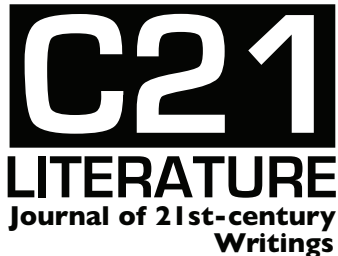




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## CREATIVE WRITING

# In the Labyrinth of Slow Time: "A Perturbation in the Deep Stream" and "A Perambulation in the Deep Stream"

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This work includes two texts on the themes of gardens and slow time presented in a reading with David Mitchell at the University of St Andrews 2017 conference on Mitchell. These works of 'truthful fiction' extend from an ongoing project, *The Petriverse of Pierre Jardin*. Written in dialogue with *The Bone Clocks* and featuring a collaboration with Mitchell, they explore the Cretan labyrinth as a cultural and topological motif and recount Jardin's designing a garden with a meditative labyrinth. The afterword situates the texts in a broader context of bringing the 'slow' movement to academic institutions and teaching Mitchell's work in connection with contemplative pedagogies.

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**Keywords:** David Mitchell; labyrinth; slow time; contemplative pedagogy

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## Introduction

The following texts were presented in a reading at the David Mitchell Conference 2017 at the University of St Andrews, loosely organized around the theme of 'slow time.' My readings of the creative pieces "A Perturbation in the Deep Stream" and "A Perambulation in the Deep Stream" were sandwiched between three stories read by David Mitchell.<sup>1</sup> This collaborative presentation reprised a joint reading that we had given the year before at "Time's Urgency," a conference convened by the International

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<sup>1</sup> A video recording of the full reading, "David Mitchell Conference 2017: David Mitchell & Prof. Paul Harris evening reading" can be found on *YouTube* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5L2BMBVhEos>, recorded on June 3, 2017 (accessed January 11, 2018).

Society for the Study of Time.<sup>2</sup> When David said that he would present three stories, I proposed that we do a tandem reading, specifying only that my texts would center on The Petriverse of Pierre Jardin, a rock garden in Long Beach, California. We were delighted to discover serendipitous resonances between our work, especially around gardens and slow time: David's short story "The Gardener" paired perfectly with my text about a rock gardener, and our texts featured characters and observers experiencing time dilation in different but comparable ways. Building on these themes, I wrote these tales of the "Deep Stream" in collaboration with and response to David's work, especially *The Bone Clocks*, for reasons that will become apparent in the Afterword. The interactive spirit of our reading was enhanced by David reading the Horologist's letter that he wrote at my invitation, and which is embedded in "A Perturbation in the Deep Stream."

### **A Perturbation in the Deep Stream**

*By Paul A. Harris and David Mitchell*

The Petriverse of Pierre Jardin is a xeriscape (a drought tolerant landscape) in the California Heights neighborhood of Long Beach, California, where many residents have taken advantage of a city program that subsidizes the conversion of grass lawns into drought tolerant landscapes. The garden's creation in 2009 is attributed to the aptly named Pierre Jardin. Jardin coined the neologism "Petriverse" to mean both 1) a world composed of rocks; e.g., a rock garden; 2) words composed of rocks; i.e., verse written with stone. The Petriverse's tagline, "a rock garden where nothing is written in stone", is literally and figuratively fitting (**Figure 1**).

As a world composed of rocks, The Petriverse is a garden featuring assembled arrays of rocks, stones balanced on bases, and naturally standing stone stacks. Stone displays integrate other collected materials, including tree stumps, different kinds of shells and various beachcombed treasures. Larger installations evoke the places rocks were collected, such as a rock-pile simulating a "tidal shelf," which combines Palos

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<sup>2</sup> "Time's Urgency," the University of Edinburgh, June 26–July 2, 2016. David Mitchell and Katie Paterson were among the featured presenters; an interview with them about their work in relation to time is forthcoming: Paul A. Harris, "Archivists of the Future: A Conversation with Katie Paterson and David Mitchell," in Carlos Montemayor and Robert Daniel, eds. *Time's Urgency*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.



**Figure 1:** Nothing is written in stone. Photo: Paul Harris.

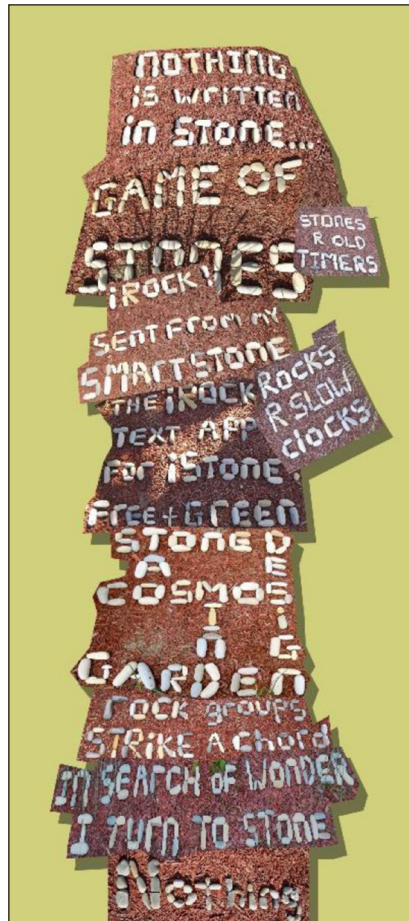


**Figure 2:** Rock climbers in tree. Photo: Paul Harris.

Verdes shore stones with coral trees and a dolphin skull. In a work called “CAUTION: Rock climbers in tree” (**Figure 2**), rocks were nestled in the forked branches of a large pine tree seven years ago; since then, they have sunk down as the wood grows up; the rocks can no longer be removed, and one is being cracked by the

tree's growth. This experiment comprises a dialogue between non-human durations: dendrochronological growth and geophysical erosion.

*Petriverse*, as words composed of rocks, refers to petric texts placed in a landscape-oriented page-place for perusal by a perambulatory public. Sometimes Petriverses pose as Paleolithic text messages sent using ecofriendly tools dating back to the Stone Age (“i rock! Sent from my smartstone”). Other texts, such as “I’m rocking now” composed in pebbles, resemble the tweets of Pierre Jardin describing what he is doing at a given moment. (Or is it a proclamation? “I’m rock-king now!”) In a multimedia composition made in collaboration with artist Richard Turner (Turner and Harris 2017: 3) (**Figure 3**), several lines of petriverse texts are assembled on a



**Figure 3:** Richard Turner and Paul Harris, “Petriverse Text Messages.” Photo: Richard Turner and Paul Harris.



two-metre-tall vinyl banner that presents them as a teetering stone stack, expressing the deliberate destabilizing of language that Jardin practices, and the incomplete nature of the Petriverse project. The range of rhetorical registers reflects the diverse audience the texts are addressing, including schoolchildren, teens, hipsters, and artists.

The bedrock composition laid in the nascent Petriverse was a Cretan labyrinth (see **Figure 4**). As a petroglyph found on ancient stones around the world, a kind of proto-writing, this symbol set the cornerstone for a petric poetics. Jardin made the labyrinth with white pebbles he collected on a beach in Crete after visiting Knossos, the archaeological site of King Minos's palace, a site associated with the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. Jardin set the labyrinth in a bed of blue aquarium gravel, evoking swirling motion in a pool, which Jardin conceptualized as a kind of maelstrom, a world-originating whirlpool, from which flowed a stream he named The River of Time. However, this aesthetically apposite action would prove to have unforeseen consequences.

The Petriverse is an Outsider Art Environment, a whimsical world expressing a personal vision, improvisationally created on home ground in spare time, never finished yet always complete. A sort of headstone announces the garden's name, with a rock in which a face vaguely reminiscent of Munch's *The Scream* can be



**Figure 4:** Cretan labyrinth, The Petriverse. Photo: Paul Harris.



**Figure 5:** Petriverse Headstone with rock showing face-like pattern. Photo: Paul Harris.

made out, serving as a portrait of the artist (see **Figure 5**). Large stone signs painted road-sign-yellow and mounted on car jacks at both sides of the garden demarcate the Petriverse as a “SLOW TIME ZONE.” A “Manifestone” broadcasts the garden’s ethos in a lighthearted haiku: “Stones are vital signs/of the earth’s living spirit/plus they’re pretty cool.” The garden has a dedicated blog simply called “The Petriverse of Pierre Jardin”;<sup>3</sup> a rock-face and speech balloon with a QR code labeled “read me” enables strollers to access the blog while at the site, and post comments. An aperiodic newsletter called *The Slow Times* occasionally appears in a document box like those used by agents selling homes.

It was the *Slow Times* headline article, “Temporal Anomalies Detected,” that first brought The Petriverse public notoriety.<sup>4</sup> The story reported speculations that the Petriverse was literally a “slow time zone,” causing distinct physical effects, as if space-time somehow stretched along the garden’s 44-foot stretch of sidewalk. Strange behaviors in observers, including consistent decreases in perambulatory velocity in adults, and contorted gesturing by children walking in slow motion, suggested

<sup>3</sup> See *The Petriverse of Pierre Jardin* website at <https://petriverse.wordpress.com>, accessed January 11, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The article can be accessed at <https://petriverse.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/slow-times-issue-2-page-001.jpg>, accessed January 11, 2018.

that the Petriverse was generating some sort of gravitational field. Physicists and psychologists from the International Society for the Study of Time theorized that aesthetically pleasing stone configurations can create quantum cerebral sinkholes that attract and bind bodies, eyes and brains, causing people to stop and stare. Further noting that temporal vortices may form when consciousness gets caught in circular reasoning, they suggested that petriverse text messages such as 'NOTHING IS NOTHING' were causing a condition known as "paradox vortex of the cerebral cortex" in passersby.

For Pierre Jardin, the article proved to be a real coup d'éclat, as it led to his first public work, commissioned by a philosopher aptly named Brad Stone at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in the US. Professor Stone enlisted Jardin to design a "slow time zone" on the LMU campus where faculty and students could engage in "slow time exercises."

Thrilled as he was to get this prestigious invitation, Pierre Jardin also suffered palpitations of trepidation for his reputation: what if the Petriverse wasn't an actual slow time zone? What if the temporal anomalies had a simple explanation, or, unthinkable, turned out to be a hoax? How could he replicate the Petriverse results, and what defined some activity as a 'slow time exercise'? He was rescued from his resignation by the arrival of a strange missive on parchment paper, under the letterhead of The Horological Society, Greenwich, founded 1690.

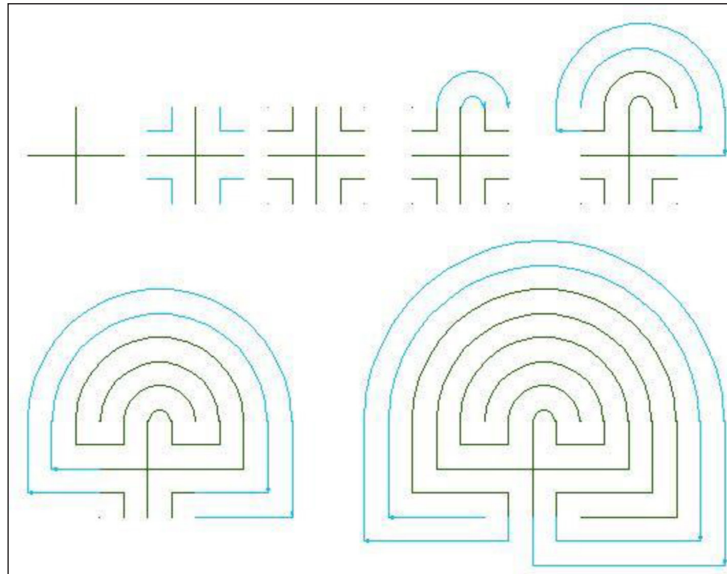
Dear, Esteemed, M. Jardin:

The Society trusts this missive finds both yourself and Luna, your feline companion, in salubrious fettle. I write to you, however, on a matter sombre and momentous; to wit, our Greenwich Academy has observed a Serious Perturbation amid the Deep Stream; a perturbation, moreover, that Psychosoteric Enquirers have followed to *your* illustrious garden's Cretan Labyrinth! Wherein tectonic currents, 'whipped into being' by rock cluster harmonies generate An Intense Temporal Voltage. For reasons as yet unknown, Cretan stone labyrinths accumulate a Maximum Charge, in essence becoming a Slow Time Machine whose emitted fluxions in the flow of geologic time prompt, ultimately, a catastrophe – the above-mentioned



Perturbation in the Deep Stream; or, as I explained it to our Chimney Sweep this very morning, “a Disturbance in the Force of Time.”

The Cretan labyrinth, as you are doubtless aware, is a species of “metalife” that has propagated itself across the globe over time immemorial, pre-dating the Fall of Nineveh, the Rise of Ur and the Levelling of Xiao Xi.<sup>5</sup> The labyrinth is disseminated by a simple seed (**Figure 6**). This embryonic motif, found on pottery shards in the Society's Collection, attracts an unsuspecting host and compels the agent, as iron filings are compelled by lodestone, to draw its pattern by means of a precise, plotted, unvarying process. Might the sensual pleasure experienced be derived from a resonance betwixt the left-to-right motions and the body's bilateral symmetry? Might these oscillations explain, in no small part, the sense of well-being that accompanies the act of walking a labyrinth? Whatever the truth of these



**Figure 6:** Seed and Cretan labyrinth. Photo: Nm5mini. “How to do labyrinth.” November 12, 2007. *Wikimedia Commons*. Public Domain. Accessed January 15, 2018. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:How\\_to\\_do\\_labyrinth.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:How_to_do_labyrinth.jpg).

<sup>5</sup> The account of the topological properties of the Cretan labyrinth is informed by Harris (2014).



turn. Centripetal and centrifugal motions engender 'Vortical Swirling'; in moving from outside entry point (0) through middle level (4) to the center (8), the path tantalizes walkers by going three levels away from the center, twice (between 0 and 4, we traverse levels 3-2-1, and between 4 and 8, we traverse levels 7-6-5). The numbers reveal why circuits never extinguish themselves by overlapping; for when two segments intersect, one is contained inside the other. Thus in the sequence, [3, 2] is inside [1, 4], and [7, 6] is inside [5, 8]. These sets of pairs sustain their polar balance by virtue of their sums remaining the same (5 and 13, respectively).

"Why", the Society anticipates your objection, "does the Cretan labyrinth perturb the Deep Stream?" Because, we conclude, Ariadne's Palindromic Thread suspends Time in a Reversible Course in which, to deploy a line by a Nameless Poet whose grasp on sanity is as dubious as his grasp of the English Tongue, "The Future looks a lot like the Past" (Mitchell 2014: 493). Monsieur Jardin: we beseech you to respect the Cretan Symbol's singular powers of Slow Time, and to deploy its Circuitous Energies only when the Breath of the Shaded Way is on your Neck and its Blade at your Throat!

Your Obedient Servant, etcetera,  
Lachim DiVeldt

Even though a lot of this letter was Greek to Pierre Jardin—especially the maths—it sprang him into action. After packing up the Cretan pebbles and scattering them in the Pacific Ocean, he drove straight to the Loyola Marymount campus and looked for a suitable site. Jardin was immediately taken with "the bluff," a stretch of campus with panoramic views of Santa Monica Bay, the Los Angeles basin, and surrounding hills and mountains, including the Hollywood sign. He obtained permission to design a garden in an unused section of it, and set to work.

Determined to intensify the garden's slow time field at every turn, Jardin formed the labyrinth with aluminum bender board that curves space-time, and used time-retardant decomposed granite to make the paths. Jardin engraved the benches



**Figure 8:** Consecration of labyrinth garden, Loyola Marymount University. Photo: Paul Harris.

around the labyrinth with gnarly turns of phrase designed to induce cerebral perplexity in slow-time exercisers: KNOW TIME LIKE THE PRESENT, SUSPEND YOUR TIME HERE WISELY, and THE CALL OF THE BLUFF LIES WITHIN. The Garden Of Slow Time was consecrated on December 9<sup>th</sup> 2016 in a ceremony where Professor Stone read “An Epistle to the Future” (**Figure 8**). The garden was blessed by Father Randy Roche, a Jesuit priest and spiritual director, and Dwight Tribble, a jazz singer and prophet.<sup>6</sup>

Looking down on the ceremony from a rooftop perch, Pierre Jardin felt at peace. He had put to rest the Perturbation in the Deep Stream, and was guardedly optimistic that walking the newly minted labyrinth would prove to be a trip to the Slow Time Zone.

## **A Perambulation in the Deep Stream**

*Paul A. Harris*

The reading of this text at the David Mitchell Conference 2017 was synchronized with a video showing feet walking the labyrinth in The Garden of Slow Time at LMU. The intent was to integrate text and image in an experimental simulation of Pierre

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<sup>6</sup> See “Introducing the Bellarmine Forum Labyrinth” at <http://bellarminenews.lmu.edu/introducing-the-bellarmino-forum-labyrinth/>, accessed January 11, 2018.

Jardin's contemplative experience of slow time in the labyrinth; the text's seven sections mimic the path's seven circuits, and several palindromes and chiasmic tropes mirror the path's reversals and reversibility.

## I.

Lines align body and mind;  
Feet tread a thread to the heart.

As he approaches the labyrinth, Pierre Jardin reflects on its embodied and symbolic dimensions: "Labyrinth walkers don't walk in a void. We walk in a physical space,"<sup>7</sup> but we also walk in "an imaginative space," "cabinets full of junk, treasure ... both cultural ... and personal, like home grown cosmologies" (Mitchell 2014: 374) or favorite novels, or 80's pop songs. Jardin pauses at what one of his favorite novels would call "The Aperture," but technically is known as the labyrinth's "mouth," the only fork in this garden's path, where you choose whether or not to enter. "I'm a mirror rim am I," the mouth intones, as Jardin passes through the looking glass to a wonderland where "Weird Shit" (Mitchell 2014: 15; 17; 20) can happen and mythical monsters may live—though Jardin would be more likely to meet Medusa than the Minotaur, given his predilection for petrification.

## II.

In the end it turns out  
The way out is the way in  
In reverse, inside out.

Walking Ariadne's thread is rather like reading a book full of twists and turns that ends in the middle, only to up start again, going over the same ground in the second part, but in the opposite order.<sup>8</sup> The thread forms a Script written in

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<sup>7</sup> The passage substitutes labyrinth walking for writers working in Cripsin Hershey's lecture "On Never Not Thinking About Iceland" in *The Bone Clocks*: "Writers don't write in a void. We work in an imaginative space ..." (374).

<sup>8</sup> While *The Bone Clocks* explicitly foregrounds the labyrinth motif, *Cloud Atlas*' form is the most labyrinth-like of Mitchell's novels.

boustrophedon, bi-directional text that flips or reverses from left to right and right to left in alternating lines. The Script guides Pierre Jardin like a Greek ox (*bou*), turning him (*strophe*), furrowing his brow as he plows his way through the labyrinth. “I’m walking a line,” he sings, “I’m thinking about empty motion”—like, for example, the motion of “an empty wine bottle rolling oh-ever-so-gently on the [ship] cabin floor, this way and that ... This way and that ... This way and that” (Mitchell 2014: 306).

### III.

Breath and blood cycle in synch  
 The pacing of concentric circuits  
 Every turn a return to earth.

The labyrinth walk is Pierre Jardin’s immersive baptism in the Deep Stream of archaic time, echoing the labyrinth’s possible origin as a chthonic journey through a winding underworld cavern, symbolizing the uterus of the Earth Mother. Ariadne’s thread is Jardin’s “second umbilical cord” (Mitchell 2014: 38): a nurturing tie to the lithosphere he loves. He looks out to sea and sees Catalina Island, where he often camps and collects volcanic rocks from the Miocene Era. On the geologic time scale, the Island is flying north at 31.5 miles per million years; in human terms, that’s 2 inches a year, making it very hard to detect with the naked eye. To mind the gap between human and geologic scales, Pierre does the mental math: 2 inches = 5.08 centimeters; a micron is point-five zeros-1 centimeter; there are 525,600 minutes in a year; ergo, the island is moving about a micron a minute. Given that a human hair is 40 microns thick, if I stand still for 40 minutes, I will see Catalina move a hair’s breadth. Or, he realizes with a start, the San Andreas Fault may fracture at any moment; if I’m lucky, this bluff I’m walking on will also survive by becoming an island.

### IV.

In search of wonder,  
 I turn to stone.

Absorbed in this reverie, Pierre Jardin feels he has satisfied the garden’s injunction: ‘SUSPEND YOUR TIME HERE WISELY.’ Suspended between being petrified by the



terrifying thought of tectonic instability on the one hand, while also cocooned in the comfort of slow tectonic motion on the other, Jardin reflected that “Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes, either, and nothing passes just because nothing lasts” (Mitchell 2014: 388, quoting Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*). In this aphoristic epiphany, Pierre Jardin discerns his true desire: to cross over into the realm of lithic temporal suspension, to absorb himself in stones until he would begin to absorb stone himself, as if he could let stone seep into him through a kind of “dialectical animism” (Bachelard 2002: 14),<sup>9</sup> until the process would reach its apotheosis in his petrification. Stones are the bones of the earth, he thinks; we humans are walking, talking minerals, the earth’s upper crust in upright, bipedal form, and I, Pierre, am a rock clone, a bone clock.

## V.

Now I emit

Time I won.

Pierre Jardin’s wandering mind is wondering: what does it mean to KNOW TIME LIKE THE PRESENT? Could you ever actually *know* the elusive, spurious present? The present’s presence wavers in and out of existence, oscillating between “None Of This Is Happening” and “All Of This Is Happening” (Mitchell 2014: 65). Mesmerized by his silhouette’s appearance and disappearance as he walks the path, Pierre speculates that while the present cannot be apprehended, perhaps it can be adumbrated as time’s shadow. This labyrinth is a Salvador Dali sundial, he thinks, and I am the needle; what time has joined together, let gnomon put asunder. With the right horological device, we can know time like the present in our body: I will install an analemmatic sundial, so that the shadow is cast by a person standing in the middle with a raised arm. The sundial will be called “BEING THE TIME FOR THE TIME BEING,” and inscribed around the middle will be a question, “What time is it?” answered with a question: “You mean right now?”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> “Dialectical animism” names the relation between mind and matter reached through what Bachelard terms “materialist imagination,” a cognitive mode and practice that “thinks matter, dreams in it, lives in it” (Bachelard 2002: 14).

<sup>10</sup> “What time is it? You mean right now?” is a famous quote by baseball player and manager Yogi

## VI.

Amazement for mindful meandering  
A maze meant for a meandering mind.

The Garden of Slow Time invites visitors to sit and reflect, to discern their path in life. The bench inscribed “THE CALL OF THE BLUFF LIES WITHIN” riffs on the LMU tradition to heed the call of the bluff, to serve the needs of the diverse communities of Los Angeles. Pierre Jardin ruminates on this phrase as he navigates the ins and outs of the labyrinth path. He soon finds himself lost in a cloud of semantic associations: to find your vocation, your inner truth, you have to “call a bluff”? One that “lies within”? From what metaviewpoint do you look inside yourself and call your own bluff? And “lies within” could refer to your inner bluff, the false self-image you hold but hide from the world and yourself. The Cretan labyrinth has entangled Pierre Jardin in the Cretan liars paradox: Epimenides the Cretan says, “all Cretans are liars”; if this is true, then he is lying when he says all Cretans are liars, because he just told a truth. “It’s an echo chamber, this place” (Mitchell 2014: 322), Jardin mutters, wondering, what if my very existence is just a bluff that could be called at any time?

## VII.

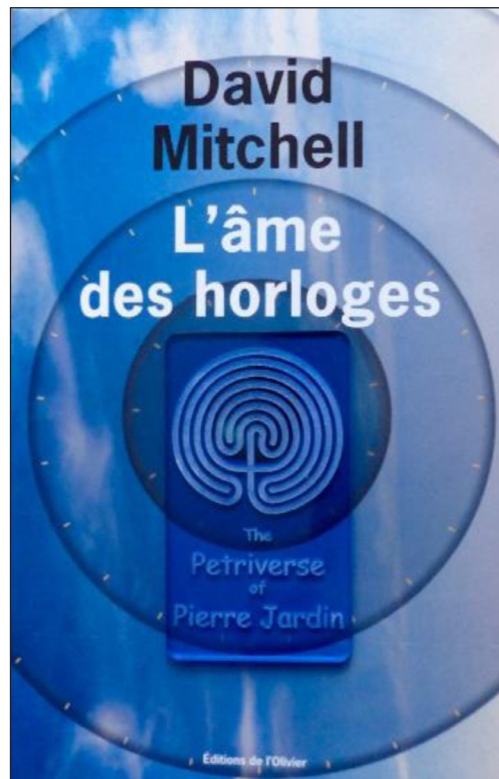
In time’s mirror  
We are ancestors  
Of the future

A slab like a gravestone in The Garden of Slow Time bears a curious inscription: “The Values of Time: A Capsule; To be opened Spring 2112 or any time thereafter.”<sup>11</sup> The time capsule buried there is an “Archive of the Future,” designed “to make a tiny dent in the world’s memory” (Mitchell 2014: 204). It contains Professor Stone’s “Epistle to the Future,” a signed collector’s edition of *Cloud Atlas* that the author dedicated “to the future,” with a sealed envelope that says “Open in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century”; and a

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Berra. See Yogi Berra with Dave Kaplan, *What Time Is It? You Mean Right Now?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> The time capsule and contributions referenced here all exist as described.



**Figure 9:** The Cretan labyrinth of Pierre Jardin egresses into the labyrinth of *The Bone Clocks*. Photo: Paul Harris.

“Dying Star Letter” contributed by artist Katie Paterson. If the Slow Time capsule is opened as scheduled, during LMU’s bicentennial in 2112, it will serve as a trumpet-call heralding the 2114 unveiling of the books in Katie Paterson’s Future Library, in which a forest of trees will become an anthology of books to be printed in 100 years, composed of works contributed by authors each year and held in trust.<sup>12</sup> The Slow Time capsule will show that we tried to be good ancestors to future faculty and students.

The capsule also contains a clue about the fate of Pierre Jardin: judging by this book cover and curious calling card (see **Figure 9**), it would appear that his last step through the Aperture of the labyrinth in the Garden of Slow Time turned out to be

<sup>12</sup> See the *Future Library* website at <https://www.futurelibrary.no>, accessed January 11, 2018.

the first step on a different path, the start of a new thread—but that’s another story. “For one voyage to begin, another voyage must come to an end, sort of” (Mitchell 2014: 613).

## Afterword

In our presentation at the David Mitchell Conference 2017, the previous two texts were sandwiched in between three stories David Mitchell wrote for collaborations with the design duo Kai and Sunny: “The Gardener,” “Lots of Bits of Star,” and “My Eye On You.”<sup>13</sup> Mitchell’s first story in the sequence is narrated by a character watching over his flower patches at sunset, from beyond the grave; the second is a sequel in which the gardener comes to the aid of the narrator Leo, a boy with autism. The third, longer tale reflects Mitchell’s desire to “try to visit the head of a person who is endowed with a kind of ‘temporal hotspot’ which means their own personal time moves at a different velocity to everyone else’s.”<sup>14</sup> This “person” turns out to be Richard Cheeseman from *The Bone Clocks*, as he begins experiencing time passing at a twelfth of its normal speed.

While it was a privilege and pleasure to have occasion to work with David again at St Andrews, it was also a challenge to write these texts, knowing that they would be heard alongside his, by an informed audience of fellow Mitchell scholar-fans. On the one hand, this context sharpens one’s focus and makes one keenly aware of every word in a way different to any other writing I have done. On the other hand, David’s willingness to take chances and try new things in his fiction is also inspiring, and serves as an implicit invitation to do the same.

“Perturbation” and “Perambulation” are in part a homage to *The Bone Clocks*. I wrote these in implicit collaboration with the novel, first incorporating text from it in

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<sup>13</sup> The box-set texts may be viewed in the University of St Andrews Special Collections; they feature illustrations for each story by Kai & Sunny. See “David Mitchell Conference 2017 Visits Special Collections” at <https://standrewsrarebooks.wordpress.com/2017/06/15/david-mitchell-conference-2017-visits-special-collections/>, accessed January 11, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> In *The Guardian*, March 3, 2016; see “David Mitchell’s strange new tale and the art show that inspired it” at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/03/david-mitchell-new-tale-short-story-art-my-eye-on-you-kai-and-sunny-whirlwind-of-time>, accessed January 11, 2018.

unattributed citations, then attempting a sort of plagiaristic ghost-writing by penning a letter by a Horologist. I sent David the letter and asked if he would be willing to enhance our performance by reading it; he not only agreed to do so but rewrote the letter, under the anagrammatic pseudonym Lachim DiVeldt. It was exhilarating to receive David's transposed version of the letter, which bore trademark elements of his style; it also laid bare the shortcomings of my attempt at fictional voice.<sup>15</sup> I thank David for his generosity in collaborating on the text and, subsequently, agreeing to put his name on it.

"Perturbation" and "Perambulation" reflect longstanding, related interests in labyrinths, slow time, and David Mitchell's fiction. The texts culminate a period of fleshing out and testing out conceptual conjectures about the labyrinth developed in my previous work. Lachim Devildt's account of the Cretan labyrinth in "Perturbation", as a "SlowTime Machine" whose "Psychoteric Potential" emanates from "Numerology", is a fictionalized rendering of a scholarly essay in which I extrapolated the labyrinth as a model of "Eotemporality," a reversible time in which memory and anticipation mirror one another, in a kind of suspended present (Harris 2014). In subsequent work I suggested that the labyrinth provides a fruitful heuristic model for narrative time in Mitchell's fiction, as it expresses the way his texts "combine linear and cyclical structures and temporalities" (Harris 2015a: 3). In analyzing "two-way labyrinthine temporality" in *The Bone Clocks* in *SubStance*, I cited passages from the novel that also appear in "Perambulation" and "Peturbation" ("an archivist for the future" and "the future looks a lot like the past") (Harris 2015b: 150).

As recounted in "Perturbation," in fall 2016 myself and my colleague Brad Stone launched "Slow LMU," an initiative that invited the campus community to participate in a program of events related to "slow time" and to do "slow time exercises" (modeled after the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, a series of meditations and prayers) in designated "Slow Time Zones" that I designed on campus.<sup>16</sup> "Perturbation" concludes with the dedication of "The Garden of Slow Time,"

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<sup>15</sup> The original version of the letter is included as an appendix below.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of Slow LMU, see 'SLOW LMU: Taking Time for Each Other, Making Time for Ourselves'

which features a Cretan labyrinth for meditative walking. We formed Slow LMU to mitigate against the pernicious effects of the 'corporate' or 'neoliberal' university, the institutional embodiment of "the total colonization of our mind by the logics of economic productivity" (Citton 2013: 70). As Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber argue, "Distractedness and fragmentation characterize contemporary academic life; we believe that slow ideals restore a sense of community and conviviality [...] which sustain political resistance" (Berg and Seeber 2016: 90). The Slow LMU motto "Making time for each other/Taking time for ourselves" responds to what Yves Citton identifies as the "attention economy":

In our information-affluent societies, the new scarcity is no longer material goods, nor information itself, but *attention*: the time and capacity to plug one's mind to a certain source of mental stimuli, within the context of a distressingly superabundant supply of available stimulations (Citton 2013: 73).

The slow ethos finds expression in pedagogical practice as "Contemplative Pedagogy" and "Mindfulness" in Higher Education (Nicholson and Jinnah 2016; Kimberly 2016; Gunnlaugson et al. 2014; Eifler and Landy 2014). Contemplative pedagogy may be defined as "experiential and experimental educational methodology that explores contemplative practice and contemplative experience, especially with respect to their relevance and application to education and perhaps to larger existential and sociopolitical issues" (Komjathy 2017: 159). As an initial foray into the field, I began to integrate labyrinth walks and other contemplative exercises into my courses. I did so in an open spirit of experimentation, while remaining warily aware of what Louis Komjathy calls "the banalization, commodification, and corporatization of contemplative practice" (Komjathy 2017: 5).

Most forms of contemporary "contemplative pedagogy" and "contemplative practice" at the university level draw on forms of Buddhist meditation and/or

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at [http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/bellarminforum2016\\_resources/14/](http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/bellarminforum2016_resources/14/), accessed January 11, 2018.



various Yoga traditions. It should be emphasized that these practices presuppose and/or entail formal training of kinds that I have not undertaken. Instead, I designed contemplative exercises organically, as it were, informed and shaped by the specific material I was teaching, with careful consideration given to the students in my courses. In the institutional discourse currently seeking to legitimate contemplative pedagogy, there is an understandable emphasis on professionalization and methodological rigor. This discourse may (perhaps unintentionally) discourage interested faculty in experimenting with devising new pedagogical practices; I would contend that contemplative pedagogy should remain an inclusive umbrella term that welcomes experimentation and recognizes that disciplinary grounding and institutional context will likely generate very heterogeneous ideas and examples of “mindfulness” in higher education. I thus follow Komjathy’s advocacy of “pluralist” rather than “perennialist” framing of contemplative practice, with an emphasis on “contextualization” in implementation and interpretation, “the process of locating people, texts, movements, and other phenomena in their corresponding historical, cultural, social, and political circumstances” (Komjathy 2017: 5).

In the pedagogical context in which I was working, slow time has two essential, synergistic tenets: in psychological terms, slow time means time spent with a single cognitive focus, or not switching attention; in physical terms, slow time refers to geologic or cosmic timescales. The fundamental premise of the slow time exercises I devised was that contemplative engagement with images and ideas of geologic/cosmic timescales would augment a conceptual understanding with an affective, imaginative relation to them. This premise was tested out in a core curriculum course I developed called “From Eternity to Here,” which focuses on “Big History” (integrating cosmic, earth, and human history in one unfolding story) before moving to contemporary fiction and art that unfolds on Anthropocene timescales. Students read Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks* while studying Katie Paterson’s art, with her Future Library project providing a fitting link between them. Drawing on the Stoic tradition of philosophical exercises, particularly Marcus Aurelius’s “the point of view of the cosmos” (in which he presses a person to imagine

experiencing the world from a cosmic rather than limited individual perspective), I designed contemplations of specific elements or processes of cosmic and geologic history. Students conducted these contemplative exercises while walking the labyrinth, and then wrote reflections recording their experiences.

Teaching *The Bone Clocks* in this context became an experiment in literary slow pedagogy. In order to engage students (first years from all disciplines) in the close reading of a lengthy, complex work of fiction, I dedicated a third of the course (five weeks) to studying the novel: a 90-minute class session was devoted to discussing each section. In addition to writing a critical essay about the novel, students also expressed their responses to the novel in book spine poems<sup>17</sup> that were displayed in the university library. David's response on seeing photos of the students' works was, "Spine poems illustrate how art is a duet with imagination on cello and interpretation on piano."<sup>18</sup>

As a final contemplative exercise, students were directed to walk the labyrinth at the Garden of Slow Time and reflect on the labyrinth as a motif in *The Bone Clocks* and use that experience as a springboard to help them to understand and describe the novel's narrative complexity. This exercise was a way to assess the analogy between the "willing suspension of disbelief" of reading fiction and the seeming suspension of time in walking a labyrinth. While this one teaching experiment provides no basis on which to draw substantive conclusions, anecdotal evidence suggests that the exercise was of some use for students in developing their insights into the novel.

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<sup>17</sup> Book spine poetry is a form of found poetry: poems are created by stacking books, whose titles form the lines of a poem. Students walk through the library stacks and pull out promising titles, before assembling them in a specific order. The genre/practice originates from the 1990s with artist Nina Katchadourian's photos of stacked books; see her *Sorted Books* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Email received April 3, 2017. David's generous response was also humorous: "Please thank your innovative students for the collective hours and serendipity-fishing they must have spent in the library ... I wish I'd had them when I was doing media for the book – whenever an interviewer who hadn't read the novel rolled out the question "So could you sum up *The Bone Clocks* for me – just for those readers/listeners who haven't read it yet", I could have simply shown them the pictures and said, "Behold..." then added "My work here is done" before retiring for another cinnamon roll. Spine poems illustrate how art is a duet with imagination on cello and interpretation on piano."

Many students compared the twists and turns of the novel's plot to the labyrinth's meandering path; the way in which the path tantalizes the walker by moving closer to, then further away from, the center was likened to the novel letting the reader become accustomed to a narrator or plotline, then suddenly shifting to another viewpoint or story. Other students observed that the book begins and ends with Holly, just as the labyrinth walk concludes where it commenced; some added that if the path is a metaphor for one's life journey, then the Horologists could be thought of as traversing the labyrinth for an eternity of lives. One student said that Holly's journey in the book is like the path, which she follows without knowing where it leads her, while the Horologists and the Script were like the walls that guide the path.

"Perturbation" and "Perambulation" are the culmination of a year of exploring slow time in the contexts of teaching, practice, and critical and creative writing. During this period, the concept of "David Mitchell in the Labyrinth of Time" – which I had explored before (Harris 2015a) – has taken on new meanings, including a literal one, with the burial of the time capsule containing *Cloud Atlas* and a "Letter to the Future" from David. The capsule underscores the importance of the future in practices and expressions of "slow time." Through contributions from David Mitchell and Katie Paterson, the capsule becomes part of a global garden of forking paths linked to Paterson's Future Library. Paterson's project integrates nature, the public sphere (The Future Library Trust is supported by the City of Oslo), libraries and literature in an artwork comprising several synchronized systems, in which tree rings transform into leaves of books over the course of a century. As Paterson writes, Future Library "questions the present tendency to think in short bursts of time, making decisions only for us living now. The timescale is one hundred years, not vast in cosmic terms. However, in many ways the human timescale of one hundred years is more confronting. It is beyond many of our current lifespans, but close enough to come face to face with it, to comprehend and relativise" ("Future Library 2014–2114"). As Mitchell said of the project, "The Future Library is a candidate on the ballot paper for possible futures. It brings hope that we are more resilient than we think: that we will be here, that there will be trees, that there will be books, and readers, and civilisation" ("Future Library 2014–2114"). In a similarly optimistic

vein, Brad Stone, in his “Epistle to the Future” delivered at the dedication to the garden, concludes by inviting future LMU faculty and students to investigate their temporal values, and “create a time capsule for the next palindromic year (in the case of 2112, that would be 2222, followed by 2332). In the capsule you could include this letter and all ‘An Epistle to the Future’ letters from subsequent time capsules (in translation if need be)” (Stone 2016).

Slow time connotes invitations to both be mindfully present, contemplatively grounded in context, and to take a long view that imagines futures in light of pasts, on several nested timescales. Sustaining slow time in these senses seems more critical than ever, in the turbulent or “catastrophic times” (Stengers 2015) we live in. The slow time of literature, of the academy, provides psychic comfort and enrichment; it also opens a political space to imagine and create alternative futures. This work, so evidently at the heart of David Mitchell’s fiction, is perhaps humanity’s most pressing task: as Pierre Jardin and Lachim DiVeldt would tell you, nothing less than the course of the Deep Stream is at stake.

### **Editorial Note**

The editor would like to note that, as the creation of a fully blind copy of this work was not possible due to the personal nature of the work, this essay and creative piece were reviewed by the editor and another peer-reviewer; both felt that this did not impact their ability to provide an impartial review of the piece.

### **Appendix**

Below is my original draft of the letter from “A Perturbation of the Deep Stream”, which was subsequently rewritten by David Mitchell as above.

Salutations, Pierre Jardin:

We write to warn and inform you that The Petriverse is causing a perturbation in the Deep Stream. Psychoteric analysis of the temporal anomalies showed them to be emanating from the garden’s Cretan labyrinth, an ancient, powerful symbol of slow time. The labyrinth lies dormant unless activated by tectonic harmonies made by rock groups, especially if the stone were collected in Crete. Once animated, the

labyrinth becomes an STM (Slow Time Machine), generating undulating fluxions in the flow of geologic time, which can cascade into megaripples that cause an elliptic umbilic catastrophe, popularly known as a perturbation in the Deep Stream. Think of it as “a disturbance in the Force” of subterranean Earth history.

The Cretan labyrinth is a viral form of “meta-life,” which has propagated across the globe since the Neolithic Era through 500 human generations, predating “Rome, Egypt, Peking, Nineveh and Ur.” It is an esoteric symbol of SO (Symmetry in Opposition), evident in its associated meanings: tomb or womb, map of the underworld or astronomical atlas of planetary motions, funeral site or marriage rite.

The labyrinth pattern is disseminated by a simple seed. This embryonic motif, found on ancient rocks and pottery shards, draws in unsuspecting hosts, and entrains them to draw the pattern from the seed, in a mesmerizing, precisely plotted process. It is thought that the sensual pleasure subjects experience in drawing the pattern stems from a resonance between right/left motions and the human body's bilateral symmetry. At the moment of the human host completes the pattern, a subliminal illusion transpires: the drawn lines recede from focus and transform into a passive background; simultaneously, the circuits between the lines begin to resonate, and the labyrinth's path dominates the host's visual field. This in turn serves as a strong subconscious suggestion to give the pattern a physical body, to create a labyrinth for the host to walk through. When this happens, the labyrinth's incorporation of human corporeality is complete.

The path, Ariadne's thread, possesses topological intricacies some call ‘diabolical’ because of the vertiginous effects they induce in the temporal bones of labyrinth walkers. The path's psychoteric power is based in its esoteric numerology. Number its concentric circuits from mouth to goal; the path through the labyrinth produces the sequence: 0-3-2-1-4-7-6-5-8. This sequence balances energies by alternating even and odd numbers; as the path traverses the concentric levels, it changes direction each time it changes levels. Vortical swirling is caused by oscillations between centripetal

and centrifugal motion; in moving from outside entry point (0) through middle level (4) to the center (8), the path tantalizes walkers by going three levels away from the center, twice (between 0 and 4, we traverse levels 3-2-1, and between 4 and 8, we traverse levels 7-6-5). The numbers show that circuits never short themselves out by overlapping; if two segments intersect, one must be contained inside the other. Thus in the sequence, [3,2] is inside [1,4], and [7,6] is inside [5,8]. These sets of pairs are in polar balance because their sums are the same (5 and 13, respectively).

The Cretan labyrinth can cause perturbations in the Deep Stream because it diagrams the palindromic suspension peculiar to archaic slow time. The path generates dynamic motion in constant compensatory oscillation: left/right and in/out. The point tracing a path to a goal and back expresses time as a NOW in a reversible temporality, a mirror where past or future appear the same. The labyrinth does not hold time in the static form of perfect balance; it suspends time in a form that is both symmetrical and symmetry-breaking.

Monsieur Jardin, we urge you to respect this symbol's slow time powers, and be circumspect in installing this circuitous entomber of souls.

### **Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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