



# Class #2: Cloud Atlas 1

ENGL 10: Global Fictions

Jeon

## History repeats...

- Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: **the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.**
- Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, **but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.** The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. **And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.** Thus Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793-95. In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but **he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue.**

▪ - Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1952)

*The Post* (2017)

1971/2017

“Period piece”



The sullen miss was hanging laundry on a shrub & ignored us. She has a tinge of black blood & I fancy her mother is not far removed from the jungle breed.

As we passed below the Indian hamlet, a "humming" aroused our curiosity & we resolved to locate its source. The settlement is circumvallated by a stake fence, so decayed that one may gain ingress at a dozen places. A hairless bitch raised her head, but she was toothless & dying & did not bark. An outer ring of *ponga* huts (fashioned from branches, earthen walls & matted ceilings) groveled in the lees of "grandee" dwellings, wooden structures with carved lintel pieces & rudimentary porches. In the hub of this village, a public flogging was under way. Henry & I were the only two Whites present, but three castes of spectating Indians were demarcated. The chieftain occupied his throne, in a feathered cloak, while the tattooed gentry & their womenfolk & children stood in attendance, numbering some thirty in total. The slaves, duskier & sootier than their nut-brown masters & less than half their number, squatted in the mud. Such inbred, bovine torpor! Pockmarked & pustular with *haki-haki*, these wretches watched the punishment, making no response but that bizarre, beelike "hum." Empathy or condemnation, we knew not what the noise signified. The whip master was a Goliath whose physique would daunt any frontier prizefighter. Lizards mighty & small were tattooed over every inch of the savage's musculature:—his pelt would fetch a fine price, though I should not be the man assigned to relieve him of it for all the pearls of O-hawaii! The piteous prisoner, hoarfrosted with many harsh years, was bound naked to an A-frame. His body shuddered with each excoriating lash, his back was a vellum of bloody runes, but his insensible face bespoke the serenity of a martyr already in the care of the Lord.

I confess, I swooned under each fall of the lash. Then a peculiar thing occurred. The beaten savage raised his slumped head, found my eye & shone me a look of uncanny, amicable knowing! As if a theatrical performer saw a long-lost friend in the Royal Box and, undetected by the audience, communicated his recognition. A

tattooed "blackfella" approached us & flicked his nephrite dagger to indicate that we were unwelcome. I inquired after the nature of the prisoner's crime. Henry put his arm around me. "Come, Adam, a wise man does not step betwixt the beast & his meat."

Sunday, 10th November—

Mr. Boerhaave sat amidst his cabal of trusted ruffians like Lord Anaconda & his garter snakes. Their Sabbath "celebrations" downstairs had begun ere I had risen. I went in search of shaving water & found the tavern swilling with Tars awaiting their turn with those poor Indian girls whom Walker has ensnared in an impromptu *borderello*. (Rafael was not in the debauchers' number.)

I do not break my Sabbath fast in a whorehouse. Henry's sense of repulsion equaled to my own, so we forfeited breakfast (the maid was doubtless being pressed into alternative service) & set out for the chapel to worship with our fasts unbroken.

We had not gone two hundred yards when, to my consternation, I remembered this journal, lying on the table in my room at the *Musket*, visible to any drunken sailor who might break in. Fearful for its safety (& my own, were Mr. Boerhaave to get his hands on it), I retraced my steps to conceal it more artfully. Broad smirks greeted my return & I assumed I was "the devil being spoken of," but I learned the true reason when I opened my door:—to wit, Mr. Boerhaave's ursine buttocks astraddle his Blackamoor Goldilocks in my bed *in flagrante delicto!* Did that devil Dutchman apologize? Far from it! He judged *himself* the injured party & roared, "Get ye hence, Mr. Quillcock! or by God's B—d, I shall snap your tricky Yankee nib in two!"

I snatched my diary & clattered downstairs to a riotocracy of merriment & ridicule from the White savages there gathered. I remonstrated to Walker that I was paying for a private room & I expected it to remain private even during my absence, but that scoundrel merely offered a one-third discount on "a quarter-hour's gallop on the comeliest filly in my stable!" Disgusted, I retorted

**The Uncanny:**  
uncomfortable repetition of  
something we prefer to forget

- A disconcerting blend of the familiar and the unfamiliar
- Freud – repetition/compulsion/repression
- "You bear a striking resemblance to my late mother."
- The uncanny is structured like Marx's history: it repeats and devolves.

of the ocean still unschooled by the White Man. Old Rekohu's claim to singularity, however, lay in its unique Pacific creed. Since time immemorial, the Moriori's priestly caste dictated that whosoever spilt a man's blood killed his own *mana*—his honor, his worth, his standing & his soul. No Moriori would shelter, feed, converse with, or even see the *persona non grata*. If the ostracized murderer survived his first winter, the desperation of solitude usually drove him to a blowhole on Cape Young, where he took his life.

Consider this, Mr. D'Arnoq urged us. Two thousand savages (Mr. Evans's best guess) enshrine "Thou Shalt Not Kill" in word & in deed & frame an oral "Magna Carta" to create a harmony unknown elsewhere for the sixty centuries since Adam tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. War was as alien a concept to the Moriori as the telescope is to the Pygmy. Peace, not a hiatus betwixt wars but millennia of imperishable peace, rules these far-flung islands. Who can deny Old Rekohu lay closer to More's Utopia than our States of Progress governed by war-hungry princelings in Versailles & Vienna, Washington & Westminster? "Here," declaimed Mr. D'Arnoq, "and here only, were those elusive phantasms, the noble savages, framed in flesh & blood!" (Henry, as we later made our way back to the *Musket*, confessed, "I could never describe a race of savages too backwards to throw a spear straight as 'noble.'")

Glass & peace alike betray proof of fragility under repeated blows. The first blow to the Moriori was the Union Jack, planted in Skirmish Bay's sod in the name of King George by Lieutenant Broughton of HMS *Chatham* just fifty years ago. Three years later, Broughton's discovery was in Sydney & London chart agents & a scattering of free settlers (whose number included Mr. Evans's father), wrecked mariners & "convicts at odds with the New South Wales Colonial Office over the terms of their incarceration" were cultivating pumpkins, onions, maize & carrots. These they sold to needy sealers, the second blow to the Moriori's independence, who disappointed the Natives' hopes of prosperity by turning the surf pink with seals' blood. (Mr. D'Arnoq illustrated the profits by this arithmetic—a single pelt fetched 15 shillings in Canton & those

pioneer sealers gathered over two thousand pelts *per boat!*) Within a few years the seals were found only on the outer rocks & the "sealers" too turned to farming potatoes, sheep & pig rearing on such a scale that the Chathams are now dubbed "The Garden of the Pacific." These parvenu farmers clear the land by bushfires that smolder beneath the peat for many seasons, surfacing in dry spells to sow renewed calamity.

The third blow to the Moriori was the whalers, now calling at Ocean Bay, Waitangi, Owenga & Te Whakaru in sizable numbers for careening, refitting & refreshing. Whalers' cats & rats bred like the Plagues of Egypt & ate the burrow-nesting birds whose eggs the Moriori so valued for sustenance. Fourth, those motley maladies which cull the darker races whenever White civilization draws near, sapped the Aboriginal census still further.

All these misfortunes the Moriori might have endured, however, were it not for reports arriving in New Zealand depicting the Chathams as a veritable Canaan of eel-stuffed lagoons, shellfish-carpeted coves & inhabitants who understand neither combat nor weapons. To the ears of the Ngati Tama & Ngati Mutunga, two clans of the Taranaki Te Ati Awa Maori (Maori genealogy is, Mr. D'Arnoq assures us, every twig as intricate as those genealogical trees so revered by the European gentry; indeed, any boy of that unlettered race can recall his grandfather's grandfather's name & "rank" in a trice), these rumors promised compensation for the tracts of their ancestral estates lost during the recent "Musket Wars." Spies were sent to test the Moriori's mettle by violating *tapu* & despoiling holy sites. These provocations the Moriori faced as our Lord importuned, by "turning the other cheek," & the transgressors returned to New Zealand confirming the Moriori's apparent pusillanimity. The tattooed Maori *conquistadores* found their single-barked armada in Captain Harewood of the brig *Rodney*, who in the dying months of 1835, agreed to transport nine hundred Maori & seven war canoes in two voyages, in *guerno* for seed potatoes, firearms, pigs, a great supply of scraped flax & a cannon. (Mr. D'Arnoq encountered Harewood five years ago, penurious in a Bay

Imperfect  
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wise ameliorate the savages' sufferings by *hastening* their extinction? Think on your Red Indians, Adam, think on the treaties you Americans abrogate & renege on, time & time & time again. More humane, surely & more honest, just to knock the savages on the head & get it over with?"

As many truths as men. Occasionally, I glimpse a truer Truth, hiding in imperfect simulacrum of itself, but as I approach, it bestirs itself & moves deeper into the thorny swamp of dissent.

*Tuesday, 12th November—*

Our noble Cpt. Molyneux today graced the *Musket* to haggle over the price of five barrels of salt-horse with my landlord (the matter was settled by a rowdy game of *trentuno* won by the captain). Much to my surprise, ere he returned to inspect the progress in the shipyard, Cpt. Molyneux requested some confidential words with Henry in my companion's room. The consultation continues as I write. My friend has been warned of the captain's despotism, but still, I do not like it.

*Later—*

Cpt. Molyneux is... from...

ing. It is pleasant merely to breathe the cooler air. One loses one's eye in lanes of sea phosphorescence & the Mississippi of stars streaming across the heavens. Last night, the men were gathered on the foredeck laying up grass into sinnet for ropes by lantern light & the prohibition on "supernumeraries" on the foredeck seemed not to apply. (Since the "Autua Incident" that contempt directed at "Mr. Quillcock" is in recess, as is the epithet.) Bentrail sang ten verses on the world's brothels foul enough to put the most wanton satyr to flight. Henry volunteered an eleventh verse (about Mary O'Hairy of Inverary) that turned the air yet bluer. Rafael was next coerced to take his turn. He sat on the "widow maker" & sang these lines in a voice unschooled yet honest & true:—

Oh, Shenandoah, I long to see you,  
Hurrah, you rolling river.  
Oh, Shenandoah, I'll not deceive you,  
We're bound way cross the wide Missouri.  
Oh, Shenandoah, I love your daughter,  
I love the place across the water.  
The ship sails free, the wind is blowing,  
The braces taut, the sheets a-flowing.  
Missouri, she's a mighty river,  
We'll brace her up till her topsails shiver.  
Oh, Shenandoah, I'll leave you never,  
Till the day I die, I'll love you ever.

Silence from rude mariners is a grander accolade than any erudite eulogy. Why should Rafael, an Australian-born lad, have an American song by heart? "I don't know 'twas a Yankee un," he replied awkwardly. "My mam taught it me before she died. It's the only thing of hers I got still. It stuck in me." He turned to his work, an awkward curtness in his manner. Henry & I sensed anew the hostility that workers emanate at the bystanding idler & so we left the toilers to their industry.  
Reading my entry for 15th October, when first I met Rafael

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. His luminous beauty is chipped away, revealing the timber-muscled seaman he shall become. Already he looks rather given to rum & water. Henry says this "sloughing off of his cocoon" is inevitable, *bon gré mal gré*, & I suppose he is right. Those smatterings of education & sensibility Rafael received from his patron, Mrs. Fry of Brisbane, serve a cabin boy ill in the harum-scarum world of the fo'c'sle. How I wish I could help him! Were it not for the intervention of my Mr. & Mrs. Channing, my own fate may well have been of a piece with Raf's. I asked Finbar if he thought the boy was "fitting in well." Finbar's Delphic reply, "Fitting *what* in well, Mr. Ewing?" left the galley cackling but myself quite in the dark.

Saturday, 7th December—

Petrels are aloft, sooty terns afloat & Mother Carey's chickens roost on the rigging. Fish similar to borettoes pursued fish similar to sprats. As Henry & I ate supper, a blizzard of purplish moths seemed to issue from the cracks in the moon, smothering lanterns, faces, food & every surface in a twitching sheet of wings. To confirm these portents of nearby islands, the man at the lead shouted a depth of only eighteen fathoms. Mr. Boerhaave ordered the anchor to be weighed lest we drift onto a reef in the night.

The whites of my eyes have a lemon-yellow aspect & their rims are reddened & sore. Henry assures me this symptom is welcome, but has obliged my request for an increased dosage of vermicide.

Sunday, 8th December—

Sabbath not being observed on the *Prophetess*, this morning Henry & I decided to conduct a short Bible Reading in his cabin in the "low-church" style of Ocean Bay's congregation, "astraddle" the forenoon & morning watches so both starboard & port shifts might

→ 475.



Van Morrison and the Chieftains,  
*Shenandoah* (1998)

- based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century American song  
- *Cloud Atlas*, p. 38



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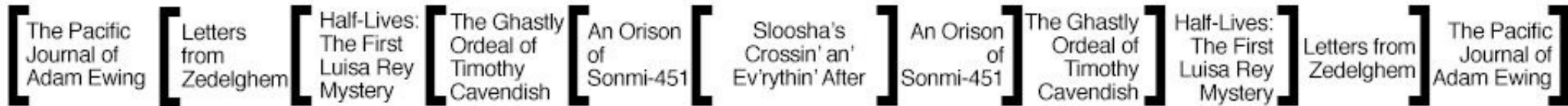
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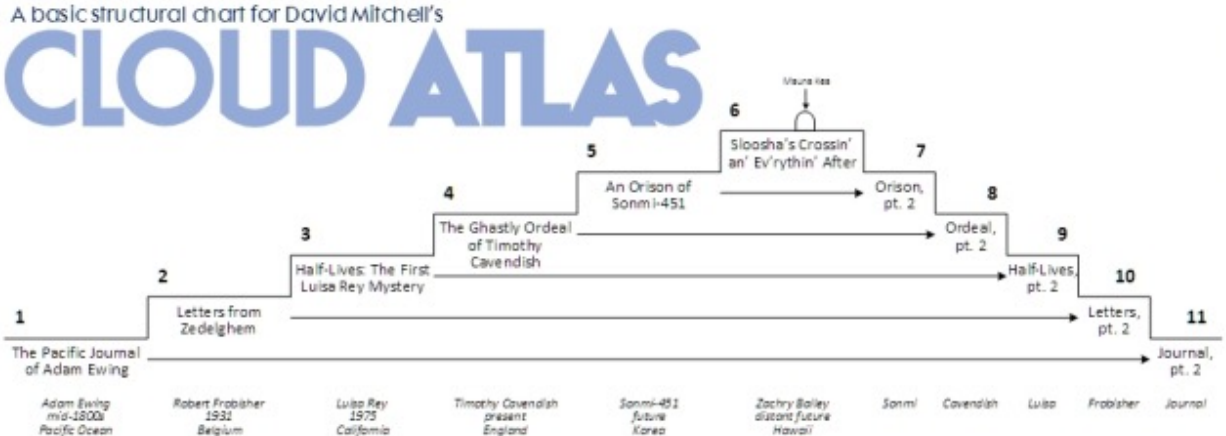
Cpt. Molyneux is a very different man from what I had heard of.

Let's try a thesis statement (in 2 parts):

- ***Cloud Atlas* from very early on in the novel tracks the repetitive devolution of history, in Marx's terms, from tragedy to farce.**
- **HOWEVER, and this is the tricky part, history is also paradoxically preserved by the very mechanisms that function to erase it.**



# Cloud Atlas schema



Title	location	date	genre	style
<i>The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing</i>	Pacific Islands	1849	Historical /adventure	1st person, journal
<i>Letters from <u>Zedelghem</u></i>	Belgium	1931	Historical / romance	1st person, letters
<i>Half-Lives: The First <u>Luisa Rey</u> Mystery</i>	California	1950	Mystery	3rd person, novella
<i>The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish</i>	Great Britain	2004	Comedy	1st person, narrative
<i>An Orison of <u>Sonmi-451</u></i>	Korea	2144	<u>Sci-Fi</u>	3rd person, Orison (interview)
<i><u>Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After</u></i>	"Big Island" (Hawaii)	after the fall	<u>Sci-Fi</u> , Fantasy	1st person, storytelling

## Two accounts of history in *Cloud Atlas*

As many truths as men. Occasionally, I glimpse a truer Truth, hiding in imperfect simulacrum of itself, but as I approach, it bestirs itself & moves deeper into the thorny swamp of dissent.

- On the one hand, history seems flat. It seems to *repeat* rather than *progress*.

[The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing] [Letters from Zedelghem] [Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery] [The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish] [An Orison of Sonmi-451] [Stoosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After] [An Orison of Sonmi-451] [The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish] [Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery] [Letters from Zedelghem] [The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing]

- On the other hand, the novel seems uncomfortable with this flattening.

