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## Temporal Collapse And Historical Erasure In David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas

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TEMPORAL COLLAPSE AND HISTORICAL ERASURE IN DAVID MITCHELL'S  
*CLOUD ATLAS*

by

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## ABSTRACT

Teleological historical “progress” disintegrates in the temporal disjunctures that structure David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*—disjunctures that collapse past dangers into present concerns and resonate in potential futures. The novel has conceptual resonances with Walter Benjamin’s formulations on historical method, as well as with Linda Hutcheon’s work on postmodern metahistories. Drawing on these theorists, my thesis focuses on “marked” historical agents in the novel. Throughout my analysis, I demonstrate how these marked agents work within the book’s interrupted narrative structure to communicate historical violence and memory from a moment of danger to another one in a temporal collapse. Such a process creates a space for historical violence and memory to pass between and through the victims’ physical bodies and their historically determined technology of transmission. These technologies take different forms, though each disturbs the hegemonic, teleological historical record that the oppressive ideology relies upon. In my analysis, I focus upon two sections of the novel’s interrupted narrative. These sections, “An Orison of Sonmi~451” and “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After” represent the futuristic portion of Mitchell’s novel. I analyze these sections alongside excerpts of others in order to suggest a reparative methodology for accessing elided histories within our contemporary moment.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary critics, scholars, and artists have challenged the once-hegemonic understanding of history as unitary and progressively linear. My thesis is devoted to the specific version of that challenge developed by David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004). In that book, historical "progress" disintegrates in the face of a series of temporal disjunctures, which collapse past dangers into immediate, present concerns and resonate in potential futures. The novel has conceptual resonances with Walter Benjamin's formulations on historical method, as well as with Linda Hutcheon's work on postmodern metahistories. Drawing on these theorists, my thesis focuses on the marked historical agents in the novel—that is, figures who share a physical mark signaling their transhistorical unity, and hence, the repetition in the present of a past that progress believes itself to have surmounted. I show how these "marked" agents work together with the book's interrupted narrative structure to communicate historical violence and memory from a moment of danger to another one in a temporal collapse. Such a process creates a discursive space for historical violence and memory to pass between and through the victims' physical bodies and their historically determined technology of transmission.

To uncover how historical violence becomes encoded in memory and narrative across time, I will be using the formulations developed by Walter Benjamin, in "On the Concept of History." In this text, Benjamin explores historical materialism while

critiquing the idea of a teleological, historical progress. He critiques both historicism and progress by first stating “mankind’s historical progress cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time” (Benjamin 394-5). This combined critique is fundamental, because a teleological progress veils historically oppressed voices that helped form history, but became muted within the hegemonic master narrative (one constitutive of a historicist’s “empty time”). Despite false claims of “progress,” the same violence and silencing repeat themselves. The historical materialist aims to recover these oppressed narratives from the past by recognizing their reappearance in present forms of violence.

As such, Benjamin argues in his critique that historical time and the past reoccur in the now and inform present time (Benjamin 395). Thus, a materialist approach to historiography is based on moments of tension that halt time and form a monad, a unit that informs the historical materialist’s concept of history and progress. By examining historical subjects within a monad, the historical materialist recognizes a chance “in the fight for the oppressed past” (396). Part of this fight for an occluded past relies upon acknowledgment that many cultural “treasures” have a barbaric past, in that all documents of civilization are simultaneous “document[s] of barbarism” (391-2). Historical materialists examine these cultural monuments with detached understanding of this traumatic, obscured past. Thus, Benjamin provides a methodology for historical examination of the past as discrete units that reflect contemporary moments and possible future iterations.

To elucidate his theses, Benjamin uses a painting by Paul Klee titled “Angelus Novus” to imagine an “angel of history,” one that cannot look away from the piled

wreckage of the past while being pulled into the future. In particular, his analysis of this painting notes that the angel cannot turn away from the “one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage” (Benjamin 392). This singular catastrophe is important because it disavows teleological progress in the form of a “chain of events” (392). No chain connects event to event, but rather these moments of danger are all occurring at once and building upon each other. Despite the angel’s wish to repair the destruction, he is pulled into the future backwards by a storm called “progress” (392). Two notable aspects about this image form Benjamin’s critique of homogenous time—the backwards movement into the future and the iterative, simultaneous nature of past trauma. First, the angel wants to solve these wreckages of the past but remains unable to heal them, illustrating the way that historians cannot look away from past trauma or solve its problems. Secondly, the angel’s movement into the future without sight illustrates the way that human nature operates without foresight. No indication of expectation exists, but nevertheless propulsion pulls the angel into the future. The only guide for future expectations remains the wreckage of the past, which we cannot fix but must utilize as the only guide towards future phenomenon.

In one of his key argumentative claims, Benjamin states that the past reappears to individuals when dangerous instances occur, recalling a specific instance of the past into the present (Benjamin 390-1). He states that the “tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule,” and that we “must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight” (392). His method for doing so does not involve recording the past “the way it really was” but instead “appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (392). These



moments of danger connect the past with present and create a “constellation saturated with tensions” of the past and present, a “constellation through which the historical materialist recognizes a chance to recover oppressed and silenced members” (396). Shanahan connects this concept to *Cloud Atlas*, stating that “such openings to the transcendent happen to characters in moments of sacrifice for causes beyond or even against their own individual fortunes” (Shanahan 120). Through the “constellation” of past and present violence, the historical materialist accesses a chance to “blast open the continuum of history” (Benjamin 396). For historians and concerned others, Benjamin’s theses serve to restore elided voices and memories in wake of a hegemonic historicism and misleading nature of a perceived teleological progress.

Because Mitchell’s novel approaches these matters through a postmodern, metafictional lens, it’s worth articulating Benjamin’s theses alongside Linda Hutcheon’s formulations in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Hutcheon explores the variance in historical representation and its manifestation in postmodern texts. She begins her discussion of postmodernism and historiographic metafiction by asserting “historiographic metafiction...keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context and...problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here—just unresolved contradiction” (Hutcheon 106). This excerpt illustrates the competing ambiguities within any type of historical representation, and the way that some voices have been excluded from the narration of past events. Hutcheon thus explores the postmodern attempt to relate a multitude of truths that are “relative to the specificity of place and culture” (108). Therefore, historiographic metafiction works to “confront” history and bring all truths to

the forefront of representation (Hutcheon 108). However, Hutcheon complicates this further by stating that true and false might not be the best descriptions for history, since there are multiple truths and no clear falsity. Instead, “fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses, positing both the generic contracts of fiction and of history” (110). These two genres can inform each other, a blurring of form that postmodernism responds to in suggesting that the representation of past events in either genre has resonance in the present and resists a teleological conclusion (110).

However, Hutcheon maintains the difference between history and fiction, despite the way they share form and similar contexts. Both are “ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained” (Hutcheon 112). Understanding the relationship between history and fiction allows for a conception of historiographic metafiction and the “intense self-consciousness” that frames it (113). Therefore, postmodernism reduces the practice of projecting present beliefs onto the past and recognizes our limitations to conceive the past while currently undergoing the historical process.

Considering Benjamin and Hutcheon’s formulations together provides a strong foundation for my argument. Their theories echo and reinforce one another, particularly insofar as each emphasizes the unresolved multiplicity of every moment in historical time. As elucidated above, Benjamin isolates what he calls “monads” as discrete units of the past that crystallize the tensions of that historical moment. These monads also contain potential resonances with the present and future—resonances that the historical imagination can “seize” upon for transformative projects. This formulation corresponds

to Hutcheon's problematizing of a historical knowledge based in reconciliation. Instead, she argues against the possibility of reconciliation in the face of the "unresolved contradiction" that forms the bases of any historical knowledge. This "contradiction" is akin to the idea of a "constellation" of tensions operating as a unit for historical analysis in Benjamin's theory. Additionally, Hutcheon argues for the presence of multiple truths and no unambiguously false narrative about the past—another complement to Benjamin's troubling of one comprehensive view of historical memory. Benjamin and Hutcheon thus reinforce each other's insights in ways I draw out in my readings below.

My argument is that *Cloud Atlas* pursues a similar critique of progressist history, and does so especially through its form. Composed of five distinct narratives, each section of the novel has a different protagonist and highlights a unique technology of transmission by which its story reaches a future historical recipient. Each narrative also depicts a distinct moment in historical time, from the height of colonialism to a post-apocalyptic future. In the first section, "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," the titular character recounts his adventures in a travel diary, detailing his near-death by poison and encounter with an escaped slave. This narrative breaks off abruptly, giving way to "Letters from Zedelghem," letters from a budding composer to his queer partner that describe his time as amanuensis to a more famous composer. These letters halt as "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery" begins, a manuscript about a headstrong reporter attempting to dismantle a nuclear power corporation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This section, too, is interrupted before completion, as Mitchell moves on to "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish." This narrative begins with the woes of a contemporary-era book publisher trapped in a nursing home. As his absurd escape attempts unfold, the novel

breaks off yet again. Mitchell interposes “An Orison of Sonmi~451,” the hyper-capitalistic, postmodern narrative of an indentured working class of “fabricants.” Finally, the novel transitions to “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After” the post-apocalyptic narrative in which language and “civilized” society have broken down.

After this section, the previous narratives resume where they left off but in reverse order, finally returning to Adam Ewing and his colonial-era adventures in the Pacific. Thus, “[b]y the time we have finished the book, we have arrived back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, creating a sense of coming full circle: the apocalyptic end of civilization becomes the occasion for the beginning of a new chapter or phase of each of the stories Mitchell had begun earlier” (Hicks). This temporal reunification illustrates how the past and present collapse into what Benjamin terms a “constellation” of time and historical memory and grounds this discussion of the transmission of violence across time and experience (Benjamin 396). Temporal boundaries are rendered liminal and transversable; the depicted experiences form and exist within one dimension of time. This temporal collapse allows for a space that encourages communication between these narratives and the historical injuries depicted within them. Time becomes repetitive or “cyclical,” in an effort to counter the devastations induced by the myth of linear progress. For as Heather Hicks has argued, “If a linear conception of time is contributing to humanity's apocalyptic tendencies, why not revert to the cyclical understanding of time that structured human consciousness for millennia?” (Hicks). The map that emerges from such a structure is one that “incorporates alternative constructions of worldhood and acknowledges the...influence of culture as a resource for negotiating and reorienting developmental thought and action” (Knepper 94). The bleeding of historical narratives

into one another exposes hegemonic elisions while uncovering the “alternative constructions of worldhood” to which Knepper alludes.

This process is signaled most clearly by the way that each story contains a character physically marked by a past historical moment and serving, too, to transmit the present into the future. These figures of transmission are designated by the same mark: a comet-shaped birthmark that inscribes their bodies with the memory of a historical violence that they did not themselves experience: the violence of past hegemonic orders that’s “transmitted” to them as birthmark. This mark connects each narrative to the others by using the physical bodies to transfer the memory of historical violence. By repeating these crises of danger in an identical mark, I argue, the novel illustrates history’s compulsion to reproduce violence across time and thereby exposes the ruse of teleological progress. Additionally, by “Gradually revealing that Robert Frobisher, Luisa Rey, Timothy Cavendish, Sonmi-451, and Meronym have identical birthmarks, *Cloud Atlas* suggests they share a soul that is recycled across time” (Hicks). Shanahan also describes this mark as “an emblem of de-individuation within larger causes as we read of their struggles with the dynamics of oppression in their various worlds” (Shanahan 120). I focus especially on the following sections of the text: “An Orison of Sonmi~451” and “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After,” alongside smaller portions of the other narratives. A detailed analysis of each of these sections will illustrate my argument that the historical past is imperfectly replicated in the present and the projected future. Additionally, my argument reveals potential reparative practices in the recovery of historical trauma while pointing to the possibility of preventing trauma’s reoccurrence in the future.

## CHAPTER 2

### AN EXAMINATION OF “AN ORISON OF SONMI~451”

I begin my analysis with a detailed examination of “An Orison of Sonmi~451.” Sonmi~451<sup>1</sup>, the protagonist of this section, served her entire life as a “fabricant” in the province of Nea So Copros, a hyper-capitalized, futuristic image of current Seoul, Korea. Fabricants are genetically modified individuals grown in “womb tanks” to serve various needs of the so-called “pureblood” consumers. Forming the “downstrata” or enslaved working class, these fabricants perform duties such as “process[ing] sewage,” “xtract[ing] oil and coal,” and other tasks “purebloods” deem unsuitable (Mitchell 326). Sonmi~451 herself works as a “dinery” server in a futuristic fast food restaurant. Fabricants in the dinery follow the Catechism of a holographic idol, Papa Song. In this system, “[o]ne twenty-four-hour cycle in Papa Song’s is indistinguishable from any other” in which they “greet diners, input orders, tray food, vend drinks,” among other servile tasks (185). Fabricants’ unwavering servitude relies on the brainwashing Catechisms and the substance “Soap” that they drink every day. Their only physical sustenance, Soap contributes to the suppression of their mental capacity and ability to resist their situation. Without it, fabricants “conveniently xpire after forty-eight hours” (325). This Soap further controls them by “nullif[ying] memory,” but Sonmi~451 overcomes this because the “amnesiads in [her] Soapsac were reduced...and ascension catalyts instreamed”

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<sup>1</sup> The numerical portion of Sonmi~451’s name references Ray Bradbury’s novel, *Fahrenheit 451*. 451 degrees Fahrenheit is the temperature at which paper, and thus, books, burn. This reference is important in this novel, because Sonmi~451 and other marked figures actively resist occlusion from the historical record through various technologies of transmission, ones that evade omission or “burning.”

(Mitchell 197). In her interview with a corpocratic archivist, Sonmi~451 explains ascension: “I believe that ascension merely frees what Soap represses, including the expression of an innate personality possessed by all fabricants” (187). Sonmi~451 ascends and fully embodies her own individuality as part of the revolutionary Union plan to overthrow the corpocratic Unanimity hegemony. However, Sonmi~451 ultimately realizes that Unanimity staged the Union revolution in an attempt to control and subvert resistance. Before Unanimity executes her as example of failed fabricant resistance, they encourage her to compose her own catechism for the fabricant class. Though Unanimity deems this catechism false and misguided, her *Declarations* grows influential after her death and persists beyond the corporate, consumer-driven age to the “fall” of man described in “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After.” Her narrative, as we shall see, enacts the Benjaminian processes I have described, in which History’s untrammelled progress is interrupted by other stories that record and transmit a “moment of danger” whose retrieval enables the imagining of some other kind of future.

Each of the six narratives in *Cloud Atlas* features a figure who enacts this process of uncovering historical elisions and violence. In “An Orison of Sonmi~451,” Sonmi~451 serves as this agent and subverts the Unanimity plot to control the narrative. I examine this subversion in later passages, but first I wish to linger on the corporeal mark that signals her revolutionary destiny. During her stay with Hae-Joo Im, the Union member charged with her safety. He takes her to learn the truth of fabricant “Xultation”—the condition of “retirement” that is presented to them as a kind of blissful transcendence—and this moment of horror catalyzes Sonmi~451’s active resistance. On the ship promising to take retired fabricants to their Xultation, Sonmi~451 witnesses the horrific

truth: fabricants are slaughtered and “recycled” into biomatter that fuels fabricant wombtanks and provides food for pureblood consumers (Mitchell 343). After this traumatizing revelation, Sonmi~451 has sex for the first time, with Hae-Joo. Hortle remarks on this, stating that “[w]hen Sonmi-451 and Hae-Joo Im later have intercourse, it is defined in opposition to the deathly biopolitical excess they have just witnessed” (Hortle 263). The sexual act is figured, in other words, as a counter-political deployment of corporeality, and hence it matters that the sex scene contains the only mention of Sonmi’s birthmark. She states that after their lovemaking, “the young man smoked a nervy marlboro in silence and studied my birthmark, curiously” (345). This mention of her birthmark signals that she is the figure “chosen” in this period to reveal the disruption of teleological progress. Additionally, as Hortle suggest, Hae-Joo’s “stars of sweat” find accord with Sonmi- 451’s comet-shaped birthmark as a symbol of humanity’s regenerative force that should not be inscribed upon her fabricated body (Hortle 204). Though brief, this scene particularly illustrates that disruption because of Hae-Joo’s involvement. Not only does he closely examine her birthmark, he does so with curiosity, implying that he is inexplicably drawn to it. He belongs to the Unanimity plot to use Sonmi~451 as a sacrificial example, but brushes against (and finds himself drawn to) the symbol of her resistance and eventual disruption of Unanimity control. It is as if Mitchell were highlighting both the “messianic” dimension of a resistant, counter-historical agency (Sonmi~451’s) and the way such messianism is experienced (by Hae-Joo) as seductively disruptive—a moment that appeals precisely because it challenges his belief in the rightness of the current order. This moment features an acknowledgment of Sonmi~451’s imminent martyrdom and Unanimity’s blindness towards the collapse of



their corporatic society (as referenced in the next narrative strand, “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After,” which takes place after the fall of that society). Thus, though the birthmark’s range of meanings expands with each occurrence, this sequence suggests that one of those meanings concerns the repetition of historical violence subtending official history, as well as the transmission of a story of resistance as containing a potential to radicalize the official historian.

The technology of transmission that exposes this historical violence bears special notice. Here, I draw upon Fredric Jameson’s consideration of *Cloud Atlas* and the function of historical transmission. He states that “[e]ach segment, each story, is indeed registered by a different material apparatus of transmission” (Jameson 309). Thus, Jameson acknowledges that the novel operates as an “experimental history...of communicational technology,” a formulation I draw upon in examining the various technologies of transmission and how these figures utilize them to communicate across temporalities (309). Though Sonmi~451 composes *Declarations*, the details of this text remain obscure. However, Sonmi~451’s interview with the Unanimity archivist serves as this narrative’s specific technological transmission through which an enslaved voice achieves a platform. The archivist controls the questions asked for the purposes of Unanimity records, to “provide a context for corpocratic historians of the future” (Mitchell 185). His very purpose in asking Sonmi~451 these questions about her role in the supposed Union revolution is an attempt by Unanimity to control the future’s conception of the present. Yet despite the archivist’s framing, Sonmi~451’s written condemnation of the violence committed against fabricant slaves subverts the attempts to control historical memory. Understanding the way technologies of historical transmission

operate is paramount to this gesture. The very form of the novel illustrates how these marked figures “blast open the continuum of history” and expose the violence hidden within a hegemonic historical master narrative.

In this light, *Cloud Atlas* can be read as an elaboration of Benjamin’s notion that the “state of emergency” is not an exception, but rather the substance of human history (Benjamin 392). The best (least ideologically mystified) attempt at engaging the past involves, for Benjamin, not accurate reconstruction but “appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (392). I am interested in these moments of danger as they occur in each section of the novel, and how the marked figures of transmission (as noted by their birthmarks) “seize” these opportunities, these moments of intense danger, to uncover suppressed truths. Sonmi~451’s narrative occurs at once such moment of danger: it takes place during an interview with a corpocratic archivist, just before her execution. Another aspect of this moment’s danger emerges as she recounts the events that led to it. Those events include her “ascension” into knowledge, her time spent as a graduate student’s experiment “lab rat,” the escape from the university and pursuit by Unanimity forces, and her temporary role as figurehead of the illusory Union revolution. Each of these moments simultaneously threaten her life and (as part of Unanimity’s plot) lead to her eventual execution. Thus, she exists within the continual tension between life and death without knowing the full truth of what is happening to her. Through her description of these events, an expanded view of danger is revealed: not merely the danger to her personally, but the way that this age is defined by a ruthlessly “race”-based social hierarchy and a compulsive, corporate-induced obsession with commodity consumption, encouraged through a never-satiated hunger for *more*. Sonmi~451

describes this society as a “sponge of demand that sucked goods and services from every vendor, dinery, bar, shop, and nook” (Mitchell 227). This layered “monad” of “tensions” informs both the past and present narratives surrounding Sonmi~451’s tale and opens a slim, potentially reparative space for political hope (Benjamin 396).

These processes are perhaps most visible in the story of Yoona-939. Like Sonmi~451, Yoona-939 was ascended and had accessed materials forbidden to fabricants. She shared her access with Sonmi~451, thereby fostering the latter’s ascension as well. The storage closet they discover contains various pureblood items, promising them a “world of lost forests, folded mountains” and a lexicon they had never known such as “secret” (Mitchell 193). Yoona-939’s use of a flashlight metaphorically captures their entry into knowledge, as Sonmi~451 asks “Is lite alive?” and Yoona-939 responds “Perhaps lite *is* life, sister” (191). Though part of the Unanimity setup, Sonmi~451 forever transcends the darkness of her enslaved fabricant status and accesses knowledge and language. She achieves enlightenment despite the Unanimity plot, for her own individual embodiment. However, this ascension comes with a fatal price, as it “creates a hunger sharp enough to consumer the subject’s sanity” (193). Although Yoona-939 does not survive this desperation, Sonmi~451’s survival and subsequent role in the Unanimity plan catalyze a moment of danger in corpocratic hegemony. As the archivist struggles to capture the moment of Yoona-939’s murder, Sonmi~451 supplies his words: “You felt the corpocratic world order had changed, irrevocably. You vowed never to trust any fabricant” (195).

After the death of Yoona-939, a stranger named Mr. Chang offers Sonmi~451 a choice: stay in her position and risk a similar fate, or go with him outside of the dinery

where she had spent her entire existence. She chooses to leave and faces the uncertainty of life as an ascended fabricant, describing herself as “less a cross-zone tourist, more a time traveler from a past century” (Mitchell 202). (Here, Sonmi~451 directly comments on Mitchell’s portrayal of temporal liminality and her role in transcending these boundaries to communicate to other historically marked agents). After this escape from the dinery, Mr. Chang transports her to a university on Mt. Taemosan for a new role serving as a graduate student’s research subject. She undergoes dismissive, cruel treatment in his presence until another fabricant brings her a “sony,” or electronic device that allows her to access various texts and increase her knowledge. When Wing-027 gives this to her, she remarks that he “warned [her] never to let a pureblood catch [her] gathering knowledge, for the sight scares them, and there is nothing a scared pureblood will not do” (207). Knowledge serves as the basis for power acquisition for Sonmi~451, though it is a knowledge predicated on the technological access unique to her situation. Additionally, this provides compensation for her trials until Union activists intercede in a moment of cruelty, to transport her to another location. Here she remains and continues to learn, until Unanimity enforcers attempt to arrest her. With the help of Hae-Joo, a Union member, she escapes and begins the flight that culminates in her archival interview and execution.

At this point, her account halts and cedes to the narrative of “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After,” resuming in the midst of Sonmi~451’s escape attempt. These interruptions do not occur without purpose; rather, they occur at the height of danger and emphasize how danger catalyzes these historical transmissions. In this moment, Sonmi~451 escapes through the seemingly Union resistance plot, orchestrated by

Unanimity forces. One detail about this journey that informs my argument is the scene that Sonmi~451, “alone, of all [her] sister[s], [sees] the true Xultation and live[s]” (Mitchell 345). During this scene, Hae-Joo transports Sonmi~451 to the factory that takes the murdered bodies of fabricants and processes them into “liquefied biomatter,” biomatter that becomes future fabricants grown in the womb tanks *and* the Soap they consume (343). This horrific scene shocks Sonmi~451 into action, prompting her composition of *Declarations*, the revolutionary manifesto for fabricants. As she relays this scene to the archivist, he exclaims that “[n]o crime of such magnitude could take root in Nea So Copros,” and that “fabricants have carefully defined rights” (344). Her response elucidates the way that Sonmi~451’s narrative, among the others included in the novel, subverts oppressive hegemonies to expose elisions of violence in historical records. She remarks:

...in a cycle as old as tribalism, ignorance of the Other engenders fear; fear engenders hatred; hatred engenders violence; violence engenders further violence until the only “rights,” the only law, are whatever is willed by the most powerful. In corpocracy, this means the Juche. What is willed by the Juche is the tidy xtermination of a fabricant underclass. (344)

As a marked figure within this novel, Sonmi~451 remains a slave to a system that does not value her on equal terms, but as an “Other” who is not recognized by the “pureblood” consumers. However, Unanimity’s very oppressiveness dialectically gives rise in her to a resistant voice that finds expression in her *Declarations*. Even though the actual text of *Declarations* is not disclosed, her interview with the archivist supplies this access and reveals the truth of Unanimity’s violence in Sonmi~451’s moment of danger.

The powerful nature of Sonmi~451’s martyrdom is clear from the way her influence extends beyond her brief narrative. As stated in the introduction, the “moments

of danger” within each narrative resonate outside of it and “constellate” with both past and future “moments of danger.” Sonmi~451’s narrative begins in dialogue with “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish,” transitions in the moment of her arrest to “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After.” Once that narrative ends, Sonmi~451’s interview resumes, eventually ending and returning to Timothy Cavendish’s tale. I will include a more detailed examination of Sonmi~451’s influence on Zachry’s tale in “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After” later. For now, I wish to focus on how Cavendish’s story infiltrates that of Sonmi~451. The first mention of Cavendish in “An Orison” occurs in the middle of Sonmi~451’s arrest, just before the narrative abruptly halts. She encounters his story in the form of an antiquated, forbidden “disney” or movie. This technological form of transmission is important because it serves to disrupt teleological time in Sonmi~451’s world. She states “[t]ime is the speed at which the past decays, but disneys enable a brief resurrection” (Mitchell 235). Timothy Cavendish’s narrative inserts itself into her state of emergency and briefly resurrects the past into her present moment, fully corresponding to Benjamin’s notion of accessing memory as it “flashes up in a moment of danger” (Benjamin 392). Sonmi~451 continues, stating “Your present, not we, is the true illusion, they seem to say” (Mitchell 235). Here she attributes this disruption to the disneys and acknowledges the illusionary quality of present time. Despite efforts from Unanimity and other hegemonic orders, Sonmi~451 suggests, past violences defy obscurity and resurrect themselves into the “present.” Shortly thereafter Sonmi~451 flees to escape arrest, halting her viewing of the Timothy Cavendish tale. As her last request before execution, however, she asks to return to the “certain disney [she] once began, one nite long ago in another age” (349). This final word from Sonmi~451

highlights the relation between technological transmission and temporal disruption, since it appeals to an experience she gained “long ago in another age.” Though some could dismiss this as hyperbolic exaggeration, my previous analysis of her encounter with Timothy Cavendish’s narrative suggests otherwise. As one of the marked figures of historical disruption, Sonmi~451’s experience defies temporal limitations. Memories of past lives appear to her and other figures in the novel as familiar and already lived, despite the abrupt endings of the stories they transmit. Applying Benjamin’s formulation elucidates this in more detail, since these figures are connected across time by their various states of emergency. They appropriate past and future memories through each other’s danger, as evidenced here by Sonmi~451, who reprises a more *comic* danger in Cavendish’s story of imprisonment in an elderly nursing home while opening up, as we shall see, to a *future* danger in a post-apocalyptic narrative for which her interview plays a key part in fashioning that society’s historical and spiritual tradition. At the height of danger before execution, she returns to a memory “she” experienced “long ago in another age” (349). Thus, notions of teleological progress disintegrate as historical violence reappears in the “present” and defies obscurity.

In the project of uncovering elided historical violence, *Cloud Atlas* covers various ages of trauma revisited. Its various narratives also, however, point to the possibility of reparation. Sonmi~451’s transmission (i.e., the record of her trial in the interview that comprises the entirety of her narrative) offers future receivers a chance for reparation when she denies Unanimity attempts to erase her martyrdom’s memory. Even as she recounts her realization that her journey was a “theatrical production,” she remains hopeful that future revolutionaries will be able to access her *Declarations* and achieve

ascension like her. When the archivist asks her why she participated in this “conspiracy” even though she knew its truth, Sonmi~451 replies “Why does any martyr cooperate with his judases?” (Mitchell 349). She acknowledges that every resistance involves “judases” and betrayal, but this is a necessary price for the “game beyond the endgame” (349). Her ideas, though taught as “blasphemies” by Unanimity, have been “reproduced a billionfold” (349). At this point the archivist denies any possibility of future revolution, but Sonmi~451 counters: “As Seneca warned Nero: No matter how many of us you kill, you will never kill your successor. Now, my narrative is over” (349). This final statement of purpose before execution condemns totalitarian narratives and confirms her role in the disruption of teleological, limited versions of historical progress and memory.



## CHAPTER 3

### AN EXAMINATION OF “SLOOSHA’S CROSSIN’ AN’ EV’RYTHIN’ AFTER”

The post-apocalyptic tale of Zachry Bailey in “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After” extends the science-fiction component of *Cloud Atlas*. These two stories follow each other in the novel and provide the reader with two related if discrete visions of a projected future. “Sloosha’s Crossin’” features an island of familial tribes that subsists in a pre-technological state, dominated by farming, animal husbandry, and archaic healing and religious practices. However, the marked figure Meronym, a survivor from the small technologically advanced Prescient group, comes to the island and introduces technology or “Smart” to the Valleysmen. Her entry connects this narrative to “An Orison of Sonmi~451” and draws important connections for my argument regarding the transmission of historical memory and future potentialities. Thus, I will refer back to my analysis of Sonmi~451’s narrative in my analysis of “Sloosha’s Crossin’.” I will also continue my usage of Benjamin’s and Hutcheon’s formulations to guide my analysis of historical memory.

The narrator of this section, Zachry Bailey, serves as the focal protagonist and guides the action. Zachry Bailey and his family belong to the Valleysmen, a rural tribe of people living on pastoral means on the island of Ha-Why (formerly Hawaii). Sonmi (Sonmi~451) functions as the Valleysmen’s religious god, and at one point, in response to a crisis, she sends Zachry three prophetic messages to caution him from future danger.

In addition, he begins narrating within a moment of danger in which his father and brother are murdered by a warring tribe, the Kona. This demonstrates the constant interventions of danger in this narrative and its role in opening a discursive space for communication. In particular, this danger opens up communication for Sonmi, who functions as Zachry's spiritual guide and intervenes in key moments of danger. The narrative shifts when Meronym, from the more advanced Prescients tribe, appears on the island and asks to stay with the Valleymen. Though she does not initially disclose her purpose, Meronym comes to the island because of "a terrorsome sick" that killed many Prescients (Mitchell 295). Meronym appears in the midst of her own moment of danger, and comes to find any answer or refuge for her people. Zachry's family is chosen as host, and despite his initial suspicions his life shortly becomes tied to that of Meronym. After Meronym uses "Smart" to heal his sister from a deathly bite, Zachry commits himself to taking Meronym to a dangerous mountain peak. His life becomes tied to hers as they escape death from the elements and the Kona. In their final escape attempt, Meronym saves Zachry's life, and takes him to the Prescient ship. Zachry's narrative ends as he leaves behind his home to begin a new life among the Prescients.

Though Zachry's life dominates the action of the story, Meronym is the figure who bears the comet birthmark. During their escape from the Kona, Zachry observes the mark on Meronym's shoulder as she sleeps. "Lady Moon lit a whoahsome wyrd birthmark jus' b'low my friend's shoulder," he notices. "[P]ale 'gainst her dark skin," he wonders "why [he]'d never seen it b'fore" (Mitchell 303). This marks the end of his commentary on her symbol of connection with the other figures of the novel. The end of "Sloosha's Crossin'" features commentary from Zachry's son, in which he states that his

“old pa was a wyrd buggah,” who even “b’liefed Meronym the Prescient was his presh b’loved Sonmi, yay, he ‘sisted it, he said he knowed it all by birthmarks an’ comets’n’all” (Mitchell 308). Though Zachry’s son dismisses this as “musey duck fartin’,” this explicitly makes the connection between Meronym and Sonmi~451, along with the other birthmark figures in the novel. Additionally, Zachry notices this connection in their moment of danger in escaping from Kona, further underscoring Meronym’s role in “blasting open the continuum of history” in a “constellation” of tensions (Benjamin 396). Her introduction of technology in turn results in the uncovering of historical memory obscured by the “fall” of civilization. Therefore an analysis of “Sloosha’s Crossin’” demands an examination of Zachry’s experience alongside Meronym’s interventions. This analysis will explore how she catalyzes a historical resurfacing of forgotten memory through technological transmission. As in the case of Sonmi~451, this narrative also provides reparative hope in the aftermath of hegemonic elision.

The place of Benjamin’s “moments of danger” is key to this discussion. The plague threatening the Prescient with extinction leads Meronym to travel to Zachry’s island, where she studies the Valleysmen’s culture and lands. The Kona attack then compels her to share her reasons for coming with Zachry and hence to include him in “her” danger. This occurs as Meronym contacts the other Prescients through her orison, a device similar to the orison in Sonmi~451’s narrative that allows long-distance communication and stores information. In a dialogue through the orison (illustrating another technological transmission) another Prescient named Duophysite relays the threatening message: no contact has been made with the Prescient ship that Meronym arrived upon, signaling their probable death due to the “sickness” plaguing the Prescients.

These “dark times” serve as impetus to tell Zachry the “hole true” (Mitchell 295). The Prescients were afraid that this plague would “snuff out Civ’lize’s last bright light,” so they were “searchin’ for good earth to plant more Civ’lize in Ha-Why” (295). However, the loss of the Prescient ship’s communication and increasing Kona violence condemns their plan for a new home. It is within this moment of danger that Meronym communicates Sonmi~451’s history and disintegrates temporal boundaries.

Though Meronym is the marked figure we’ve been tracing, Zachry’s moments of danger remain important to this discussion. The tensions he experiences guide the action of the narrative that Meronym becomes entrapped within. In the beginning of his tale, Zachry relates his memory of his brother and father’s murder in a Kona attack. He frames this as the fault of the Valleysmen devil, Old Georgie, stating that there is “no sayin’ what that fangy devil won’t try an’ do” (Mitchell 239). Zachry made no attempts to intervene in his family’s defense, instead choosing to remain in hiding while they fought for life. This reticence haunts him for many years, until this narration in which he reflects upon the unlucky nature of this dangerous moment. Though he is “shoutin’ back more’n forty long years at [him]self,” he cannot alter his response to the death. However, this recollection demonstrates my tracing of historical violence and its transmission in later temporalities. Zachry cannot change his past, despite his attempts to alter what happened. However, by recalling this troubled memory, Zachry keeps it from the greater violence of obscurity. His altered perception of his past hesitation also serves as a reparative refiguration of this past violence. The narrator Zachry wishes he could tell his younger self that: “[t]imes are you’re weak ‘gainst the world! Times are you can’t do nothin’! That ain’t your fault, it’s this busted world’s fault is all!” (242). This statement affirms

the suffering of many forgotten victims who have suffered under a “busted world’s” evil, and suggests a different way of remembering their pain.

Throughout this argument, I have traced the breakdown of temporal boundaries and communication between marked figures through these liminal moments. This cross-temporal communication features in Zachry’s narrative through prophetic “augurin’s” from the goddess Sonmi (Mitchell 247). For prophecy is, of course, a heterotemporal rupture of the present by visions of a future that is yet to be actualized. The novel emphasizes this rupture in the sequence involving Zachry’s spiritual crisis. Plagued by the memory of his father and brother’s murder, Zachry visits the Valley’s Abbess for spiritual advice. She interprets his dreams and relays three “augurin’s” or warnings about moments yet to come. Though Zachry does not initially understand, each of these “augurin’s” reappears to him in a moment of danger and changes his response to that danger. For instance, in their flight to escape the Kona, Zachry recalls his third warning: “Bronze is burnin’, let that bridge be not crossed” (247). As they approached the bridge, “[his] pain shaked loose a mem’ry” of this warning (a clear illustration of danger and memory’s convergence). Meronym listens to Zachry’s warning about the bridge, and they watch from afar as it collapses under the weight of the pursuing Kona. Though Meronym affirms the human nature of Sonmi~451, Zachry’s belief in her communication through these warnings preserved their life in a moment of danger. Therefore, Sonmi~451’s life not only impacted Zachry’s knowledge of historical memory, but changed the future through her warnings and Meronym’s intervention. Thus do these moments of danger remain essential for communication across temporal liminality.

One of Meronym's greatest impacts on the Valleysmen is her introduction of technology, or "Smart" in Valleysmen's dialect. Technology here does more than heal a dying child, or aid in Meronym's quest for recording the island's makeup. Instead, it intercedes in a gap of historical memory and inserts a forgotten narrative—one that changes the course of future action. Technological transmission thus becomes equated with *knowledge*, knowledge previously denied to an entire people because of their technological lack. This understanding will guide my close readings of the following moments.

When Meronym initially appears on the island, Zachry meets her with suspicion and pays attention to moments of difference. Each night, he notices how Meronym "jus' got on with her work...an' write on spesh paper, oh so finer'n ours" (Mitchell 254). This excerpt illustrates her purpose as the marked figure observing and recording a historical moment to preserve it. He continues, stating "she din't write in our tongue, nay, she wrote in some other speakin'," further exemplifying Meronym's position as outsider and historical intercessor (254). Writing and paper might seem rudimentary technologies considering the other "Smart" that Meronym possesses, but their importance lies in their self-reflexive function: just as Meronym uses writing and paper to record and transmit knowledge in response to a moment of danger, so, too, does Mitchell's own novel accomplish this reflexive exposure and undermining of hegemonic historical apparatuses.

However, Meronym's uncovering of historical elisions serves as the most notable feature of her introduction of technology. Though she only shares this historical "truth" with Zachry, his expanded understandings change the trajectory of his life and expose truths hidden by the apocalyptic collapse of previous world orders. One moment that

illustrates this well is Zachry's discovery of Meronym's "orison," a technological device similar to the "sony" used by Sonmi~451. One day when Meronym is gone, Zachry searches through her gear bag and discovers the orison, "[o]ne big silv'ry egg it was" (Mitchell 263). In his description he states that it "don't sound senseful, but yarns 'bout Old-Un Smart an' flyin' dwellin's an' growin' babbits in bottles an' pictures zoomin' cross the Hole World ain't senseful neither but that's how it was, so storymen an' old books tell it" (263). Here Zachry demonstrates the extent and source of his knowledge about humanity and their technology before the fall. The "storymen an' old books" he refers to signal that his historical knowledge and memory stems from an oral tradition, passed down through stories told to subsequent generations. Their traditions are fostered in this way and physically shared through their initiative to preserve this memory. Books also factor in their memory tradition, but the nature of Zachry's narrative suggests greater importance placed on the oral storytelling experience. In this moment, however, that tradition confronts the advanced technology of the Prescients and uproots his understanding of historical recording. Though he did not know how to operate it, "[s]o hungrysome was [his] curio" that he held the orison until a "ghost-girl flickered'n'appeared there" (263). He remarks that she "was jus' floatin' there" and "she was *talkin'*!," prompting Zachry to watch her dialogue and attempt to understand despite the language difference. Eventually he asks her if she is a "lost soul" but finally "cogged the ghost-girl weren't talkin' to [him] an' cudn't see [him]" (264). Zachry attempts various other interactions with the orison, until a Prescient cuts the transmission and questions him about using Meronym's belongings. This inspires Zachry to abandon the orison, but he "cudn't forget that ghost-girl neither...she haunted [his] dreams

wakin'n'sleepin'" (Mitchell 265). His encounter with the orison exemplifies the irreversible impact of technology—especially a technology of representation or “culture”—on a people’s understanding of their humanity and its history. Zachry remains unable to forget the “ghost-girl” he witnessed, and it is this inability to move on that leads to his understanding of Sonmi~451’s history and the human genesis of his own religious belief. For the depiction of a ghost-girl in the orison turns out to be a recording of Sonmi giving the interview we read earlier. Though other encounters with Meronym’s technology advance his historical understanding more, this initial experience with the orison catalyzes his hunger for knowledge. He cannot return to ignorance after seeing Sonmi~451’s ghostly appearance.

Despite the importance of this initial experience, Zachry and Meronym’s trip to the Mauna Kea mountain reveals more of Meronym’s historical interventions. Once at the top, they discover abandoned observatories from before the fall left by the Old Uns. Meronym explains an observatory as a place where “Old Uns used to study the planets’n’moon’n’stars, an’ the space b’tween, to und’sand where ev’rythin’ begins an’where ev’rythin’ ends” (Mitchell 275). This spatial and temporal explanation depicts Mitchell’s temporal collapse across narratives, and prefigures the important revelation to come. When they first enter the observatory, Zachry struggles to relay the experience: “Describin’ such Smart ain’t easy. Gear there was what we ain’t mem’ried on Ha-Why, so its names ain’t mem’ried neither, yay, almost nothin’ in there could I cog” (276). As a Valleysmen, Zachry had never encountered these materials nor had remembered them through a recorded history. This “Smart” simply did not exist for him or his people. Meronym’s presence recovers the lost history and brings Zachry into the elided past. As



they walked through the observatory, Meronym “showed her orison ev’rythin’ [they] seed” (Mitchell 276). She explains to Zachry that the orison is “mem’ryin’ the place” (276). When he questions her about the orison, she responds in a profound convergence of history and technology:

An orison is a brain an’ a window an’ it’s a mem’ry. Its brain lets you do things like unlock observ’ tree doors what you jus’ seen. Its window lets you speak to other orisons in the far-far. Its mem’ry lets you see what orisons in the past seen’n’heard, an’ keep what my orison sees’n’hears safe from f’gettin’. (276)

This excerpt succinctly encapsulates all facets of my argument: a marked figure who communicates across temporal limitations utilizes specific technological transmission to resurrect a historical memory repressed by totalitarian powers. The orison, she states, functions as a brain, a window, and a memory. Each of these descriptions reveals a different aspect of history’s recording. As a brain, the orison “lets you do things” or acts as an agent of action. This speaks to a reparative function, in that there is potential for active change by utilizing this technology. As a window, the user can communicate to other orisons or windows in the “far-far.” Though Meronym refers to other Prescients she knows, this also implies the ability to communicate across preconceived boundaries and emphasizes the potential for recovered voices. Finally, as a memory the orison reveals what those in the past “seen’n’heard” and keeps her record “safe from f’gettin.” It thereby records for future reference moments of lost historical wholeness and potential reparations for the future. It keeps historical memory “safe” from forgetting and obliteration. Instead, memory is for the future generations in order to prevent repetitions of historical human errors and violence.

After Meronym describes the various purposes of the orison, Zachry asks her about the “shimm’rin’n’beautsome girl” he saw the first time he held the orison. “[W]as she a mem’ry or a window?” he asks Meronym, who hesitates and finally responds “[m]em’ry” (Mitchell 276). When Zachry begins asking more details about the girl’s origin, Meronym decides to tell him the truth—that the girl is Sonmi, not a god as he believes but a “freakbirthed human” (277). She tells him that Sonmi “was borned’n’died hun’erds o’ years ago ‘cross the ocean west-nor’westly” and that she lived a “short’n’judased life” (277). Meronym affirms the role of Sonmi’s martyred death by stating that only “after she’d died did she find say-so over purebloods’n’freakbirths’ thinkin’s” (277). Much the same way that finding the orison haunted him, this revelation transforms Zachry and shatters his previously understood worldview. “All this shockin’ newness buzzed’n’busted [his] brain an’ I din’t know what to b’lief,” Zachry states (277). In this dialogue he learns that Meronym was using Sonmi’s pre-execution interview to study the Valleysmen and learn about their belief system, since they revere her as a god. Despite the temporal gap between her existence and the Valleysmen, Meronym’s study of Sonmi connects these two historical moments within a singular “monad”. Temporal distinction disappears in the power of this connection created by Meronym’s intervention. The “future” present (as represented by the Valleysmen) becomes altered by this historical knowledge, and Sonmi’s forgotten history is recovered within a new present. Through this technological transmission, oppressed historical memories no longer remain chained to the past; instead, they discover new temporalities for expression.

It is in this moment that the issue of a reparative reading of the past emerges as well. This reparative gesture occurs in the very shape of “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’

Ev'rythin' After". Unlike the other narratives in *Cloud Atlas*, "Sloosha's Crossin'" is not interrupted by another story. Instead, it proceeds from beginning through middle to ending in a way that offers closure for the reader and opens onto a moment of reparation from Zachry's son. This latter moment falls outside of Zachry's narrative proper. After his tale ends, Mitchell includes a brief "coda" of sorts, narrated by the son, who asserts that his "old pa was a wyrd buggah" (as mentioned earlier) whose tale is perhaps not entirely true. Yet the son also highlights a truthfulness within his father's story. The main source of evidence for this truth stems from orison of Sonmi~451, found after Zachry's death. He remarks that he and the rest of Zachry's descendants awaken the orison to listen to Sonmi~451's tale. Thus, she remains influential even beyond the tale of "Sloosha's Crossin'," and is passed down through generations. Zachry's son addresses the receiver of the tale, by offering the orison for viewing: "Sit down a beat or two. Hold out your hands. Look" (Mitchell 309). "Meaning," thus, "is literally in the hands of the human" (Hortle 268). In addition to leading back into "An Orison of Sonmi~451," this gesture suggests an open engagement with historical memory and a wholesome recovery of past narratives. Also, the gesture is not made by Zachry, but by his descendants. This ensures the continuance of Zachry's life and overall humanity beyond the overwhelming threats in the conclusion of "Sloosha's Crossin'." I also want to expand this gesture beyond this argument and encourage historical recovery of oppressed voices by listening when their memories appear in our contemporary moments of danger.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Despite the threats they encounter, both Sonmi-451 and Zachry Bailey (and Meronym through his narrative) possess a connection that actively defies elision and demands space in a history resistant to hegemonic ‘correction’. Mitchell’s temporal disjunctures not only demonstrate the connection of forgotten narratives but form discursive space to reimagine a historical memory of inclusion, not omission. In another narrative of the novel, Mitchell suggests this through an image of a “Siamese temple” that experiences humanity’s contributions over many generations. In a letter to his partner Rufus Sixsmith, Robert Frobisher (in the section “Letters From Zedelghem”) considers an aquatint of the aforementioned Siamese temple, owned by his grandfather. He remarks that a “disciple of the Buddha” preached at that temple, encouraging kings and tyrants to “enhance” the temple with “marble towers, scented arboretums” and other embellishments (Mitchell 81). “When the temple finally equals its counterpart in the Pure Land,” Frobisher writes, “that day humanity shall have fulfilled its purpose, and Time itself shall come to an end” (81). This suggests a teleological passage of time, one with a hopeful fulfillment in a promised afterlife. However, Frobisher importantly complicates this reading of the temple, with a consideration of humanity’s cost in teleological fulfillment:

To men like Ayr [the composer for whom Frobisher serves as amanuensis]...this temple is civilization. The masses, slaves, peasants, and foot soldiers exist in the

cracks of its flagstones, ignorant even of their ignorance. Not so the great statesmen, scientists, artists...who are civilization's architects, masons, and priests...My Ayr's sees our role is to make civilization ever more resplendent. My employer's profoundest...wish is to create a minaret that inheritors of Progress a thousand years from now will point to and say, "Look there is Vyvan Ayr's!" (81)

Here, Mitchell illustrates my thesis's argument, that 'Progress' is marked by civilization's attempts to leave a lasting, monumental mark for future glory and remembrance. Frobisher continues analyzing this impulse, stating "[h]ow vulgar, this hankering after immortality, how vain, how false" (Mitchell 81). Vain wishes for eternal remembrance compel the "statesmen" of Progress to ignore those in the "cracks" of history's "flagstones," the ones upon whose backs the pyramids, temples, and walls are built. Thus, Mitchell undermines the project of hegemonic historical records, while highlighting humanity's forgotten "foot soldiers."

Though he includes this important acknowledgment of master narratives' intentional elision of oppressed voices and violences, Mitchell weaves a reparative message throughout the novel. Concluding this project with a consideration of this reparation seems appropriate, if only to suggest a potential methodology for recovering hidden figures (both former and contemporary ones). Though previously discussed, the ending of Zachry Bailey's tale in "Sloosha's Crossin' An' Ev'rythin' After" offers a passage illustrating this reparative gesture. After Meronym rescues him from the Kona, Zachry awakens in a kayak as they escape from the island. He states that he "watched clouds awobbly from the floor o' that kayak" and then formulates this compelling thought: "Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies, an' tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same, it's still a cloud an' so is a soul" (Mitchell 308). As my argument posits, these marked figures of the novel demonstrate how these souls connect

and communicate across time, despite (and because of) the moments of danger they inhabit.<sup>2</sup>

Despite all attempts to silence, these souls defy omission and share resistance across temporal boundaries. Never mind that a cloud or soul's "shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same"—a cloud is "still a cloud" and "so is a soul" (Mitchell 308). Zachry concludes this powerful message, stating "Who can say where the cloud's blown from or who the soul'll be 'morrow? Only Sonmi the east an' the west an' the compass an' the atlas, yay, only the atlas o' clouds" (308). No state, no hegemony, no tyrant can determine "who the soul'll be 'morrow." Humanity's oppressors imagine these forgotten souls in the "cracks of the flagstones" and depend upon their elision to ensure their violent graspings at power. Yet these souls resist their historical graves; they remain above, speaking, living, being— "cross[ing] ages like clouds cross skies."

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<sup>2</sup> Hortle suggests that "[t]he novel thus imagines true human identity through nonhuman imagery; clouds, together with metaphors of water and comets, reflect a transcendent human identity unrestricted by bodily materiality." (Hortle 253)

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