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"No Man is an Island": Tracing Functions of Insular Landscapes in David Mitchell's Fiction

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Islands are a powerful recurring motif in the writing of David Mitchell. His globe-trotting fictions negotiate the trope of 'islandness' as ambiguously positioned between desire and hostility, stranding protagonists on bountiful shores or dooming them in squalid insular exiles. As seemingly contained spaces detached from the centres of the world, islands are malleable platforms for the projection of literary experimentation. In David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* (1999), *Cloud Atlas* (2004), *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) and *The Bone Clocks* (2014), islands become utopian imaginaries, sanctuaries for the outcast, sources and tools of power and sites of corruption and entrapment, while constantly mediating between reality and the imagination, the past and the future. First and foremost, however, the analysis of the functions of islands in Mitchell's work informed by Yi-Fu Tuan's and Michel de Certeau's conceptual frameworks of 'place' and 'space' reveals that, much like the author's many individual stories, islands are never isolated, but always relational entities enabling protagonists to interact with one another and become interconnected with the larger world around them. If we want to understand how deeply topography, spatiality and identity are interwoven in Mitchell's work, we cannot circumvent his islands.

Keywords: Islands; Interconnectedness; Space; Place; Identity; Topography

> There was a man who loved islands. He was born on one, but it didn't suit him, as there were too many other people on it, besides himself. He wanted an island all of his own: not necessarily to be alone on it, but to make it a world of his own. (D.H. Lawrence, "The Man Who Loved Islands")

Similar to the protagonist of D.H. Lawrence's short story, David Mitchell is a man who loves islands. Born in the British Isles, he spent considerable time on Sicily and Honshū, before settling in Ireland. Arguably, the islands that David Mitchell has lived on may be too large to match the idea of a prototypical island, as the narrator of D.H. Lawrence's short story muses: 'An island, if it is big enough, is no better than a continent. It has to be really quite small, before it *feels* like an island' (2014, 1). What are the distinctive features of 'islandness'? Before venturing into the islands in Mitchell's fictions, though: what is an island, after all? The primary definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* remains rather unspecific: an island is 'a piece of land completely surrounded by water.' In *Islands: Nature and Culture*, however, an understanding of 'islandness' is helped by the six distinctive features established by Stephen A. Royle which all islands share, namely being surrounded by water, boundedness, discretion, relative powerlessness, small scale and remoteness (2014, 26). The three islands in Lawrence's short story match these criteria, but the story goes beyond exploring their mere physicality. The protagonist projects all his desires and hopes onto the island of his own, so it becomes a stencil for his ideal world, a utopia of his mind's making. The love of, or rather, obsession with islands is ultimately presented as a 'neurotic condition', and the spaces in question are 'not so much islands as 'I'lands', where the inflated self smothers and obliterates all other forms of life' (Nicolson 2002, 344). As Nicolson correctly observes, Lawrence's protagonist, utterly alone in his doomed insularity and on the verge of death, fights the hostility of what he finally realises to be an 'unrecognizable', 'foreign' island at the end of the short story. Thus, in "The Man Who Loved Islands", the topos of the island functions as a negotiation of the human psyche between *locus amoenus*[1] and *locus terribilis*.[2] Godfrey Baldacchino concludes that 'an island cannot be naïvely understood in its

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[1] *Locus amoenus*: (Latin: 'pleasant place') a literary trope which refers to the set description of an idyllic landscape, typically containing trees and shade, a grassy meadow, running water, song-birds, and cool breezes. *Loci amoeni* are usually perceived as places of comfort and peacefulness, and often serve as sites of love encounters, thus carrying associations of Arcadia and Eden (Roberts 2007, n.p.; Garber 1974, 85–111).

[2] *Locus terribilis*: (Latin: 'terrible place') a literary trope denoting the opposite of *locus amoenus*. *Loci terribili* are often depicted as remote, infertile, dangerous, dark and uncanny places bereft of human and animal life (Garber 1974, 240–264).

strict material, reified form: a delineated, predetermined, bordered space; it is so thoroughly seeped in 'emotional geography' that it is perhaps impossible to disentangle its 'realities' from its 'dreams'; its geographical materiality from its metaphorical allusions' (2012, 57). As D.H. Lawrence's short story illustrates, islands are indeed not mere physical topographies, but spaces enabling negotiations of the Self and Other, (be)longing and exclusion, locality and globality, and enable us 'to think about what is true at the bottom of our own character' (Holm 2000, 11–12). It is, however, only due to their physicality as confined, contained, and mostly peripheral and remote spaces that islands can be viewed as *tabulae rasae*,[3] 'potential laboratories for any conceivable human project, in thought or in action' (Baldacchino 2006, 5).

For centuries, the island as a 'category of the mind' (Hay 2006, 27) has inspired writers and philosophers alike. From the Greek myth of Atlantis and the Arthurian legend of Avalon to Thomas More's *Utopia* [1516], William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* [1623], Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* [1624], Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* [1719], Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* [1883], H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* [1896], William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* [1954] to films and TV series such as *Cast Away* [2000], *Shutter Island* [2010] and *Lost* [2004–2010], islands have become one of, if not, as Hay claims, '*the* central gripping metaphor within Western discourse' (2006, 26). Islands 'lend themselves to sophisticated fantasy and mythology' (Baldacchino 2005, 247) and are thus particularly relevant to literary studies, where they are articulated as 'utopias/dystopias, *loci amoeni*, Edens, Arcadias, nations, metatexts, stepping stones, cultural crossroads' (Stephanides and Bassnett 2008, n.p.). As 'sites of innovative conceptualizations' (Baldacchino 2006, 6), islands provide intersections between nature and culture, and the real and the imaginary, in different academic disciplines. They have served as points of reference, safe havens and places of inspiration for explorers and sailors, geographers and geologists,

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[3] *Tabulae rasae*: (plural form of the Latin phrase 'tabula rasa', meaning 'blank slate') the idea goes back to Aristotle's *De Anima*, in which he compares the human mind at birth to a writing-tablet on which nothing is yet written (see Shields 2016). Ever since, the phrase *tabula rasa* has been standing for the epistemological idea that all humans are born without innate mental contents and that all knowledge comes from experience or perception (thus supporting the 'nurture' side in the 'nature vs. nurture' controversy).

philosophers and political theorists, physicists and astronomers; Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory would have been entirely unthinkable without his journeys to and explorations of islands.[4] The establishment of an *Island Studies Journal* in 2006 is proof that their interdisciplinary nature and appeal is a powerful stimulus for academic discourses.

Both their distinctive social and geographical features and their relevance to literary and cultural studies lend islands to theorisation in the context of space and place. Significant contributions to the study of spatiality have been made, among others, by Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space* [1974, trans. 1991]), Yi-Fu Tuan (*Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* [1977]), Michel de Certeau (*The Practice of Everyday Life* [1980, trans. 1984]) and Doreen Massey (see, e.g., *Space, Place, and Gender* [1994]; *For Space* [2005]). The theories of Tuan and de Certeau are particularly relevant to the study of islands in literature. The former offers a useful distinction between place and space for humanist geography and cultural studies, while the latter connects spatiality to storytelling. According to Tuan (1977), place and space require each other for definition:

> What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. […] From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.' (6)

The idea of place goes beyond denoting a particular location; it suggests a history and meaning, as well as carrying the experiences and aspirations of a people (Tuan

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[4] Charles Darwin made most of his observations which later led to the development of his theory of evolution (see *On the Origin of Species* [1859] and *The Descent of Man* [1871]) on the islands he visited during his journey on the HMS Beagle from December 1831 until October 1836. The most significant islands for his scientific explorations were Santiago (Cape Verde Islands), the Falkland Islands, Tierra del Fuego, Chiloé Island (Chile) and the Galapagos Islands (see *Journal and Remarks* [1839], better known as *The Voyage of the Beagle*).

1979, 387). In short, '[p]lace is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other' (Tuan 1977, 3). De Certeau (1984) defines place as 'the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence' (1984, 117). As 'an instantaneous configuration of positions' (*ibid.*), place suggests stability, but does not necessarily carry the cultural weight Tuan bestows upon it. Space, according to de Certeau, is composed of 'intersections of mobile elements' (*ibid.*), meaning that '*space is a practiced place*' (*ibid.*). De Certeau dedicates an entire chapter of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to 'Spatial Stories', in which he explains how narratives create spaces by traversing, organising, selecting and linking places, and thus become 'spatial trajectories' (1984, 115). Viewing textual narratives and spatial practices as interdependent, he reasons that spaces are always culturally produced and socially negotiated (1984, 96).

David Mitchell's stories can also be regarded as 'spatial trajectories' which connect and organise the physical and mental landscapes that his characters occupy, and it seems that the island plays a significant role in this cognitive mapping of narratives. When asked about his very first novel in an interview with Kathryn Schulz, Mitchell claimed that he could not remember what it was about, but that he had drawn a map to sketch the topography of the story's setting, an 'archipelago of islands' (Schulz 2014, n.p.). With this recollection of his early approach to creating fictional worlds, it is hardly surprising that Mitchell's oeuvre today consists of an 'archipelago of islands', in two ways. Firstly, each of his stories can stand alone and be approached in isolation, much like an island. These 'story-islands' could be viewed as places in Tuan's sense, for they are meaningful entities on their own. However, only when Mitchell's individual stories are seen in the larger context of the novel and the *Über-novel*[5] do these become spaces, or 'practiced places', as de Certeau puts it (1984, 117). As interlinked narrative entities, Mitchell's 'spatial stories' span an entire fictional universe (e.g., see Childs and Green 2011; Dillon 2011), which is vividly illustrated in Jacob

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[5] *Über-novel*: (also: über-book) a term that David Mitchell has coined to refer to his overarching project of creating fictional worlds that are interconnected. He views his individual novels as chapters in this *über-novel* (see Schulz 2014, n.p.).

de Zoet's pondering of his own life story while creating a never-ending path for a ladybird on his hand: 'He pictures an endless sequence of bridges between skin-covered islands over voids, and wonders if an unseen force is playing the same trick on him' (Mitchell 2010, 137). Secondly, islands themselves are a powerful recurring motif in David Mitchell's writing. Just like his story-hopping characters, as readers, we are taken on an island-hopping tour through his fictional worlds: from Okinawa and Kumejima to Hong Kong and Clear Island (*Ghostwritten* [1999]), to Yakushima (*number9dream* [2001]), from the Chathams to Swannekke and Hawaii (*Cloud Atlas* [2004]), to Dejima (*The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* [2010]) and from the Isle of Shippey to Rottnest Island to Ireland and Iceland (*The Bone Clocks* [2014]), not to forget the myriad metaphorical islands and otherworldly lacunas of both the author's and his protagonists' imaginations. Mitchell's 'fascination with the island mentality' (Pauli 2004, n.p.) finds textual expression in his many carefully crafted island locales, which appear to be ambiguously positioned between desire and hostility, isolation and interconnectedness. The following close reading of four of David Mitchell's novels (*Ghostwritten* [1999], *Cloud Atlas* [2004], *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* [2010] and *The Bone Clocks* [2014]) elucidates how islands, in his work, are negotiated as places of refuge and sanctuary for the exiled (Okinawa, Kumejima and Clear Island in *Ghostwritten*), and evoke a sense of Arcadia (Clear Island in *Ghostwritten*) and utopia (Iceland in *The Bone Clocks* and Hawaii in *Cloud Atlas*) on the one hand, whilst serving as sites of corruption and impending nuclear threat (Swannekke Island in *Cloud Atlas*) and cultural clashes (Dejima in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*) on the other hand. The analysis also sets out to provide an answer to the question of whether Mitchell's islands can be regarded as places or spaces according to Yi-Fu Tuan's and Michel de Certeau's considerations of spatiality.

Entering David Mitchell's 'archipelago of islands' via his first novel, *Ghostwritten*, we find two utterly distinct representations of islands as momentary sanctuaries for refugees, each of which could not be more unlike the other. The opening story's title, 'Okinawa', an island in the south of Japan, marks the importance of the novel's first island setting. The autodiegetic narrator is Quasar, a member of a doomsday cult that has just carried out a terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway. Quasar has

subsequently fled to Naha on Okinawa to go into hiding. The protagonist's shifting perception of his island exile from a locale of temporary refuge to an isolated prison illustrates the ambiguous nature of Mitchell's islands. Arriving on Okinawa, Quasar immediately supposes the islanders' 'Otherness', reassuring himself of his superiority: 'Unclean, unclean. These Okinawans never were pure-blooded Japanese. Different, weaker ancestors' (Mitchell 1999, 4). As the danger of the exposure of his false identity increases, Quasar has to recede 'to a more remote location' (Mitchell 1999, 14), found in a still smaller, more peripheral island: 'The islands beckoned, imperial emeralds in a sky-blue sea. I chose one labelled Kumejima. Half a day to the west, but not so small that a visitor would stand out' (Mitchell 1999, 16). The islands are personified as a version of *sirenum scopuli*[6] appearing to welcome or even lure his lost and lonely soul, thus foreshadowing Quasar's metaphorical shipwreck on Kumejima (*ibid.*). For the protagonist, remoteness, isolation and size are the selection criteria in favour of Kumejima, a decision entirely based on reason (*ibid.*); however, he is yet to understand how 'islandness' can affect an individual's emotional constitution. When Quasar checks into his hotel on Kume Island, the old lady at the reception introduces him to a shift in perspective typical of islanders: 'I only go to the main island once a year[…] Of course, when I say "main island", I mean the main island of Okinawa, not mainland Japan. I'd never dream of going there!' (Mitchell 1999, 18). Unnecessarily, she adds: 'We're not a very big island, you know. […] life is very quiet, here. Very slow' (Mitchell 1999, 19).

   Having spent all her life on Kume Island, the receptionist's perception of spatiality differs significantly from Quasar's. She enjoys the stability and security of 'place' in Tuan's sense, while for Quasar, who depends on being able to move freely through different spaces in order not to be detected, place implies danger of entrapment. As Quasar slowly explores Kumejima on foot, he narrates his impressions of the island's natural world: 'The sea was a milky turquoise. […] I saw birds I'd never

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   [6] *Sirenum scopuli*: in Greek mythology, sirens were rumored to lure nearby sailors to shipwreck with their enchanting voices and singing. In the *Aeneid* (book 5, line 864), the Roman poet Virgil calls the three rocky islands which the sirens live on *sirenum scopuli*.

seen before and salmon-pink butterflies' (Mitchell 1999, 20). This paradisal beauty is contrasted with observations of environmental pollution, 'Junk, washed up with the driftwood. Cans, bottles, rubber gloves, detergent containers' (Mitchell 1999, 24), reflecting Quasar's ambiguous feelings towards his island exile. Wandering the island alone, Quasar has an abundance of time at his disposal, which, in a location that inspires thoughts of ancestral identity and rootedness, leads him to reflect: 'I ate […] sitting on a grave, wondering when it was I last belonged anywhere' (Mitchell 1999, 21). It seems as if the island triggers a yearning for home and belonging in the protagonist, which has remained unsatisfied despite being a member of The Fellowship. When he is given a lift back to the hotel by a sugar-cane farmer who appears to already know everything about the false identity Quasar is using, it dawns on him that islands have their own closed-circuit security systems, which can easily detect intruders: 'Secrets on islands are hidden from mainlanders, but never from the islanders' (Mitchell 1999, 24). In fact, Quasar feels increasingly incarcerated on Kumejima as he witnesses on TV how his fellow plotters in the Tokyo terrorist attack and the cult's leader, His Serendipity, have been arrested or have commited suicide, and The Fellowship has slowly disintegrated. Without their help, he realises, he is effectively stranded without the money and means to return to mainland Japan (Mitchell 1999, 27–28). Having endured his exile for The Fellowship's mission, Quasar's perception of Kumejima as a place of refuge and reflection now shifts into feelings of disgust and a sense of entombment:

> Kumejima is a squalid, incestuous prison. […] Nobody admits it, but the islands are dying now. The young people are moving to the mainland. […] When the mainland peaceniks get the American military rapists off the islands the economy will slow, sputter and expire. (*ibid.*)

No longer able to see Kumejima's peacefulness and beauty, Quasar projects his own sense of doom onto the island setting. Despite his biased critique of islandness, Quasar strikes a chord; it may even be argued that the author himself is voicing his worries about the challenges islands have come to face in the 20th and 21st century.

Quasar's clear positioning certainly invites readers to reflect and negotiate their own romantic ideas of islandness, which all too often belie the harsh reality. The protagonist's musings about Kumejima's future allude to the larger discourse about the geopolitical challenges island cultures are facing in an increasingly globalised world, as Hay notes:

> Perhaps *the* most contested faultline within island studies is whether islands are characterised by vulnerability or resilience; whether they are victims of change, economically dependent, and at the mercy of unscrupulous neo-colonial manipulation, or whether they are uniquely resourceful in the face of such threats. (Hay 2006, 21)

Yet Quasar's dire predictions for Kumejima have proven false in the world outside the novel. Since 2001, the island has been home to state-of-the-art research facilities: the pioneering Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion Demonstration Facility and the Deep Seawater Research Institute, both of which secure jobs on Kume Island and utilise the locale for sustainability research, thus making the island a prime example of resourcefulness and forward compatibility (Okinawa Prefecture Deep Sea Water Power Generation Demonstration Project 2017). Quasar, however, has arrived at the conclusion that his decision to seek refuge on an island was a terrible mistake: 'Everything around me on this godforsaken island is crumbling. I should have stayed in Naha. I should have hidden in snow country, or deep-frozen Hokkaido, or lost myself amid a metropolis of my own kind' (Mitchell 1999, 31). The island's remoteness and promise of anonymity has isolated him physically and spiritually; the receptionist's unconscious warning that Kumejima is more place than space has proven true, for Quasar has lost touch with the reality around him. The finality of his entrapment on Kumejima is mirrored by the image of the island's main road, which begins and ends at the harbour: 'The road looped back around to the port, as all roads on this island eventually do' (Mitchell 1999, 32). Quasar's return to the harbour, usually a symbol of arrival, safety and belonging, signifies the impossibility of departure from his exile. Hence, the protagonist's journey is not the journey of a

hero, not a *There and Back Again*; having come full circle on Kumejima means having come to a dead end for Quasar. He has finally 'run out of Japan' (Mitchell 1999, 27).

Similar to Quasar, Mo Muntervary, the protagonist of *Ghostwritten*'s second island narrative, 'Clear Island', has to learn that while islands may serve as momentary sanctuaries, they can easily entangle those who try to escape from their worldly troubles. In contrast to Quasar, however, Mo's perception of islandness is altogether unambiguous. Clear Island is her Arcadia and safe haven, which she instinctively, but consciously, returns to in a life-threatening moment to restore and fortify her strength. The narrative begins with Mo opening her eyes to the blurry sight of Clear Island as she approaches it aboard a boat; the readers share her perspective as Clear Island moves into view: '[…] and here was home' (Mitchell 1999, 321). As her vision of the island becomes clearer, Mo is barely able to relate the simple beauty of her home, too fascinated with the view to render it in eloquent prose. The ensuing straightforward, short sentences read like an enumeration of elements which form Mo's personal (is)landscape, built on the memories and feelings attached to every inch of her home. The protagonist's intuitive knowledge of Clear Island's topography and her deep emotional rootedness are condensed into one phrase: 'An island as old as the world' (*ibid.*). This is the place she was born, as well as her parents and theirs, and where she gave birth to her son. It is her ancestral home, a place of belonging and constancy which always awaits her return, unchanged. Zooming in with a pair of binoculars, Mo spots familiar faces and realises how much she has missed the island: 'What is it that ties shapes of land to the human heart, Mo?' (*ibid.*). As Mo ponders this self-reflective question, the boat passes by her birthplace, which triggers memories of a 'lucky childhood, galloping over this island, and prising out its secrets. Birth deals us out a hand of cards, but as important as their value is the place we are dealt them in' (Mitchell 1999, 322).

Her profession as a renowned physicist requires Mo to lead a globe-trotting life which does not allow for sentimental attachment to one particular place. Thus, she is all the more grateful for the carefree childhood she has spent on Clear Island, a place of pause in Tuan's sense, a place of being deeply rooted in her life. Suddenly aware of her fortune, Mo is lost in a moment of bliss: 'I nod, unable to take my eyes

off the island. I missed all eight square miles of you! In Smug Zurich and Euromoney Geneva and Pell Mell Hong Kong and Merciless Bejing and Damned London I could close my eyes and see your topography' (*ibid.*). Her strong feelings of affection and yearning are expressed in addressing the island as a lover she has dearly missed. As she settles in on Clear Island, spending time with her partner John and son Liam, her godparents, and her many friends, Mo realises that 'Coming back was dangerous, but not coming back was impossible' (Mitchell 1999, 328). On the run from her former employers, Mo's escape route via Hong Kong, Mongolia and London has finally brought her to the sanctuary of her birthplace, her ancestors' and family's home. The beginning of the narrative, which captures Mo's arrival on Clear Island, is interspersed with flashbacks to her work in Switzerland, her decision to leave the facility and the ensuing chase around the world, thus underlining her preoccupation with her dire situation. The more time she spends on the island, though, the more the 'old Clear Island magic' (Mitchell 1999, 366) works on her and Mo can let go of her worries and enjoy the present: 'You're back on Clear now. It's only sheep, fish and the weather here' (Mitchell 1999, 334).

Due to the relative security on Clear Island, she becomes aware of the intimidating openness, or even 'threat of space' Tuan describes (1977, 6). Mo is grateful for having managed to escape the net of global trajectories she is both accustomed to and fears; she wholeheartedly embraces the simple life of an islander, which she has longed for while she was away. When she recites the first stanza of W.B. Yeats' poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' on a hike with John (Mitchell 1999, 366), we can sense how strongly she identifies with the lyrical 'I' in her yearning for island peacefulness and a Waldenesque life in harmony with nature. In this moment, free from any thoughts of the past and the future, Mo is able to envelop herself in the joys and unique eccentricities of island life. While Godfrey Baldacchino argues that islands 'suggest peripherality, being on the edge, being out of sight and so out of mind' (2006, 5), for Mo, being on Clear Island means that the mainland is on the periphery, out of sight and mind, at least for the time being. On a daytrip to visit her mother in a Skibbereen nursing home, Mo ponders on her gratitude at recognising and understanding the importance of her roots when she realises how poorly her

mother, suffering from Alzheimer's disease, is doing: 'Without where I am from and who I am from, I am nothing […] All those wideworlders in transit, all those mis-placed, thrown-away people who know as little as they care about their roots – how do they do it? How do they know who they are?' (Mitchell 1999, 357). Her return to Clear Island has shown Mo once more how closely the topography of home is inter-woven with her identity, and how the familiarity of 'place' in Tuan's sense leaves its indelible mark for life.

As its name implies, Clear Island has in fact cleared Mo's head and empowered her over the impending capture by her pursuers. Although the islanders want to come to her aid ('"Clear Island looks after its own!"' (Mitchell 1999, 372)), one of them repeating Quasar's realisation, '"Island secrets are hidden from mainlanders, but never from the islanders"' (Mitchell 1999, 374), which would now be to Mo's advantage, she has decided to make peace with her inevitable fate: 'My journey ends here. I'm out of west to run to' (Mitchell 1999, 336). While Quasar, having 'run out of Japan', would have taken any opportunity to escape further, Mo is tired of running. She knows that Clear Island cannot protect her from reality, but it has 'placed' her in her home one last time and fortified her to be able to cope with her imminent abduc-tion. Clear Island has affected Mo 'as a juxtaposition and confluence of the under-standing of local and global realities, of interior and exterior references of meaning, of having roots at home while also deploying routes away from home' (Baldacchino 2005, 248). In the end, when Mo leaves her home island as a captive in a helicop-ter, we, once again, see Clear Island through her eyes as it swims out of focus: 'The ground became land, the land an island, and Clear Island just another island amongst the larger ones and smaller ones' (Mitchell 1999, 380). Mo has to let go of her home and sanctuary; yet Clear Island is not a Paradise Lost to her, but a Paradise regained.

Islands as locales of desire, associated with carefreeness and independence, also pervade *The Bone Clocks* (2014), where they function as places of both recreational and life-saving refuge, and even forms of utopia, for Holly Sykes and her family in different stages of their lives. In 'A Hot Spell', Holly, who is on the run from home without a particular destination in mind, finds temporary refuge and employment

as a strawberry picker on the Isle of Sheppey (Mitchell 2014, 71–90). The fourth narrative, 'Crispin Hershey's Lonely Planet', takes Holly and her daughter Aiofe to meet Crispin Hershey on island settings twice. The first encounter on Rottnest Island off the Australian coast is entirely coincidental; both parties have gone out to the island for a daytrip and Crispin meets Holly and Aiofe having a picnic close to the island's lighthouse (Mitchell 2014, 318–325). In Crispin's description, Rottnest Island is 'as small as islands go, only eight square miles of naked rock and baked gullies, twists and bends, ups and downs, and the Indian Ocean is either always visible or around the next bend' (Mitchell 2014, 316). As he cycles uphill on the way to Rottnest's lighthouse, which 'refuses to let [him] arrive' (Mitchell 2014, 317), Crispin imagines the first European settlers 'searching for water in this infernal Eden' (*ibid.*). He also 'half recall[s]' (Mitchell 2014, 315) that Italian prisoners of war were interned on the island, which, in addition to a sudden uncanny sense of feeling watched, decides his aversion to the place. When he finally meets Holly and her daughter at the lighthouse, Aiofe explains that the island's name refers to the quokkas which populate the area: 'The first Dutch who landed here thought they were giant rats, so they called the place Rat's Nest Island: Rottnest, in Dutch' (Mitchell 2014, 321). After Holly suffers a fit during which she speaks with the voice of an Indigenous Australian people, the Noongar, accusing the 'Whitefellas' (Mitchell 2014, 323) of having imprisoned and tortured the Noongar on Rottnest, Crispin has had enough of the island: 'If ever a place had a karma of damnation, it's Rottnest. And those slick galleries selling Aboriginal art were eroding away my will to live. It's as if Germans built a Jewish food hall over Buchenwald' (Mitchell 2014, 325). For Holly, Aiofe and Crispin in particular, Rottnest Island as the destination of a leisurely daytrip turns into a historically charged site of ruthless cruelty and colonisation. Like Quasar, they have come to understand that islands which look alluring are not always ideal retreats.

Their second island encounter, however, takes place on a model island, which, arguably, is the most forward-thinking, utopian space in David Mitchell's work so far: Iceland (Mitchell 2014, 349–369). Crispin Hershey is lost in one of the island's rare forests as he researches his next novel about 'an Icelandic road-trip' (Mitchell

2014, 350) featuring a character from his past who is to encounter a ghost while strolling northern mythological landscapes. Since this novel is about Crispin himself, he is doomed to be confronted with his own past during that very stroll in the woods and, indeed, a bewildering encounter leaves him low-spirited. After the eagerly anticipated but demoralising visit to a museum dedicated to his literary idol Halldór Laxness, Crispin feels utterly frustrated with his own life and writing, and listlessly awaits his evening lecture, titled 'On Never Not Thinking about Iceland'. In the lecture, he outlines an ongoing fascination with Iceland: 'Just as Orientalism seduces the imagination of a certain type of Westerner, to a certain type of southerner, Iceland exerts the gravitational force far in excess of its land mass and cultural import' (Mitchell 2014, 362). Drawing on the idea that Iceland has served as an imaginative space for the projection of creative and, particularly, literary ambitions due to the inspirational force of the sagas of its earliest proto-novelists, Crispin highlights the centrality of Icelandic thought despite its geographical peripherality. Except for Holly, Aiofe and her Icelandic boyfriend Örvar, however, the audience seem unimpressed by his enthusiastic elaborations on Icelandic literary culture. At dinner with his three acquaintances, Crispin forces himself to drive away 'an intense wish to live here' (Mitchell 2014, 363) as he immediately realises he would not survive a single winter of all-too-short days.

This intense wish to live in Iceland is paired with a strong sense of survival in the final story of *The Bone Clocks*, 'Sheep's Head', when the northern isle embodies a utopian imaginary in an age of impending 'Endarkenment' (Mitchell 2014, 584–595). One of the last ecologically intact habitats on Earth, Iceland becomes a sanctuary for Holly's granddaughter Lorelei and her foster grandson Rafiq. Holly has chosen her mother's home, the Sheep's Head Peninsula on the Irish West coast, as a place to spend her twilight years. Together with her grandchildren and the now elderly Mo Muntervary from *Ghostwritten*, she witnesses how the Endarkenment, which heralds a political, economic, ecological and moral apocalypse, fastens its grip around Europe. The invasion of Chinese militia and a second Great Famine are only days away when Marinus the Horologist arrives with a crew of Icelandic officers to

offer asylum to Lorelei, who is an Icelandic citizen. They explain to Lorelei that she is given a unique 'chance of a pre-Endarkenment life' (Mitchell 2014, 589) because 'Iceland is safe' (Mitchell 2014, 586) due to its strict immigration quota, geothermal electricity and peripherality: 'Our isolation saves us from the worst […] hardships of the Endarkenment' (*ibid.*). Marinus ultimately convinces Lorelei to board the 'lifeboat to civilisation' (Mitchell 2014, 591) with him and her foster brother Rafiq. In order to secure the benefits of its advantageous geographical position, the Icelandic government is focused on ensuring that the country's citizens living abroad are able to return to the isle for as long as it is still possible while denying entry to all those without Icelandic papers. For Iceland in the time of Endarkenment, closing the borders seems the only reasonable choice. Some of the islanders, led by Marinus' Horologists, are working on strategies to prevent global collapse in a think tank called 'Prescience' (Mitchell 2014, 590), which not only recalls the myth of the light-bearing Prometheus, but also the technologically advanced 'Prescients', who have left their homeland 'Prescience I […] far-far in the northly blue' (Mitchell 2004, 258–9) to investigate the possibility of settling on the Hawaiian Isles in *Cloud Atlas* (2004). Both the Icelanders in *The Bone Clocks* and the Prescients in *Cloud Atlas* confirm Pete Hay's prediction that 'challenges faced by islanders are also thought to engender resourcefulness and resilience. These will manifest in strategies to resist identity-threatening processes of economic globalization, and the generation of imaginative developmental alternatives' (2006, 29). Taking Iceland's and the Hawaiian Islands' largely successful attempts at circumventing cataclysmic events into consideration, it could be argued that, in Mitchell's fiction, the more self-reliant and farther removed from continents, the more likely an island community's chance of survival. However, the Prescients' plan to peacefully colonise the Hawaiian Isles and the brutal subjugation of the indigenous peoples on the Chatham Islands in *Cloud Atlas* also illustrate the vulnerability and powerlessness of small islands in face of imminent invasions.

Aside from serving as utopian or Arcadian imaginaries and places of refuge, then, islands in David Mitchell's novels are frequently subject to processes of both peaceful and forceful colonisation, cultural clashes, corruption and impending threat. *Cloud*

Atlas is interspersed with both real and metaphorical islands which share these features: from Adam Ewing's journey to the Chatham Islands, to Robert Frobisher's refuge on a miniature island in Chateau Zedelghem's pond, to Timothy Cavendish's and Sonmi~451's insular experiences in Aurora House and Papa Song's, to Zachry's home 'Big I'. Perhaps the most fascinating island in the novel, however, is a fictionalised rendering of a tiny island which exists in reality: Swannekke Island. A setting emblematic of corruption and nuclear crime, it is located in the immediate vicinity of the fictional town Buenas Yerbas, 'a city of nowhere' (Mitchell 2004, 95), its name carrying the clue for demystifying Swannekke Island. The earliest Spanish settlement on the West Coast of the United States, founded in the 1770s in the place which is now the city centre of San Francisco, bore the name 'Yerba Buena' (Browning 1998, 7–8). Today, the name of the tiny, rocky Yerba Buena Island, which is linked to the somewhat larger Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, is still reminiscent of the city's beginnings as a Spanish village. At the time of the first settlers' arrival, the island must have been abundant with herbs, for it was named after the wild herb *yerba buena* (lat. *Clinopodium douglasii*), meaning 'good herb', a kind of mint found on the island and the area of the first settlement (Boyes 1936; Gauna n.d.). However, Mitchell's fictional setting of Buenas Yerbas presents a stark contrast to Yerba Buena Island, transforming the singular form 'Yerba Buena' into the plural, hinting at the enormity of the city noted by Rufus Sixsmith observing its 'billion lights' (Mitchell 2004, 89) at night. Moreover, the inversion from 'Yerba Buena' into 'Buenas Yerbas' may signify that Buenas Yerbas is, in fact, the opposite of the Yerba Buena idyll. In an interview with Luisa Rey, Alfred Hitchcock confirms: 'This town marries the worst of San Francisco with the worst of Los Angeles' (Mitchell 2004, 95). Like Buenas Yerbas, Swannekke Island is also possibly a fictional rendering of a place which really exists. When examining Yerba Buena Island in San Francisco Bay on a map, its shape could be seen to resemble an upside down swan's head, connected to the larger, man-made Treasure Island (named after the novel) with its swan's neck (see **Figure 1**). The onomatopoetic quality of Mitchell's 'Swannekke' may thus reveal it as a fictional rendering of Yerba Buena Island.
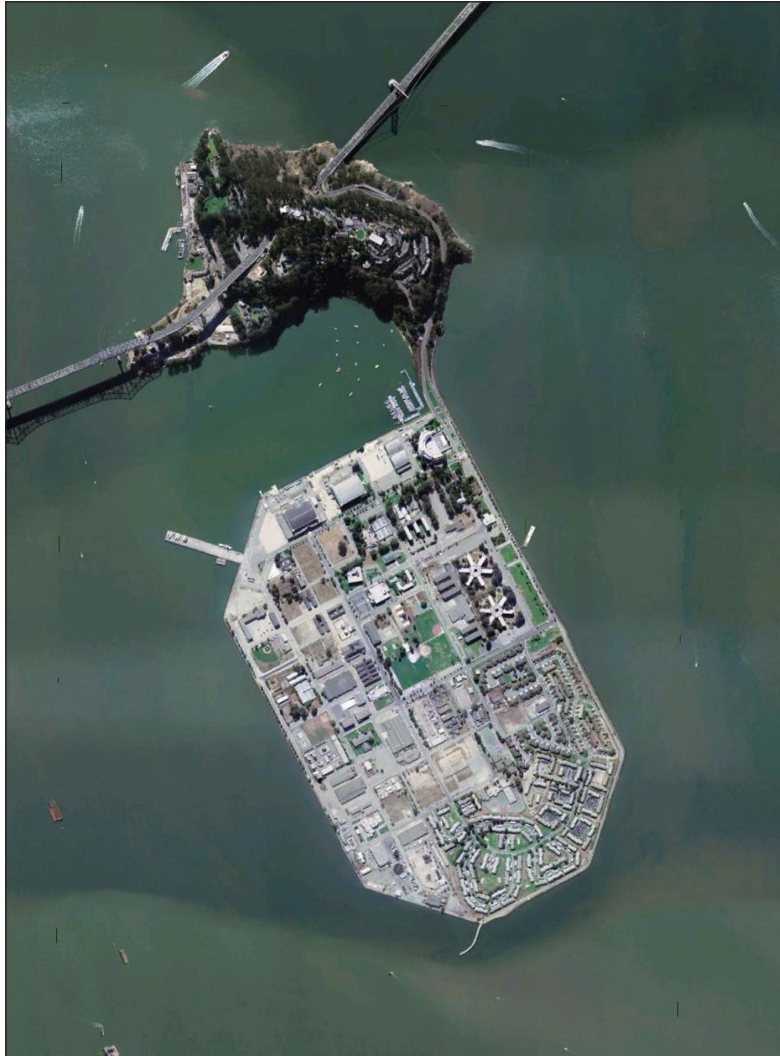
Figure 1: Yerba Buena Island (top) linked to Treasure Island (bottom). The shape of Yerba Buena Island may be seen to resemble a swan's head: the bridge on the left enters the island via the swan's beak, and the connection to Treasure Island could be seen to represent the swan's neck. Picture inverted by the author for clarity.

Image credit: "Treasure Island and Yerba Buena Island, and the San Francisco Bay Bridge, in San Francisco Bay, California." USGS aerial photograph montage. Made using NASA World Wind. *Wikimedia Commons* (Public Domain). Accessed 24 August 2017. https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=248967.

In 'Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery', the island has lost its idyllic lure and become a centre of corruption and, most significantly, a threat to many lives as the site of the controversial HYDRA nuclear reactor. To Luisa Rey and the inhabitants of Buenas Yerbas, Swannekke Island is thus the epitome of a recklessness with the planet which will ultimately lead to humankind's destruction in 'Sloosha's Crossin' An' Ev'ry'thin' After'. Interestingly, recent discoveries of Treasure Island's nuclear legacy bear striking resemblance to the Swannekke controversy in *Cloud Atlas*. In the aftermath of its function as a naval base and radar bomb scoring site during the Cold War, soil more radioactively contaminated than initially admitted by the local authorities was detected on Treasure Island when it was in the process of being developed into a new residential area of San Francisco (Carroll 2012, n.p.). Although the files revealing the truth about Treasure Island's contamination were published eight years after *Cloud Atlas*, their disclosure adds a sense of veracity to the shady dealings depicted in 'Half-Lives'. Thus, 'Half-Lives' can be read as a 'spatial story' in de Certeau's sense as it translates a real place into a fictional setting, thereby creating a new space and 'spatial trajectories' between the real and the imagined for readers and protagonists alike. By altering the pastoral Yerba Buena Island, a first haven for new settlers in the 18th century, into a place of potential threat, Mitchell not only comments on the destructive potential of nuclear power in the 20th century, but also on how islands, in their seclusion, are readily transformed into spaces for dubious scientific experiments too risky to be conducted on the mainland.

The often ambivalent power relations between island and mainland are particularly evident in David Mitchell's depiction of the interaction between Dutch merchants and the Japanese on Dejima in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), a setting characterised by negotiations of culture and identity. We catch the first sight of Dejima through Jacob de Zoet's eyes as he sketches it while sitting on the *Shenandoah*'s foremast:

> Dominating the shorefront is his home for the next year: Dejima, a high-walled, fan-shaped artificial island, some two hundred paces along its outer curve, Jacob estimates, by eighty paces deep, and erected, much like Amsterdam, on sunken piles. […] The Land-Gate connects Dejima to the shore by a single-span stone bridge over a moat of tidal mud. (Mitchell 2010, 17)
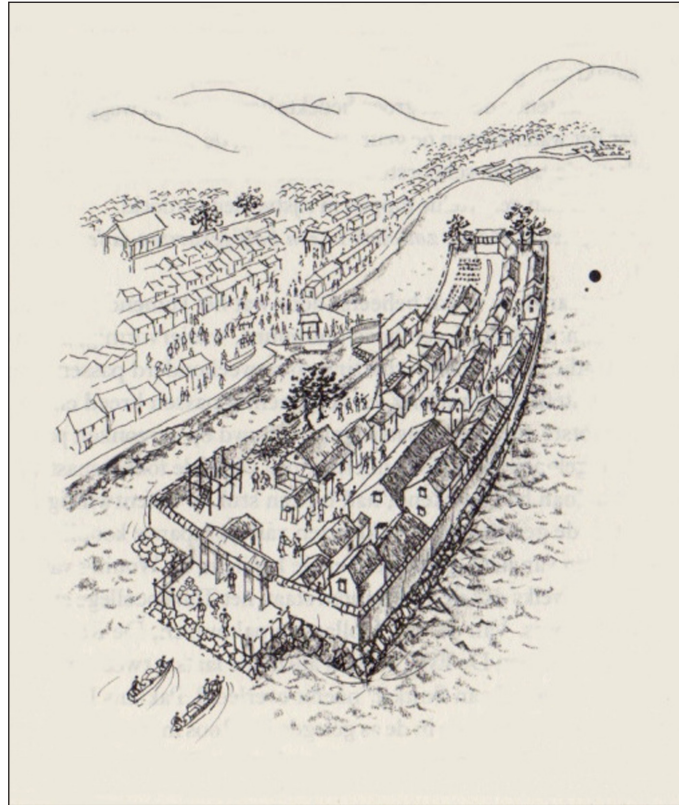
Figure 2: Jacob de Zoet's sketch of Dejima (Mitchell 2010, 18). Special credits to the artist Jenny Mitchell, and thanks to Hodder & Stoughton for the kind permission to use this image.

Jacob's concise, factual description is illustrated with more detail in his drawing (see **Figure 2**).

However, both these renderings would give island researchers pause: is Dejima truly an island? Dejima certainly matches three of Royle's characteristics of an island: 'being surrounded by water', 'boundedness' and 'small scale'. However, it is definitely not 'remote' and its 'discretion' and 'relative powerlessness' may well be questioned. Hence, Dejima appears to be somewhat difficult to define in terms of 'islandness' for several reasons. First, it is an artificial island, created in Nagasaki harbour to house a trading post, which was used by the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) from 1641 to the 1850s (Gilbert 2008). Second, Dejima has never been a self-reliant island. As long as it was used for trading, it was dependent on both Dutch and Japanese support in all areas of life. Since it was built in 1636, there has never been a fixed population of 'islanders' living on Dejima; the Dutch merchants would

arrive by ship and stay on Dejima for one or more trading seasons and then leave for Europe again. Finally, and most significantly, Dejima was constructed as a buffer zone between Japanese inhabitants and European traders. As part of the policies during the period of self-imposed seclusion between approximately 1639 and 1854, Dutch merchants were not allowed to wander off the island and only a restricted number of Japanese interpreters, cooks, clerks and officials were admitted to Dejima (Kodansha 1983; Gilbert 2008). Mitchell's fictional character Jacob de Zoet, arriving in Japan as a moral idealist in 1799 (Mitchell 2010, 41), soon has to learn that Dejima, within its own microcosm, is characterised by corruption, egotism and vicious fights over rank, reputation and money, which challenge Jacob's beliefs and convictions (Mitchell 2010, 127–128, 175, 183–185). Soon, the island comes to feel like a prison of both body and mind to the protagonist and he enviously thinks of his friends in Domburg: '*Whilst they are out in the wide world,* […] *I shall be spending my* […] *last best years – trapped in a dying factory with whatever floatsam and jetsam happen to wash up'* (Mitchell 2010, 190). Suffocated by the restrictiveness of Dejima and the overwhelming sense of pause that Tuan ascribes to the notion of place, Jacob longs for the freedom of space, for making sense of his surroundings by being able to move and roam without impediment.

In its insularity, Dejima 'represents the space between exclusion and inclusion, discrimination and acceptance, the known and the unknown' (Anderson 2003, 47) not just for Jacob, but for all Dutch traders and Japanese officials. Dejima is a contact zone between cultures, as Ogawa's master tells the interpreter when he walks across the bridge to Dejima for the first time in his life: '"This is longest bridge you ever cross because this bridge go between two worlds [*sic*]"' (Mitchell 2010, 94). As a door between East and West, the island places 'here and elsewhere in dialogue' (Stephanides and Bassnett 2008, n.p.) and serves as a site of 'mediation between cultures' (*ibid.*). Jacob, his fellow merchants, and the Japanese working on Dejima are all constantly 'on the threshold of identities' (*ibid.*), negotiating 'Selfhood' and 'Otherness' as their engagement in friendships and love affairs, experience of cultural clashes and misunderstandings broadens their horizons. David Mitchell's depiction of life on Dejima confirms J. E. Terrell's proposition that 'isolation is not a defining characteristic of island life; to the contrary, it could be argued that islanders

are generally more aware of, and in touch with, the worldwide web of human intercourse than others may be' (Terrell 2004, 11).

The close readings of David Mitchell's island settings in *Ghostwritten* (1999), *Cloud Atlas* (2004), *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) and *The Bone Clocks* (2014) seem to support Terrell's claim and suggest that islands in Mitchell's work are always relational entities. This means that his islands cannot be mere places in Tuan's sense, carrying histories, meanings and experiences of a people, but must necessarily be seen as spaces, because they generate 'a people's spatial feelings and ideas in the stream of experience' (Tuan 1979, 388). Requiring the protagonists to position themselves both geographically and culturally within the spaces they traverse, they can also be seen as 'practised place[s]' in de Certeau's sense. As relational spaces, Mitchell's individual islands do not stand isolated, but are part of larger networks spanning time and space. Although some islands may initially appear to be detached from the external world, such as Kumejima, Clear Island, Rottnest Island or Iceland, those who seek out their peacefulness and isolation soon realise that they do not provide the ultimate protection that Tuan assigns to place, but are as much involved in the world's events as any other landmass. Dejima, a deliberately constructed island to contain and control foreign traders, becomes a laboratory of intercultural exchange, and the mysterious Swannekke Island proves not to be secret enough to prevent Luisa Rey from uncovering a major scandal.

Despite their different functions, from serving as safe havens and sanctuaries for refugees and the exiled, to utopian vantage points, to sites of hostility, danger and corruption, Mitchell's islands are united in providing linked points of reference across the oceans. As platforms of intercultural exchange, islands enable us to make contact with each other, just as much as they are in constant contact with the rest of the world in an 'inter-planetary connectedness, [… which] comes from a realization that the geological processes that manifest in islands continue beneath the sea, linking island to island, island to continent' (Hay 2006, 23). Bill Holm has a similar vision: 'we only think we escape to islands; we forget the wind, which blows spores and ashes from all over the planet to keep us company' (Holm 2000, 74). These arguments strongly reverberate with the all-pervasive trope of interconnection in David Mitchell's fiction (e.g., see Childs and Green 2011, 37–39; Dillon 2011, 13; O'Donnell

2015, 5–6; Schoene 2009, 98). We may be inclined to rephrase Adam Ewing's final words, 'Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?' (Mitchell 2004, 529), into 'Yet what is this world but a multitude of islands?', or even, on a metafictional level, into 'Yet what is David Mitchell's fictional universe but a multitude of stories?' Just as much as David Mitchell's stories are embedded in and enhanced by their larger contexts, the novels and the Über-novel, his islands demonstrate that '[a]n island is a world; yet an island engages the world' (Baldacchino 2005, 248).

In conclusion, to make sense of islands in David Mitchell's fiction, we cannot consider them purely in isolation, in their remoteness, boundedness, smallness, discretion and powerlessness, but must acknowledge the opposite: they are surrounded – surrounded by water, other islands, continents and the world at large. This paper has established that they are not mere places, but relational spaces which put each other in context and call for fresh outlooks on our perceptions of here and there, now and then, Self and Other. The islands in Mitchell's 'spatial stories' at the same time juxtapose and interconnect fundamentally distinct cultural land- and mindscapes, and invite readers to reflect on their own attachment to place and longing for space. A more comprehensive study on island spaces in Mitchell's work could also take the metaphorical insularity of certain protagonists and island metaphors in general into consideration which, due to limited scope, had to be neglected in this paper. For the islands investigated in this paper, for David Mitchell's stories, his protagonists, narrators, readers and critics alike, John Donne's seemingly timeless assertion about relationality rings true: 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main' (Donne 2015, Meditation XVII).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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