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Book Review: Wendy Knepper and Courtney Hopf, (Eds). *David Mitchell: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). ISBN 9781474262101, 232 pages, hbk £75.00

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Keywords: Ecocriticism; Disability Studies; Trauma Studies; Contemporary Fiction; Literary Criticism; David Mitchell



This book is part of a series of 'Contemporary Critical Perspectives' and focuses on the author David Mitchell by bringing together scholars who approach his novels from a variety of contemporary critical perspectives. A major selling point of the book is that it contains an interview with the author himself which the editors have cleverly positioned at the end of the work. Thereby this retains the loose chronological structure of Mitchell's publications throughout his body of work, complementing the idea proposed by Mitchell that his oeuvre together constitutes one story, timeline and universe which he refers to as the 'Über-book' or the 'biblioverse.'

The collection opens with a thorough but concise timeline and introduction to Mitchell, his oeuvre, the literary universe he has created and its reception, signposting those who may not be Mitchell experts towards the pertinent information a new inquisitive reader would relish, such as his 2015 submission to the Future Library Project in Norway, 'From Me Flows What You Call Time', which will be printed on paper made from Norwegian trees in 2114. The Introduction establishes a helpful structure of clear headings that continues throughout the collection ensuring the work is accessible to academics and casual readers. Each chapter begins with a summary that aids the reader in identifying the direction of the piece and if it is relevant to their area of interest. This is extremely helpful in a collection of essays about an author who has written such diverse subject matter, and offers perspectives from which to approach Mitchell's work critically. It is this diversity which makes this collection a valuable companion for studying Mitchell's novels, but it also transcends his oeuvre and contributes to contemporary perspectives in literary criticism, trauma, disability studies, ecocriticism and how to construct and build a self-contained literary universe. For example, in the second chapter 'Questing for the post-postmodern: David Mitchell's *number9dream*', Nick Bentley examines Mitchell's second novel as a quest narrative in terms of content and form. This approach demonstrates the multiple layers to Mitchell's work as Bentley navigates the novel as a Bildungsroman narrative following the protagonist Eiji on his search for his father, whilst arguing Mitchell has moved past the postmodern of the late twentieth century and into the post-postmodern. Relevant, accessible and contemporary, Bentley engages with Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker regarding their definitions of metamodernism. This highlights how Mitchell's novels are involved in shaping twenty-first century literary criticism and establishing a narrative form which searches for meaning in a culturally different world to that of the twentieth century.

Mitchell's most renowned novel, *Cloud Atlas* (2004), is the focus of two chapters with different critical approaches which again both touch on the narrative and the

form of the book, demonstrating the multiple layers to Mitchell's writing once more. In the third chapter Martin Paul Eve examines science and technology in the novel, with a focus on Derrida's reading of the *pharmakon*. The chapter begins by highlighting the irony of utilising technology as if the reader chooses to engage with *Cloud Atlas* on a device such as a Kindle or an iPad they will have a different experience from a reader with the material book, as Mitchell employs page layout to present his narrative. Eve proceeds to outline the technology which appears in each chapter of the book identifying medicine, communication, nuclear power and synthetic beings as especially relevant and discusses these with regards to imperialism, human history and as both cure and disease. Jason Howard Mezey approaches *Cloud Atlas* as containing six stories of transhistorical trauma narratives focusing within his chapter on the story of Adam Ewing. Mezey states that for Mitchell, 'trauma is an aspect of human experience that spans continents and centuries' establishing a global connection which transcends the novel's narrative and structure (70). The form is once again significant to the discussion as Mezey highlights that Mitchell utilises the structure of interrupted narratives to mirror the delays in processing which are commonly associated with traumatic memory.

Additionally, such a disturbance within the narrative is highlighted by Courtney Hopf when discussing *Black Swan Green* (2006) from the perspective of disability studies. Here, Hopf draws out disability at the personal level and how it effects individual identity, language and power. This approach is relatively new in literary criticism, and skilfully demonstrates how an author is able to translate a disability such as speech disfluency on the page through interrupting the narrative by including the character's thought process within their speech via parentheses. The use of disability studies theory, critical approach, along with two chapters which address the environmental crisis and the Anthropocene, cement Mitchell's novels as sites of contemporary critical analysis which inform, engage and transform the literary landscape, both in form and content as the twenty-first century demands a new novel structure to reflect threshold events such as the environmental crisis.

The collection ends with the interview between Mitchell and Hopf and it covers a lot of ground from Mitchell's influences, self-biographical inclusions, the idea of a literary universe, technology and Twitter. The interview is a welcome addition as Mitchell is still producing and expanding his 'biblioverse.' and engaging with the form and content explored within the various chapters therefore it projects as honest, critical and human.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

