

Nana Soilumo

“A PYRAMID BUILT ON SHIFTING SANDS”

Information as a Tool of Power in David Mitchell’s
Cloud Atlas

Faculty of Social Sciences
Master’s Program in Literary Studies
Master’s Thesis
May 2021

ABSTRACT

Nana Soilumo: A Pyramid Built on Shifting Sands – Information as a Tool of Power in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

Master's Thesis

Tampere university

Master's Program in Literary Studies

May 2021

The questions of the nature and usage of information and knowledge have become especially topical during the last few years due to issues such as fake news, mis- and disinformation, and culture wars, to only name a few. In this thesis, I attempt to analyse the ways in which information and knowledge are depicted as a tool of power and how they are used in the stories, with more detailed questions based on the target story. The target text is David Mitchell's speculative fiction novel *Cloud Atlas*, published in 2004. The novel is composed of six independent stories, which are, still, interconnected, and form a chronological story inside *Cloud Atlas*, even though they can be read as individual stories. I will analyse only four out of these six stories, for the reason that they are the most relevant for this thesis, and *Letters from Zedelghem* and *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish* do not especially feature the subjects I examine in this thesis. Nevertheless, I will refer to them when necessary, from the perspective of the other parts. For example, I make multiple notions of how the protagonists Robert Frobisher and Timothy Cavendish follow the same themes as the protagonists of the other four stories.

The main theme of discussion in *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing* is colonialism and the colonial discourse, as mentioned in the title of chapter 2. In chapter 2.1, I will discuss the colonial discourse in general, examining the story from the perspective of historical fiction and drawing on the notions of Lynda Ng. I also point out the references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and how this earlier work relates to *Cloud Atlas*. In chapter 2.2, I will continue the theme of colonialism from the perspective of Christian religion and biological racism, and examine how these subjects relate to the colonialist idea. Again, I will draw on Lynda Ng, Gerd Bayer, and Diletta de Cristofaro's research on the *Pacific Journal*, as well as racism studies. The analysis on racism concentrates on the types of racism: the "old" biological racism predominantly featured in the story, and the "new" cultural racism, that I consider important to mention. As I will skip the chronologically second story of *Letters from Zedelghem*, chapter 3 will concentrate on *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery*. The focus will be on investigative journalism and journalism's relation to truth. In chapter 3.1, I will discuss the nature of investigative journalism in *Half-Lives* through character study, and after this, the epistemological dominant in relation to the detective novel and the thriller, which *Half-Lives* represents. For the epistemological questions, I will draw on the definitions of Brian McHale's genre studies. Chapter 3.2 will focus on how mis- and disinformation is presented in the story, and via them, propaganda and fake news that can both be considered disinformation. In this context, I will examine how the company Seaboard Power Inc. and the gossip magazine *Spyglass*, which Rey works for, use information and what are the power relations. These power relations also include the activists protesting against nuclear power. I will, again, skip the chronologically next story of *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*, and so chapter 4 concentrates on *An Orison of Sonmi-451*, the first story set in the future and considered science fiction. The focus will be on counter-narratives and how they are used by Sonmi against the governing body to dispel the dominant narrative she finds untruthful. Chapter 4.1 follows in the footsteps of *Half-Lives* in the theme of propaganda and restricted access to information. This chapter demonstrates ways in which the dominant narrative is maintained by controlling the oppressed fabricants and the pureblood citizens of Nea So Copros. I will also analyse the references made through Sonmi's experience and what this may mean to the reading experience. In chapter 4.2, I take a closer look at the counter-narratives and versions of truth: Sonmi, the purebloods, Unanimity, and the Archivist all have their own perspectives on what is true. Here, I will define counter-narratives with the help of Klarissa Lueg, Ann Starbæk Bager, Marianne Wolff Lundholt, Sanne Frandsen, and Timothy Kuhn. The last analysis chapter 5 focuses on the chronologically last story, *Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After*, the post-apocalyptic part of *Cloud Atlas*. Chapter 5.1 will discuss the nature of the apocalypse that takes place between the chronologically last two stories, and the meaning of the knowledge lost with it. I will approach this lost knowledge from the perspective of the Valleysmen who gather and seek to preserve the knowledge of the lost, pre-apocalyptic world, and the Prescients, a scientifically more developed people. The issue between what the Valleysmen think they know and what is the truth about the apocalypse is discussed as well. In this chapter, I will use the theories and notions of Diletta de Cristofaro and Marco Caracciolo. I will also comment on Caracciolo's "negative strategy" of world disruption in post-apocalyptic fiction. In chapter 5.2, the focus will be on the anthropological dilemma of Meronym's character, where she has to decide whether it is ethically right to not help

the Valleysmen in grave situations due to her scientist's code. The themes of the last chapter will take us back to the beginning of *Cloud Atlas*, the *Pacific Journal*. Here, I will draw again on Lynda Ng's notions, and briefly those of Marco Caracciolo. After this, I will present the conclusions of this thesis.

Keywords: David Mitchell, Cloud Atlas, information, power, colonialism, counter-narrative, apocalypse, thriller

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	<i>Cloud Atlas</i> as research material	2
1.2	Previous research on <i>Cloud Atlas</i>	5
2	<i>The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing</i> – The colonial discourse	10
2.1	Colonialism and mapping the world	11
2.2	Christianity and biological racism	14
3	<i>Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery</i> – Uncovering the truth with investigative journalism	22
3.1	Investigative journalism and the genre of detective fiction	23
3.2	Mis- and disinformation: propaganda and fake news	29
4	<i>An Orison of Sonmi-451</i> – The power of counter-narratives	37
4.1	Propaganda and restricted access to information	38
4.2.	Counter-narratives and versions of truth	45
5	<i>Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After</i> – Lost knowledge and the limbo of suffering	50
5.1	Apocalypse and lost knowledge	51
5.2	The anthropological dilemma and the return to the <i>Pacific Journal</i>	57
6	Conclusions	61
	Works cited	65

1 Introduction

Information and knowledge have been, through the history of humankind, tools of power. Misunderstandings, mis- and disinformation, and propaganda have set in motion conflicts and unfortunate events which, with proper knowledge or understanding, could have possibly been avoided. The more a person knows, the more tools they have at their disposal to act and effectively influence change. And, as in the case of the characters in *Cloud Atlas* (= CA, 2012/2004), begin to understand a shrouded dystopia. Intentionally and unintentionally, information can be and is used to gain power and control, and in the year 2021, I believe these subjects especially important to research, also in the field of literary studies. Especially during times of crisis and, for example, which we are unfortunately witnessing again, information is vital. Otherwise governments and companies would not be so interested in what whistleblowers have to say, and scandals like Wikileaks would never have happened. *Cloud Atlas* follows closely its speculative dystopian predecessors in presenting a cast of characters who find themselves and their people oppressed by a system that is by others believed quite utopian: I consider the clearest predecessor to be George Orwell's *1984*. The novel is extensively intertextual and intermedial, referring to other pieces of literature (such as Orwell's *1984*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*), films such as *Blade Runner* (1982), but also factual historical events (Chatham Islands). Because of this, my thesis study aims to contribute to both literary science and sociology.

Due to the diversity in the nature of the stories in *Cloud Atlas*, I will also use a set of multiple theories and methods, such as postcolonialism and theories on counter-narratives. My main aim is to investigate the nature of information and the connection between information and power, and how they are represented in four of the six stories of *Cloud Atlas*: concealing information, propaganda, mis- and disinformation, rewriting and preserving history, and the scientific approaches. In this, I will make use of Brian McHale's (2001) tool of epistemological dominance to a certain extent. I will treat information as a source and tool of power, a weapon that is utilised to keep a certain power structure functioning (e.g., the corpocracy in An Orison of Sonmi-451). By investigating these kinds of connections focusing on information narratives, I expect to also uncover knowledge about the underlying power structures and discourses

with the help of critical discourse analysis when needed, as first introduced by Michel Foucault (1972) and later broadened, amongst others, by Brian Paltridge (2015).

Historically speaking, many of the stories can be approached through postcolonial theory: especially the first part, *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing*, explicitly deals with colonialism as a story itself. In this, I will use postcolonial theory as first penned by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002/1989), but I will also heavily draw on Lynda Ng's (2015) postcolonial take on *Cloud Atlas*. The question of the nature of colonialism carries through the whole of *Cloud Atlas*, and after the first part *Pacific Journal*, connects it to more modern types of oppression. For example, the fifth story of *An Orison of Sonmi-451* presents futuristic takes on colonialism, and the protagonist Sonmi-451 devises her own strategies to make her people's voices heard.

This takes us to the discourse of counter narratives that was also discussed in *The Empire Writes Back*. Postcolonialism has studied how the oppressed have "written back" against the colonialism, creating their own narratives countering the widely accepted narrative that the entity in power has produced. This is the case in *Cloud Atlas* as well: it is seen in the "Cloud Atlas Sextet" Frobisher writes his life into and in the "Declarations" Sonmi-451 leaves to the next generations. Due to the pivotal question of knowledge and knowing in this thesis, I will, to the extent needed, discuss the roles of the narrator and reader: in many cases in *Cloud Atlas*, the narrator or the protagonist knows less than our contemporary reader.

1.1 *Cloud Atlas* as research material

The target text of this thesis is David Mitchell's speculative fiction novel *Cloud Atlas*. The work is composed of six different, yet interconnected stories, which all represent different genres and styles of writing. Because of this, *Cloud Atlas* is speculative in multiple meanings of the word, giving us fictional situations in historical settings, but also speculative visions of Earth's future that can be considered science fiction. Speculative fiction in itself is an extremely broad term, essentially meaning all fiction not set in our real world. According to Hanna-Riikka Roine (2016), speculative fiction "combines the creative imagining of fictional characters, events and locations with the rational and systematic process of prospecting into what is to come" (Ibid.,

6). I argue that this is exactly what *Cloud Atlas* does, both the individual stories and the work as a whole.

The first part *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing* is, as its name suggests, a diary written by an American notary Adam Ewing, set in the mid-nineteenth century Pacific Ocean. *Letters from Zedelghem* are letters written to his friend and lover by Robert Frobisher, a British composer, who has escaped his family and creditors to Belgium in 1931. *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery* is a thriller novel starring reporter Luisa Rey and set in the fictional city of Buenas Yervas in 1975 California. *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish* is an autobiography by an old publisher Timothy Cavendish, written in the UK of 2010s. *An Orison of Sonmi-451* is an audio-visual interview of Sonmi-451, a rebel *fabricant* from Nea So Copros, a future state in the 2100s that today is the Korean peninsula. The chronologically last and physically middle-set story is *Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After*, an oral telling featuring a young villager named Zachry from the Big Island of Hawaii, in a post-apocalyptic world somewhere in the far future. The stories are physically cut in the middle, one mid-sentence, presenting an unusual order of reading inside the covers: the reader starts their journey with Adam Ewing, and after traversing the other five worlds, ends it with him as well. For this reason, *Cloud Atlas* has two possible endings: the chronological, apocalyptic ending of *Sloosha's Crossin'*, and the concrete, more hopeful ending of the *Pacific Journal*. In her study on *Cloud Atlas*, Lynda Ng terms these endings the story-time and discourse-time endings¹, respectively (Ng 2015, 115). In my study, I will treat the stories as individual storylines while bearing in mind that Mitchell meant the events to be read interconnectedly.

Partly because of the novel's structure, there has been debate over whether the story of *Cloud Atlas* is deterministic or not. Gerd Bayer notes that "[the] novel casts any historical present as fundamentally marked by catastrophic development" (2015, 345). Diletta de Cristofaro, on the other hand, does not consider the novel deterministic (2018, e.g., 250), whereas Bayer as well as Jennifer Rickel consider it a warning text and, as such, a commentary on contemporary

¹ Story-time essentially refers to the time that passes inside the story world. Discourse-time, on the other hand, refers to the time from the point of view of the telling itself. Because of this, the reader reads the events of *Cloud Atlas* in different order from which they happen in the story world. Gérard Genette, for example, distinguishes three forms of time: the story-time, the discourse-time, and the narrating-time (see Genette 1986/1980).

society (Rickel 2015). Heather J. Hicks has written on the novel's take on historicism (Hicks 2010). Concerning the novel as a commentary, which I believe it to be as well, Bayer states that: "Mitchell clearly questions to what extent post-Enlightenment cultural history can be read as a story of progress." (Bayer 2015, 346). I will further comment on this take on "progress" in chapter 5 of this thesis, but it is clear from the very first story that *Cloud Atlas* tests our perspectives of human history and its consequences. Mitchell's view of historical progress is negative, to the point of being apocalyptic.² Now in 2021, during the last few years many of us have been quite effectively disillusioned with the progress of human societies, if not before. Not to mention I am writing this thesis in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, eerily reminded of the problematic spread of diseases in the future worlds of *Orison* and *Sloosha's Crossin'*. In spite of this, there is no need to consider *Cloud Atlas* in wholly negative light. Bayer notes:

What Mitchell's novel invites its readers to envision —and, indeed, even to celebrate— is not the promised land of a utopian future, nor even the horrors of a post-apocalyptic dystopia [--], but instead the human qualities already existent across history, independent of the post-Renaissance concept of progressive developments and Enlightenment improvements. (Bayer 2015, 347.)

In Bayer's opinion, *Cloud Atlas* invites the reader to consider the "eternal present", rather than a single, confined historical presence, and see the historically positive features in their respective situations (Bayer 2015, 347). The novel brings the historical moments close to the reader in very personal perspectives, and entwines eras centuries apart from each other with common themes that are not common only to them, but also to us contemporary readers. I would argue that these themes remain important should the reader exist in the time of *Cloud Atlas'* publication in 2004, now in 2021, or decades hence. I agree with Bayer's notion of a "sense of the omnipresence of the apocalyptic, revealing the ever-so-fragile nature of peace, health, safety, and joy. [--] *Cloud Atlas* lends emphasis to the small-scale logic of local action and face-to-face encounters." (Ibid., 348). Indeed, *Cloud Atlas* celebrates the deeds of individuals in the face of oppression and abuse surpassing the size of one person. The history presented in *Cloud Atlas* reaches beyond the linear models presented in the European and American history studies and this is true for the whole novel: *Cloud Atlas* presents the world as one. Bayer calls these

² See e.g., Bayer (2015) and de Cristofaro (2018).

linear models “established”, but this seems problematic to me: the linear model is not a global default, but dependent on the cultural context, which, in this case, is western. He is, nevertheless, right in noting that the conversations in the different eras in *Cloud Atlas* are timeless (Ibid., 346). Independent of the time of their occurrence, the discussions between the characters are always topical.

For this thesis, I have decided to exclude the second story *Letters from Zedelghem* and the fourth story *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*. This is due to the choice of subject: these two stories do not address the questions about knowledge and information when it comes to power relations as much as the other four stories. It would be pointless to examine these two stories in the same length as the others, so I have decided to include the comments that I do have of them into the analysis of the four other parts.

1.2 Previous research on *Cloud Atlas*

David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* has attracted attention and discussion on several fields since its publishing seventeen years ago. On the one hand, the novel is a clear descendant of, for example, previous apocalyptic writings, but on the other, its unusual structure and approach to old topics has caused disagreement over matters as seemingly simple as what genre *Cloud Atlas* represents: according to Gerd Bayer, every story inside the book represents a different subgenre of the novel (Bayer 2015, 345). The variety of themes inside the six stories has enabled researchers to look at the novel from many points of view, and many have treated *Cloud Atlas* as a warning text (e.g., Rickel 2015), which I consider it to be, as well.

The most discussed subject about *Cloud Atlas* is the apocalyptic genre, which is represented in the last story of the novel, the post-apocalyptic *Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After*. Some researchers have discussed the apocalyptic features of *Sloosha’s Crossin’*, some have paid attention to how the preceding five stories pave the way to the approaching disaster. Heather J. Hicks, for example, states that “the sequence [of the events in the stories] invites us to infer and attempt to decode causality from the series of narratives: somehow the events taking place in each era may have, sequentially, or in the aggregate, created the conditions of global

catastrophe.” (Hicks 2010). Because of this, Bayer notes that *Cloud Atlas* presents the apocalypse that is usually seen as a disaster in a far-away future already taking place (Bayer 2015, 345). Lynda Ng discusses features, such as cannibalism, found in the pre-apocalyptic stories that can be considered apocalyptic (Ng 2015). According to her, in depicting the post-apocalyptic world in a “Hobbesian state of nature” and situating both the first and last story in the Pacific region, Mitchell implies that the human history begins and ends this way. Diletta de Cristofaro notes that while apocalypse is originally the biblical pathway to a utopian world, in contemporary fiction, the post-apocalyptic world is distinctly dystopian (de Cristofaro 2018, 243). This is the case with *Cloud Atlas* as well, as *Sloosha’s Crossin’* depicts a world where human race is swiftly disappearing: it is likely the end of the world is happening, but at least it is the end of humanity.

Multiple studies (see e.g., Hopf 2011; Brown 2017) have addressed identity: *Cloud Atlas* features a very diverse character spectrum that varies between different sexes, sexualities, ethnicities, ages, and even beings of existence, considering the protagonist of *An Orison of Sonmi-451* is a humanoid. According to Kevin Brown, Mitchell “portrays the idea of identity or authenticity as defined by individual choice and action” (Brown 2017, 60). He states this is because in each of *Cloud Atlas’* six stories, the characters fight to discover who they are and how to live in the society that is, in different ways, hostile towards them (Ibid., 62).

Kevin Brown has also written about metafiction and the unusual narrative, and he is not alone in this, either. Brown states that it is important to notice that the protagonists themselves become aware (reading or otherwise) of the story of the chronologically previous protagonist and in doing so are encouraged to tell their own stories (Brown 2016, 78). According to Mitchell himself, the novel’s structure is also about ways of telling stories (Raja 2005). Brown notes that the structure where five of the six stories are cut in the middle disrupts the reading process: “it is labelled as a ‘postmodern’ novel, using that word in the sense of purposefully breaking what we think of when we imagine traditional structures.” (Brown 2016, 78). Jennifer Rickel echoes these thoughts, linking the novel’s disruptive structure with neoliberalism and consumerism, arguing that Mitchell is intentionally trying to disrupt the reading process. She states that “Although the novel offers an opportunity to inhabit the alterity of the Other, a neoliberal packaging of literature renders the Other an object of consumption.” (Rickel 2015,

159). By disrupting the 'consumption', or reading process, Mitchell prevents the novel from becoming this neoliberal packaging of literature. Others who have discussed the novel's views on economics, mainly capitalism and neoliberalism, include Kristian Shaw (2015).

Connected to the cannibalism mentioned previously, colonialism is an important subject throughout the book that has earned the attention from multiple scholars and is a major theme in this thesis as well. Lynda Ng reminds us that even though Mitchell has invented fictional people such as the fabricants and the Valleysmen, the history of the Maori and the Moriori is, of course, based on actual historical events (Ng 2015, 112). Ng describes some of Mitchell's historical inaccuracies, but notes that he makes "a double criticism of both the Maori colonization of Moriori lands, and of the greater English colonization of Maori territory." (Ibid., 113). Very much like the way Mitchell does not make his protagonists the image of flawless heroes, he stays true to this side of the historical events and does not depict the Maori as simply oppressed. *Cloud Atlas'* treatment of history has been discussed outside colonialism as well, for example by Casey Shoop and Dermot Ryan. Shoop and Ryan have analysed the presence of Big History in the novel (Shoop & Ryan 2015), while Hicks has written about the problem of historicism (Hicks 2010).

Not the least due to the aforementioned, unusual structure of the book, the concept of time and chronology has also sparked scholarly interest. Gerd Bayer points out that *Cloud Atlas* covers a vast event continuum in past, present, and future (Bayer 2015, 345). Hicks, on the other hand, notes that due to the matryoshka-like structure, the novel depicts a perception of time that is circular rather than linear (similarly to Bayer, as mentioned before) (Hicks 2010, 42). Diletta de Cristofaro writes that contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction is, in general, concerned with time and history, and deliberately tries to challenge apocalypticism (de Cristofaro 2018, 243). Amongst others, de Cristofaro makes the same observation that while *Cloud Atlas* gives a predetermined, post-apocalyptic end devoid of any hope for humankind, it also presents a 'second', distinctly different ending in the form of a concrete ending where the physical book ends (Ibid., 245).

In this thesis, I will use predominantly the theoretical points made in the works of Lynda Ng and Diletta de Cristofaro, due to the importance of their notions on the themes and subjects

that I examine. Because the focus of this thesis is the nature of information and knowledge, I will concentrate on those subjects also when using the previous research: for example, Ng focuses on the colonialist and apocalyptic features of *Cloud Atlas*, and I will use her notions as bases for the epistemological discourse that is presented through these subjects in the book. Like Gerd Bayer, de Cristofaro also focuses on the concept of time, and I will draw on her research similarly to Ng's.

I will discuss the stories of *Cloud Atlas* in the chronological order in which they are presented in the novel. The thesis begins with the analysis of the *Pacific Journal*: how does the colonialist setting and the racist ideology produce and attempt to maintain their dominant discourse through information and knowledge? There is also the question of religion, in this case Christianity, which contributes to the ideas expressed by some of the characters. I will approach these questions through the experiences of the protagonist Adam Ewing, and his dialogue with the characters who represent these ideologies. The third chapter concentrates on *Half-Lives* and investigative journalism. Here, I will use a set of terms such as mis- and disinformation, fake news, and propaganda to support my reading of the part. These terms will be introduced properly in the third chapter. The focus is, again, on the protagonist Luisa Rey, but also on the thriller genre due to its epistemological nature. In the fourth chapter of the thesis, I will discuss the part *Orison*, which is the first part set in the future. Due to the part being presented in the form of the protagonist Sonmi-451's interview, hers is the only coherent view the reader receives of the world's situation – in spite of the interviewer Archivist stating longer comments from time to time. In the analysis of *Orison*, I write extensively on dominant and counter-narratives. Dominant narrative is the social narrative told and maintained by a dominant culture, in contrast to the minorities or people who are oppressed. In the case of *Orison*, the nation's governing body seeks to maintain their dominant narrative in order to remain in power, and Sonmi, as the member of the oppressed fabricants, creates and publishes her counter-narrative, her version of what she calls the truth. I will analyse both the informative strategies of the governing body as well as the strategies Sonmi uses to create her narrative while gaining information and knowledge about the world around her. In the last chapter, I will concentrate on the chronologically last story of *Sloosha's Crossin'* and its post-apocalyptic world. I will use the word apocalypse because the researchers before me have as well (see

e.g., Bayer 2015; de Cristofaro 2018; Rickel 2015), even though the term is debated. The original meaning of apocalypse comes from the biblical Book of Revelation, where the Apocalypse is described as the destruction of the current world before a new, more utopian world (utopian in a Christian concept). This apocalypse consists of the destruction and a revelation after it, where the destruction is given sense and purpose (e.g., de Cristofaro 2018). The apocalypse presented in *Cloud Atlas*, however, is the type often found in contemporary dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction: the destruction is mostly, if not only, negative, and there is no utopian teleology or revelation afterwards. The apocalypse of *Cloud Atlas* is named the Fall and is set between the stories of *Orison* and *Sloosha's Crossin'*, and even though we are not given an explanation of what happened, *Orison* hints to its causes and *Sloosha's Crossin'* presents the dystopian world after it. The problem with the term "apocalypse" in cases such as *Cloud Atlas* is perhaps the association to the "destruction of the world". If the destruction only concerns the human race, why would it equal as the destruction of the whole world? As I will argue later in this thesis, it seems that in *Cloud Atlas*, however, the apocalypse touches the environment and other species as well. After the last analysis chapter, I will present the conclusions.

2 *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing* – The colonial discourse

The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing is both the opening and closing story of *Cloud Atlas*, and can be seen, in a peculiar way, as the frame story of the book: in spite of it opening and closing the novel in the perspective of discourse-time, the events still happen before the other parts in story-time. The *Pacific Journal* is set in the mid-nineteenth century Oceania and follows the protagonist Adam Ewing, a San Franciscan notary heading back home from the Chatham Islands in New Zealand. At the beginning of the story, he meets an Englishman, Dr Henry Goose, with whom he leaves on the ship *Prophetess*. During the journey, Ewing is stricken by an enigmatic illness and eventually discovers that Dr Goose has been trying to poison him for his wealth. Ewing is saved by Autua, a stowaway Moriori slave whom he has previously helped. The *Pacific Journal* is literally presented as Ewing's journal, edited, and published by his son Jackson, who is not part of the story, but makes himself present in a footnote. The journal is later read by Robert Frobisher in *Letters from Zedelghem*, who also identifies the *Pacific Journal's* date to 1849 or 1850 (CA, 64). *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing* is an adaption of an existing historical story of a Moriori stowaway Koche, who related his story to an American lawyer, C. Ewing, in 1873 (see e.g., Lynda Ng 2015).

In the first part of this chapter, 2.1, I will examine the prominent theme of the *Pacific Journal*, colonialism, and its main points in the story. Colonialism is a recurring theme in the whole of *Cloud Atlas*, from the *Pacific Journal* to *Sloosha's Crossin'*, and its starting point is naturally the imperialist and colonialist setting in the *Pacific Journal*. From my thesis' point of view, the *Pacific Journal* is exceedingly epistemological: combating colonialism and racism requires identifying the mindsets behind them, and challenging these ideas and beliefs with more educated arguments and knowledge. This is the case with many themes of oppression in *Cloud Atlas*, but especially that of racism, and via racism, colonialism. Following this, I will move on to 2.2 to discuss the contemporary Christianity and the so-called "old racism" that prevailed in the 19th century, the two subjects that were pivotal in establishing the core of the colonialist idea.

2.1 Colonialism and mapping the world

In addition to being a recurring theme in the novel, colonialism is the most prominent theme in the story of the *Pacific Journal*. It begins on the very first page, when the narrator-protagonist Adam Ewing meets Dr Henry Goose on a beach: "His nationality was no surprise. If there be any eyrie so desolate, or isle so remote that one may there resort unchallenged by an Englishman, 'tis not down on any map I ever saw." (CA, 3). Ewing's attitude towards the English extending their rule across the world is seemingly sarcastic and disapproving. The reason at this point might not be the colonialism in itself, but the fact that these two characters represent the old and the new world: the relationship between the Americans and the British was heavily taxed by the American Revolutionary War. The subject of differences between "old and new" also extends to human generations: Ewing knows that, for example, his father-in-law would not approve of his life choices and would think him naïve (CA, 528–529). During his journey on the ship *Prophetess*, Ewing meets colonialists of other nationalities apart from the English, and his personal attitude towards these people, whose actions are governed by greed, turns all the more negative. The *Pacific Journal* echoes *Orison* in this theme of learning, and in Ewing's case, learning by experience: the young notary is depicted quite naïve at first, having utmost faith in the prevailing Christian beliefs and those of the people around him without really questioning them. Eventually Ewing becomes more aware of the cruel reality of the minorities and those oppressed, and with this new knowledge he decides to join the abolitionists. The fates of Autua and a cabin boy named Rafael are what seem to motivate Ewing the most: Rafael is sexually abused by the other sailors on the *Prophetess*, and in the end takes his own life by hanging himself from the ship's mast (CA, 517–519). This incident greatly unsettles Ewing, and he speaks of Rafael still in the closing of his journal. It is also worth noting that when the *Pacific Journal* is cut in the middle, at the point where *Letters from Zedelghem* begins, the text is cut mid-sentence, in a situation where Ewing is writing about Rafael. The sentence begins "Reading my entry for 15th October, when I first met Rafael" (CA, 39) and ends "during our shared *mal de mer* on the Tasman Sea, I stand amazed at how that sprite lad, aglow with excitement at his maiden voyage & so eager to please, has become this sullen youth in only six weeks." (CA, 493). Firstly, Ewing is referring to an entry in his journal the reader has no access to (as the journal presented begins in November), revealing he has known Rafael longer than the others. Secondly, the rest of *Cloud Atlas* is read between these

pages and the reader proceeds from the suicide of *Zedelghem's* protagonist to Ewing wondering if something is amiss with Rafael. Before killing himself, Rafael seeks aid from Ewing and he does question the boy, but because he is feeling unwell, he dismisses the issue when Rafael does not elaborate. For this reason, Ewing blames himself for Rafael's death, and I believe this feeling of guilt and helplessness is what pushes Ewing to act. Ewing does acknowledge the mental growth himself: when addressing his diary, and more notably, the reader, he explains why he thinks a utopian world of equality is possible and states: "I am not deceived. It is the hardest of worlds to make real." (CA, 528). Ewing understands the hardships of the battle he has joined to fight, but like *Orison's* Sonmi, he fights nonetheless, because he believes he can contribute to a better future.

Ewing's first experience towards a change in attitude happens before his departure from the Chatham Islands, when Ewing and Dr Goose witness a flogging of a Moriori slave. Ewing and the slave share an intensive eye contact, after which Ewing enquires about the man's crime, but is led away by Dr Goose. Later this same slave escapes and Ewing finds him on the ship in his own cabin: after the initial shock on Ewing's part, the Moriori introduces himself as Autua. Ewing pledges to help him, because he is too scared not to, and in his own opinion, risk Autua eating him alive. The reason Ewing considers the possibility of cannibalism is because he has been told that the natives eat other humans (e.g., CA, 15). One may note that the cannibalism has been mentioned in connection to the Maori, but Ewing, possibly not distinguishing between the two native peoples, extends this discourse to the Moriori. Lynda Ng points out that this discourse is a strategy to lift the white Western society on a higher moral pedestal, but in fact on false grounds, since cannibalism has been practiced amongst Europeans as well. According to her, cannibalism was one of the taboo subjects that was used to distinguish the civilised Western society from the uncivilised native ones. (e.g., Ng 2015, 109). Evidently, Ewing does not know this and because he is taught to consider the natives morally below the white people³, he does not question the cannibalistic trait and so fears Autua. This fear is solely based on what other white men have told him, but is slowly soothed by his personal experiences with Autua, who shares with Ewing his own story and proves himself worthy of

³ Ewing uses the term "White" with a capital w of people like himself, Dr Goose, and the Dutch first mate Boerhaave. I will use the term in this context with the same meaning, but not capitalised; people of explicitly western ethnicity, whom the characters in the book consider to be "Whites".

his trust. From this meeting begins the examination of the nature of racism and oppression between different groups of people that runs through the whole of *Cloud Atlas*, and Ewing's personal growth and unlearning of the racist attitudes based on racial segregation and biased "science". I will examine these questions of racism and science more closely in 2.2.

"Mapping the world" has been considered a major part of the colonialist idea.⁴ Ewing's first comment about finding an Englishman on the far side of the world and not knowing of any maps depicting places where the English would not have been is reminiscent of the colonialist obsession of "filling" the "blank spaces" of the world map. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from 1899, the sailor Marlow speaks of "dark places of the earth" (Conrad 2012/1899, 3). He says:

I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. (Conrad 2012, 7.)

It is obvious, of course, to the present-day reader that the map spaces were not "empty", but simply undiscovered by the westerners. Ewing is initially presented believing in this discourse, as he writes: "Thus far, the Moriori were but a local variant of most flaxen-skirted, feather-cloaked heathens of those dwindling 'blind-spots' of the ocean still unschooled by the White Man." (CA, 12). As it is morally "easier" to enslave a dehumanised person⁵, it is also easier to colonise land that is not considered anyone else's property, or if the previous owner is seen unfit to own it. As stated above in the case of Autua, the more knowledge one has of another person or people, the more personal the relationship becomes, and the more difficult to dehumanise someone. In spite of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (and his other works) being a criticism of colonialism and imperialism, it is not a defence of Africa due to its depiction of the continent and its people. The *Pacific Journal*, on the other hand, criticises both colonialism and racism, and instead of escaping the problems like Conrad's characters do in *Heart of Darkness*, Ewing pledges himself to the Abolitionist cause, saying "I owe my life to a self-freed slave

⁴ See e.g., Huggan 1989; Said 1994.

⁵ See e.g., Haslam & Loughnan 2014.

& because I must begin somewhere" (CA, 528). Acknowledging the limits of just one man, Ewing begins his work at home.

2.2 Christianity and biological racism

Ewing is not the kind of virtuous and brave protagonist who rushes into action when facing an oppressed individual: his actions and behaviour are more realistic, demonstrating the difficulties of abandoning beliefs he has been raised to believe by the society around him that treats them as social facts. As stated in 2.1, in the beginning of the story he does follow these taught principles, but seems awkward and, at times, questions the racist comments of the people around him. The *Pacific Journal* is like a bildungsroman of sorts, with the difference Ewing is an adult through the whole book: he grows to understand slavery in a very concrete way and chooses to side with the oppressed, in spite of his higher status in the society. He questions the dehumanisation of others and by stating that Autua is a "self-freed slave", he foregrounds Autua as a subject who fights for himself and succeeds, rather than simply an objectified victim. By writing that he owes his life to Autua and "must begin somewhere", Ewing seems to feel he must join the fight Autua is fighting as well.

The mantra of the dominant narrative in the *Pacific Journal* is the Social Darwinist belief that the "strong engorge themselves on the weak", first stated by Dr Goose on the very third page of *Cloud Atlas*. This idea of a power hierarchy founded on purely physical strength carries through the book, but is the most dominant in the *Pacific Journal*. The type of racism presented with Autua's character is the most historical one in *Cloud Atlas*: he is a native of Chatham Islands, who has been enslaved by both the conquering Maori and the white colonists. When Ewing enquires why Autua chose him to be his saviour, Autua refers to their first meeting and gives an answer seemingly obvious to him, but not to Ewing: "'Pain is strong, aye – but friends' eyes, more strong.' I told him that he knows next to nothing about me & I know nothing about him. He jabbed at his eyes & jabbed at me, as if that single gesture were ample explanation." (CA, 29). According to Lynda Ng, when Autua looks him in the eye, Ewing is forced to acknowledge the slave as an individual, a human being, rather than a native slave not as "human" as the Europeans and Americans are (Ng 2015, 114). In order to gain his freedom, Autua does not have much of a choice in his actions, so it is hardly surprising he chooses

to place his trust in a white man who shows distrust towards his own people and sympathy towards a slave. As stated previously, this does not make Autua an object or simply a victim, but he is a subject who saves himself with Ewing's help.

The racist colonialism practiced by the whites is not the only perspective on racism in the *Pacific Journal*, however. In the centre of Autua's story are the Maori, who, as another native group, enslaved the more pacifist Moriori on the Chatham Islands upon their arrival. Despite the fact that in this case natives enslave natives, the white colonist plays their part: the British intentionally let the Maori oppress the Moriori, and this dispute still continues.⁶ This is an actual historical occurrence⁷, even though *Cloud Atlas* does not comment on the events further. Ng states that in the *Pacific Journal*, Mitchell presents two different takes on the theories that are linked to the 18th and 19th century racist discourse: on the one hand, the Maori, who kill those in their way and even eat them, represent Thomas Hobbes' idea of a human being who, in their "natural" habitat, behaves aggressively and cannibalistically. The pacifist Moriori, on the other hand, represent Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "noble savage". With their non-violent nature, the noble savage in turn mirrors the civilised European values, but remains the Other, an exotic savage. (Ng 2015, 3.) Ng makes two points about this issue:

Thus, the ideological contradictions that underlie Western 'civilisation' are brought to the fore. The first is the necessary construction of a racial hierarchy in order to justify the enslavement and exploitation of other human beings; the second, the projection of the barbaric qualities of the enslavement process onto the slaves themselves. (Ng 2015, 115.)

The *Pacific Journal* emphasises this question of the westerners' hypocritical behaviour. Whereas the Europeans and Americans present the natives as wild cannibals, they themselves kill, rape, and oppress each other in their greed and religious fanaticism (e.g., CA, 7, 518). In spite of the issues between the Moriori, the Maori, and the British colonisers presented in *Cloud Atlas* being actual historical problems, there has been criticism towards the way the slavery is depicted in the novel: the forms of slavery are different, but in *Cloud Atlas*, the practices between the Maori enslavers and the Moriori slaves resemble those of white Americans

⁶ See e.g., King 1989 and the Waitangi Tribunal report. The tribunal report focuses on land claims where the Maori were given land belonging to the Moriori, but it also highlights the issues of colonisation on the Moriori lives.

⁷ See e.g., King 1989; Morrison 1990.

and their black slaves.⁸ This, in my opinion, is problematic because of the generalisation of such contexts, but the case may also be that the slavery in the Pacific has been linked to the slavery in the United States, because it is Ewing's home country and where he starts his own fight.

The type of racism the *Pacific Journal* depicts is sometimes called the "old racism" or "biological racism" in racism studies (see e.g., Augoustinos & Reynolds 2001; Werbner & Modood 2015). The biological racism is often examined related to "cultural racism", but this distinction has been considered problematic. According to Anna Rastas, amongst others, the old and new racism do not differ profoundly, only the terms have changed. In spite of this, the old racism emphasises more the "natural" basis of societal hierarchy based on race (see e.g., Rastas et al. 2005). Whereas the "new" cultural racism emphasises discrimination based on cultural differences between people, the "old" biological racism is based on the assumption that human beings can be categorised hierarchically depending on their skin colour and ethnic background. Because modern science has rendered these theories of old racism invalid, the racist gaze has turned towards culture. In spite of biology being in the spotlight, both forms can be found in the *Pacific Journal*: the natives of New Zealand amongst other races such as Indians and Chinese are discriminated based on their ethnicity. The Maori, for example, are also discriminated based on the cannibalistic behaviour that the whites consider a part of their culture.

"Culture" is emphasised also when speaking of another central subject in the *Pacific Journal*: religion. The white characters, hailing from different countries (e.g., English and Dutch), show quite a broad attitude spectrum towards Christianity. Ewing is a firm Christian, often reprimanding the other men around him for their behaviour and saying, for example, that he would rather die than have sex with a woman other than his wife (CA, 7–8). Dr Goose is somewhat more ambiguous, mostly following Ewing almost like an escort, and the sailors of the *Prophetess* are the other end of the spectrum, spending the Sabbath in an impromptu brothel and quite literally threatening Ewing when he comments on their immoral behaviour. Ewing's attitude is explicit in this scene: he calls the men behaving in this way "white savages" (CA, 7).

⁸ See e.g., the article "Accumulated Histories and Disposable People in *Cloud Atlas* and the Black Atlantic" in *The Black Atlantic*, 2014.

Even though the men are “white”, he calls them “savages” on the assumption that the non-whites behave in the same way when left to their own devices. Dr Goose, on the other hand, is very outspoken in his beliefs concerning human power, yet more indirect and subtle in the ways he actually uses it: for example, he befriends Ewing before trying to rob and kill him. Goose is the first to mention the “natural law” of the weak being devoured, and he maintains the discourse through the story. Where Ewing leans on the Biblical script to argue his righteous morale, Goose uses the same religious source to justify his own views of power relations: when attending the Sabbath sermon, both Ewing and Goose are requested to recite a Bible passage of their own choosing (CA, 8). Ewing, having recently been rescued from a storm, recites from Luke’s chapter eight from the New Testament, the event of Jesus calming a storm with his words: “And they came to him, & awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, & rebuked the wind & the raging of the water: & they ceased, & there was a calm.” Goose, on the other hand, chooses to recite the Old Testament’s Psalm the Eighth, which addresses the human race’s position in relation to God: “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou has put all things under his feet: all sheep & oxen, yea, & the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, & the fish of the sea, & whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” Many passages of the Bible are, of course, open to interpretation. Instead of understanding this passage as an encouragement to take responsibility and care for those under the “dominion” of humankind, as some Christians do, Goose chooses to interpret this as a proof of human supremacy and a permission to use power over them, to the extent of abuse.

Next to Dr Goose, another character preaching the racist agenda is Preacher Horrox. Even though Goose relies on the will of the Old Testament’s God in his arguments, he is nevertheless a man who insists the world is ruled by manpower and weapons, whereas Preacher Horrox insists it is ruled by divine will (CA, 508). As a man of church, Horrox connects the race question to the Bible and argues his points with the alleged supremacy of the white westerners (especially men). In spite of the major differences in their arguments, both Goose and Horrox proclaim the racist agenda “normal” and “natural”. Horrox speaks of the “Civilization’s Ladder”:

I have always unswervingly held, that God, in our Civilizing World, manifests himself not in the Miracles of the Biblical Age, but in Progress. It is Progress that leads Humanity up the ladder towards the God-head. No Jacob's Ladder this, no, but rather 'Civilization's Ladder', if you will. Highest of all the races on this ladder stands the Anglo-Saxon. The Latins are a rung or two below. Lower still are Asiatics – a hardworking race, none can deny, yet lacking our Aryan bravery. Sinologists insist they once aspired to greatness, but where is your yellow-hued Shakespeare, eh, or your almond-eyed da Vinci? Point made, point taken. Lower down, we have the Negro. Good-tempered ones may be trained to work profitably, though a rumbunctious one is the devil incarnate! The American Indian, too, is capable of useful chores on the Californian *barrios*, is that not so, Mr Ewing? (CA, 506–507.)

Speaking of information and knowledge, there are many points to be made in Preacher Horrox' speech. First is the Ladder itself: Horrox' category set is quite the typical race hierarchy, unbased on the Bible itself, but drawing on the "scientific" ideas of the biological racism. The Ladder presents the main characteristics of the 19th century belief of a white man's supremacy and the so-called "white man's burden" to civilise and lead people considered unable to do so themselves. This white man's burden means the "alleged duty of the white peoples to manage the affairs of the less developed nonwhite peoples" (Merriam-Webster). Emphasising the uncivilised and "wild" nature of a person connects to the idea that the maltreatment of a dehumanised person is "easier" to the conscience than a person considered an individual. This same theme of dehumanisation connects all of the stories in *Cloud Atlas* from beginning to end.

Secondly, there is the "Shakespeare and da Vinci" question. Even with simple logic, this is not a very good argument, because Horrox (and his listeners) are simply not aware of the things he speaks of. Horrox says that "sinologists insist they once aspired to greatness", which, in spite of being somewhat weirdly put, identifies the problem of simply not being aware of the achievements of other races. Instead, if Horrox had spent the time to research the subject he is preaching about, he would have been aware of the many scientific and artistic achievements in other parts of the world. The 19th century was a time of discoveries, but from the colonialist point of view it was a time when the Europeans and Americans spread across the globe, considering their culture, science, and arts superior to anything the other human races could possibly have conceived. The Europeans had seen beyond the ancient architecture of Africa, the Americas, India, and China amongst many others, and yet the ignorant attitude persisted. The meeting point of biological and cultural racism is where the westerners try to argue their

stance with “science”. The science of the 19th century in general was very far from what it is today, independent of the field of science, and many mock-scientific theories such as those presented by the characters in the *Pacific Journal* were not based on a very scientific research, not according to today’s standards. Ewing, for example, tries to analyse the information given to him:

The origins of the Moriori of ‘Rēkohu’ (the native moniker for the Chathams) remains a mystery to this day. Mr Evans evinces the belief they are descended from Jews expelled from Spain, citing their hooked noses & sneering lips. Mr D’Arnoq’s preferred theorem, that the Moriori were once Maori whose canoes were wrecked upon these remotest of isles, is founded on similarities of tongue & mythology, & thereby possesses a higher *carat* of logic. (CA, 11.)

The genetic studies were, of course, out of the question in this era. The theories are mostly European-centred (e.g., a Pacific people descending from European) and even though Ewing, quite logically in fact, finds D’Arnoq’s reasoning more believable, it is still pure speculation rather than science. Lynda Ng mentions that the theory of Moriori descending from Maori actually existed, but was disproved (Ng 2015, 112). Ng does not say who discredited these theories, but in contrast to this, the Waitangi Tribunal report from 2001 presents scientific evidence that Moriori are indeed “the same people as Maori but, through isolation, they are unique as a Maori tribe”. This is, of course, a conversation that could not have been based on science in the time and context of *Cloud Atlas*, and so the characters’ theories remain unscientific.

According to Diletta de Cristofaro, the criticism towards colonialism and racism in *Cloud Atlas* is also criticism of the nature of progress in human history (de Cristofaro 2018). She states:

[T]he [Horrox’] sermon is not only a critique of this [colonialist] discourse, but also of progress *qua* apocalyptic metanarrative. The reference to the “God-Head” suggests a teleology inherent in history, and the preacher’s final remarks are reminiscent of the utopian end of the New Jerusalem, since catastrophic events are followed by the questionable eternal bliss of a “glorious order [--] when all races shall know & aye, embrace, their place in God’s ladder of civilization” (507). In Isaac’s⁹ terms, Horrox’s teleology is a way of apocalyptically “landscaping” the future in order to justify colonialism, keep the native population submissive and conceal the

⁹ Here de Cristofaro speaks of Isaac Sachs, a character in *Half-Lives*, who theorises of possible actual and virtual past and future scenarios quite metaphysically.

fact that “rapacity [--] powers [the white man’s] Progress” (509). *Cloud Atlas* underscores that the will to power is often the ugly truth behind the simulacrum of progress and posits an exploitative apocalypticism at the heart of the civilization whose development the novel depicts – a civilization that closely resembles our own up to Timothy’s story. (de Cristofaro 2018, 251.)

As I stated in 1.1, multiple scholars have addressed the question of how *Cloud Atlas* depicts the future and nature of the progress of human civilisation. Gerd Bayer, for one, considers *Cloud Atlas* deterministic due to the story-time ending in a postapocalyptic world without much if any hope for the future (Bayer 2015, 345). De Cristofaro, on the other hand, disagrees, on the basis that “*Cloud Atlas* rejects an understanding of history in terms of apocalyptic determinism and gives prominence to the individual’s agency to shape the future, reflecting the openness of actual time, as opposed to the closure of time in traditional plots.” (de Cristofaro 2018, 248). Because *Cloud Atlas* has two possible endings, the story-time and discourse-time endings, there are also at least two different ways of viewing this issue. Considering colonialism and racism as ideologies with long history and the question of knowledge, what does this mean? My reading is similar to de Cristofaro’s: *Cloud Atlas*, as an example of speculative fiction, presents the reader with a vision of possible future timelines, which can end in the described apocalypse if the society does not change its course. Even though I disagree with Bayer’s view of *Cloud Atlas*’s determinism, I agree with his opinion on the nature of the apocalypse:

Needless to say, this particular strategy of revelation—that is to say, of apocalypse—is not so much prophetic or directed at the future, but retroactive: it redefines the meaning of past events and, through that, the significance of present institutions. For instance, in the first narrative, titled “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing,” colonialism, medicine, and the legal profession are presented in the most negative light. What Mitchell’s novel clearly shows is that even such supposedly enlightened professions as the law or medicine were, in fact, complicit with the various atrocities committed during colonialism. (Bayer 2015, 352.)

It is this disruption of conceptions of time that is especially intriguing. Western, that is, European and North American concept of time is often viewed very linear, whereas in other parts of the world time’s nature is seen very differently. Due to its matryoshka-like structure, *Cloud Atlas* depicts time as everything but linear: after having been presented only halves of each story in chronological order, as we reach the postapocalyptic world, the time is reversed, and we are taken back to the endings of the earlier stories. While none of the endings are exactly

optimistic and, for example, both *Zedelghem's* Frobisher and *Orison's* Sonmi die, the protagonists have, in some way, found freedom. The novel is brought to an end by its discourse-time ending of the *Pacific Journal*, where Ewing has found his purpose and believes in a world free of slavery and inequity. As stated, his statement "It is the hardest of worlds to make real" (CA, 528) proves he is not unaware of the hardships ahead, but because of Ewing's optimism, the novel's closure is hopeful.

As the opening of *Cloud Atlas*, the *Pacific Journal* presents us with many of the themes that are discussed throughout the novel. The oppressing systems and the ideologies behind them, the strategies with which they are maintained, the dehumanisation of people seen as the Other, and most of all, an individual's struggle under the pressure. Ewing can perhaps be seen as the character who sets the gears in motion, and the following protagonists follow in his footsteps, if in different ways with different outcomes. During his story, Ewing learns to look at the situations presented to him from different perspectives, and in this, both Autua and Rafael play decisive roles. Rafael's fate makes Ewing understand his own helplessness and desire to act, and Autua gives him the motivation to do so and teaches him to see through the eyes of those presented as "Other". Hearing speeches such as those of Goose and Horrox, Ewing becomes more aware of the conflict between the dominant narrative and the counter-narrative represented by those oppressed. The colonial narrative maintained with the help of racism and Christianity is laid bare, and with this new, informed perspective, Ewing chooses a side. Because I have left *Letters from Zedelghem* mostly outside this analysis, the next chapter will discuss *Half-Lives*, set in the US. In spite of being very different from the *Pacific Journal* in many ways, including genre and context, *Half-Lives* features similar themes, but in a new setting. I consider this the major connection between all the stories of *Cloud Atlas*: the same issues are presented in different eras, in different contexts.

3 *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery* – Uncovering the truth with investigative journalism

Half-Lives is chronologically the third part of *Cloud Atlas* and tells the story of an investigative journalist's mission to uncover the truth at the risk of her own life. The story is set in Buenas Yervas, a fictional city in 1975 California, where the protagonist Luisa Rey works as a reporter for a gossip magazine *Spyglass*. She endeavours to use her position as a journalist to investigate suspicious occurrences rather than spread rumours as tabloids tend to do, both in the storyworld as well as in our own. After discovering that the new Seaboard HYDRA nuclear power plant has flaws kept secret by its builder Seaboard Power Inc., Rey decides to find evidence to reveal the scheme to the public. A hitman hired by Seaboard attempts to kill her, and she survives, but at the cost of the lives of Joe Napier, an ex-guard at Seaboard and a friend to Rey's late father, and Isaac Sachs as well as Rufus Sixsmith, the project's leading scientists who betray the company in favour of helping Rey's investigation. *Half-Lives* is composed as a thriller novel and is later read by Timothy Cavendish, the narrator-protagonist of *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*.

It is worth noticing that Rey is not strictly an investigative journalist, at least not at first, and the magazine *Spyglass* which she writes for is a tabloid and, as such, not considered a "serious journal" by the other characters. This dismissive attitude comes from several characters in the story, and an important part of Rey's character is her ambition to become a journalist who is taken seriously: Richard Ganga, a musician Rey tries to interview at the beginning of the story, is more interested in sleeping with her than reading her articles, and when she refuses, he says: "Who d'you think you are, Joni fucking Mitchell? You're only a fucking *gossip columnist* in a magazine that like *no-one ever reads!*" (CA, 91). For her own pride and the respect for her late father, she endeavours to be more than what people expect her to be as a reporter for *Spyglass*.

In the first part of this chapter, I will examine the nature of the investigative journalism presented in *Half-Lives* through Rey and the main supporting characters, as well as the epistemological focus of the detective story as a genre. The second part will focus on the subjects of

propaganda, fakes news, and mis- and disinformation, centred on the company Seaboard Power Inc., the industrial villain in *Half-Lives*.

3.1 Investigative journalism and the genre of detective fiction

The detective story and thriller as genres define *Half-Lives* in many ways, also from the point of view of information and knowledge. Tzvetan Todorov defines the thriller as a “genre within detective fiction” (Todorov 1977, 47). According to him, the whodunit contains two stories, the story where the crime is committed and the story where the crime is investigated, whereas the thriller fuses these two stories and emphasises the investigation. The crime is not (only) examined afterwards, but “the narrative coincides with the action”. He explains that there is no such mystery in the thriller as there is in the whodunit, because, as in *Half-Lives*, the culprit is already known. (Ibid., 47.) Like in any other detective story, *Half-Lives* features the important problems of who knows and what do they know. Rey, as the investigating protagonist, serves as the character who does not know enough, but receives information both from her associates and through her own investigation. These associates are, in major part, characters who have previously worked or are currently working for the Seaboard Power Inc. she is investigating. The question is, how do they each provide her with the required information and what are their personal motives for doing so?

Rufus Sixsmith is the first character introduced in *Half-Lives*, as he is a recurring character from the previous part *Letters from Zedelghem*, where he is introduced as the friend and lover of the protagonist Robert Frobisher and the recipient of his letters. Having recently left his position, he is an atomic engineer previously in service of the Seaboard Power Inc. and introduced as one of the twelve scientists who made a safety report on the new HYDRA-Zero nuclear reactor on the Swanekke Island. He is the first informant whom Rey meets, and decides to help her because of his guilt concerning the secrets of the reactor being defective:

Frustrated and weary, Rufus Sixsmith addresses the TV. ‘And when the hydrogen build-up blows the roof off the containment chamber? When prevailing winds shower radiation over California?’ He turns the set off and squeezes the bridge of his nose. *I proved it. I proved it. You couldn’t buy me, so you tried intimidation. I let you, Lord forgive me, but no longer. I’m not sitting on my conscience any longer.* (CA, 108, original cursive.)

Sixsmith is the one who sets the story and Rey's investigation in motion, explaining to Rey his fears of the reactor's malfunctioning. As he states above, he wants to finally take action, and I consider there to be two main factors on why he confides in Rey: he is desperate in his guilt, but does not know how to act on it. When he meets Rey, he seems to put his trust in her first because her father was known to be a just person as a journalist, but also because questioning Rey reassures him that she is, too. After leaving the company, he is hunted and eventually found by Seaboard, and killed by the company's hitman Bill Smoke. Unlike the two other informants, Joe Napier and Isaac Sachs, as an ex-employee of Seaboard (although having left and gone to hiding only approximately two weeks before meeting Rey), Sixsmith is strictly an "informative" informant who does not physically take part in the investigation, and can only help Rey from the outside, even though he is providing her information in the form of Seaboard's official documents left in his possession. Sixsmith's initial story about the defective reactor is enough to make Rey start the investigation, but his assassination (officially declared suicide) is the factor that pushes Rey to search for the truth in earnest (CA, 114–116).

Joseph "Joe" Napier is a security guard of Seaboard Power Inc. who is forced to retire early during *Half-Lives* and finds the situation suspicious (CA, 424). Like Sixsmith, Napier knows something is wrong from the start and he is aware of Seaboard's questionable activities, which makes him feel guilty as well:

The real miracle, Joseph Napier ruminates, was getting eleven out of twelve scientists to forget the existence of a nine-month inquiry. A [CCTV] screen shows these very scientists drifting onstage, chatting amicably. Like Grimaldi says, every conscience has an off-switch hidden somewhere. (CA, 103, original cursive.)

"Eleven out of twelve" means, of course, that one member of the scientific team designing the nuclear reactor did not let himself be bought, and this one scientist was Rufus Sixsmith. Alberto Grimaldi, the company president of Seaboard Power Inc., holds all his employees in tight leash. So, if Napier was aware of the situation, why did he co-operate? He actually asks this from himself: "*And Joe Napier? Has his conscience got an off-switch?*" He sips his bitter black coffee. *Hey, buddy, get off my case. I'm only following orders. Eighteen months till I retire, then it's off to fish in sweet rushing rivers until I turn into a goddamn heron.*" (CA, 104, original cursive). "I'm only following orders" is an extremely common defence when one is

questioned about their wrongdoings. The same excuse is used by Bill Smoke before he shoots Rufus Sixsmith: *“A tragedy for loved ones, a big fat nothing to everyone else, and a problem solved for my clients. I’m just the instrument of my clients’ will. If it wasn’t me it’d be the next fixer in the Yellow Pages. Blame its owner, blame its maker, but don’t blame the gun.”* (CA, 113, original cursive). The difference between Napier and Smoke is that Napier knew only of “intimidations”, not killings, while Smoke was the Seaboard’s assassin without any regrets. Eventually, Napier realises the excuse does not release a person from his moral responsibilities, and decides to help Rey. Although he seemingly acts on his guilt like Isaac Sachs and Rufus Sixsmith, it seems his friendship with Rey’s late father Lester does contribute heavily to his decision to protect her (CA, 137). He functions as the “physical” insider, who provides Rey with tactical information about the company and most importantly the guards and hitmen the company hires. In spite of knowing the possibly fatal consequences of helping Rey in her investigation, Napier has a strong sense of justice and wants to play his part in preventing the disaster should the power plant explode. This motivation is strengthened further by his devotion to his late friend and Luisa’s father, Lester Rey, an investigative journalist who fought beside him as a soldier. Apart from being Rey’s informant, Napier also becomes her impromptu bodyguard when Seaboard sends their hitmen after her. He is eventually killed guarding her, but manages to take the hitman with him.

Like Sixsmith, Isaac Sachs is a scientist, a young theoretical engineer working for Seaboard. He is described as a stereotypical scientist spending his time in the laboratory and having considerable difficulties socialising. In spite of this, he decides to help Rey, and in the end admits having fallen in love with her. Sachs is what I would call an unsure ally, willing to help due to his own guilt as a part of the scientist team, but afraid for his own life at the same time. He has, from the start, stolen a copy of the “Sixsmith Report”, the report written by Sixsmith about the HYDRA-Zero reactor’s defections. Having done so, Sachs evidently does not approve of what has occurred, but he is still “sitting on” the report due to his fear:

Sachs tries to remember how it felt not to walk around with this knot in his gut. He longs for his old lab in Connecticut, where the world was made of mathematics, energy and atomic cascades, and he was its explorer. He has no business in these political orders of magnitude, where erroneous loyalties can get your brain spattered over hotel bedrooms. *You’ll shred that report, Sachs, page by goddamn page.*

Then his thoughts slide to a hydrogen build-up, an explosion, packed hospitals, the first deaths by radiation poisoning. The official inquiry. The scapegoats. Sachs bangs his knuckles together. So far, his betrayal of Seaboard is a thought-crime, not one of action. *Dare I cross that line?* (CA, 130, original cursive.)

Sachs' conscience tells him what is right (for example when he stole the report), but he is too afraid to help Rey at the beginning, and he is very self-aware about this: "Isaac Sachs's tragic flaw,' analyzes Isaac Sachs [--] 'is this. Too cowardly to be a warrior, but not *enough* of a coward to lie down and roll over like a good doggy.'" (CA, 133). He could have chosen to shred the report, just as he thought, but he does not, and instead risks his life for both Sixsmith and Rey. Just like with Sixsmith, it is a conversation with Rey that finally pushes him to act:

'Luisa, what'd you *do* with a copy of the report, *if* one found its way into your hands?'

'Go public as fast as I possibly could.'

'Are you *aware* of...? *I can't say it.*

'Aware that people in the upper echelons would rather see me dead than see HY-DRA discredited? Right now it's all I'm aware of.'

'I can't make any promises.' *Christ, how feeble.* 'I became a scientist because... it's like panning for gold in a muddy torrent. Truth is the gold. I – I don't know what to do...'

'Journalists work in torrents just as muddy.' [--]

'Do,' says Luisa finally, 'whatever you can't *not* do.' (CA, 135, original cursive.)

Sachs has, at this point, realised he is smitten with Rey, but according to the dialogue, if the attraction contributes to his decision, it is not explicitly stated. I would argue his feelings for her are secondary to his motivation driven by guilt and fear of being eventually accused of assisting Seaboard in their deception. As with Rufus Sixsmith and Joe Napier, Sachs is killed by Seaboard in a plane accident that also kills the Seaboard CEO, Alberto Grimaldi, as per the Energy Secretary Lloyd Hooks' plan.

The fact that all three of her informants are eventually killed by the company for aiding Rey places a high price on the information acquired. Because *Half-Lives* is indeed fiction and, in Mitchell's own words, written "using the format of a cheap airport thriller" (Raja 2005), the reader cannot expect the story to take into account ethical problems such as the informants' anonymity. In spite of this, Sixsmith does question Rey:

'A hypothetical question, Miss Rey. What price would you pay, as a journalist I mean, to protect a source?'

Luisa doesn't consider the question. 'If I believed in the issue? Any.'

'Prison, for example, for contempt of court?'

'If it came to it, yes.'

'Would you be prepared to... compromise your own safety?'

'Well...' Luisa does consider this 'I... guess I'd have to.'

'Have to? How so?'

'My father braved booby-trapped marches and the wrath of generals for the sake of *his* journalistic integrity. What kind of a mockery of his life would it be if his daughter bailed when things got a little tough?' (CA, 97.)

This conversation from the beginning of *Half-Lives* illustrates Rey's conviction and need to become a "better" journalist, for the sake of her own dignity but also due to the respect she has for her late father. Her answer is also the motivation Sixsmith needed to reveal the problems at Seaboard to someone who can make them public: "*Tell her*. Sixsmith opens his mouth to tell her everything – the whitewashing at Seaboard, the blackmailing, the corruption – [--] 'I'll telephone you, Miss Rey,' says Sixsmith, as Luisa hands him his stick, 'soon.' *Will I break my promise or keep it?*" (CA, 97, original cursive). Sixsmith knows the information he holds is, in his words, lethal (CA, 89), but Rey's determination to do the right thing finally convinces him to act on the guilt he has felt, likely for years.

The informant's safety is a question that involves *Half-Lives* more than the other three stories I have chosen to analyse in this thesis. Out of the stories that I examine, *Half-Lives* is closest to our own reality of the 21st century and I would argue that now in the spring 2021, the question of calling business companies to account for environmental disasters at the risk of one's safety is quite an essential topic – it has, of course, been for a long time, but the issue has taken new forms with the internet platforms at people's disposal. According to Todorov, another difference between the whodunit and the thriller is this sense of dread: "its [whodunit's] chief characters (the detective and his friend the narrator) were, by definition, immunized: nothing could happen to them. The situation is reversed in the thriller: everything is possible, and the detective risks his health, if not his life." (Todorov 1977, 44–48). In *Half-Lives*, this is demonstrated quite clearly, due to the deaths of three supporting characters and the imminent threat to Rey's life throughout the whole story. Luisa Rey's situation echoes that of her father, a journalist and a police officer: Lester Rey is described to have a very similar personality to his daughter's, and this sense of justice drove him into lethal danger as well. According

to Rey, her father was severely injured in a shooting, but survived (CA, 93–94). Following the theme of defending the oppressed and fighting against the inequity, Rey's father is described as an empathetic and wise person, first by Sixsmith: "Lester Rey was one of only four or five journalists who grasped the [Vietnam] war from the Asian perspective" (CA, 92). In this sense, Rey is following in her father's footsteps. Her readiness to help is demonstrated when she notices Javier, a ten-year-old neighbour boy, having been hit by his mother's boyfriend: Rey rushes for the phone, only for Javier to tell her not to call his mother because she would leave her work and be dismissed, and when Rey is about to go and speak with the boyfriend instead, Javier tells her he will start a fight and they will get evicted – all this to Rey's utter frustration (CA, 98). Like many of the other characters in *Cloud Atlas*, Rey is frustrated with the fact that even though she holds the knowledge of something being wrong, she cannot do anything about it. I consider this the predominant reason why she endeavours to become an investigative journalist instead of a simple "gossip columnist": like the other protagonists in *Cloud Atlas*, she is concerned about the nature of truth and how this truth is delivered to the people. Other than wanting to show her worth as a journalist for personal reasons, Rey seems genuinely dedicated in staying true to her moral principles and work ethic as someone who publishes information. In Rey's case, information alone does not give her power. She needs a strategy and status in order to be taken seriously and for the information she has to prove actually useful.

As is logical when it comes to any kind of journalism, Rey struggles with what she knows, what she believes to be true, and what she wants to convey to the public in order to bring the truth to light. Because of the importance of information, knowledge, and knowing in the genre, Brian McHale uses the detective novel as an example text to explain his epistemological dominant. McHale defines the dominant with the English translation of Roman Jakobson's lecture quote from 1935 (1971): "The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components." (McHale 2003, 6). According to McHale, in modernist fiction, this dominant is epistemological:

What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as

it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? And so on. (McHale 2003, 9.)

The detective novel does, of course, lay these questions out more explicitly than other genres. McHale also states that compared to modernist fiction, in postmodernist fiction the epistemological is backgrounded: because epistemological questions entail ontological questions, the dominant specifies which come first. For example, science fiction foregrounds the ontological dominant due to world depiction. As the ontological questions are attended to first, this leaves the epistemological questions to the background. I would argue that *Cloud Atlas* attends to both kinds of questions and themes, but *Half-Lives*, slightly different from the other stories, attends to the epistemological first due to its genre. For example, the questions of being and identity are more important to Sonmi and Frobisher than they are to Rey. I would also argue that in the stories of the *Pacific Journal*, *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish* and *Sloosha's Crossing* the information and knowledge is predominantly gained by experience and reasoning through these experiences, rather than someone telling the protagonist hard facts. In the cases of Ewing and Cavendish, they are forced into situations where either information is simply not available, or it is misinformation. In Zachry's case in *Sloosha's Crossing*, he is presented with scientific and historical facts, but he is initially not willing to believe in them. Whereas Ewing and Cavendish need to gain information through experience in order to act, Zachry believes in the facts he is given only after his own experiences. Nevertheless, the epistemological questions are central to the whole of *Cloud Atlas*, otherwise I would not be writing this thesis. In order to break free from their respective types of oppression, the characters need information and knowledge they do not have at the start of the stories.

3.2 Mis- and disinformation: propaganda and fake news

Because I have observed that the use of the terms *misinformation* and *disinformation* can be unsystematic in both casual conversations and media, I will use a few sentences to define them, as the terms have a crucial difference. Misinformation is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary LEXICO as “false or inaccurate information, especially that which is deliberately intended to deceive”. Disinformation, on the other hand, is defined by the same source as “false information which is intended to mislead, especially propaganda issued by a government organization to a rival power or the media”. The English dictionary of Merriam-Webster defines

misinformation simply as “incorrect or misleading information”, and disinformation as “false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth”. Even though the Oxford Dictionary includes deliberate intent in the definition of misinformation, I will use the term on the basis that if a person does not have the *intention* to spread information that they *know* to be false, the correct term is misinformation. Disinformation, as inferred from the above definition, *always* includes intentional misleading, and is mostly connected to official information such as government and business company reports. As such, my research questions on *Half-Lives* are mainly concerned with disinformation, especially since we are dealing with the propaganda promoted by a nuclear power company. The main points of this chapter are propaganda and fake news, and connected to both of them, mis- and disinformation.

Propaganda is defined in the LEXICO as “information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view”. This definition is rather narrow, shrinking the meaning to only a political context. Merriam-Webster uses a broader definition: “the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person” and additionally “ideas, facts or allegations spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause”. Are the interests behind Seaboard’s propaganda then political or something else? I will argue that they are both. They are political on the basis that the funding for the new HYDRA-Zero nuclear reactor comes from the government (CA, 108) and that the Energy Secretary seems interested in a seat at the company’s board (CA, 105). Other reasons include, of course, financial interests and the promotion of nuclear power over other options of energy sources. In real life as well as in fiction, business companies have employees taking care of their public relations (PR)¹⁰ and media appearances. Their chief responsibility is to ensure the company’s positive coverage in media and the eyes of consumers. The Seaboard Power Inc., the company responsible for the Swannekke’s HYDRA reactor, is no different. Quite the contrary, Seaboard goes as far as to physically eliminate any individuals who would pose a threat to their business. This is a very stereotypical, and one may argue, realistic, presentation of a big industrial company.

¹⁰ PR, public relations: the business of inducing the public to have understanding for and goodwill toward a person, firm, or institution. (Merriam-Webster).

At Seaboard Inc., the PR is managed by a character named Fay Li, a Chinese-American woman. She is described as very methodical and sharp, both in her behaviour and work. At first, Li appears to be simply the stereotypically meticulous PR manager, but she is revealed to be perfectly aware of the company's transgressions. This charade is strengthened by Smoke, who states: "Li isn't thinking anything. She's a PR woman, period. Napier's not looking. There's the blind, Mr Grimaldi, there's the wilfully blind, and then there's the soon-to-be-retired." (CA, 130). I consider this an attempt to make the reader inclined to believe that like Napier, Li is oblivious to the nature of Sixsmith's death. Smoke is, in fact, mistaken, doubly so: Li not only knows about Sixsmith, but she also knows about the Sixsmith Report, and is trying to find it in order to sell it to a third party (she mentions an oil company having offered her one hundred thousand dollars, CA, 138). After the death, or assassination, of Rufus Sixsmith by the Seaboard hitman Smoke, Li tells the newspaper:

Dr Sixsmith's untimely death is a tragedy for the entire international scientific community. We at Seaboard Village on Swanekke Island feel we've lost not just a greatly respected colleague, but a very dear friend. Our heartfelt condolences go to his own family and his many friends. He shall be greatly missed. (CA, 115.)

Because the reader knows Seaboard is behind the assassination, Li's words sound extremely hollow and duplicitous – all the more so, when one looks at the details and recalls Sixsmith stating to himself that he has only one friend left, his niece Megan (CA, 89). This official statement is obviously the kind which companies copy and paste into all official reports and announcements, and as the reader is very likely to notice this hollowness, it makes the company that much more repulsive to the reader as the story's villain.

Seaboard Power Inc. is not carrying out their misdeeds alone and even in the case of fiction, it would not be very convincing if they could. When Sixsmith's murder is announced, Rey suspects the police were "encouraged to arrive at conclusions convenient for Seaboard", adding that "Seaboard Corporation is the tenth biggest corporation in the country. They could buy Alaska if they wanted." (CA, 119). Later, Doctor Hester Van Zandt, who is staying with a group protesting against the nuclear reactors at the Swanekke Island camp, explains to Rey that "Seaboard and the police have informers in our network. Last weekend the authorities wanted to clear the site for the VIPs, and blood was spilled. That gave the cops an excuse for a round of arrests. I'm afraid paranoia pays." (CA, 125). It is in Van Zandt's dialogue where the power

relations concerning the whole *Cloud Atlas* are demonstrated and the importance of information stated most explicitly:

The conflict between corporations and activists is that of narcolepsy versus remembrance. The corporations have money, power and influence. Our sole weapon is public outrage. Outrage blocked the Yuccan Dam, ousted Nixon and, in part, terminated the monstrosities in Vietnam. But outrage is unwieldy to manufacture and handle. First, you need scrutiny; second, widespread awareness; only when this reaches a critical mass does public outrage explode into being. Any stage may be sabotaged. The world's Alberto Grimaldis can fight scrutiny by burying truth in committees, dullness and misinformation, or by intimidating the scrutinizers. They can extinguish awareness by blinkering education, owning TV stations, paying "guest fees" to leader writers or just buying the media up. The media – and not just the *Washington Post* – is where democracies conduct their civil wars. (CA, 125–126.)

This means that according to Van Zandt, financial power and influence are the tools to hide the truth, but the main point is exactly that: the information. With proper awareness, as she states, revolution is possible, even against the more powerful parties. Mitchell has selected three major, historical events where "public outrage" has made a difference: the Yuccan Dam, President Nixon, and the Vietnam War. To connect the subject to our historical present, we can mention campaigns such as Black Lives Matter, MeToo, and Extinction Rebellion, amongst many others. What does this analysis tell us? To me, at least, it evinces that the fight is far from over. These passages from *Half-Lives* demonstrate the unfortunate power of money and hence, corruption, demonstrated most explicitly in both *Half-Lives* and later in *Orison*.

Fake news is literally that, false news or essentially disinformation in the form of news. LEXICO defines fake news as "false information that is broadcast or published as news for fraudulent or politically motivated purposes".¹¹ Here again, we have the *intent* to spread disinformation, this time via news. The question is difficult when it comes to cases like *Spyglass*: the journalists do not exactly have a political agenda, they simply do not care if their articles are true or not, it is enough if they are sensational. Even though Rey works for a gossip magazine, she is obviously against this policy by which the tabloids, including *Spyglass*, write their articles. When asked about telling the audience the "truth", the editor-in-chief of the magazine, Dom Grelsch,

¹¹ Merriam-Webster does not have an entry for "fake news".

answers her: “Anything is true if enough people believe it is.” (CA, 99). Here is another perspective on “truth”, again. Unlike many of the other characters, Grelsch believes truth is always a matter of opinion, and interestingly, his comment echoes the ways dominant narratives are maintained. When Rey retaliates, Grelsch argues that unlike her investigating a powerful company like Seaboard, small, fictitious gossip articles sell, but are not a (legal) threat to the magazine (CA, 101). This sounds suspicious from multiple perspectives: Grelsch does not see the harm in small gossips that may prove extremely harmful to the targets, and from Rey’s perspective, he seems to be underrating the value and power of journalistic work. Many celebrities and public figures, for example, have taken legal action against magazines (especially tabloids) that have written controversial articles or news about them, even when the magazines have initially thought the cases quite “harmless”.¹² This subject should be viewed from multiple perspectives, and so I will return to the issue with Grelsch later in this chapter.

I categorise these kinds of *Spyglass* instances as disinformation: there is the knowledge that the information spread to the public is false, and at times intentionally altered or even completely fabricated by the writer (Rey’s *Spyglass* colleagues). Additionally, they are written for the sole purpose of attracting readers to buy the magazine, that is, financial interest. In spite of this, I would argue that the political purpose often linked to disinformation is not there. Rey can be considered the “black sheep” of the gossip magazine: the journalist who does not want to produce simple rumours, but to take journalism seriously and publish articles beneficial to the community. Rey’s colleagues construct their actual life events in a similar way they construct their magazine articles, by adding fictional elements, mainly to promote their own ego and “professionalism”. When one of these colleagues, Jerry Nussbaum, describes his incident with muggers, Rey retorts: “If the muggers took your every last cent – *literally* – what were you doing in a *cab* from Greenwich Village to Times Square? Sell your body for the fare?” (CA, 109). To this, Nussbaum replies that Rey has a “genius of missing the point”. He cannot counter Rey on the fact that he was lying, so he attempts to save his face by changing the subject. The fact that Rey cannot stand liars and insincerity is the main reason for the social gap between her and her colleagues: the others consider her somewhat arrogant because she does

¹² As a recent example, the Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle suing *The Mail on Sunday* and MailOnline for breaching her privacy.

not share their attitude. In spite of not doing so willingly, she does lie when needed: in order to get to the truth, she has to deceive the enemy (CA, 140).

There are, of course, often two sides to a coin. In spite of the other journalists of *Spyglass* seemingly interested in writing articles solely for the money's sake, the editor-in-chief has different motives: Rey overhears his phone conversation with someone named "Mr Frum", possibly an insurance consultant, accusing him of not taking Grelsch's wife's leukaemia seriously: "No – no, no, Mr Frum, it *is* black-and-white, tell me – hey, I'm talking now – tell me a *more* black-and-white "condition" than leukemia? Know what I think? I think my wife is just one piece of paperwork between you and your three o'clock golf slot, isn't she?" (CA, 109–110). Grelsch's introduction leaves the reader with the impression that he says what he says simply out of greed, but this discovery makes the reader understand that if the magazine does not sell, the consequences for his wife will be grave. Apparently, Rey has considered Grelsch a talented professional even before hearing this phone call. When begging for the editor-in-chief to let her continue the Seaboard investigation rather than writing "reviews and a food feature", she says: "C'mon. Dom Grelsch doesn't snuff out solid investigative journalism just because it doesn't turn up the goods in one morning. Dad told me you were just about the most daring reporter working *anywhere* in the mid-sixties." (CA, 119–120). Rey tries to appeal to both Grelsch's conscience and his dignity as a respected senior journalist. She reminds him of an occasion when he "took a bone-chilling white supremacist out of politics for good", knowing that cases like these and Lester Rey's respect for him are likely to move Grelsch. In other words, Rey has case knowledge and understanding on how to appeal to him through pride and emotions. Additionally, when these situations and conversations are presented to the reader, the new information places Grelsch into a new light in the reader's eyes as well.

The fake news is not the only problem when it comes to journalism, be it tabloids, magazines, or newspapers, online or paper. The other issue is the choice of subject – an issue both historical and present. Doctor Van Zandt explains this problem to Rey while demonstrating why she gave her information in the first place:

I wanted to give you the truth as we see it, so you can at least make an informed choice about which side you'll back. Write a satire about GreenFront New Wal-

denites in their mini-Woodstock and you'll confirm every Republican Party prejudice and bury truth a little deeper. Write about radiation levels in seafood, "safe" pollution limits set by polluters, government policy auctioned for campaign donations and Seaboard's *ex juris* police force, and you'll raise the temperature of public awareness, fractionally, towards its ignition point. (CA, 126.)

So, in contrast with Grelsch, Van Zandt offers an alternative perspective on "truth". In spite of not being explicitly "propaganda" or "fake news", the choice of subject in this case can promote an agenda, very much like propaganda, when it is done deliberately with a set goal in mind. Intentionally avoiding one subject contributes to drawing away attention from it¹³, and intentionally covering another contributes to drawing attention to it. Likewise, intentionally choosing a certain, in these cases, biased, perspective, contributes to drawing away attention from the problematic nature of the subject, exactly as Van Zandt states in her speech.

Half-Lives revolves around the questions of what ethical journalism is, how is it done, and what does it cost to the journalists. Rey's stance on journalism and information is very different from her colleagues, and to her, the important thing as a journalist is to uncover the truth and present it to the public. The nature of the investigative journalism presented in *Cloud Atlas* is this search for truth, even when the price is paid in human lives. The reader does not know if Sixsmith or Sachs had regrets of giving their lives for helping Rey because neither knows they are dying, but they are both explicitly afraid to die. Sachs asks himself whether he feels doubt, relief, fear, or righteousness after helping Rey, but he simply states he feels "a premonition I'll never see her [Luisa] again" (CA, 408). Napier, on the other hand, is dying from bullet wounds as he kills Bill Smoke, but as he concentrates on saving Rey, he does not seem as afraid as Sixsmith and Sachs. I consider this to be because he is, indeed, a soldier, whereas the other two men are scientists. It is possible that Sixsmith saw Frobisher's body in *Zedelghem* or that he was the one to find him, but of Sachs we do not know if he has witnessed any kind of violence in his life. The question of experience is demonstrated here as well: had Napier not been a professional, he might never have been able to save Rey. Rey, as a journalist, and Van Zandt, as a researcher, have their own experiences with propaganda, fake news, and mis- and disinformation, and Van Zandt is the character who encourages Rey to look at the situation

¹³ This is also called "whataboutism" or "whataboutery". LEXICO defines whataboutism as "the technique or practice of responding to an accusation or difficult question by making a counter-accusation or raising a different issue". Merriam-Webster has no entry for whataboutism.

from different perspectives. In spite of her enthusiasm, Rey needs the other characters to show her to the right direction and offer her information. Even though the epistemological questions are dominant in the detective fiction, I would argue they are important in all speculative fiction, foregrounded or not. Speculative fiction – science fiction, as a good example – often forces the reader to shift the understanding of what they know and how they see the world around them. *Half-Lives* discusses epistemology in the rather concrete way as thrillers do, but for example the futuristic *Orison*, which I will analyse next, foregrounds different kinds of epistemological questions, and, in my reading, doubts about both the future and our contemporary reality.

4 *An Orison of Sonmi-451* – The power of counter-narratives

The chronologically fifth story of *Cloud Atlas*, *An Orison of Sonmi-451*, takes place in the future of the 22nd century Korean peninsula and is presented in the form of an interview of a fabricant named Sonmi-451, a genetically modified server, before her¹⁴ execution. The interview is recorded into a device called orison, which records both voice and image, but the reader of *Cloud Atlas*, of course, reads it as a text. Sonmi is interviewed by the Archivist, who is expected to archive information for the Ministry of Testaments. The focus here will be on the tension between Sonmi and the governing body Unanimity: how does Sonmi learn and how does she use the gained knowledge about her environment and herself in her fight against oppression? How does Unanimity maintain the system where the citizens are kept ignorant of the true state of affairs? A major part of this analysis is the plot structure where Sonmi is “rescued” by members of the Union, a rebel syndicate believed to oppose the Unanimity’s unequal system, but at the very end of *Orison*, Sonmi reveals to the Archivist that the Union was, in fact, created by Unanimity itself. The question is, why did Sonmi stay and fulfil her purpose for the Union, even when she knew she was being used and would be executed for it? I will also seek to note the reader’s role: often the reader is likely to know more than Sonmi does of the subjects she describes, and is, perhaps, expected to. Do these intertextual references, if they can be called as such, guide the reader? And if they do, in what ways? Is Sonmi’s attitude towards these subjects different than ours due to her lack of information?

In the first part of this fourth chapter, I will examine the different ways the governing body Unanimity produces and maintains the dominant narrative through propaganda and oppressive strategies. I will provide dialogue and situation examples from *Orison* and analyse them from the thesis’ epistemological point of view. The focus is, of course, on Sonmi and her experiences, but also on the informational tension between Sonmi and the Archivist who interviews her. The Archivist, mostly out of ignorance, seemingly unintentionally provokes Sonmi into conversations she might not have told the orison if not for the comments she receives from her interviewer.

¹⁴ Since Sonmi is a fabricant, her biological sex is ambiguous. According to the other characters and her own description, she has the features of a female and the pronouns used of her in *Orison* are she/her, so I will use these as well. Sonmi says she is “not exactly a girl” (CA, 235).

The second half will focus on the counter-narrative that Sonmi creates and her strategies to challenge the dominant narrative. Here, too, the focus is on Sonmi's experiences. Through the information she has gained, she has also gained knowledge about the world around her, and learning to understand how the society works, she decides to use the means she can to change it. The tools at her disposal are extremely limited, and she has to devise her strategies wisely, especially due to the fact that she knows she will, in the end, die.

4.1 Propaganda and restricted access to information

Orison is set in a state named Nea So Copros, in what today is the Korean peninsula, and its form of government is called corpocracy. The name is self-explanatory: the state is based on business power and trade, its citizens categorised according to their wealth and solvency with credit cards as their IDs, and the currency (and seemingly some valuables like gems) is called Souls. Figuratively speaking, the people, predominantly simply called consumers, give their "souls" to the state, and receive civil rights and status in return. In this setting, the "natural" humans (purebloods) are consumers, and the working class is made of genetically altered humanoid fabricants. The fabricants resemble humans, but are born in manufactured womb-tanks and are biologically nearly identical within their own model categories. Hierarchically speaking, consumers are citizens whose only purpose is to spend money, while fabricants are slaves in all but name. The system feeds the fabricants Soap, which ensures they do not think about ethical or moral questions about their status (CA, 189).

Unanimity actively produces propaganda that establishes the fabricants as beings who are not human, therefore free for exploitation, and most of the consumers presented in the story seem to believe in the dominant narrative about the fabricants' nature. This is explicitly demonstrated in the following examples. A pureblood woman, whom Sonmi's colleague Yoona-939 serves at the restaurant, describes the fabricants to her son: they all look identical because they have been bred in the same wombtank ("like radishes in his biology class"), they do not have children because they do not want them, and they are happy, naturally, because they do not have to worry about "dollars, tests, insurance, rising upstrata or sinking downstrata, sickness or birth quotas." (CA, 192). To this, Yoona says in her politely unpolite way,

“Trash, madam.” The fabricants themselves know these claims to be false, but the pureblood woman seemingly believes in the “truth” the consumer-citizens are told. The way she compares the humanoid fabricants with radishes is obviously degrading.

Later, when Sonmi has escaped the city, she witnesses a scene where a pureblood man throws a humanoid doll Zizzi Hikaru off a bridge. He very casually explains how he bought the Zizzi for his daughter, but because she did not want her anymore, he decided to throw her away. The man’s wife retorts that they should have taken her back to the store and asked for a refund. When the Archivist asks Sonmi if she considers the man a murderer, she says yes, “one so shallow he didn’t even know it.” (CA, 352). The man is thence raised in a world where, according to the dominant narrative, the fabricants are not humane beings and as such are devoid of human rights that, when abused, might cause purebloods a guilty conscience. It is later revealed that the scene was staged, just as Sonmi herself suspected, but this does not change the fact that Zizzi Hikaru was killed. If anything, Unanimity staging such an event confirms that in order to provoke Sonmi further, they have no qualms about killing a fabricant so offhandedly.

Unanimity’s practices seem very similar to its fictional predecessors, such as the Party in Orwell’s *1984*, as it controls its citizens through restricted access to information, science, and culture. The fabricants are normally not allowed outside their respective working spaces, and due to this it was essential for the Union’s plan to enrol Sonmi into a university. This move was meant to both make Sonmi believe she is given a chance of education and put her in a space where the purebloods see her publicly, but do not think she belongs in. With “space” in this case, I mean both the physical space such as the university building normally occupied by purebloods only, and the more abstract notion of academic circles reserved for the higher strata. When asked what her first lecture was, Sonmi says: “Swanti’s ‘Biomathematics’; but its real lesson was humiliation.” (CA, 230). She says her presence provoked “surprise, then unease”. The other students shout immature jokes at her, prevent her from sitting next to them, and one throws a paper dart at her, but the most important point is their disapproval of her *being* there. One of the students says to her: “I don’t vend burgers in your dinery, fabricant: why are you taking up space in my lecture theater?” (CA, 231). The lecturer, Dr Chu’an, stops midsentence when she notices Sonmi, and “forces herself to continue”. Sonmi, of course, does

not understand this hostility, and speaks about it with Professor Mephi, her own tutor in service of the Union:

The professor asked if my lecture had been fruitful; I chose the word ‘informative’, and asked why the students despised me so when I had given them no cause for offense? He asked why any dominator fears their dominated gaining knowledge. I dared not utter the word ‘insurrection’ and chose a circumspect route. ‘What if the differences between social strata stem not from genomics or inherent excellence [sic] or even dollars, but differences in knowledge?’ The professor asked, would this not mean that the whole Pyramid is built on shifting sands? [--] ‘Try this: fabricants are mirrors held up to purebloods’ consciences; what purebloods see therein sickens them. So they blame the mirrors.’ (CA, 231.)

Sonmi is, as presented thorough the whole *Orison*, extremely intelligent and shows deep empathy where the purebloods do not, a theme Gerd Bayer considers a *Blade Runner* reference (Bayer 2015, 348). In a matter of days, she comes to understand broad social concepts and in so doing, observes the power structures that direct the lives of the people, purebloods and fabricants, in Nea So Copros. She recognises with almost frustrating easiness the problems – and solutions – a pureblood might not discover in their whole life. When it comes to such social problems as oppression, the question ‘why’ is so difficult, there are probably no definite answers. Sonmi asks Professor Mephi when the purebloods might start blaming themselves instead, and Mephi answers: “History suggests not until they are *made to*.” (CA, 231). Considering the historical problems featured in *Cloud Atlas*, such as colonialism and racism, the answer is quite historically accurate.

A major informatic tool of oppression, both from fiction and actual world, is the rewriting and censoring of history and historical facts. The first implication to this is the Archivist’s comment about none of his colleagues showing interest in hearing Sonmi’s case on account of her being a fabricant, even though they are supposed to record history. Unanimity has systematically altered the historical information presented to its citizens, be they fabricants or purebloods. Sonmi’s interactions with different kinds of people during her journey outside the city confirm that an enormous amount of knowledge, both scientific and cultural, has been lost. In these cases, the contemporary reader most likely knows more about the storyworld’s history than Sonmi or the locals do, and recognising the subjects indicated is often quite easy. I will present an example from the latter half of *Orison*, where a reference to Buddhism is made.

At the end of her journey, Sonmi and Hae-Joo Im, an agent of the Union assigned as Sonmi's guard and travelling partner, visit an abbey consisting of the remains of a nunnery and people who have taken refuge there. "Buddha" or "Buddhism" is never mentioned by name, but the reader is most likely to identify the context. Sonmi asks the nunnery's Abbess about a statue of a "giant sitting in a lotus position" she has seen: "That old rogue, she nodded. Siddhartha had other names, all lost now. The Abbess's predecessors could have recited all his names and sermons, but the old Abbess and senior nuns were Lighthoused¹⁵ when the abbeys were criminalised fifty years ago." When the Abbess tells Sonmi Siddhartha did not "inflict punishment or protect them from the pain of life", but instead taught them how to "overcome that pain and earn a higher reincarnation in future lifetimes", Sonmi says she hopes that Siddhartha would reincarnate her in the Abbess' colony. (CA, 345–348.) The conversation has a seemingly deep impact on Sonmi, even though she understands the little she hears about Buddhism through her own, previous experiences at Papa Song's and thus misunderstands: Siddhartha, or Gautama Buddha, is not considered to reincarnate anyone, simply help them take their own fate into their own hands.¹⁶ Another difference is that the goal of Buddhist religious practice is to break free from the limbo of reincarnation (*samsāra*), whereas Sonmi wants to be reincarnated, if in a better place.

Sonmi's misunderstanding has, at least, two reasons: when she sees the statue for the first time, she initially asks about it from Hae-Joo Im. Hae-Joo describes Siddhartha "offering salvation from a perpetuity of birth and rebirth" (CA, 345), which, to Sonmi, sounds as if Siddhartha is in charge of reincarnation. The second reason is very likely Sonmi's own history at Papa Song's: the servers were taught to think of Unanimity and the Papa Song Corp. in very religious terms and, for example, the "Xultation", though simply meaning retirement, was presented to the fabricants in the form of some kind of religious salvation. With this background experience, Sonmi is likely to analyse any encountered religion on the same informational foundation. Historically speaking, authoritarian government systems are known to ban and dispose

¹⁵ Lighthouse is a prison and the location of Sonmi's execution.

¹⁶ Buddhism in general considers a person's fate, possible enlightenment, or further reincarnation to be in the hands of the individuals themselves, and as such, emphasises personal responsibility. Gautama Buddha and the Bodhisattvas can be seen as helpers, but enlightenment is attained through meditation.

of religion in all the forms that are not beneficial to them.¹⁷ In the context of *Orison*, the reader might make the connection to the persisting tensions between China and the Tibetan Buddhists. The government, as in Unanimity's case, seeks to replace the previous religion with one that makes the citizens obedient to the system: the centre of the new religion *is* the system. But when it comes to lost practical knowledge, however, Sonmi remarks that in a way, Unanimity has unintentionally handicapped itself, since the pureblood society is now dependent on the very same fabricants they enslave:

Who would work factory lines? Process sewage? Feed fishfarms? Xtract oil and coal? Stroke reactors? Construct buildings? Serve in dineries? Xtinguish fires? Man the cordon? Fill Exxon tanks? Lift, dig, pull, push? Sow, harvest? Purebloods have lost the skills that build societies. (CA, 342–343.)

This setting echoes a narrative of a society thriving on slave labour, and even if it is not clear to Unanimity, the risk is clear to Sonmi: what if these slaves, for any reason, were not there to do their work anymore? Another question is, has the rewriting, censoring, and deleting human history from collective memory caused the governments to also lose the knowledge with which to learn from history? Sonmi's present would indicate that this is the case.

One of the greatest plot twists in *Orison* comes at the very end of the story: the rebel Union which helped Sonmi escape and write her Declarations was, in fact, a part of the governing body Unanimity. It is implied that, essentially, Unanimity manufactured its own enemy in order to create uncertainty and strengthen its own position in the public eye through staged rebellions and fake news. Provoking Sonmi into writing and publishing the Declarations and then apprehending her was meant to undermine the fabricants' reputation and cause distrust towards them in the pureblood citizens. This plan, as we know from the following story *Sloosha's Crossin'*, backfired and even though the reader is not told what happens between Sonmi's execution and *Sloosha's Crossin'*, we know that Sonmi eventually succeeded in preserving her version of the "truth". I will concentrate further on Sonmi's motives and strategies in chapter 4.2.

¹⁷ See e.g., Schleutker 2020; Sarkissian 2015.

When asked about her earliest memories, Sonmi says she does not have them: “I have no earliest memories, Archivist. Every day of my life in Papa Song’s was as uniform as the fries we vended.” (CA, 187). The system endeavours to make the fabricants’ lives as repetitive and unstimulating as possible because causes of interest such as the sony, a handheld computer Yoona finds invite individual thinking from new perspectives that the Unanimity so fears: according to Sonmi, the underground restaurant did not even have windows (CA, 187). An important part of keeping the fabricants in line is enhancing communality: every morning they are gathered to a religious mass, where the Papa Song’s’ Logoman holds a sermon. Scenes like these are familiar from other dystopic writing, first and foremost George Orwell’s *1984*. The fabricants are taught to believe in these doctrines distributed by the Unanimity, so that they would be easier to control: the fabricants do not question their position or status of life if the oppressor’s dominant narrative gives them a higher purpose and the promise of a brighter future. The maintenance of strict control and obedience is also connected to the notion that the less the oppressed converse, or even speak for that matter, the less likely they are to form rebellious groups or construct counter-narratives. Sonmi states that even though there were no rules of silence, the pureblood restaurant chief Seer Rhee did not approve of them talking without a reason (CA, 191). Due to this, Yoona’s first ‘flaw’ was her talkativeness and the fact that she learnt words not taught to fabricants because they do not “need” them. Also, Yoona made Sonmi laugh: “She took pleasure in making me laugh. Laughter is an anarchic blasphemy. Tyrants are wise to fear it.” (CA, 192). Laughter signifies the slaves’ joy, lack of fear, and communality not orchestrated by the oppressor. About her strictly observed life in both the restaurant and her holding cell, Sonmi states: “Both in Papa Song’s and in this cube, my dreams are the single unpredictable factor in my zoned days and nights. Nobody allots them, or censors them. Dreams are all I have ever truly owned.” (CA, 189). In the context of the whole of *Cloud Atlas* where all six stories are tied together, dreams are spaces where the characters see into the other stories: in the 1931 Belgium, Vyvyan Ayrs tells Robert Frobisher he saw a dream of “a nightmarish café, brilliantly lit, but underground, with no way out. I’d been dead a long, long time. The waitresses all had the same face.” (CA, 80). The dreams are Sonmi’s escape into a space where she is truly free and where the dominant narrative does not force her and her identity.

The brainwashing the Unanimity engineers is explicitly demonstrated when Sonmi mentions slavery. The Archivist says, “There are no slaves in Nea So Copros! The very word is abolished!” (CA, 193). By deleting the word itself from common language, the Unanimity seeks to obliterate it, and with it the entity which it signifies. A “slave” denotes a person who lives in slavery: if they are given a more “proper” term (fabricant, server, etc.), the word itself does not signify the actual slave status any longer. That part of the person does not vanish, but it is made invisible in the language and the eyes of others. Because the conversation of slavery is cut off by Sonmi due to her apparent frustration towards the Archivist’s ignorance after the exclamation, it is unclear how Sonmi knows the word “slave”, but it is safe to assume she has either heard it from the members of the Union or she has come across the word in her pursuit of information when using the historical data bases. The Archivist most likely knows the word due to being an official of the Ministry of Testaments and thus being, at least somewhat, aware of the history, if not of the connotations abolishing such a word has. The irony of using the word “abolish” in this situation is also notable.

In this, *Orison* follows in the footsteps of the *Pacific Journal* closer than the other stories of *Cloud Atlas*. The Abolitionists are mentioned by name and are a separate group from the Unanimity-governed Union. They are never further introduced in *Orison*, but seem to be an actual faction working for the fabricants’ rights, compared to the Unanimity-staged one. Sonmi is aware of them, but she is never in direct contact with them, and this raises the question if the Abolitionists know that the Union is not what it claims to be. The Abolitionists are, of course, a direct reference to the Abolitionism of the 19th century depicted in the *Pacific Journal*, but the two movements differ slightly. Both are, as the name suggests, working towards freeing the slaves and ending slavery as an institution. But because of the shift in context, *Orison*’s Abolitionism is not only about racial oppression, but also about the ethical question of manufactured life. In Nea So Copros, the fabricants are made for the sole purpose of (slave) work, and in this *Cloud Atlas* joins the dystopian literature that examines the consequences of producing artificial life, alongside works such as Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* – if with a little grimmer perspective. Mitchell delves into these ethical questions from multiple perspectives: what is the responsibility connected to creating artificial life, in the frankensteinian meaning of caring for the created being? What does it tell us about the pureblood creators, when the fabricant created commands greater empathy than her creators? On these bases, how is a

“human(e) being” defined? Amongst others, empathy is a subject Gerd Bayer considers a *Blade Runner* reference, comparing the fabricants and the question of empathy to *Blade Runner’s* replicants (Bayer 2015, 348). Most likely, the reference is there, and the question of empathy is essential in both *Cloud Atlas* and *Blade Runner*. There are, however, major differences, and I would count violence as one of them. Unlike *Blade Runner’s* replicants, Sonmi or the other fabricants are never depicted using violence of any kind, in spite of being subjected to it themselves. The replicants’ anger is aggressive and explosive, whereas Sonmi’s is calm and calculated. Another difference is the theme of deception: the replicants are given memories to make them mentally more human-like, and they feel deceived because the memories are not their own, but borrowed. The fabricants are not given anything: Sonmi feels deceived when she realises the story of the purpose of their life is a lie. Essentially, the replicants of *Blade Runner* are made to be better-functioning human beings, whereas the fabricants of *Cloud Atlas* are simply clones made for slave labour. The question of empathy is there, but the context is very different.

4.2. Counter-narratives and versions of truth

The interviewer, who is never given a name other than the Archivist, tells Sonmi that the ministry was against the interview because they did not think a server had anything to give them. The Archivist admits that his career may be endangered due to his decision to interview Sonmi (CA, 193–194). In spite of him also admitting that “when I petitioned to be assigned your case, approval was granted before I could change my mind”, his willingness to hear Sonmi’s story gives reason to believe he may be more open-minded to the counter-narratives than his colleagues, who immediately turned down the assignment. Being interested in Sonmi’s case in the first place implies that, at least on some level, he considers Sonmi’s story worth recording, even if his colleagues do not. The Archivist’s sincerely surprised and horrified comments on the atrocities Sonmi describes also have the reader believe that he is not intentionally a “bad

person”, simply misinformed. There is no explicit proof of the Archivist not being only a convincing part of the Unanimity’s scheme, but at least in my own opinion, the dialogue presents no reason to have the reader believe so.¹⁸

According to Lueg, Bager and Lundholt, a counter-narrative is a societal narrative which focuses on views resisting a dominant narrative, e.g. narratives by minorities. Counter-narratives define themselves when they are placed against another narrative, otherwise they would be only ‘narratives’. They can be seen as enabling and supporting constructive, beneficial social change and, for example, ethical discourse. But counter-narratives can also be harmful and destabilise the social balance: one must remember that the interpretation of a counter-narrative (like any narrative) relies on the interpreter’s social status and that counter-narratives are instruments for social change independent of what exactly the change is. (Lueg, Bager & Lundholt 2020, 4.) This means that counter-narratives form resisting social discourse: they are only visible next to a dominant narrative, and thus create a collision of two categories. (Frandsen, Lundholt & Kuhn 2017, 1–2.)

When the Archivist states that during the interview it is only Sonmi’s version of truth that matters, Sonmi tells him: “No other version of the truth has ever mattered to me.” (CA, 187). Sonmi keeps speaking of this “truth” throughout *Orison*: the truth she experiences is vastly different from the truth the governing body Unanimity feeds the public. As the Union helps Sonmi escape Papa Song’s, she sees behind the scenes and is faced with the reality that her whole life is based on a lie. For example, the fabricants never reach the promised Xultation after twelve years of service, but are butchered like cattle, sent into a factory, and condensed into Soap – the very food the living fabricants are fed. Sonmi comes to understand that the dominant narrative told by the state, not only to the consumers but to the fabricants themselves, is a lie, and decides to take the Union’s offer to write her own Declarations to be distributed to the public. Sonmi begins to create the counter-narrative based on how she understands the societal situation and how she experiences herself as an individual. She describes

¹⁸ It is perhaps worth noting that in the 2012 film adaption of *Cloud Atlas*, co-scripted and co-directed with David Mitchell himself, the Archivist is explicitly indicated being on Sonmi’s side by the end of the interview. But this is, of course, no proof that this is the case in the novel.

to the Archivist how servers are cloned visibly identical: the word in the fabricant's name signifies the model and the number signifies their personal serial number. Sonmi understands and sees the differences between the fabricants, but the purebloods do not. With her comet-like birthmark, Sonmi-451 is a strange exception, because anomalous features such as birthmarks are "genomed out" (CA, 204). Fabricants with personalities deviating from the standard, such as Sonmi-451 and Yoona-939, are considered dangerous defects that need to be exterminated. In the cases of Sonmi and Yoona, this imposition is, however, artificial: both fabricants were test subjects in a project called "ascension". One of the project's main purposes was to test what happens to fabricants whose Soap effects are eliminated. On multiple occasions during the interview, Sonmi expresses her frustration at the Archivist's (and other purebloods') attitude towards fabricants. In these parts, the dominant narrative and its effects are shown explicitly:

[--] I believe ascension only frees what was suppressed by Soap. Ascension doesn't implant traits that were never present. Despite what purebloods strive so hard to convince themselves, fabricants' minds differ greatly, even if their features and bodies do not.

'Despite what purebloods strive so hard to convince themselves'? Why do you say that?

To enslave an individual distresses the conscience, but to enslave a clone is merely like owning the latest mass-produced six-wheeled ford. In fact, all fabricants, even same-stem fabricants, are singular as snowflakes. Pureblood naked eyes cannot discern these differences, but they exist. (CA, 191.)

Even though at this point Sonmi has already distributed her Declarations, her own truth, to the public, she explains her counter-narrative to the Archivist in order to make him, as a member of the Ministry, to understand her view of the dominant narrative that is taken as facts by so many. On many occasions in *Orison*, Sonmi appeals against exactly this dehumanisation born from the way the fabricants are presented. This, and the descriptions of the Abolitionists fighting for the fabricants' rights, builds a direct thematic bridge between *Orison* and the *Pacific Journal*.

When questioned why she cooperated with the Union's charade even after she found out about it, Sonmi answers: "Why does a martyr cooperate with his judases? He sees a further endgame." (CA, 364). Sonmi's endgame are her Declarations, the catechisms she wrote to

replace the old ones presenting and constructing the dominant narrative. After Sonmi's pre-meditated arrest, the media was more than delighted to receive and publish the texts written by the infamous rouge fabricant. Sonmi states that this was exactly her intention: "Every schoolchild in Nea So Copros knows my twelve 'blasphemies' now. My guards tell me there is even talk of a State-wide 'Vigilance Day' against fabricants who show signs of the Declarations. My ideas have been reproduced a billionfold." (CA, 365). The people have become aware of the Declarations and those who know to read against the dominant narrative can identify the counter-narrative and understand that not everything is as it is supposed to be. Wing-027, a fabricant assisting her, tells Sonmi that "to survive for long, Sonmi-451, you must create Catechisms of your own." (CA, 215). It is likely Sonmi simply wished to stop oppression and free the fabricants, not found a religion, but as her message survives the apocalypse in the Declarations and the Orison's recording, she becomes revered to as a goddess by people yet again oppressed. "Historians still unborn will appreciate your cooperation in the future, Sonmi-451" is the very first sentence of Orison. *Orison* and the following *Sloosha's Crossin'* emphasise the importance of legacy, but the legacy is very different from what the Archivist thought it would be.

Orison takes its place in the continuum of dystopian literature, presenting a society ruled by an authoritarian government reminiscent of the Party in Orwell's *1984*. Like in *1984*, the story is presented to us by a member of the oppressed, a fabricant fighting not only for herself, but those who come after her. The narrative is presented through Sonmi's perspective, her experiences, and the reader learns what she learns: in spite of the reader knowing the intertextual and -medial references probably better than Sonmi, Sonmi is the one who explains the state of her storyworld to the reader, and we learn both the dominant narrative as well as her counter-narrative from her – occasionally with the help of the Archivist's comments. The references guide the reader in at least two ways: we are acquainted with subjects Sonmi finds important (e.g., the Buddhist conversation) and the variety of subjects she learns about (arts and sciences), but the references about the world and the way *Orison* is written place the story in a genre continuum. These kinds of references are, for example, the ones to Orwell and *Blade Runner*, amongst others. The incident with Yoona gives Sonmi her first push to act, and characters such as Professor Mephi, Hae-Joo Im, and the Abbess provide her with infor-

mation and wisdom, but like Autua in the *Pacific Journal*, Sonmi is an acting subject, determined to learn everything she has access to in the computer data bases. This is why she does not learn only information from the present of her world, but also historical knowledge. Sonmi demonstrates what happens when someone previously denied access to information suddenly gains it: with information, she gains the power to plan her strategy against Unanimity. In *Orison's* storyworld, this proves how much Unanimity can control simply by restricting access to information many of us in the actual world take for granted. A more detailed form of this control is the deletion of words such as "slave". Another bridge back to the *Pacific Journal* is the dehumanisation of the fabricants, a theme that is not quite present in *Half-Lives*, but is there in *Zedelghem* and especially in the *Ghastly Ordeal*. This theme is essential in *Sloosha's Crossin'* as well, and the chronologically last part is both thematically and contextually closest to both the *Pacific Journal* and *Orison*. The next chapter will discuss this story that brings the story-time to an end.

5 *Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After* – Lost knowledge and the limbo of suffering

Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After is the middle section of *Cloud Atlas* and thus the only uninterrupted story of the book. The story displays a world after what is called the Fall, the apocalypse that takes place between *Orison* and *Sloosha's Crossin'*, but presenting only one corner of it: the Big Island of Hawaii. The protagonist is Zachry, a young goat herder, whose older self is the narrator of the story. Because the Fall has left Earth mostly desolate of human life, Zachry's people (the Valleysmen) live in very archaic conditions as traders and farmers, and are plagued by the Kona, a cannibalistic tribe on the same island. The world does not seem to be in the hands of the humankind any longer since they are nearly extinct, and the main supporting character, Meronym, expresses the concern of a complete extinction. Zachry tells the story of his early years to his progeny, and the oral presentation is, apparently, retold by one of them.¹⁹

Because *Cloud Atlas* does not directly or explicitly present the events between *Orison* and *Sloosha's Crossin'*, or the causes and consequences of the Fall, we are left to analyse these questions from the details of *Sloosha's Crossin'*. *Cloud Atlas* describes this apocalypse as a predominantly environmental catastrophe that has resulted in the decline of the human race. Due to this Fall, the Valleysmen are presented archaic, but enthusiastic in their attempts to understand the remains of knowledge left behind from the previous civilisations. What exactly was the nature of the apocalypse presented? What is the legacy Sonmi has managed to left behind and what does it mean to a tribe in the far future? And what is the purpose of the knowledge salvaged from the past civilisations? These are the questions I will analyse in 5.1.

When Meronym, a member of the scientifically more developed Prescients, comes to research the lives of the Valleysmen, she is placed into a situation where she is forced to reconsider her ethical guidelines as an uninvolved anthropologist. What do the scientist's ethical dilemmas

¹⁹ *Sloosha's Crossin'* ends in a commentary by an adult child of Zachry's, who appears to have shared the story with other, unidentified listeners.

mean to Meronym's character, and how is this question of responsibility based on knowledge and information presented in *Sloosha's Crossin'*? And lastly, how does *Sloosha's Crossin'* relate to the *Pacific Journal*, when the book's story-time comes to an end in geographically the same area where it began? These subjects will be the focus in chapter 5.2.

5.1 Apocalypse and lost knowledge

Sonmi's Declarations have survived the Fall, and have been handed down from generation to generation by the Valleysmen as the texts of their religion. Sonmi is understood to be a goddess who watches over the tribe, and at least Zachry sees the other tribes' gods in quite a negative light:

Valleysmen only had one god an' her name it was Sonmi. Savages on Big I norm'ly had more gods'n you could wave a spiker at. Down in Hilo they prayed to Sonmi if they'd the moodin' but they'd got other gods too, shark gods, volcano gods, corn gods, sneeze gods, hairy-wart gods, O, you name it, the Hilo'd birth a god for it. The Kona'd got a hole tribe o' war gods an' horse gods'n all. But for Valleysmen savage gods weren't worth knowin', nay, only Sonmi was real. (CA, 255.)

The Valleysmen believe in reincarnation, echoing Sonmi's account of her encounter with Buddhism. Zachry tells the listeners of his story that the Valleysmen also believed in "Old Georgie", their version of the devil, and that no fate was worse than being "stoned" by him:

[--] when a truesome'n'civ'lized Valleyman died she'd [Sonmi] take his soul an' lead it back into a womb somewhere in the Valleys. [--] Unless Old Georgie got your soul, that is. See, if you b'haved savage-like an' selfy an' spurned the civ'lize, or if Georgie tempted you into barb'rism an' all, then your soul got heavy'n'jagged an' weighed with stones. Sonmi cudn't fit you into no womb then. Such crookit selfy people was called 'stoned' an' no fate was more dreadful for a Valleysman. (CA, 255.)

Just like everything else left behind from the world before the Fall, religions have changed and reformed as combinations of preceding religions. Because the situation has retrograded from the perspective of human societies, the religions are depicted as returning close to the form of nature worship and Earth-centred religions. How the Valleysmen's religion has come to be is not explained or presented in *Cloud Atlas*, only that Sonmi's words have caused a societal

change far greater than even she herself likely imagined. In spite of Sonmi's legacy being seemingly positive, the overall situation of the post-apocalyptic world is not, continuing the dystopian theme of *Orison*. According to de Cristofaro, this is typical to post-apocalyptic fiction: "This reversion is what I term temporal inversion, a critical temporality typical of post-apocalyptic fiction, where the future is often represented as a dystopian return to a past stage of human civilization" (de Cristofaro 2018, 247). I stated in the introduction of this chapter that *Cloud Atlas* does not explicitly present the reasons for the Fall. They can be, nevertheless, deduced from the six stories: the greed for power and money had reached dystopian proportions by the time of *Orison*, and being the predominant theme in the whole of *Cloud Atlas*, I, amongst others²⁰, consider human agency the main cause of the apocalypse. This is hinted at in details such as the fact that the genomics unit, which produces the fabricants in *Orison* is named "HYDRA" after its namesake in *Half-Lives*, presenting the reader a negative association and insinuating that Seaboard Power Inc. has possibly survived, at least in some form. As Marco Caracciolo states in his article about post-apocalyptic fiction, the contemporary perspective of apocalypse is not the classical Christian one any longer:

[--] while in these classical narratives catastrophe is presented as the result of divine intervention in human history, in today's world catastrophic occurrences tend to be conceptualized as the product of a complex causality, crisscrossing human and nonhuman factors." (Caracciolo 2018, 238.)

The utopian teleology and the post-apocalyptic "enlightenment" do not happen, and the apocalypse is simply a catastrophe without a possibility to return to the former world. De Cristofaro states:

First, in these texts²¹, the aftermath of the destruction of the world as we know it is preponderantly dystopian. That is, contemporary post-apocalyptic novels do not espouse the notion of a utopian teleology active in history, a notion that is at the core of traditional apocalyptic logic. Second, contemporary post-apocalyptic fictions are essentially concerned with time and history, and third, this concern is not only central to the narratives' content but also is embodied within their formal features. (de Cristofaro 2018, 243.)

²⁰ See e.g., Bayer 2015; de Cristofaro 2018.

²¹ Post-apocalyptic novels.

She also adds that “as typical of contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction, in *Cloud Atlas* ‘apocalypse’ comes to mean merely ‘catastrophe,’ critically effacing the etymological sense of a revelation of a better world to come and the sense-making function of the end.” (CA, 247). It is unclear if the Fall has affected the world as a whole or just the human race, but according to *Orison*, the environment outside the big cities is uninhabitable already in their pre-Fall situation (CA, 332, 341). In *Sloosha’s Crossin’*, Zachry recounts the birth of his first child:

But then Jayjo’s waters busted moons too soon an’ Banjo fetched me to Cutter Foot where she was labourin’. The babbitt came out jus’ a few beats after I’d got there. [--] The babbitt’d got no mouth, nay, no nose-holes neither, so it cudn’t breath an’ was dyin’ from when Jayjo’s ma skissored the cord, poor little buggah. Its eyes never opened, it just felt the warm of its pa’s hands on its back, turned bad colors, stopped kickin’ an’ died. (CA, 254.)

Some details such as this in *Sloosha’s Crossin’* indicate that the post-apocalyptic world is plagued by mutations and illnesses beyond the human race’s ability to heal. When the Prescient Meronym comes to the village, the Valleysmen show interest in the colour of her skin:

Ruby o’ Potter’s asked why Prescients’d all got dark skins like cokeynuts, nay, we’d never seen a pale’un or pink’un come off of their Ship. Meronym said her ancestors b’fore the Fall changed their seeds to make dark-skinned babbitts to give ‘em protection ‘gainst the redscab sickness, an’ so them babbitts’ babbitts also got it, like father like son, yay, like rabbits’n’cukes. (CA, 264.)

Meronym’s explanation indicates some form of skin cancer, which has been countered by intentionally changing humans’ skin colour darker. Hae-Joo Im told Sonmi in *Orison*, that Nea So Copros has a serious problem with diseases, and that the “melanoma and malaria belts advance northwards at forty kilometers per year” (CA, 341). This means the problems pre-existed the Fall, and the apocalypse was most likely an environmental catastrophe, resulting from the ecological neglect from the businesses’ and governments’ part. In *Sloosha’s Crossin’*, we see the price paid by humankind. The ultimate story-time ending of *Cloud Atlas* presents Zachry’s adult²² child commenting on Zachry’s story, and from this part we can discern that the world presented is still in decline: the narrator speaks of Sonmi’s orison, mentioning it is not very useful because “it ain’t Smart you can use ‘cos it don’t kill Kona pirates nor fill empty

²² I use the word “adult”, because Zachry’s progeny mention having children of their own. This, however, is not comparable to our contemporary “adult”, since Zachry had his first child when he was twelve, with a girl approximately the same age. A fourteen-year-old is considered an adult by the Valleysmen. (CA, 253, 256)

guts". "Smart" in *Sloosha's Crossin'* refers to technology. In the post-apocalyptic world Zachry's progeny inhabit, the priority remains on subsistence level, as it does in the whole of *Sloosha's Crossin'*.

Zachry keeps speaking about "civilisation", the people preceding the Valleymen as "civilised" and the time before theirs the "Civilised Days". The information and knowledge salvaged from the preceding civilisations seem extremely important to the Valleymen and as stated in Zachry's explanation of Old Georgie, they are considered the measure of a person. Zachry's tribe considers their leader the Abbess, again reminiscent from *Orison*, the high priestess of Sonmi. The Abbess is the person who conveys Sonmi's will to the other members of the community, but apart from her religious duties, she is also the village's teacher. Zachry admits not being very good at school, but he holds knowledge in high regard, nevertheless. This might be due to two reasons: because his religion tells him so and because everyone else in the community does – very much like Ewing in the *Pacific Journal*. It is not very clear whether Zachry has taken this attitude on knowledge as his own or if it is simply the result of external influence. The Valleymen seem to long for a past that the ones living do not even remember, because none of them have ever lived in the world preceding the Fall. The Abbess and her knowledge are respected without question, and even Zachry seems to understand learning about the past is (culturally) important. This is why Meronym is hesitant to tell Zachry about the reasons for the Fall, stating that the truth about science is not one the Valleymen want to hear (CA, 286). Some of the knowledge is not useful for the people in their daily lives, but it is taught in the school in spite of this. Zachry recounts he never learnt to understand the clock:

The greatest of 'mazements tho' was the clock, yay, the only workin' clock in the Valleys an' in hole Big I, hole Ha-Why, far as I know. See, it din't need batt'ries it was wind-up. When I was a schooler I was 'fraid of that tick-tockin' spider watchin'n'judgin' us. Abbess'd taught us Clock Tongue but I'd forgot it, 'cept for *O'Clock an' Half Past*. I mem'ry Abbess sayin', *Civ'lize needs time, an' if we let this clock die, time'll die too, an' then how can we bring back the Civ'lized Days as it was b'fore the Fall?* (CA, 257.)

As Zachry states, the Valleymen understand reading the time from clocks as "language". As we can see from the language Zachry himself uses telling the story, the English has changed somewhat. Mitchell has, of course, presented it as understandable, if a little hard and slow to

read at times. By the time of *Sloosha's Crossin'*, the "old" languages are dead. At the story-time end, Zachry's progeny find the orison containing Sonmi's interview from Zachry's belongings after his death, and the narrator says: "Like Pa yarned, if you warm the egg in your hands a beausome ghost-girl appears in the air an' speaks in an' Old'un tongue what no'un alive und'stands nor never will, nay." (CA, 324). What does this mean in practice? Losing language means losing all information written or spoken, that is, recorded, in that language. In the case were most of the world's languages are gone, this means most of the information is as well. The Abbess spoke of "bringing back" the Civilised Days, referring to the Valleysmen's effort to return to the world that once was. It is not, of course, physically possible with most of the world uninhabitable and, according to Meronym, the situation growing worse, so they try to recreate a society resembling the one lost. Why would they do this, then? It seems the Valleysmen consider the world before the Fall a better world. This is one of the features discussed previously, where Mitchell has gone against the "progressive" perspective of human history. *Cloud Atlas* presents a speculative future where the "human progress" is not progress after all, but rather the humankind's path is regressive. This has been commented on by multiple researchers. De Cristofaro states that with this, Mitchell has gone against the traditional, utopian post-apocalyptic metanarrative (de Cristofaro 2018, e.g., 245, 247). I agree with the notion that Mitchell goes against the older narrative, where the apocalypse brings a utopian world, as is the case with biblical apocalypse. His version of the world's possible ending is clearly dystopian, but there is also the question of how the Valleysmen comprehend the "world before". They may consider the pre-Fall state of the world a better one, but is it really? As I have stated previously, already in the storyworld time of *Orison*, Earth is plagued by environmental disasters and diseases, and in *Sloosha's Crossin'*, Meronym states the following:

O, more gear, more food, faster speeds, longer lifes, easier lifes, more power, yay. Now the Hole World is big but it weren't big 'nuff for that hunger what made Old'uns rip out the skies an' boil up the seas an' poison soil with crazed atoms an' donkey 'bout with rotted seeds so new plagues was borned an' babbits was freak-birtherd. Fin'ly, bit'ly, then quicksharp, states busted into bar'bric tribes an' the Civ'lize Days ended, 'cept for a few folds'n'pockets here'n'there, where its last embers glimmer. [--] human hunger birtherd the Civ'lize, but human hunger killed it too. (CA, 286, original cursive.)

Based on what Meronym tells Zachry here, I argue that when taken the hints of the whole of *Cloud Atlas* into consideration, the Fall is not the cause of the human race's decline, but the

consequence of human hunger, as Meronym calls it. The Valleymen do not know this, and maybe it is due to their hope of a possibility for a better world, or a wish to be closer to the Prescients that they uphold this view. Meronym understands this, and tells the truth only to Zachry, adding that it is not what they want to hear.

Zachry's representation of his world can be confusing to the reader at times. Essentially, this is because of the long distance in time to what is, to us contemporary readers, a place and context in a far, unknown future. But when speaking of the narrative, Zachry does not explain everything because it is his own progeny he is speaking to: he does not give background information, because he "knows that everyone knows". He does not, of course, know that the actual reader does not know: the things and events he recounts are considered common knowledge amongst the people of the storyworld. But the reader also possesses information that relate to the pre-world that Zachry does not. This includes details such as what his "Clock Tongue" actually means and what a clock is, for example, but even more importantly the truth about Sonmi's being. This is called a "negative strategy" by Marco Caracciolo:

While, as we have seen, any narrative in this genre presupposes a temporal rupture between a pre- and a post-world, my case studies probe this divide in formal terms, as a means of engaging with the psychological consequences of catastrophe: the emphasis falls not on apocalypse as a plot device, but on its power to disrupt the protagonists' experience of reality—and particularly their sense of a sharp demarcation between human societies and nonhuman things and processes. This conceptual destabilization is an effect of what I call "negative strategies": the post-world emerges as the narrative negates (i.e., subtracts or pares down) some of the salient characteristics of the pre-world—features with which readers are familiar through their everyday reality. (Caracciolo 2018, 224.)

I would argue that like in the texts²³ Caracciolo examined, the apocalypse in *Cloud Atlas* is, indeed, a world disrupting subject rather than a clear plot device: the apocalypse is not clearly explained, thence not an explicit event in the novel, and its consequences are more important to the story than the apocalypse itself. *Cloud Atlas* emphasises the chronology as a whole, through the unrepresented apocalypse, not only the story up to the catastrophe.

²³ Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, and Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*.

5.2 The anthropological dilemma and the return to the *Pacific Journal*

Because their sources of information are extremely limited, the Valleysmen have formed their understanding of the previous civilisations from the scraps they do have, adding to it their own perspectives. So, what is possible for the Valleysmen to know? This brings us to the anthropological dilemma with Meronym, the Prescient visiting the community. The lack of knowledge and the enthusiasm to know more is one of the reasons why the Valleysmen are extremely interested in Meronym. The Prescients live somewhere far away from Hawaii and possess information and technology far superior to the Valleysmen. Both communities seemingly descend from the previous civilisations living on Earth, so how this chasm in culture and knowledge has come to be is an intriguing question, but not one clearly answered in *Cloud Atlas*. On page 255, Zachry mentions a “Flotilla what bringed our ancestors got to Big I to ‘scape the Fall”, in which Flotilla could mean a ship. A possible course of events is indicated at when Meronym speaks of the location of the Prescience Isle: “Prescient I weren’t on any map made jus’ b’fore the Fall, Meronym said, ‘cos Prescience’s founders kept it secret. It was on older maps, yay, but not the Abbess’s.” (CA, 263). Later, when Meronym has decided to confide in Zachry, she tells him:

Fin’ly, five decades after my people’s landin’ at Prescience, we relaunched the Ship what bringed us there. [--] They finded the cities where the old maps promised, but dead-rubble cities, jungle-choked cities, plague-rotted cities, but never a sign o’ them livin’ cities o’ their yearnin’s. We Prescients din’t b’lief our weak flame o’ Civ’lize was now the brightest in the Hole World, an’ further an’ further we sailed year by year, but we din’t find no flame brighter. [--] I vow it, there ain’t more’n sev’ral places in Hole World what got the Smart o’ the Nine Valleys. (CA, 285, original cursive.)

Due to this admission, it seems that the Prescients do not consider themselves scientifically very developed, which, in turn, tells us that the world before the Fall was scientifically extremely developed. But instead of sharing their knowledge and technology with the Valleysmen, or other such settlements, the Prescients decided to keep their distance and simply observe. This, in itself, is use of power, because the Prescients are technologically in a superior position compared to the Valleysmen.

As a member of this technologically more developed society of the Prescients, Meronym has more information and has, thus, power over the Valleymen even if she does not intend to use it – at least consciously. Meronym comes to stay with Zachry’s community to conduct anthropological research for her Prescient university. She is bombarded with questions about the life of Prescients as well as her own personal one, but as Zachry notices, she answers without exactly explaining anything:

But the wyrd thing was this. Meronym seemed to answer the questions, but her answers didn’t quench your curio none, nay, not a flea. So my cuz Spensa o’ Cluny Dwellin’ asked, *What makes your Ship move?* The Prescient answered, *Fusion engines*. Ev’ryun’ nodded wise as Sonmi, *O, fusion engines it is, yay*, no’un asked what ‘fusion engine’ was ‘cos they din’t want to look barb’ric or stoopit in front o’ the gath’rin’. (CA, 263, original cursive.)

Zachry does not understand why a Prescient would be interested in their less scientific culture, and noticing this evasion of questions, he is suspicious of Meronym’s intentions, and goes as far as to claim that the Prescients plan to invade the Nine Valleys (CA, 275). Even though Meronym is, in fact, truthful, and the reader is able to understand her answer, the Valleymen are not, and so they do not know if she is lying to them. In spite of this, Meronym seems to be simply an anthropologist interested in researching the Valleymen’s way of life (in my opinion, the narrative does not give the reader a reason to think otherwise, especially since Meronym speaks about the university to herself), and her silence stems from exactly this position. The Prescients are instructed to not teach the archaic people nor answer their questions too deeply, and they are not allowed to assist the Valleymen with their own technology (CA, 279). This becomes a moral problem when Meronym is forced to make a choice between life and death. Lynda Ng states that her friendship with Zachry makes her go against the Prescient instructions:

Adhering to the anthropologist’s code, she faces personal ethical dilemmas about her role within the Valleymen community. Although she strives to maintain scientific impartiality throughout most of the narrative (“*The life o’ your tribe’s got a nat’ral order*” [280]), the emotional bond she forms with Zachry makes it impossible for her not to intervene. She slips him medicine that will help his sister recover from an illness (281) and later on rescues him when he is captured by the Kona (307). In both cases, non-intervention would have resulted in death. (Ng 2015, 117.)

Meronym's statement, which Lynda Ng refers to, includes a familiar term: the natural order. This takes us straight back to the *Pacific Journal* and the issue about Horrox's Civilisation's Ladder. Unlike Horrox, Meronym does not seem to have any intention of using this discourse as a tool of power, and yet she does, in spite unconsciously. Stating that if the other Prescients find out about her helping Zachry's sister Catkin, her "hole faculty'd be disbandied" (CA, 281), which tells us that the anthropological code is a code instructed by the university. When Zachry pleads Meronym to help his sister, Meronym does so, after a struggle with her conscience. The later decision to save Zachry from the Kona is entirely Meronym's own and by then, she has decided that to save lives is more important than keeping to her code. Zachry, for his part, helps Meronym after learning to trust her, and at the end of *Sloosha's Crossin'* when Zachry's village is destroyed by the Kona, he accepts Meronym's offer to take him with her. Both Zachry and Meronym learn to trust and confide in each other after mutual hardships and creating the bond Ng speaks of.

The apocalyptic environment has divided some groups to prey on others (the Kona) and some to try and establish a safe community by working closely together (the Valleymen). The lack of food and the change in morale has led to cannibalism by the Kona, which Lynda Ng points out is present in both the chronologically first and last stories of the *Pacific Journal* and *Sloosha's Crossin'*. She also notes that "by situating the narratives of Adam Ewing from 'The Pacific Diary' [sic] and Zachry from 'Sloosha's Crossin'" within the Pacific region, Mitchell implies that human history both begins and ends here." (Ng 2015, 108). It is implied that at the beginning and the end of the cycle of human existence, the situation is the same. This is also proposed by Ewing at the end of *Cloud Atlas*: "[O]ne fine day, a purely predatory world shall consume itself." (CA, 528). Ewing sought to change the world and disrupt this cycle he speaks of, but as Zachry's present proves, none of them succeeded. The prominent dystopian features in *Sloosha's Crossin'* are insecurity and uncertainty. The Valleymen never know when the crops will fail, when a disease will spread, or when the Kona will attack. They have no secure picture of tomorrow, and everything depends on the teamwork between the members of the community: it is quite impossible to live alone, unattached from everyone else. This is most likely one of the reasons Zachry describes being "stoned" by Old Georgie the most unwanted of fates: being shunned by the other Valleymen would mean almost certain death. Caracciolo states that "these narratives evoke the post-world as a negation of the pre-world

– a strategy that, as a matter of fact, affirms the pre-world while foregrounding its absence in affectively charged terms.” (Caracciolo 2018, 226). This may be one perspective of looking at the narrative, but as stated earlier in this thesis, I consider *Cloud Atlas* more complex than this. What Caracciolo speaks of is the story-time ending of *Sloosha’s Crossin’*, which does present a very grim, dystopian future. In spite of this, we have the discourse-time ending of the *Pacific Journal*, in which Ewing admits the difficult struggle ahead, but also finds the hope in the future. The further the novel goes to the future of *Orison* and *Sloosha’s Crossin’*, the more explicit the world disruption is and the more the epistemological and ontological questions are foregrounded. These two worlds are strange to the reader of our time, yet they bear similarities in both context and themes. I would argue all of them, in spite of the story-time ending’s dystopian setting, end in a spark of hope.

6 Conclusions

In this thesis, I have attempted to analyse the ways in which information and knowledge are depicted as a tool of power in David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas*. So, in what different ways does it seem information has been utilised? In *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing*, the focus was on the foundations of colonialism. The information and science are used to maintain the dominant narrative told by the colonists, and the view through which the world is seen is extremely narrow. Through his own experiences and growth as a human being, Ewing learns of new perspectives and utilises the knowledge both old and new in joining the abolitionists' fight against colonialism and racism. The characters of Preacher Horrox, Dr Goose, and Boerhaave function as the representatives of the types of ideology Ewing begins to oppose. Rafael functions as the spark that ignites the sleeping anger in Ewing, and Autua gives him a model of an active subject that encourages Ewing to change his course in life. The tools of power Ewing encounters are forms of the colonial discourse, including the Civilisation's Ladder of Preacher Horrox, the aggressive power narrative maintained by Dr Goose, and the idea of mapping the world. If Ewing's growth story can be said to have a moral point, I would consider it the message that one can unlearn these kinds of narratives told by the dominant culture. In spite of "colonialism" as a term referring to the historical colonialism of the British empire that I have examined in this thesis, it should not be forgotten that the 19th century colonialism has its surviving form in today's world: neoliberal imperialism. This is a perspective that could be discussed further concerning this novel. The legacy of colonialism still exists, and it is not a positive notion.

In *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery*, we are presented with the importance of individual action and "public outrage", both enabled by gaining the right information and being able to bring it to the public awareness. The story, in spite of being a fictional one, demonstrates the very real problems and dangers the investigative journalists face in the actual world, as well as the price they pay for it. I have extensively discussed the ethical problems of journalism and the danger investigative journalism poses on the journalist. Rey struggles with her own helplessness and the fact that the battle against the dangerous disinformation costs the lives of

three people. But as Hester Van Zandt stated, history proves the fight for truth is not a hopeless fight, and in spite of the fight happening quite physically in the thriller, she notes that “the media [--] is where democracies conduct their civil wars”, emphasising how important it is to simply write and speak (CA, 125–126). In the chapter 3.2, I have also attempted to look at *Half-Lives* from the perspective of mis- and disinformation. These terms, and following them, propaganda and fake news, are sometimes overlapping and hard to distinguish properly. I made the distinction between the motives of Rey’s colleagues at the *Spyglass* magazine and the Seaboard corporation, arguing that the magazine is not driven by a similar political agenda as the power company. Possibly due to its genre and the plain fact that *Half-Lives* is fiction, the “good” and “bad” sides are quite explicit in the story, and the reader is not given much to doubt on the greater scale: on smaller scale, there are cases such as Grelsch, who turns out to have quite emotional motives behind his greed. The thriller, as a detective genre according to Todorov, foregrounds the epistemological questions more explicitly than other genres, and I have sought to demonstrate this with *Half-Lives*. The question of knowing is important to all of the stories I have discussed in this thesis, but in *Half-Lives*, the epistemological is *in* the genre itself. But it is not only relevant from the perspective of what the characters know about the storyworld case, but also what does *Half-Lives* tell us about the world, from the perspective of the whole *Cloud Atlas*. *Half-Lives* presents the same themes of oppression and power structures as the other stories do, if in its own way and with the tools of the thriller genre.

An Orison of Sonmi-451 continues the theme of propaganda and disinformation, and is the first story to present us a speculated future for the actual world we live in. That is, in case the reader wants to look at *Cloud Atlas* as this kind of a warning text. In Nea So Copros, the propaganda veiled as scientific knowledge is, again, a tool of power over both the consumers as well as the fabricants. But like Rey, Sonmi uses the chance and the brief time given to her to learn the “truth”, and constructing her own strategy, she deceives both the Unanimity and the Union. In spite of knowing she will die, Sonmi gives the future world a testament in the form of her Declarations, hoping that world will be better than hers. *Orison* presents ways of control and oppression familiar from the preceding stories, but in a new setting. The Unanimity of Nea So Copros reminds us of the Party in Orwell’s *1984* with its diverse strategies of maintaining the dominant narrative, which keeps Unanimity in power. In both *1984* and *Ori-*

son, the governing body tries (and in 1984, succeeds) to deceive the protagonist with a rebellious faction created for this purpose. Sonmi realises this and turns the game into her benefit, even at the expense of her life. The propaganda created by Unanimity extends from the controlled restriction of information to widely disinformed consumers and even the complex scheme of ascension and Sonmi's journey with the Union.

In the post-apocalyptic ending story of *Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After*, the perspectives of two peoples collide again: the Valleysmen and Prescients have, until this story, lived separately with the Prescients using their technologically more advanced culture to simply observe the Valleysmen and other colonies. The unlikely friendship the young Zachry and the older Meronym form brings together two versions of the same existing world: the hopeful oblivion of the Valleysmen and the grim knowledge of reality of the Prescients. Both Zachry and Meronym teach each other, and force each other in situations where they have to reconsider the truths and codes given to them. Zachry's view of the world is drastically widened, quite negatively, and Meronym faces moral problems she would not have without meeting Zachry, giving her alternatives to her scientist's code. I analysed the importance of the pre-world knowledge, which the Valleysmen call "Smart", concluding that even though some of the practices are not relevant for survival or everyday life, the Valleysmen hold important pieces left to them from the world that seems like a better one, but does not exist any longer. Meronym, on the other hand, unconsciously uses power over the Valleysmen in following her code of not interfering with the "natural order", which took us back to the *Pacific Journal*. The term is the same, yet in a new setting with new purpose. When it comes to the term "apocalypse", the Fall in *Cloud Atlas* has most likely been caused by the human race itself, and so has no divine interference as in the biblical version of apocalypse. This dystopian apocalypse is the result of human greed, and *Cloud Atlas* as a whole points into this direction, enabling the reader to consider the book as a warning text.

Different characters in *Cloud Atlas* have different perspectives on information and knowledge, as well as what one can achieve knowing more. In each story, the perspective is slightly different, but the end is the same: with information comes power to change the course of society, and often the price paid is high. Sometimes, as in *Half-Lives*, the information does not bring power simply with it, but it enables a change when utilised correctly. In *Half-Lives*, Sachs tells

Rey the reason he is a scientist is because he wants to uncover the truth (CA, 135). Van Zandt says she wanted to tell Rey the truth as the activists see it, so that she can choose a side, and that those in power can always try to bury their truth (CA, 125–126). Grelsch, on the other hand, draws on the basis of how dominant discourses are maintained by stating that “anything is true if enough people believe it is” (CA, 99). Sonmi states that no “other version of truth” than her own has ever mattered to her (CA, 187). In every story, the nature of truth is mentioned and debated, with the endnote being that “truth” differs from person to person, and in all of these stories, the dominant narrative forces the truth as seen by the dominant culture on others. It is maybe worth noting that the counter-narrative as a term does not imply it is always positive: a counter-narrative is simply a narrative countering the dominant narrative, independent of the contents of the narrative itself.

I want to dedicate this thesis, especially the analysis on *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery*, to the memory of the investigative journalists who have lost their lives trying to make this world a better place for us. In the wake of the losses of Jamal Ahmad Kashoggi and Kenji Goto, amongst many, many others, I have written this thesis in respect for their work and hope that none of us admit defeat in the face of the abuse of power.

Works cited

Mitchell, David 2012 (2004). *Cloud Atlas* [=CA]. London: Sceptre.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin 2002 (1989). *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.

Augoustinos, Martha & Katherine J. Reynolds 2001. *Understanding Prejudice, Racism and Social Conflict*. London: SAGE.

Bayer, Gerd 2015. Perpetual Apocalypses: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and the Absence of Time. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 56, 345–354.

Brown, Kevin 2016. Finding stories to tell. Metafiction and narrative in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 63(1), 77–90.

Brown, Kevin 2017. A 'horizon of important questions': Choice, action and identity in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. *Journal of European Popular Culture* 8(1), 57–75.

Caracciolo, Marco 2018. Negative Strategies and World Disruption in Postapocalyptic Fiction. *Style* 52(3), 222–241.

Conrad, Joseph 2012 (1899). *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Books.

De Cristofaro, Diletta 2018. Time, no arrow, no boomerang, but a concertina: *Cloud Atlas* and the anti-apocalyptic critical temporalities of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 59(2), 243–257.

Frandsen, Sanne, Marianne Wolff Lundholt & Timothy Kuhn 2017. *Routledge Studies in Management, Organizations and Society: Counter-Narratives and Organization*. London: Routledge.

Genette, Gérard 1986 (1980). *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Haslam, Nick & Steve Loughnan 2014. Dehumanization and infrahumanization. *Annual review of psychology* 65(1), 399–423.

Hicks, Heather J. 2010. "This Time Round": David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and the Apocalyptic Problem of Historicism. *Postmodern Culture* 20(3).

Hopf, Courtney 2011. Discursive Identity through Narrative Form in *Cloud Atlas*. *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, 105–126. Canterbury; Gylphi.

Huggan, Graham 1989. Decolonizing the Map: Post-Colonialism, Post-Structuralism and the Cartographic Connection. *Ariel*, Vol. 20(4), 115–131.

King, Michael 1989. *Moriari: A People Rediscovered*. Auckland, N. Z.: Viking.

Lueg, Klarissa, Ann Starbæk Bager & Marianne Wolff Lundholt 2020. What counter-narratives are: Dimensions and levels of a theory of middle range. *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives*, 1–14. London: Routledge.

Morrison, Robin 1990. *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand*. Auckland, N. Z.: Random Century.

Ng, Lynda 2015. Cannibalism, Colonialism and Apocalypse in Mitchell's Global Future. *Substance: A Review of Theory & Literary Criticism* 44(1), 107–122.

Panaram, Sasha, Hannah Rogers & Thayne Stoddard 2014. Accumulated Histories and Disposable People in *Cloud Atlas* and the Black Atlantic. An article in project "Contemporary Film and the Black Atlantic". <https://sites.duke.edu/blackatlantic/sample-page/contemporary-film-and-black-atlantic/history/accumulated-histories-and-disposable-people-in-cloud-atlas-and-the-black-atlantic/>

Raja, Nazalee 2005. Secret Architectures: A Conversation With David Mitchell. An interview with David Mitchell on May 16th, 2005, published in the literary blog *The Agony Column*. <http://trashotron.com/agonycolumns/2005/05-16-05.htm>

Rastas, Anna, Laura Huttunen and Olli Löytty (edit.) 2005. *Suomalainen vieraskirja. Kuinka käsitellä monikulttuurisuutta*. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Rickel, Jennifer 2015. Practice reading for the apocalypse: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* as a warning text. *South Atlantic Review* 80, 159–176.

Roine, Hanna-Riikka 2016. *Imaginative, Immersive and Interactive Engagements. The Rhetoric of Worldbuilding in Contemporary Speculative Fiction*. Doctoral thesis, University of Tampere.

Said, Edward 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage.

Sarkissian, Ani 2015. *The Varieties of Religious Repression: Why Governments Restrict Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schleutker, Elina 2020. Co-optation and Repression of Religion in Authoritarian Regimes. *Politics and religion*, 1–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Todorov, Tzvetan 1977. *The Poetics of Prose*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Waitangi Tribunal report summary: *Rekohu: A Report on Moriori and Ngati Mutunga Claims in the Chatham Islands*. https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/WT/reports/reportSummary.html?reportId=wt_DOC_68595363

Werbner, Pnina & Tariq Modood 2015. *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London: Zed Books.