the characters are distinguishable: in their selflessness, their conscious choice to do something good. As Russian writer and historian Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn aptly pointed out in *The Gulag Archipelago*:

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them' [...] 'But gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, not between classes, nor between political parties either – but *right through every human heart*.' [italics added]¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ The term 'topos' or 'literary motive' is introduced by German literary scholar and philologist Ernst Robert Curtius in his notorious work *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948). The term is derived from classical rhetoric, in which 'koinoi topoi' are fixed twists or clichés in orations and other works of literature. (Claes 2011 : p. 115).

¹⁵⁰ O'Donnell 2015: p. 165-66.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² O'Donnell 2015: p. 167. Manichaeism was a major religious movement that was founded by the Iranian prophet Mani in the Sasanian Empire and was once the state religion of Persia. For Manicheans, all that was good was a gift from the Lord of Light and all that was evil was an affliction visited by the Lord of Darkness. Their religion describes the struggle between this good, spiritual world and the evil, material one. This dualism extended to cosmology and ethics. (Tardieu 2008).

¹⁵³ Solzhenitsyn 1973: p. 168.

This is why a clear distinction between 'good' and 'bad' people does not exist, because good and evil exist in every person. It all depends on how an individual acts upon the choices that are presented to him, as Solzhenitsyn believes: 'One and the same human being is, at various ages, under various circumstances a totally different human being. At times he is close to being a devil, at times to sainthood.'¹⁵⁴ Mitchell is obviously inspired by Solzhenitsyn in his ethical vision, when this statement is compared with that of Hugo Lamb: 'We're all of us different things at different times. A plonker now, something nobler at other time's. Don't you agree?' (*BC*: p. 153). Meronym's comparison between 'Civilizeds' and 'Valleymen', arguing every human has the potency to be both, strongly resembles that of Solzhenitsyn and Lamb. In the aforementioned metaphor (*BC*: p. 123), Hugo sees his future self through time's telescope, which will lead to the choice of the present self, 'to modify their actions in response, in a relationship that fosters a heightened awareness of personal responsibility and agency', according to Harris Birtill.¹⁵⁵ In *JZ* Captain John Penhaligon unknowingly contributes to this ethical vision that relies heavily on the relation between time and an ethics of possibility, fittingly remarking: *He sense the gaze*, the captain guesses, *of his future self, watching him.*' (*JZ*: p. 416).

The importance of time is yet again apparent in both *CA* and *BC*: when Zachry visits his Abbess, she tells him the importance of their material clock, saying that if time dies, civilisation will go extinct too: 'Civ'lize needs time, an' if we let this clock die, time'll die too, an' then how can we bring back the Civ'lized Days as it was b'fore the Fall?' (*CA*: p. 257). The moment Hugo notices he has left his watch in Holly's bathroom after freshly being groomed by the Anchorites, with the Abbess's words in mind, this is a clear indication of Hugo heading straight down the moral hill (*BC*: p. 197). Hugo has not just lost sense of time, but also his sense of what is morally the right thing to do. O'Donnell likes to see moral action in a larger chain of mutual responsibility, claiming that 'All human actions are interconnected, each leading to each other'.¹⁵⁶ Human beings are connected in their pursuit of love and beauty.¹⁵⁷ To prove the importance of this ethics of love through interconnectedness of people it is wise to return to Holly once again.

2.3. Holly and her family: an ethics of love

Whereas Hugo's biggest wish would be a button to pause time – and press it right at the moment when he is with Holly in Switzerland in 1992, when they were 'properly young' (*BC*: p. 187 and p. 534), Holly already then realises that 'You only value something if you know it'll end' (*BC*: p. 187). From both these

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁵ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 165.

¹⁵⁶ O'Donnell 2015: p. 168.

¹⁵⁷ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 177.

quotes speak a realisation of temporality, of leading a mortal life that will one day come to an end. Also at a later stage in her life, Holly remains bothered with her mortal, temporal state. Returning to the 'Bedbugs' example as mentioned earlier in this chapter and at the beginning of the introduction, it becomes evident that Holly's light-hearted way of wishing her daughter Aoife goodnight has been passed on to her granddaughter Lorelei:

'Sleep tight, Gran. Don't let the bedbugs bite.' Dad used to say that to me, I used to say it to Aoife, Aoife passed it on to Lorelei, and now Lorelei says it back to me. We sort of live on, as long as there are people to live on in. (BC: p. 542).

After this touching conversation they share, in retrospect being one of their last, she reflects upon her imminent death and consoles herself with the thought that 'We sort of live on, as long as there are people to live on in'. Once these micro-stories have made an intergenerational impact, they can be given on to one's descendants thus having the ability to surpass mortal life's. Marinus and Holly come together in being able to live on, whether it is through literal reincarnation or stories like these. Holly's life is exemplary in this sense. She will still exist in the stories of her family and more broadly in the 'human' narrative. Figure 3 that shows the interconnected circles of life is yet again an apt visualisation.¹⁵⁸

In the previous chapters and paragraphs, immortality has been regarded from a supernatural or celestial perspective, discussing Marinus who is gifted with it (or cursed, in his own opinion) and Hugo, who obtains it immorally. For a mere 'bone clock' like Holly, her body being a ticking clock that can stop at any given moment, this does not suffice. Another way to partly surpass or 'extend' her life beyond a singular lifetime is via stories, thus attaining great importance to narratives in general. On a narratological level, this also goes for non-fictional figures like Holly, as proven by the aforementioned 'Bedbugs' example.¹⁵⁹ Her 'Bedbug' story has come back to her in a circular movement. The feeling this tiny narrative triggers is first and foremost love; the most important ethical feeling according to Nussbaum.¹⁶⁰ Holly feels love for her family members that cannot be with her anymore (her father, her husband Ed, Aoife) but also for the ones that can (Lorelei). Precisely the circularity of these kind of emotionally charged stories can make the acceptance of her death easier.

It should not come as a surprise that Nussbaum goes one step further in proving the importance of stories, arguing that literature can compensate for the inevitable shortness of our lifespan. She says that a singular individual has never lived enough (inspired by Aristotle) and that our experiences are 'too

¹⁵⁸ Figure 3 is discussed in the paragraph on Holly's character development and flourishing of virtues (2.1) and can be found in the Appendix.

¹⁵⁹ Phelan 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Nussbaum 1990: p. 141-2 and Hale 2009: p. 892.

confined and too parochial'.¹⁶¹ Literature, in all its shapes and sizes, can subsequently extend our life and our experience.¹⁶²

On a larger scale, when moving to the outer circle of Figure 3, it can be argued that humanity's sole chance for survival will be through narratives because 'we have a hand in delivering and passing on narratives that offer alternatives to those fatal territorial stories of empire and supremacy, narcissistic agency, and xenophobic fear that tenaciously remain', O'Donnell argues.¹⁶³ A similar view is expressed by Phelan, who proclaims that living and telling are inextricably connected, either in 'real life' or in fiction.¹⁶⁴ Close-reading his novels, it becomes evident that Mitchell agrees with such a poetics. In *Ghostwritten* is said that 'The human world is made of stories, not people'.¹⁶⁵

On an intradiegetic level, there are other characters besides Holly who make sense of their experiences making use of the stories that they tell about them, even fictionalising them in some cases. According to futurist Chanka Mui we need stories to crystallise and internalise abstract plans and concepts.¹⁶⁶ Protagonist Eiji Miyake in *NumberNineDream* is the most prominent example in this regard, using fantasies as a coping mechanism to deal with the traumatic event of losing his twin sister at the age of ten.¹⁶⁷ Eiji tries to structure his reality using fantasies, daydreams, snippets of films, games and other artforms.¹⁶⁸ Whilst reading a diary written by his great-uncle Subaru during World War II, his great-uncle remarks: 'This journal is my solace, my meaning, and my body'.¹⁶⁹ The journal is more than just a remnant of the past: it *becomes* Subaru, being all that is left of him.

Thematically, love, death and narratives/storytelling become inextricably intertwined within the ethics of Mitchell's fiction. Death can even be seen as a condition for love, as Holly realises 'You only value something if you know it will end.' O'Donnell agrees with this vision, because 'Holly's life leads to the survival of a generation to follow, and the tentative possibility of a future – perhaps a better one – beyond herself'.¹⁷⁰ Novelist and romancier Paul Claes acknowledges the interconnectedness of love and death in *Echo's Echo's*.¹⁷¹ He traces back the topos of 'the kiss of the soul' calling it one of the most persistent literary motives of Western love literature.¹⁷² He speaks of the parallel between bodily and spiritual love.¹⁷³ In the Greek and Roman period the soul was seen as 'breath' or 'wind', leaving the body

¹⁶¹ Nussbaum 1990: p. 47.

¹⁶² Nussbaum 1990: p. 43.

¹⁶³ O'Donnell 2015 : p. 21.

¹⁶⁴ Phelan 2005: p. IX.

¹⁶⁵ Mitchell 1999: p. 386.

¹⁶⁶ Parker 2018: p. 17.

¹⁶⁷ Mitchell 2014 (2001).

¹⁶⁸ O'Donnell 2015: p. 169.

¹⁶⁹ Mitchell 2014 (2001): p. 275-6.

¹⁷⁰ O'Donnell 2015: p. 180.

¹⁷¹ Claes 2011: p. 113-131.

¹⁷² Claes 2011: p. 115.

¹⁷³ Claes 2011: p. 114.

after death (think of the expression 'breathe one's last').¹⁷⁴ Wind, breath and soul are interlinked. The Latin word 'anima', meaning soul, is akin to the Greek 'anemos'; wind. This would not have been relevant, if it were not for the fact that from ancient times people believed that through physical expressions of love, like a kiss, the soul can be transferred onto loved ones.¹⁷⁵ Consider the following Latin poem by an unknown writer that stems from the second century A.D.:

'Als de zoen iets langer had geduurd, dan was mijn ziel, door liefdesgloed gedreven, van mij naar hem overgelopen en was een wonder gebeurd: ik zou zelf dood zijn, maar in mijn jongen voortleven!'¹⁷⁶

With this in mind, Holly's Bedbugs-story becomes the more meaningful. In this case, love is given not just via the physical expression of the kiss, but on a more abstract, spiritual level can also be expressed and carried on through *narratives*. Holly will live on telling and retelling stories, whether they are micro-stories like wishing her children goodnight in a certain manner or more on a macro- (and meta) scale like the stories that will be told about her after her human life. Which stories these will be, are yet to be disclosed after her real death.¹⁷⁷

This is why the continuance of bloodline is such an important issue and further adds to the ethics of love that is expressed in *BC* and other novels of Mitchell. Returning to Holly's legacy and the repeated emphasis on the importance of her family, it appears that the preservation of her bloodline can prevent her from 'die-dying' and thus giving her semi-immortality – at least as long as her bloodline does not die out too (the middle circle in Figure 3). In *NumberNineDream*, Eiji's grandfather Takara underlines the importance of family, telling him: 'Flesh and blood matter, Miyake! Blood-lines are the stuff of life. Of identity! Knowing who you are from is a requisite of self-knowledge'.¹⁷⁸ Text-eternally, the continuing bloodline theme is also visible through bringing back descendants of earlier characters.¹⁷⁹ The most obvious example is the Penhaligon clan, who historically speaking make a first appearance in *JZ* (*JZ*: p. 349) at the early beginning of the nineteenth century in the person of Captain John Penhaligon, whose great-great-grandson Johnny Penhaligon later returns as a friend of Hugo Lamb (*BC*: p. 100).¹⁸⁰ Penhaligon, captain of the British ship *HMS Phoebus*, is a minor character in *JZ* but gains importance near the end of the novel deciding to spare Jacob's life when he gets the chance to blow Dejima to

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁵ Claes 2011: p. 115.

¹⁷⁶ 'If the kiss had lasted a little longer, then my soul, driven by the glow of love, had transferred from me to him and a miracle would have occurred: I, myself, would have been dead, but I would have lived on through my boy!' (Ibidem, own translation).

¹⁷⁷ Let us hope that Holly's descendants Lorelei and Rafiq will focalise chapters in the future, given the reader into a sneak peek of their faith and to which degree Holly has survived in them.

¹⁷⁸ Mitchell 2014 (2001): p. 274.

¹⁷⁹ Phelan 2014.

¹⁸⁰ With the importance of the continuing bloodline in mind, it makes it extra tragic that Johnny Penhaligon commits suicide at a young age, driving his Aston Martin of a cliff (*BC*: p. 151).

pieces, the island being assaulted by the English. When seeing Jacob from afar he reminds him too much of his own son which makes him to cease fire: 'De Zoet removes his hat; his hair is copper, untamable, bedraggled... and Penhaligon sees Tristram, his beautiful, one-and-only, red haired son, waiting for death...' (JZ: p. 465). Through Penhaligon's small deed of kindness (an ethics of possibility is yet again apparent!) triggered by the love for his son, Jacob is given the opportunity to live out the rest of his life, even reaching the titular 'autumn' of his life.¹⁸¹

In *BC* a comparable situation occurs. In the deplorable situation of Holly and her grandchildren, Marinus's aforementioned *deus ex machina* appearance becomes a matter of life and death, Marinus playing his pious part in preserving Holly's (b) cycle of life (see Figure 3), collecting her grandchildren so they will have a chance to live a pre-Endarkenment life. Considering all the trouble Marinus has been through, Holly must mean something to Marinus. Mo Muntervary makes a fair point: why *does* he especially return for Holly? Is it just to repay his debts? Probably not – through this selfless deed speaks an ethics of survival, surely, but most importantly he too, shows an ethics of love.¹⁸² Instead of being carried away by his almost invincible state of being, getting 'stoned on the opiates of wealth and power' (*BC*: p. 438), he wants to emphasise the similarities rather than the differences between 'bone clocks' and Atemporals, saying to Holly: 'What you feel for Aoife, that unhesitating willingness to rush into a burning building, I've felt that, too. I've gone into burning buildings, as well.'" (*BC*: p. 501). How different both characters might be, including their ethical vision on life and death, this is where Marinus and Holly meet: in their pursuit of love, letting their virtues flourish, in doing 'the right thing'.

¹⁸¹ The last pages of the short final chapter of *JZ*, fittingly called 'The Last Pages', summarises the rest of Jacob's life after leaving Dejima (*JZ*: p. 503-510). Jacob returns to Holland and lives out the rest of his rather uneventful life, while his heart still lies in Japan. Looking backward, Jacob sees 'pages from the months and the years ahead.' (*JZ*: p. 508). It is only a small step from Jacob's reflection on his past *and* future life, leaning heavily on fiction as a way of structuring life, to Hugo Lamb's telescope metaphor.

¹⁸² see *SH* p. 230 as quoted in the last chapter for more prove of Marinus's ethics of love and survival.

Conclusion

When returning to writer and literary critic Ursula Le Guin, who said that death is at the heart of *The Bone Clocks* and hidden under all the ‘klaxons and saxophones and Irish fiddles’ lies a ‘haunting silence at the centre’, it can by now be said with full confidence that this is not the case.¹⁸³ *BC* is not pessimistic to the bone, as Le Guin tends to believe. It paints a brighter picture of life. It is an ode to life and love in that life, not to death. Although an ethics of survival is represented by a selected group of characters, above all Mitchell’s fiction in general and *BC* in particular express an optimistic vision through its ethics of possibility and ethics of love.¹⁸⁴ The feelings Mitchell’s fiction triggers are of more positive nature, emphasising virtues like selflessness, open-mindedness and kindness. In the will of a plethora of characters to change the world, lies its optimism.¹⁸⁵ In being ‘finely aware and richly responsible’ as Nussbaum calls it, human virtues can flourish. Human cruelty can be infinite; but ‘Human generosity can be boundless’ as Marinus pleads. (*BC*: p. 468).

Ultimately, it is not the point if there is a ‘cure’ for mortality or if it can be conquered. It is not about living a prolonged, even immortal life. It is not about survival either, as Harris-Birtill might suggest.¹⁸⁶ In the end, it is about leading a good life, only then, ‘a single life can turn out to matter’ as Kathryn Schulz persuasively opines:

“I was undone by the ending of *The Bone Clocks*, but I was also—to borrow the word for how Horologists reconstruct themselves when they are born anew—re-raveled by the one note of grace Mitchell bestows on the failing world. It is the grace of connection: a single life that turned out to matter, a single act, a debt repaid, a promise kept, a flame lit by another flame.”¹⁸⁷

Virtues as generosity and selflessness might be represented by certain characters in particular, like Marinus and Holly, but are not fixed and can thrive in everyone.¹⁸⁸ Being good is a choice. According to Parker, in regard to *BC* referring to the larger-scale eco-crisis, ‘Mitchell suggests that we may already be too late to fix the problems.’¹⁸⁹ However, it is not what he is suggesting at all. On the contrary, as proven in this thesis his fiction constantly reminds us of an ethics of possibility, as expressed in his novels countless of times, and that an individual always has the chance to change for the better. These are not

¹⁸³ Parker 2018: p. 16 and Knepper 2016: p. 97.

¹⁸⁴ This theme is also apparent in *CA*. The dire future might be averted if, like the first narrator Adam Ewing, ‘humanity begins to act now’. (Parker 2018 p. 16).

¹⁸⁵ Nussbaum 1985: p. 516-529.

¹⁸⁶ Harris-Birtill 2014: p. 134.

¹⁸⁷ Schulz 2014.

¹⁸⁸ It is remarkable though that a character like Marinus consequently represents the same virtues and appears more and more in Mitchell’s more recent fiction. Is he ever-returning? And why? Is it poetical justice? Is he truly the personification of a virtue, namely conscience, like Jiminy Cricket? It is probably for the reader to decide how to decipher and interpret Marinus’s (meta)-role.

¹⁸⁹ Parker 2018: p. 11.

grand gestures and mostly just matter on a personal scale (see Figure 2 and the circles of life with Holly in the middle). Remember Zachry, who decides to save Meronym's life after hearing a vague premonition in *CA*, John Penhaligon choosing to spare Jacob's life in *JZ*, Adam Ewing joining the Abolitionist cause at the conclusion of *CA*, Hugo eventually choosing for Holly knowing he will never have a life with her in *BC*, Marinus crossing the Seven Seas to save children that are not even his 'own blood' (*BC*: p. 549). As Figure 3 has shown, through the interconnectedness circles of life, the behaviour of a single individual can cause a butterfly effect of positive change that can ultimately have great influence. Their small-scale deeds might just be a 'single drop in a limitless ocean', as Adam Ewing says (*CA*: p. 529). But then again, to quote Ewing: 'What is an ocean but a multitude of drops?' (*Ibidem*).¹⁹⁰

Position in the academic field and further research

The importance of reading Mitchell's fiction non-linearly cannot be emphasized enough – scholars keep misinterpreting his work adopting a linear gaze. This brings them to think his fiction is ultimately pessimistic because of the 'grim future' he has envisioned for mankind.¹⁹¹ Luckily cyclical temporality has already been brought to the attention numerous of times in research on Mitchell's novels and can already count on broad coverage by for example Paul Harris, Patrick O'Donnell, Berthold Schoene and Childs & Green.¹⁹² Rose Harris-Birtill's suggestion of the 'spiralling gaze' could be taken into consideration, although there are other non-linear ways of looking possible, like the Buddhist view on circular time and its cycle of birth and rebirth.¹⁹³

In this thesis it has been an explicit choice to focus on (reappearing) characters within Mitchell's oeuvre, but not everyone considers characters worthy of academic attention. In O'Donnell and Harris's conversation on *SH*, O'Donnell says that to play "Where's Waldo?" with the novels largely misses the point because doing so overdetermines characters as the primal element of his fiction'.¹⁹⁴ 'The repeated identities of his novels', he remarks, 'are simply one set of elements among many that circulate molecularly through his fiction: his game is terrain, not identity.'¹⁹⁵ I agree with O'Donnell that it is unwise to focus on individual characters, when they are seen as 'Waldos' or Easter Eggs. In that case indeed, they are nothing more than flat characters; fixed identities that cannot develop. In this thesis it has been shown that recurrent characters are more than that – they are in constant development, make conscious choices and always stand in direct connection with others, albeit on micro- or macroscale.

¹⁹⁰ Inspired by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's 'One drop of truth can outweigh an ocean of lies'.

¹⁹¹ Le Guins argument in her review on *BC* does not have to be repeated anymore I presume. The linear gaze is also visible in Parker 2018 (mainly in her discussion on the apocalyptic ecocrisis in the chapter 'Sheep's Head' in *BC* on p. 16-18).

¹⁹² Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 167-8.

¹⁹³ Harris-Birtill 2017: p. 168.

¹⁹⁴ O'Donnell and Harris 2016.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

They should be seen within the complex, ever-evolving, rhizome-like Mitchellian universe. As for denying the importance of characters for being just one set of elements among many others, he is guilty of choosing another singular set of elements as the primal element, namely terrain. Although it can be argued to what extent the voice of the writer should be incorporated, Mitchell does have a point saying that 'time can be seen as the primal element of the narrative, along with character, plot, style, structure and theme, and as such can alter the nature of the narrative itself.'¹⁹⁶ In this thesis, temporality has been discussed thoroughly, but always as interrelated with characters, ethics and (narratological) structural elements. Unfortunately, in this thesis it could not be achieved to further investigate Mitchell's fiction within these interrelated sets of elements with for example O'Donnell's suggestion of terrain or *locale*, but it is warmly recommended for further research.

On the importance of ethics in literature, Nussbaum can be an academic guide. Her belief that literature can serve as a moral agent and literature shows us the sheer difficulty of moral choice has already been discussed in the introduction and throughout this thesis. Furthermore however, literature gives 'ethical relevance' to 'particularity and the epistemological value of feeling'.¹⁹⁷ The novel communicates its meaning via emotion and gains ethical value of certain types of emotion – for example through the feeling of possibility.¹⁹⁸ Again Nussbaum is not alone in her claim. It is the essential task of literature to combine 'clear realistic vision with compassion', agrees Iris Murdoch, thus providing a model for ethical cultivation.¹⁹⁹ Literature can play a role as a 'repository of values and an agent of moral edification'.²⁰⁰ Jeffrey Karnicky takes a broader perspective on ethics and literature and follows Deleuze, Guattari and Maurice Blanchot in the claim that the reading of a text can engage with and produce material effects in the 'real' world.²⁰¹ Karnicky's argument brings us back to the section 'Literary Ethics' of the introduction, in which Nussbaum *et al.* complain that literature and philosophy live in 'splendid isolation' of each other which makes it impossible for both disciplines to engage into meaningful discussion.²⁰² More directly related to the ethics of Mitchell's fiction, Nick Bentley *et al.* argue in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, that it is able to propose 'alternative sets of ethical positions appropriate to the new millennium' through his art.²⁰³ Mitchell's fiction attempts to 'arrive at some defined sense of human values that tie the periods and forms together'.²⁰⁴ Contemporary

¹⁹⁶ Harris 2015 (c): p. 10.

¹⁹⁷ Nussbaum 1990: p. 175.

¹⁹⁸ Hale 2009: p. 898.

¹⁹⁹ Elliot 2018: p. 245.

²⁰⁰ Zuern 2009: p. 1.

²⁰¹ Karnicky 2007: p. 15.

²⁰² Skilleas 2001: p. 136 and Elliot 2018 p. 245 and 251.

²⁰³ Bentley *et al.* 2015: p. 17.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem.*

novelists like Mitchell, Bentley argues, have reintroduced a set of grounded ethical positions.²⁰⁵ Bentley's inclusion of the larger British (post)post-modern context is something this thesis lacks. Approaching Mitchell's fiction from a perspective that stands in direct relation with the (socio-cultural) context could be suggested for further research, for example in Mitchell's use of postmodern- as well as metamodern registers and his engagement with eco-political issues like global warming and neo-capitalism.²⁰⁶

Although believing Nussbaum is generally a bit too extreme in her opinions on the value of literature on the larger societal scale, it would be interesting indeed to see more academics trying to bridge the gap between philosophy and literature. Mitchell's fiction can for example be explored in centralising themes (mortality, temporality, freedom of choice), ethics ('Good' and 'Evil') or can be analysed by using notions or concepts of philosophers like Nussbaum, Friedrich Nietzsche and Adam Smith.²⁰⁷ Infinitely interesting and surprisingly uncovered, is the relation between Mitchell's fiction and Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory on the hermeneutic circle, as mentioned shortly in the introduction. His theories combine storytelling, (the unreliability of) perception, the merging of horizons, temporality, the importance of tradition and the circle-figure as suggested in Figure 3. According to Gadamer, literary meaning is never-ending ('divine effluence').²⁰⁸ The research possibilities in the hermeneutic field in relation to Mitchell's fiction are as endless as the interpretations of his fiction itself.

Another future direction for this research could be to incorporate the voice of the reader. Almost all narratologists that are occupied with ethics of reading, agree with narratologist Wayne Booth saying that 'systematic correlations between a given technique, open or closed, and a given ethical (or for that matter aesthetic) effect, are, I now think, always suspect'.²⁰⁹ What underlines Booth's quote, is that the reader cannot be forced into a certain reading of a text, albeit moralistic or ethical. He will often not come to a definite conclusion if for example the narrator is trustworthy and if he is ethically right or wrong. If the reader wants to come to a unambiguous conclusion, he will eventually have to activate his own ethical values and desires.²¹⁰ Evidently, at least one readerly voice has been implicitly mentioned. The writer of this text has indeed activated her own ethical values and desires, pointing out specific

²⁰⁵ Regrettably, what Bentley precisely means with this 'set of grounded ethical positions' he does not make clear (Bentley *et al.* 2015: p. 17).

²⁰⁶ For metamodern theory, see *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* edited by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen. They also mention Mitchell in relation to reconstructing depth, discussing fantastic stories in which the potential to reconstruct communication and meaning 'is gauged in spite of a persistent postmodernist scepticism towards the possibility of representation.' (Vermeulen 2017: p. 153).

²⁰⁷ For example with regard to Friedrich Nietzsche his *On the Genealogy of Morality* can be included into the discussion (Transl. Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 (1887)).

²⁰⁸ Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney 2008 (2006): p. 271.

²⁰⁹ Booth 1988: p. 75.

²¹⁰ Herman and Vervaeck 2009: p. 131 and Miller 1987: p. 38-9

virtues and ethical issues that have been of personal value. But to ensure the ethical character of Mitchell's oeuvre, it is imperative that other readerly gazes will be deployed and incorporated in not just the popular but also the academic debate.

This thesis has attempted to build a bridge between literature and philosophy by incorporating ethics and philosophical issues like temporality and mortality. However, it has been difficult combining theories from a wide range of (sub-)disciplines between ethics and narratology studies. There was no core text to begin with; the information that was necessary in answering the research question was scattered over a wide range of articles, books and theoretical traditions. It has been hard to make choices and narrow down the focus. I am very grateful for Phelan James's overview on Narrative Ethics, that upon discovery felt like a personal holy grail for finally finding academic relevance in focusing on the ethical choices of characters rather than the ethical effects on the reader, opting for doing more research in this field (from 'the inside out' instead of 'from the outside in').²¹¹ Like Holly's life, it has been a long and winding road, albeit very instructive.

Of course a different approach could have been chosen in this thesis, through for example concentrating on certain novels, *locales*, art forms like music or visual arts, intertextuality or philosophical issues. These equally interesting research subjects would have exposed other dimensions of Mitchell's texts that possibly would have been enough food for thought to deliver theses that would match or extend this one in size and depth. But to conclude with the words of one of Mitchell's characters one last time, to choose for such an approach and not my own would have been 'a possible future, auditioned by the present, but rejected with other dreams'.²¹²

²¹¹ Phelan 2014.

²¹² Eiji in *NumberNineDream*. (Mitchell 2014 (2001): p. 310).

Bibliography

Primary sources

- Mitchell, David. *The Bone Clocks*. London: Sceptre, 2014.
- Mitchell, David. *Cloud Atlas*. London: Sceptre, 2004.
- Mitchell, David. *Slade House*. London: Sceptre, 2015.
- Mitchell, David. *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. New York: Random House, 2010.

Secondary sources

- Bentley, Nick, Nick Hubble, Leigh Wilson. (ed). *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- Bloomfield, Paul. *The Virtue of Happiness: A Theory of the Good Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Booth, Wayne. *The Company We Keep*. Berkeley: California University, 1988.
- Brillenburg Wurth, Kiene, Rigney, Ann (red). *Het leven van teksten*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008 (2006).
- *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*. October 2018, Vol. 6, Issue 3: 'A special issue on the works of David Mitchell'. Via: <https://c21.openlibhums.org/issue/39/info/>.
 - o Harris-Birtill, Rose. 'Introducing the David Mitchell Special Edition of *C21 Literature*'.
 - o Parker, J.A. 'Mind the gap(s): Holly Sykes's Life, the 'Invisible War, and the History of the Future in *The Bone Clocks*'.
 - o Schmitz, Eva Maria. "'No Man is an Island'": Tracing Functions of Insular Landscapes in David Mitchell's Fiction'.
 - o Shaw, Kristian. 'Some magic is normality': Fantastical Cosmopolitanism in David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks*'.
- Childs, Peter and Green, James. 'David Mitchell'. In: *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels*. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013: p. 127-158.
- Childs, Peter and Green, James. 'The Novels in Nine Parts': p. 25-48. In: Dillon, Sarah (ed). *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*. Canterbury: Glyphi Limited, 2011. Via: <https://books.google.nl/books?isbn=1780240031>.
- Claes, Paul. 'De zoen van de ziel'. In: *Echo's Echo's: De kunst van de allusie*. Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2011: p. 113-131.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone, 1988.
- Elliott, Jay R. 'Virtue Ethics and Literary Imagination'. In: *Philosophy and Literature*. Vol. 42, No. 1 (April 2018): p. 244-256.
- Hale, Dorothy J. 'Aesthetics and the New Ethics. Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century'. In: *PMLA*, Vol. 124, No. 3 (May 2009): p. 896-905.
- Harris-Birtill, Rose. 'David Mitchell: The Bone Clocks'. Via: http://www.academia.edu/8156124/David_Mitchell_The_Bone_Clocks (2014): p. 131-134. (6 February 2019).
- Harris-Birtill, Rose. "'Looking down time's telescope at myself': reincarnation and global futures in David Mitchell's fictional worlds.' In: *KronoScope: Journal for the Study of Time*. Vol 17, No. 2 (2017): p. 163-181.

- Herman, Luc; Vervaeck, Bart. *Vertelduivels: Handboek Verhaalanalyse*. Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2009 (2001).
 - o 'Het structuralisme' : p. 47-95.
 - o 'Narratologie en ideologie: Ethiek' : p. 122-133.
- Huber, Irmtraud. *Literature After Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Karnicky, Jeffrey. *Contemporary Fiction and the Ethics of Modern Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Knepper, Wendy. 'Toward a Theory of Experimental World Epic: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*' *A Review of International English Literature*, Volume 47, April 2016: p. 93-126.
- Mason, Wyatt. 'David Mitchell, the Experimentalist'. (25 June 2010) Via: <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/27/magazine/27mitchell-t.html> (5 March 2018).
- Meister, Jan Christoph. 'Narratology'. In: Hühn, Peter *et al.* (eds.): *the living handbook of narratology* (2014). Via: <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/48.html> (1 March 2019).
- Miller, J. Hillis. *The Ethics of Reading*. New York: Columbia University, 1987.
- Mitchell, David. *Black Swan Green*. London: Sceptre, 2006.
- Mitchell, David. *Ghostwritten*. London: Sceptre, 1999.
- Mitchell, David. *Number9Dream*. London: Sceptre, 2014 (2001).
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature'. In: *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol 82, No. 10 (October 1985): p. 516-529.
- O'Donnell, Patrick. *A Temporary Future: The Fiction of David Mitchell*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
 - o 'Introduction: Many Worlds, Real Time': p. 1-21.
 - o 'Time Travels: *Cloud Atlas*': p. 68-102.
 - o 'Minor Histories: *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*': p. 123-154.
 - o 'A Secret War: *The Bone Clocks*': p. 155-181.
- O'Donnell, Patrick and Harris, Paul. *Slade House in Review(s)*. January 25 2016. Via: <https://uwpress.wisc.edu/blog/?p=691> (27 February 2018).
- Phelan, James. *Living to Tell About it: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Phelan, James. *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996.
- Phelan, James. 'Narrative Ethics'. In: Hühn, Peter *et al.* (eds.): *the living handbook of narratology* (2014). Via: <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/108.html> (19 February 2019).
- 'The Philosophy of *Cloud Atlas*: How Beauty Will Save the World' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwLP62fL83k>. 14 February 2018 (2 February 2019).
- Roosenberg, Alyssa. 'In *The Bone Clocks*, David Mitchell asks what makes a life good. Via: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2014/11/13/in-the-bone-clocks-david-mitchell-asks-what-makes-a-life-good/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c733ba49d878 (17 February 2019).
- Schoene, Berthold. '*Tour du Monde*: David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* and the Cosmopolitan Imagination.' In: *College Literature*. Volume 37, No. 4 (Fall 2010): p. 42-60.
- Schoene, Berthold. *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

- Schulz, Kathryn. 'Boundaries Are Conventions. And *The Bone Clocks* Author David Mitchell Transcends Them All.' In: *Vulture*. New York Magazine, 25 August 2014. Via: <https://www.vulture.com/2014/08/david-mitchell-interview-bone-clocks-cloud-atlas.html> (24 January 2019).
- Skilleås, Martin Ole. *Philosophy and Literature: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.
- Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1973: Vol. 1. Via: <https://archive.org/details/TheGulagArchipelago-Threevolumes/page/n2>.
- *SubStance*. Volume 44, Number 1, 2015 (Issue 136): 'David Mitchell in the Labyrinth of Time'
 - o Harris, Paul. A (a). 'David Mitchell's Fractal Imagination: *The Bone Clocks*': p. 148-153.
 - o Harris, Paul. A (b). 'Introduction: David Mitchell in the Labyrinth of Time': p. 3-7.
 - o Harris, Paul A (c). 'David Mitchell in the Laboratory of Time: An Interview with the Author': p. 8-17.
 - o Larsonneur, Claire. 'Revisiting Dejima (Japan): From Recollections to Fiction in David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010)': p. 136-147.
- Tardieu, Michel. *Manichaeism*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Walton, David. 'Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari.' In: *Doing Cultural Theory*. London: SAGE, 2012: p. 287-289.
- Zuern, John. 'Seminar in Literary Criticism Ethics and Contemporary Fiction.' Via: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~zuern/classes/syllabi/727-2009-zuern.pdf> (13 February 2019).

Other sources

- Murren, Neal. 'The Bone Clocks Endpapers' (Image collage on title page) Via: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/b/va-illustration-awards-2015/published/book-cover-illustrations/bone-clocks-david-mitchell> 2014 (1 March 2019).

Appendix

List of abbreviations

CA: *Cloud Atlas* (2004)

JZ: *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010)

BC: *The Bone Clocks* (2014)

SH: *Slade House* (2015)

Figure 1: 'Crowd Atlas'

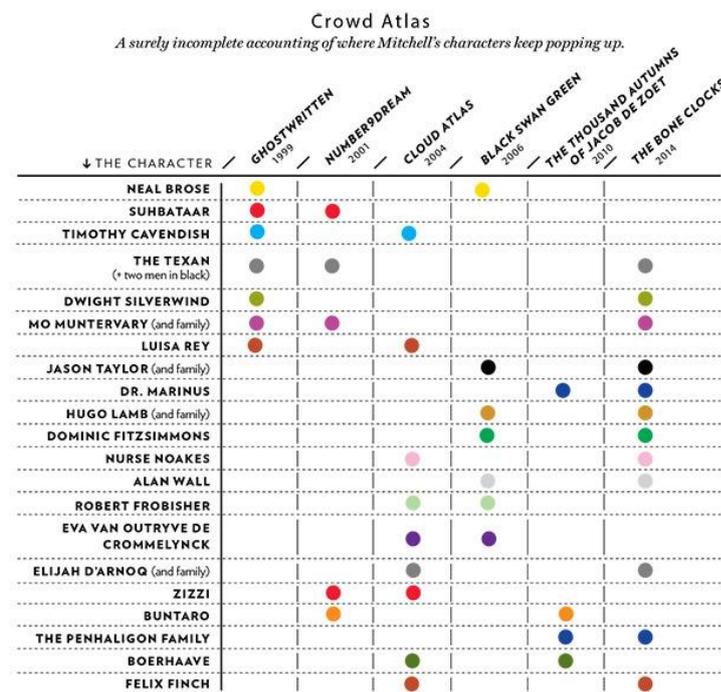


Figure 1: Schulz' overview of some of the recurrent characters in Mitchell's oeuvre minus Slade House

Figure 2: The virtues and vices within the oeuvre of Mitchell

Unethical behaviour	Ethical behaviour
Selfishness	Selflessness
Dishonesty	Integrity
Egocentrism, greed	Generosity, kindness, altruism
Predacity	Equality
Denial of death	Acceptance of death
Prejudiced	Open-minded
Wilful ignorance	Being cognisant, aware

Figure 3: Circles of life

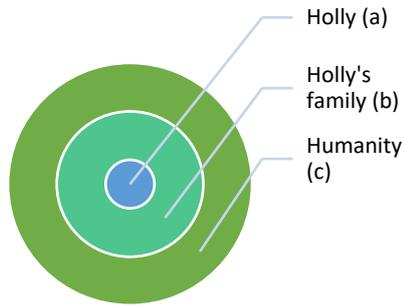
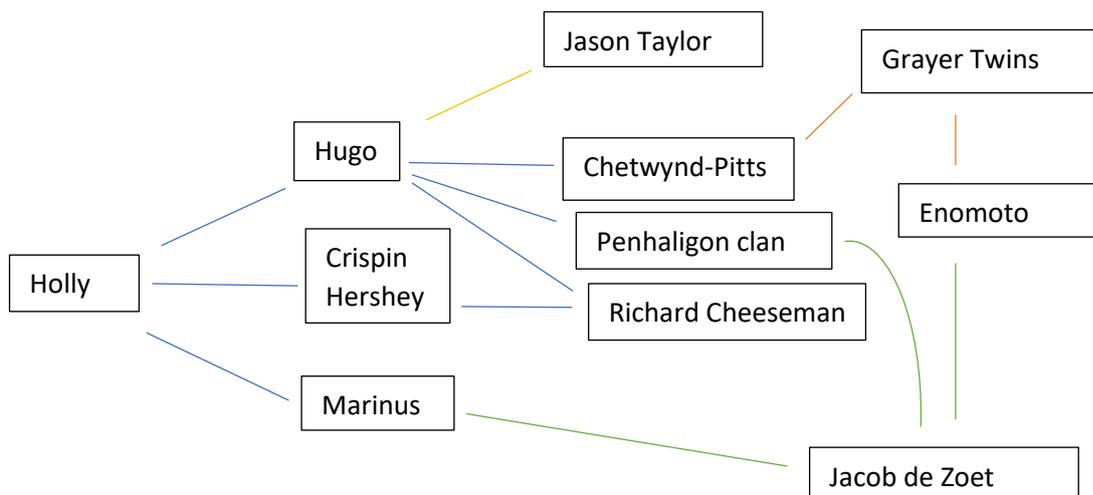


Figure 3: The three interconnected circles of life, with Holly at the core

Figure 4: Holly within the Mitchellian rhizome

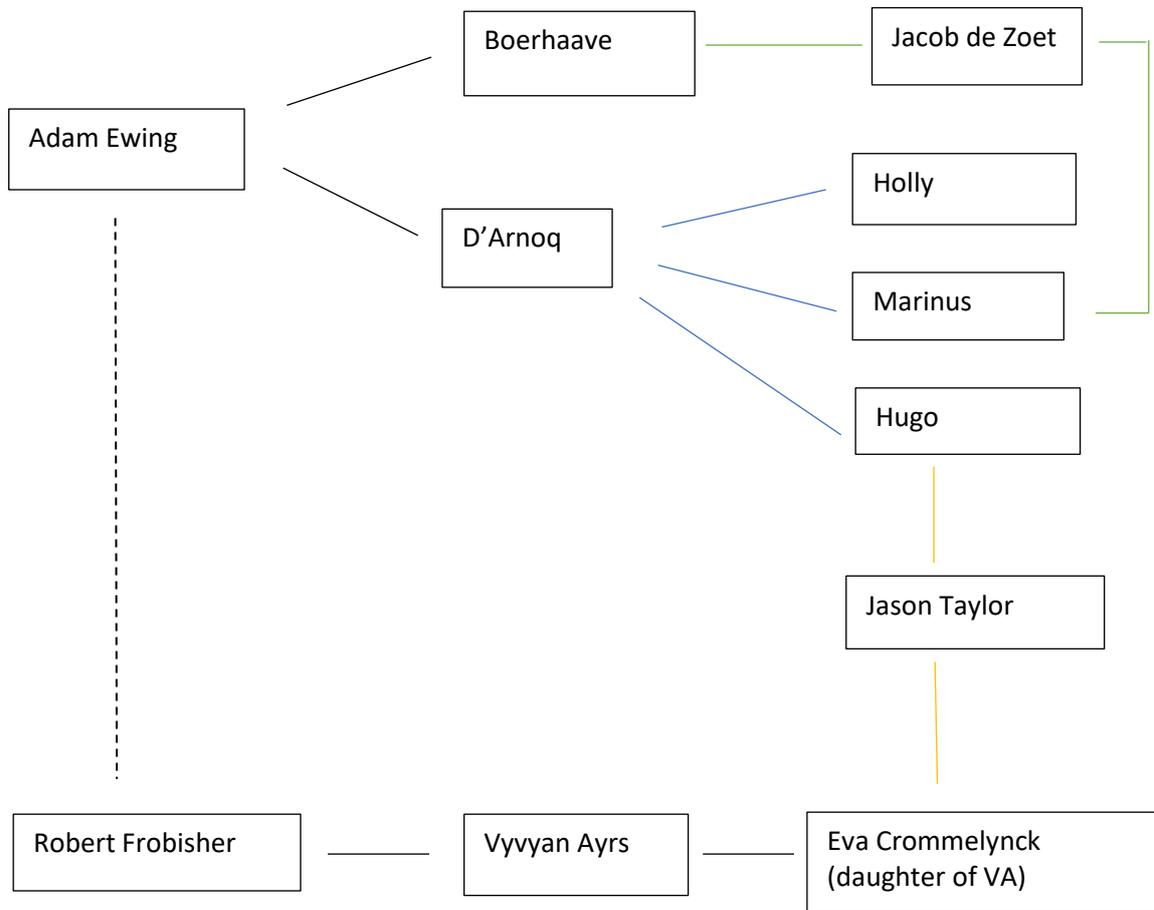
N.B: for the sake of clear overview, only non-family members are taken into account
Only the most relevant, directly interconnected characters for this thesis specifically are mentioned



Most important connection in the novel...:

- *The Bone Clocks*
- *Black Swan Green*
- *Jacob de Zoet*
- *Slade House*

Figure 5: Another example of a Mitchellian rhizome



Most important connection in the novel...:

- *Cloud Atlas*
- *The Bone Clocks*
- *Jacob de Zoet*
- *Black Swan Green*
- - - *Cloud Atlas (loosley connected)*