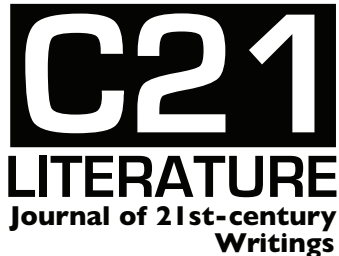




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ARTICLE

## Foreword to the Special Edition of *C21 Literature*

David Mitchell

Author

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A foreword to the David Mitchell Special Edition of *C21 Literature* by David Mitchell.

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'What an honour' was my initial reaction when Dr Rose Harris-Birtill invited me to the University of St Andrews in June 2017 for a conference on my writing. I had the very same thought as I sat in the School of English listening to papers presented by scholars from across the UK and much further afield. That academics at all stages of their careers spend time and research energy on my work is a further honour I'll never take for granted. I'm aware that swanning into a conference on David Mitchell's writing might look like a vanity of Crispin Hershey proportions, but the possibilities for learning were too many and too tempting. I wasn't disappointed. The variety and quality of the submissions was impressive and humbling, and I only wish I could have cloned myself so I could have attended both programmes, instead of having to choose which room to go to by flipping a coin.

I was keen to state at St Andrews the same point I'd like to make here: that my role was not to arbitrate whether, and to what degree, any given paper had 'got it right' or divined my authorial intentions correctively. Literature is more interactive than that: that's why it works. Anyhow, many of those authorial intentions lie buried under 15 or 20 years' worth of changes of mind, later development or native forgetfulness. The articles which I enjoy the most are often those which treat my books less as a self-contained object of study and more as a lens or a prism. Consequently, the attendees at the St Andrews conference treated me not as a living fossil or the Lord Chamberlain but as a co-explorer of ideas that occupy us, as writers, readers, thinkers and humans. That felt like the biggest honour of all.

A big Thank You, then, to Dr Harris-Birtill and her hardworking team for putting together a memorable conference; to everyone who attended; to Professor Paul Harris for encouraging Lachim DiVeldt to emerge from his oubliette; and to all at *C21 Literature* for devoting this special issue to articles on my work. I'm a fortunate writer.

### Competing Interests

The author is the subject of this issue but has no competing interests to declare.

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