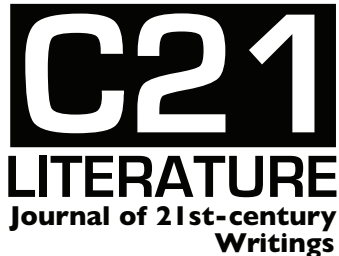




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Article

How to Cite: Larsonneur, C., 2018. "Oblique Translations in David Mitchell's Works." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 6(3): 10, pp. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.53>

Published: 01 October 2018

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, which is a journal of the *Open Library of Humanities*.

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ARTICLE

Oblique Translations in David Mitchell's Works

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Translation crops up in David Mitchell's work both as a fictional theme, for instance in *Black Swan Green* (2006) and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), and as a personal practice when Mitchell and his wife Keiko Yoshida translated two non-fiction works by a young Japanese boy with non-verbal autism: *The Reason I Jump* (2013) and *Fall Down Seven Times, Get up Eight* (2017). Interestingly, these four books are all related to the genre of autobiography, and three of them focus on Japan. Drawing from an investigation into the specificity of the Japanese tradition of translation and into theories of translation as intertextual and multi-temporal, we will start by exploring the notions of relay and voice in Mitchell's use of translation. To further investigate the particular nature of the association of translation and autobiography in Mitchell's work, we will discuss the concept of devolved testimony developed by French historian Emmanuel Bouju and that of the 'born-translated novel' by Rebecca Walkowitz. We will finally contend that the notion of "oblique writing", defined as the practice of rewriting or writing over a lost voice from a lateral perspective, captures the spirit of these works, enabling him to navigate both issues of power play and the delicate relation between intimacy and distance.

Keywords: translation; autobiography; voice; Japan; oblique; relay; Mitchell

David Mitchell's 'house of fiction' features writers of all sorts: there are diarists (Jason in *Black Swan Green* (2006), Adam Ewing in *Cloud Atlas* (2004)), archivists (*Cloud Atlas*), scholars (Marinus in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), Meronym in *Cloud Atlas*, Mo Muntervary in *Cloud Atlas* and *The Bone Clocks* (2014)), journalists (Luisa Rey in *Cloud Atlas*), novelists (Crispin Hershey in *The Bone Clocks*), and clerks and copyists (Frobisher in *Cloud Atlas* and de Zoet in *The Thousand Autumns*). Such a thorough exploration also includes translators. For instance, the assignment Jason receives from Eva Crommelynck to translate the first chapter of

Le Grand Meaulnes (1913) corresponds to a key moment in his education (Mitchell 2006: 206). *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, however, is where translators are given pride of place. Since the only access that Westerners stranded on Dejima could have to Japan was through translators and interpreters, it stands to reason that translation should be featured in the novel. But Mitchell chose to give translation a central role, involving all of the novel's lead characters: Uzaemon works on Adam Smith and Abbot Ennemoto on Newton, Orito and Marinus use translations in their medical practice, and Jacob uses translation to decipher a crucial scroll. Beyond fiction, Mitchell also has first-hand experience of translation with *The Reason I Jump* (2013) and *Fall Down Seven Times, Get up Eight* (2017), two accounts of autism by Naoki Higashida which Mitchell translated with his wife Keiko Yoshida. This experience led him to coin the word 'texticators' in a 2017 article for *The Guardian*: 'I like to think the success of *The Reason I Jump* has encouraged a readership for other books by non-verbal textual communicators with autism – "texticators", since I'm in a word-coining mood' (Mitchell 2017).

What is the specificity of the translator in Mitchell's gallery of textual communicators, writers and proto-writers? How does Mitchell approach translation, both in fiction and in practice? Can the prism of translation shed some light on his writings and his relation to language? Mitchell's experience of translation is often focused on the Japanese language, both when translating Higashida or when turning Dejima into fiction: it thus rests upon first hand confrontation with language at its most foreign, for Japanese not only belongs to an entirely different family of languages than Western idioms, but is also associated with a culture that lived in isolation from 1641 to 1853 during the Edo period. And knowing Mitchell's meticulous dedication to research,¹ the theoretical and historical context of translation, poised between

¹ Mitchell travelled to Dejima in 1994 where he collected a wealth of material for his work, completing his research in the Netherlands (see the interview for *The Telegraph* (Mitchell 2010), and the acknowledgments section of *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*). This research spanned a broad spectrum of sources and included historical accounts, fiction and iconography: "Everything I could lay my hands on", in Mitchell's own words (private conversation at the David Mitchell Conference 2017, University of St Andrews).

Western and Eastern traditions, matters. We can also note that translation for Mitchell chimes with a circulation between languages and between literary genres: this essay will explore the connections between translation, fiction and autobiography through the notions of voice, relay and devolved narrative, following the analyses of the French theorists, Berman and Bouju. The notion of "oblique writing", defined as the practice of rewriting or writing over a lost voice from a lateral perspective, may capture well the spirit of what Mitchell undertook in the works discussed in this essay.

Between East and West: Different Contexts for Translation

The weird thing is doing the translation didn't feel like hours, not once I got going. *Bags* more interesting than *Youpla boum! Le français pour tous* (French method) Book 3 [...] I'd've liked to've asked Miss Wyche our French teacher to check my translation. But getting creep-stained as a model student in a subject as girly as French'd sink what's left of my middle-ranking status. Translating's half-poem and half-crossword and no doodle. Loads of words aren't actual words you can look up, but screws of grammar that hold the sentence together. It takes *yonks* to find out what they mean, though once you know them you know them. (Mitchell 2006: 206)

This enthusiastic account of the discovery of translation by Jason accurately sums the intellectual excitement felt by many translators. Deftly, in passing and in the words of a thirteen-year old, Mitchell touches upon a number of key issues in Translation Studies: theories about the nature of language, reflections upon the creative process and debates about the status of translators, as full authors or as linguistic underdogs. Comparing translation simultaneously to a poem and a crossword is an astute way of suggesting the inevitable struggle between leeway and constraint. Instead of opposing those two notions, Mitchell underlines their interplay: the poem, inherently creative, usually obeys a set of formal rules, while the crossword, though formally bound by the grid, calls for a creative approach in crafting the definitions.

It is also a very neat take on the core theoretical divide that has been fuelling debates on translation for centuries, between those in favour of fidelity to the source text and those that focus on the reader's experience in the target language. These two antagonistic schools of thought are usually represented on the one hand by the seventeenth century French tradition of *Les Belles Infidèles* (target-oriented, the poem) and on the other hand by the nineteenth century German preference for a scholarly, precise rendition as close to the original as possible (source-oriented, the crossword). As Salama-Carr notes:

The free dynamic translations known as *Les Belles Infidèles* aimed to provide target texts which are pleasant to read, and this continued to be a dominant feature of translation into French well into the eighteenth century. [...] One of the main figures to adopt this approach was Nicolas Perrot D'Ablancourt (1606–64), who adapted classical texts to current canons and genres to such an extent that some of his translations are considered travesties of their originals. He not only 'censored' these works in the course of translating them but also 'corrected' any factual errors he encountered and generally aimed to 'improve' on the source text whenever he deemed it necessary. (Salama-Carr 2009: 407)

Both schools of thought – source-text oriented and reader oriented – have, of course, co-existed in France and in Germany since the medieval age. But the crux of the matter lies in the perception of a hierarchy between languages and the power play that entails. The 1539 edit de Villers-Cotterêts in France placed French on an equal footing with Latin (a defiant gesture towards Rome) which paved the way for *Les Belles Infidèles*. The German tradition was also built as a gesture of emancipation but this time from the French tradition, coinciding with the emergence of their nation in the nineteenth century and the shaping of their own intellectual tradition (Kittel and Poltermann 2009: 415).

It is particularly illuminating to reread the negotiation scenes upon the arrival of the *Phoebus*² in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* in light of this debate.

² *Phoebus* is the name of the British ship commanded by Penhaligon. For this episode, Mitchell drew upon the real-life 1808 incident in which *HMS Phaeton* threatened Nagasaki and the Dutch representatives. In the wake of this attack, Japanese official interpreters were ordered to learn English and Russian in addition to Dutch.

The game is rigged, since one party, the Prussian Fisher, is an enemy of de Zoet, and the other party, British captain Penhaligon, speaks neither Dutch, nor Japanese nor German. The text also mentions French and Russian interests, which firmly anchors this narrative sequence in the colonial contest for power (Mitchell 2010: 385):

'Begin with the Dutch; do they, in principle, agree to co-operate?'

Hovell translates Fisher's reply as, 'Dejima is as good as ours'.

This 'as good as', thinks the Captain, *is the first sour note.*

'Do they recognise the legitimacy of the Kew Memorandum?'

The long reply makes Penhaligon wonder about Fisher's foundation stones.

(Mitchell 2010: 408)

Although Mitchell places the power play of languages in the limelight, emphasizing the violence and duplicity in the confrontation scenes (Larsonneur 2013: §4–5), he is also careful to show its more positive side as a vector of knowledge. In the opening scene of *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, Orito the midwife saves both baby and mother during a difficult birth only because she has had access to a Scottish treaty on obstetrics. Translation acts both as a potential pitfall and a life-saving tool.

If we turn to the Japanese tradition of translation, the same issues of power and knowledge arise, but in a different light. Since Japan was hermetically closed to strangers from 1641 to 1853,³ all translation activities centred around Dejima, an artificial island near Nagasaki where a trading post was established, and which acted as the sole contact point between Japan and the rest of the world. The one hundred or so translators (*tsūji*) were officials of the Japanese government and inherited their trade from their fathers. Some were bound to be faulty and sloppy translators, a

³ The period of closure (*sakoku* in Japanese) is usually defined as 1641–1853. The Portuguese and other European nations, with the exception of the Dutch, were banned from trading in 1639. The Dutch traders themselves, previously allowed on the mainland, were confined to Dejima from 1641 onwards. Increased pressure from the European and American powers led to the abandonment of that policy, usually symbolically represented by the arrival of Commodore Perry in July 1853, or by the Kanagawa Convention signed in 1854. See 'Dutch-Japanese Relations' on the *Netherlandsandyou.nl* website at <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/your-country-and-the-netherlands/japan/and-the-netherlands/dutch-japanese-relations>, accessed 24 January 2018.

fact that Mitchell exploited through the character of Sekita, an incompetent and ridiculous figure:

Sekita's ample rear juts over the bulwark. His scabbard catches in the ladder: his attendant earns a sharp slap for this mishap. Once the master and servant are safely seated, Vorstenbosch doffs his smart tricorne hat. 'A divine morning, Mr Sekita, is it not?'

'Ah.' Sekita nods without understanding. 'We Japanese, an island race...'

'Indeed, sir. Sea in all directions; deep blue expanses of it.'

Sekita recites another rote-learned sentence: 'Tall pines are deep roots.'

(Mitchell 2010: 18)

But others became scientists and scholars in the field of Rangaku or Dutch Studies, a shortcut name encompassing the study of Western science, through and beyond translation (Michel-Zaitis 2007; Jansen 1984; Low 1989; Macé 2016). Rangaku scholars mostly focused their efforts on medicine, physics and engineering, like Shizuki Tadao (1674–1728), who wrote nine books on the Dutch language, parts of which touch on translation issues, and who is widely regarded as the father of physics in Japan (Kondo & Wakabayashi 2009: 470). The exchanges between Orito, Marinus, de Zoet and Ogawa pay tribute to that rich tradition of coupling translation with scientific investigation (Mitchell 2010: 63). It resulted in a paradoxical situation (Larsonneur 2013: §4) since translations were fraught with errors due to the poor command of the language, but they also acted as triggers for scientific investigation and scholarly work. Expanding source texts and rewriting them to adapt them to Japanese realities became the norm, in scientific matters as well as for literary works. Kondo and Wakabayashi take the example of Aesop's fables, translated in 1593, or *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles, translated in 1870, showing that the source text would frequently be abridged, simplified and censored. It even became an explicit strategy:

Such writer/translators as Uchida Roan (1868–1929), Tsubouchi Shoyo, Hasegawa Futabatei and Mori Ogai advocated rewriting foreign works into natural Japanese. (Kondo & Wakabayashi 2009: 475)

Mitchell follows up on this Japanese tradition of adding onto the source text in the English edition of Higashida's *Fall Down 7 Times Get Up 8*, where the half-title page states: 'For their second time translating Naoki, Mitchell and Yoshida have worked with him directly to expand the Japanese version with new, original material including a fiction short story by Naoki'. This is further detailed in the *Note to the English edition* which specifies that some chapters were added from another book, others written in response to questions from the translators, others again revised and the sequencing of chapters changed. Expanding and adapting the original work by Higashida is not only in keeping with the Japanese custom of rewriting foreign texts, but also with the tradition of passing on and furthering knowledge through translation. In this particular instance, one should note that translation, beyond the text per se, relies on an active collaboration and prolonged exchanges with the author. Here, translation is not simply about transmitting a message, but also the opportunity to relay the voice of an individual.

Voice and Relay

Mitchell and Yoshida have been very careful to cast their translation as a relay for the personal voice of a fellow-writer: the subtitle of the English version of *The Reason I Jump* reads, 'One boy's voice from the silence of autism'. This is in keeping with the nature of the book, which is neither a scholarly contribution nor a memoir but rather a testimony in the form of a FAQ: each chapter provides a detailed and lengthy response to questions commonly asked by people without autism. In the preface, Naoki Higashida is presented as a student, an author, and a fellow writer, but never someone who is ill or a victim (2013: 12). Mitchell reminds the reader that Higashida is the author of poems, blogs, autobiographical notes, fairy tales and illustrated books, shifting the emphasis from the diagnosis of autism to Higashida's astounding achievement. He also situates Higashida's book within the rich body of works on autism, spanning a variety of genres such as self-help, academia, confessional memoir, and autobiography (2013: 6).

Mitchell's own experience as the parent of a boy with autism makes for a very strong personal tie (2013: 8): 'It felt as if, for the first time, our own son was talking to us about what was happening in his head, through Naoki's words.' Writing and

translating here provide a form of voice relay, particularly effective in this case since the publication of the English version spurred a spate of translations of Higashida's works into other languages. I would further argue that Higashida as a non-verbal communicator, Mitchell as a writer and a stammerer, and translators as per their trade, are all constantly grappling with linguistic challenges, though on different levels. Higashida describes the predicament of a non-verbal person very clearly:

But in our case, the words we want to say and the words we can say don't always match that well. Which is why our speech can sound a bit odd, I guess. When there's a gap between what I'm thinking and what I'm saying, it's because the words coming out of my mouth are the only ones I can access at that time. (2013: 33)

This description could very well apply to stammering, and is quite similar to Mitchell's description of this condition via the character of Jason in *Black Swan Green* (Mitchell 2006: 29): 'Jesus, I envy anyone who can say what they want at the same time as they think it, without needing to test it for stammer words.' In both descriptions of autism and stammer, the person's grasp of syntax and semantics is good, but they cannot access some words; Higashida's verbal struggles clearly resonate with Mitchell's own experience of stammering.

Writing, in this case through translation for Mitchell, serves thus as a substitute for a voice that strives to be heard. Naoki Higashida comments upon this at length in "Speech Bubbles" (Higashida 2017: 46–68). Mitchell and his wife also describe how translating Naoki's books helped them engage with their own son: 'We got craftier at discerning his unexpressed wishes rather than assuming his wishes were non-existent. We began speaking to him normally, rather than sticking to one-word sentences.' (Higashida 2017: xiii). This same theme of substituting a voice crops up more than once in Mitchell's fiction. In *The Bone Clocks*, Holly Sykes⁴ writes a book titled

⁴ Holly Sykes is the main character of *The Bone Clocks*, a novel which charts her progression from her teens to old age. Her life is punctuated by encounters with the parallel universe of Atemporals, immortals who can practice a form of telepathy.

The Radio People as a way of dealing with the loss of her brother and of relaying the voices of the Atemporals that she alone can hear. Jason in *Black Swan Green* writes poems to bypass the stammer that he refers to as his 'hangman' (2006: 3).⁵ In *Cloud Atlas*, the Archivist records Sonmi's story in an 'orison', which will then be passed on from one generation to the next until no one can recognize the language she speaks (2004: 189).

Most of these examples are linked to the genres of biography and autobiography, in which the notions of voice and relay are crucial. A sophisticated example of this can be found in the relationship between Jacob de Zoet and his real-life model Hendrik Doeff, the Dutch commissioner in Dejima between 1799 and 1818. Doeff was also a lexicographer and poet, and he wrote *Recollections of Japan*, a mix of pamphlet, travel narrative and autobiography, first published in 1833 in Dutch and only translated into English in 2003 by Annick Doeff. Mitchell drew much of his inspiration from Doeff's memoirs, but instead of remaining close to the events depicted, he rearranged and rewrote the elements of Doeff's narrative (Larsonneur 2015: 138, 141). When Mitchell turned the largely unknown autobiography of Doeff into a biographical fiction, he relayed the lost voice of Doeff, but in a manner reminiscent of Japanese translations, by adding and omitting, rephrasing, repurposing and rearranging.

The process of writing over an autobiography, or relaying a voice, has much in common with the translation process, because in both cases the writer needs to address issues of authenticity and distance. The autobiographical theme is always transposed (Jason as an almost-double for Mitchell, de Zoet for Doeff), translated onto another plane (interviews recorded and archived) or handed over to another narrative voice. What I would like to call 'autobiofiction' involves a to-and-fro movement between memory and fiction, being close and striving for closure. In the 2010 interview by Adam Begley, Mitchell emphasizes that point: 'Arguably, the act of memory is an act of fiction— and much in the act of fiction draws on acts of memory.'

⁵ In the words of David Mitchell, *Black Swan Green* is 'a semi-autobiographical novel narrated by a stammering 13 year old' (Jason Taylor) ("Lost for words", *Prospect* magazine, 23 February 2011, Issue #180).

Despite the fact that Jason's and my own pubescent voices are close, his wasn't the easiest to crack...' To further understand autofiction, one could turn to the notion of devolved narrative (in French '*délégation de témoignage*'), which was coined by Emmanuel Bouju in his 2006 essay *La Transcription de l'histoire: essai sur le roman européen de la fin du XXe siècle* [*Transcribing History: European novels at the End of the 20th Century*]. It focuses on the transcription of history into fiction, analysing the works of Primo Levi, W.G. Sebald, and Patrick Modiano, among others. A large section of this book deals with the traumatic events of the twentieth century: World War Two, the Holocaust and the mass migration of refugees. How does literature relay the voices of those who have disappeared, or who are lost? Fiction is where, Bouju argues, voices can migrate from history and thus be retrieved: the narrators of such works are neither historians nor puppet-masters, but archivists and interpreters in the French meaning of the term – as one speaks of a performer's interpretation or the transcription of a musical score. Bouju's analysis of Sebald's *The Emigrants* (2006: 48) underlines the double level of enunciation at play:

The narrator collects and quotes the testimony of his character and the narrative's extraordinary texture proceeds from this original discourse, lost yet reproduced. This is the anchor from which stem the homogeneity and the variations of the narrative, its detours and its slow progression towards revelation.

Autofiction inhabits precisely that space, the locus of a lost yet reproduced discourse. It alternates between referentiality and creation, much like translation alternates between source and target, the crossword and the poem. Here again Bouju's analysis is illuminating: 'if testimonies are always devolved, the gap between past and present can be seen as a space that enables us to go back and figure out the meaning of disappearance' (2006: 26). That approach, which emphasizes the creative process of rewriting and offers an open view on history, is quite close to what Mitchell practices in his historical narratives, and in line with his fondness for recalling, relaying and repurposing various elements of his 'house of fiction'. It also echoes Jonathan Boulter's analysis of this subject in Mitchell's writing, which 'can only be

fully comprehended as an instantiation of various traces of incompatible, because traumatized, temporalities' (2015: 19). If we consider that writing can thus open up a space in history, it is therefore sensible to investigate the manner in which it does so more closely.

Oblique Writings

One of the first remarks to be made here is that Mitchell writes in English and only in English, with the rare exception of a quote. All the voices relayed are relayed into one language, even in the case of an international crew as in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*⁶ or in the case of Marinus, whose various reincarnations in *The Bone Clocks* would have him/her speak Chinese, Russian and Spanish. Chapters in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* are alternatively written focusing on the Dutch site of Dejima and on the Japanese mainland, yet all of the novel's content is given in English. This linguistic illusion could be compared to an optical trick played on the reader, one that deceives the senses into seeing something other than expected using slanting light and various convex or concave surfaces. Another interesting reading of this monolingual yet polyglot paradox is to be found in Rebecca Walkowitz's notion of a 'born-translated novel'. In her 2015 article, "English as a foreign Language: David Mitchell and The Born-Translated Novel", Walkowitz argues that Mitchell uses English as a foreign language; my contention would be that he rather uses English as a set of foreign languages, in the plural, as evidenced by the variants of English in *Cloud Atlas*, or the very specific idiom of teenagers in *Black Swan Green*. She also claims that his work seeks to be translated and deals with translation in an innovative way (2015: 30):

Mitchell's novels incorporate the history of translation in an unusual way: they narrate languages rather than describe them. His works rarely display multilingualism. Instead, they make English into a foreign language by emphasizing target rather than source, audiences rather than authors, and by attributing their own beginnings to prior editions and literary works in other languages.

⁶ There is a detailed analysis of the multilingual dimension of *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* in Walkowitz 2015: 39–45.

Her analysis of translation is therefore based on mediation's potential for creativity instead of copy ethics, which would bring us back to the debate between the French versus the German traditions of translation: 'the conceit of mediated *editions* rather than sourced *manuscripts* allows Mitchell to suggest that we are reading documents that have been translated in all sorts of ways'. (2015: 36).

The plurality of readings and writings that Walkowitz emphasises above is another characteristic feature of oblique discourse. Translation for instance entails a number of linguistic and cognitive operations that resembles those at work in biographies and autobiographies: compensation, transposition, equivalence, adaptation or reduction. There is some repetition and some repurposing, some remembering and some redacting, with the translator reproducing some elements and revealing others. This may explain why one source text can foster numerous translations and retranslations, and why the life of an individual may lend itself to various autobiographies and biographies. In addressing the original discourse, be it source text or first-hand testimony, and rewriting it through pastiche, adaptation or variation, autofiction is close to the hypertextual form of translation defined by Antoine Berman (1984: 33). He underlines that translation and retranslations amount to highlighting and rejuvenating the source (1984: 95); they also constitute a form of home coming or repatriation, a '*rapatriement*' (1984: 118).

In turn, this hypertextual quality and the to-and-fro movement of repatriation are quite consistent with another specificity of translation: the complex web of temporalities which is rather strikingly described by Sylvie Le Moel in the proceedings of the 2007 symposium on translation and history, edited by Henry (2008):

First, then, reflecting upon the distortions that occur between what we called the time of writing and the time of translation: different modalities of time, short term, long term, fanning out to include latency, oversight, resurgence, all that through which a text is being introduced, reintroduced, forgotten. It's there, in the locus of translation, that how we welcome, rebut or forgo what is foreign to us is revealed. (Henry 2008: 138).⁷

⁷ My translation. The original quotation reads: 'D'abord la réflexion sur les distorsions qui ont lieu entre ce que nous avons appelé le temps de l'écriture et le temps de la traduction, donc différents types de

If we follow the theoretical trails opened by Berman and Le Moel, a complex web of temporalities might be the third defining characteristic of oblique discourse. And this resonates deeply with Mitchell's own practice of fiction, especially if we consider the labyrinthine or fractal quality of his timelines, to take up the similes convincingly used by Paul Harris to describe temporality in Mitchell's work (2015: 11, 148) or 'the spiralling model of reincarnation time' discussed by Rose Harris-Birtill (2017: 174). The complexity of time relies on formal repetition and involution, as the simile suggests, but also on loss and incompleteness, as underlined by Jonathan Boulter. The historicity of the subject in Mitchell's work, according to Boulter, 'essentially figures the subject as partially present, coming into its pure possibility at some other time, as being fundamentally incomplete in its present time' (Boulter 2015: 19). This combination of historical depth, intertextual quality and incompleteness are what differentiate oblique discourse from lateral thinking. I took up that notion from José Saramago's remarkable *History of the Siege of Lisbon* (1989), in which a proofreader and his publisher decide, inspired by an 'oblique thought', to act upon an error in transcription and 'to bring the deviation into letter' by rewriting an historical essay with alternate facts (1989: 110). And it chimes with Walkowitz's analysis of the structure of *Ghost-written*: pointing out the tangential reappearance of characters from one chapter to another, she describes it as 'roughly chronological and obliquely contiguous', underlining the coincidence of a sense of accumulation and discrepancy (2015: 32).

To conclude, I would like to come back to *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* and its central mismatch of exchanges: the dual episodes of the letter and the scroll. Love-struck Jacob de Zoet hides a letter written in Dutch to Orito in a dictionary, which he then entrusts to Interpreter Uzaemon, who agrees to deliver it to her. But the letter is intercepted, and never reaches Orito. Months later, an apostate monk entrusts a scroll written in Japanese which reveals the evil doings of Abbot Ennemoto to an old woman, who then delivers it to Uzaemon. The latter, before embarking on a dangerous rescue mission, entrusts it to de Zoet who, upon hearing

temporalité, temps court, temps long, avec tous les phénomènes de latence, d'oubli, de résurgence, qui font qu'un texte est introduit, réintroduit, oublié, que c'est là, dans la traduction, que se manifeste l'accueil ou la résistance, ou l'absence, tout simplement par rapport à la réception de l'étranger'.

of Uzaemon's death, will endeavour to translate it into Dutch and expose the evil Abbot. This mirror game encapsulates much of what we see at play in oblique discourse: multiple relays, lost and stifled voices, indirect address, the arduous process of making sense of and having to write over what was lost and what was transmitted. I will contend that the Japanese tradition of translation, devolved narratives and autofiction, all partake of the aesthetics of oblique discourse as an intertextual, multi-temporal and illusionistic practice that Mitchell's works have honed into an art form.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Larsonneur, C., 2018. "Oblique Translations in David Mitchell's Works." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 6(3): 10, pp. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.53>

Published: 01 October 2018

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