

Class #3: *Cloud Atlas* 2

ENGL 10: Global Fictions

Jeon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ny45k0rwUtM>

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

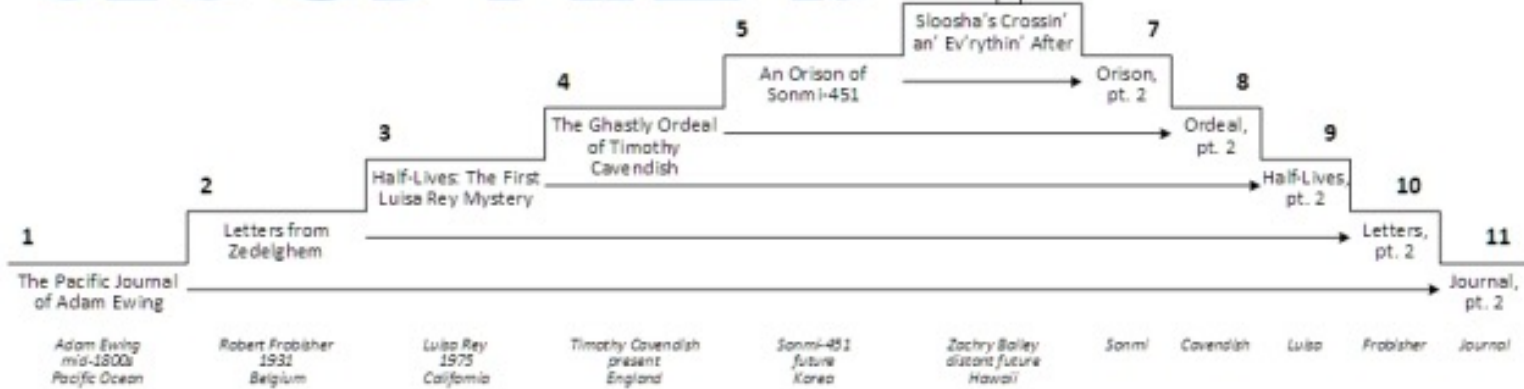
- ***Cloud Atlas* from very early on in the novel tracks the repetitive devolution of history, in Marx's terms, from tragedy to farce.**
- **HOWEVER, and this is the tricky part, history is also paradoxically preserved by the very mechanisms that function to erase it.**

[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] [Sloosha'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]

Cloud Atlas schema

A basic structural chart for David Mitchell's

CLOUD ATLAS



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

What to make
of the *minor*?



Story => Network

Minor
characters





Minor characters: from Alex Woloch, *The One vs. The Many*

The descriptive conventions that arise around minoriness depict the symptoms of such disjunction, which takes two dominant forms: the *engulfing* of an interior personality by the delimited signs that express it and the *explosion* of the suffocated interior being into an unrepresentable, fragmentary, symptomatic form. We can consider these two typical descriptions from Dickens:

He was not old, but his **hair was white**; his **body was bent, or bowed** as if by the weight of some great trouble; and there were **deep lines in his worn and melancholy face**. The fire of his eyes, the **expression of his features**, the very voice in which he spoke, were **all subdued and quenched, as if the spirit within him lay in ashes**. (*Dombey and Son*, 135–36)

[H]is **face was curiously twisted as by a spasm**, but whether of paralysis, or grief, or inward laughter, nobody but himself could possibly explain. The expression of a man's face is commonly a help to his thoughts, or glossary on his speech; but the **countenance of Newman Noggs . . . was a problem which no stretch of ingenuity could solve**. (*Nicholas Nickleby*, 77)

In both these brief examples, the full actualization of human consciousness in a social, exterior form is blocked. **One character's "spirit" is suffocated by his leaden exteriority**, and **one character's convulsive exterior is**

The strange significance of minor characters, in other words, resides largely in the way that the character disappears, and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing. These feelings are often solicited by the narrative, and it is the disappearance of the minor character (for every minor character does—by strict definition—disappear) that, finally, is integrated into his or her interesting speech or memorable gesture. **We feel interest and outrage, painful concern or amused consent at what happens to minor characters: not simply their fate within the story (whether they marry or die, make their fortune or lose it, find a home or become exiled) but also in the narrative discourse itself (how they are finally overshadowed or absorbed into someone else's story, swallowed within or expelled from another person's plot).**

This is simply, once again, to locate the minor character at the junction


CHARACTERIZATION AND DISTRIBUTION

25

disjoined from any connection to a furious interior that cannot find adequate form.⁵ (We can also note how these two passages begin to suggest a broader spectrum of contrasts, so that, for example, two different *modes of speech* reflect these two modes of being: the old man's "voice" gets "subdued and quenched," while Newman's "speech" no longer serves as a "glossary" for his thoughts.)

These two existential states lie behind the two pervasive extremes of minoriness within the nineteenth-century novel: the *worker* and the *eccentric*, the flat character who is reduced to a single functional use within the narrative, and the fragmentary character who plays a disruptive, oppositional role within the plot. These two kinds of minoriness—with all the narrative functions and descriptive conventions they motivate (to portray the characters' bodies, gestures, and speech)—are flip sides of one coin.¹⁶ In one case, the character is smoothly absorbed as a gear within the narrative machine, at the cost of his or her own free interiority; in the other case, the minor character grates against his or her position and is usually, as a consequence, wounded, exiled, expelled, ejected, imprisoned, or killed (within the *discourse*, if not the *story*).¹⁷ In both cases, the free relationship between surface and depth is negated; the actualization of a human being is denied.

a·man·u·en·sis

/əˌmʌnyəˈwɛnsəs/ 

noun

a literary or artistic assistant, in particular one who takes dictation or copies manuscripts.

The work of an amanuensis...

the cellar.

A work routine is developing. Ayrs and I are in the music room by nine o'clock every morning his various ailments and pains let him. I sit at the piano, Ayrs on the divan, smoking his vile Turkish cigarettes, and we adopt one of our three modi operandi. "Revisionals"—he asks me to run through the previous morning's work. I hum, sing, or play, depending on the instrument, and Ayrs modifies the score. "Reconstitucionals" have me sifting through old scores, notebooks, and compositions, some written before I was born, to locate a passage or cadenza Ayrs dimly remembers and wants to salvage. Great detective work. "Compositionals" are the most demanding. I

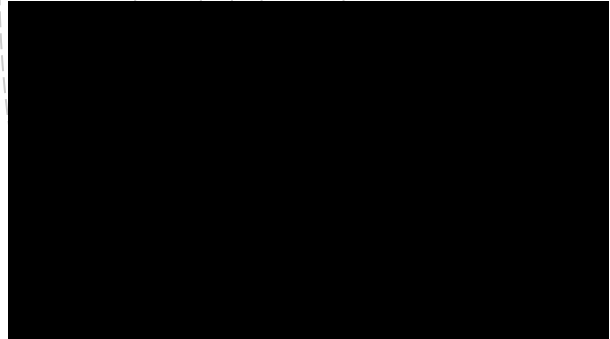
sit at the piano and try to keep up with a flow of "Semiquaver, B-G; semibreve, A-flat—hold it four beats, no, six—crotchets! F-sharp—no no no no F-sharp—and . . . B! Tar-tatty-tatty-tarr!" (*Il maestro* will at least name his notes now.) Or, if he's feeling more poetic, it might be "Now, Frobisher, the clarinet is the concubine, the violas are yew trees in the cemetery, the clavichord is the moon, so . . . let the east wind blow that A minor chord, sixteenth bar onwards."

Like that of a good butler (although you can be sure, I am better than good), my job is nine-tenths anticipation. Sometimes Ayrs will ask for an artistic judgment, something like "D'you think this chord works, Frobisher?" or "Is this passage in keeping with the whole?" If I say no, Ayrs asks me what I'd suggest as a substitute, and once or twice he's even used my amendment. Quite sobering. People in the future will be studying this music.

By one o'clock Ayrs is spent. Hendrick carries him down to the dining room, where Mrs. Crommelynck joins us for luncheon, and the dreaded E., if she's back for the w/end or a half holiday. Ayrs naps through the afternoon heat. I continue to sift the library for treasure, compose in the music room, read manuscripts in the garden (Madonna lilies, crowns imperial, red-hot pokers, hollyhocks, all blooming bright), navigate lanes around Neerbeke on the bicycle, or ramble across local fields. Am firm friends with the village dogs. They gallop after me like the Pied Piper's rats or brats. The locals return my "Goede morgen" and "Goede middag"—I'm now known as the long-term guest up at the "kasteel."

After supper, the three of us might listen to the wireless if there is a broadcast that passes muster, otherwise it will be recordings on the gramophone (an His Master's Voice table model in an oak box), usually of Ayrs's own major works conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. When we have visitors, there will be conversation or a little chamber music. Other nights, Ayrs likes me to read him poetry, especially his beloved Keats. He whispers the verses as I recite, as if his voice is leaning on mine. At breakfast, he has me read from *The Times*. Old, blind, and sick as Ayrs is, he could hold his own in a

Major/minor



*major
wilder*
Cloud Atlas

"The rest you may know. Covered Korea for *Illustrated Planet*, then became *West Coast Herald's* Latin America man. He was in Vietnam for the battle of Ap Bac and stayed based in Saigon until his first collapse back in March. It's a miracle my parents' marriage lasted the years it did—y' know, the longest I spent with him was April to July, this year, in the hospice." Luisa is quiet. "I miss him, Rufus, chronically. I keep forgetting he's dead. I keep thinking he's away on assignment, somewhere, and he'll be flying in any day soon."

"He must have been proud of you, following in his footsteps."
"Oh, Luisa Rey is no Lester Rey. I wasted years being rebellious and liberated, posing as a poet and working in a bookstore on Engels Street. My posturing convinced no one, my poetry was 'so vacuous it isn't even bad'—so said Lawrence Ferlinghetti—and the bookstore went bust. So I'm still only a columnist." Luisa rubs her tired eyes, thinking of Richard Ganga's parting shot. "No award-winning copy from war zones. I had high hopes when I moved to *Spyglass*, but simpering gossip on celebrity parties is the closest I've gotten so far to Dad's vocation."

"Ah, but is it well-written simpering gossip?"
"Oh, it's *excellently* written simpering gossip."
"Then don't bemoan your misspent life quite yet. Forgive me for flaunting my experience, but you have no *conception* of what a misspent life constitutes."

"Hitchcock loves the limelight," says Luisa, her bladder now growing uncomfortable, "but hates interviews. He didn't answer my questions because he didn't really hear them. His best works, he said, are roller coasters that scare the riders out of their wits but let them off at the end giggling and eager for another ride. I put it to the great man, the key to fictitious terror is partition or containment: so long as the Bates Motel is sealed off from our world, we want to peer in, like at a scorpion enclosure. But a film that shows

the world is a Bates Motel, well, that's . . . the stuff of Buchenwald, dystopia, depression. We'll dip our toes in a predatory, amoral, godless universe—but only our toes. Hitchcock's response was"—Luisa does an above-average impersonation—"I'm a director in Hollywood, young lady, not an Oracle at Delphi." I asked why Buenas Yervas had never featured in his films. Hitchcock answered, "This town marries the worst of San Francisco with the worst of Los Angeles. Buenas Yervas is a city of nowhere." He spoke in *bons mots* like that, not to you, but into the ear of posterity, for dinner-party guests of the future to say, "That's one of Hitchcock's, you know."

Sixsmith wrings sweat from his handkerchief. "I saw *Charade* with my niece at an art-house cinema last year. Was that Hitchcock? She strong-arms me into seeing these things, to prevent me from growing 'square.' I rather enjoyed it, but my niece said Audrey Hepburn was a 'bubblehead.' Delicious word."

"*Charade's* the one where the plot swings on the stamps?"
"A contrived puzzle, yes, but all thrillers would wither without contrivance. Hitchcock's Buenas Yervas remark puts me in mind of John F. Kennedy's observation about New York. Do you know it? 'Most cities are nouns, but New York is a verb.' What might Buenas Yervas be, I wonder?"

"A string of adjectives and conjunctions?"
"Or an expletive?"

"Megan, my treasured niece." Rufus Sixsmith shows Luisa a photograph of a bronzed young woman and a fitter, healthier self taken at a sunny marina. The photographer said something funny just before the shutter clicked. Their legs dangle over the stern of a small yacht named *Starfish*. "That's my old tub, a relic from more dynamic days."

Luisa makes polite noises about not being old.
"Truly. If I went on a serious voyage now I'd need to hire a small crew. I still spend a lot of weekends on her, pottering about the ma-



Major/minor

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FRANÇOISE LIONNET AND SHU-MEI SHIH

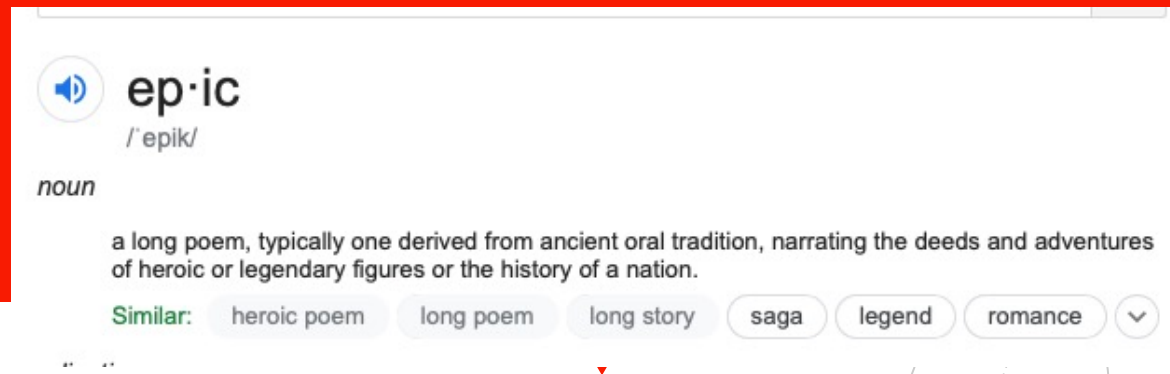
Introduction*Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally*

The conception of this collaborative project emerged from a serendipitous meeting on a cold and gray November day in 1998. We were both attending a conference that was being held in the Luxembourg Palace in Paris. The dark corridors and heavy security of this major site of political power in a European capital led us to a conversation on the state of “ethnic studies” in the United States and Europe. In a café, over cups of hot mulled wine, we continued the conversation on our personal and institutional backgrounds, allegiances, and dissatisfactions until late into the evening. One main dissatisfaction, we found out, was over the disciplinary boundaries that would ordinarily keep us on very different professional tracks, and thus not lead us to meet with each other. Our paths would not have crossed were we back in our home institutions, too busy fighting our own battles within our narrowly focused disciplines to understand the possibilities of working across these disciplines. One a Mauritian of French descent working in francophone, African, and African American studies, and the other a Korean-born ethnic Han working in Chinese, Sinophone, and Asian American studies, we were both in some sense “minoritized” in the major disciplines of French and Chinese. We were both too “ethnic studies” for the mainstream of our fields, but we would not normally have shared our common concerns and our common predicament. Had we not met through an arbitrary gathering in a major metropolis, the seat of power, our minor orientations would have remained invisible to each other. We realized, in retrospect, that our battles are always framed vertically, and we forget to look sideways to lateral networks that are not readily apparent.

Minor Transnationalisms

Thesis moment!

Cloud Atlas focuses on the problem of the minor by emphasizing “lateral” relations over “vertical” relations. It offers us a minor epic.



ep·ic
/ˈepɪk/

noun

a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the history of a nation.

Similar: heroic poem long poem long story saga legend romance

[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] [Sloosha'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]

dean

you got manuscript paper in here or should I have Hendrick go and get some?"

Relief that V.A. hadn't come to catch me tugging his wife made his imposition seem less preposterous than it actually was, so fine, I said, yes, I have paper, I have pens, let's start. Ayr's sight was too poor to see anything suspicious in the foothills of my bed, but Hendrick still posed a possible danger. One should avoid relying on servants' discretion. After Hendrick had helped his master to a chair and wrapped a rug round his shoulders, I told him I'd ring for him when we were done. Ayr didn't contradict me—he was already humming. A conspiratorial flicker in H.'s eyes? Room too dim to be sure. The servant gave a near-imperceptible bow and glided away as if on well-oiled coasters, softly shutting the door behind him.

Splashed a little water on my face at the washbowl and sat opposite Ayr's, worrying J. might forget the creaking floorboards and try to tiptoe out.

"Ready."

Ayr hummed his sonata, bar by bar, then named his notes. The oddity of the miniature soon absorbed me, despite the circumstances. It's a seesawing, cyclical, crystalline thing. He finished after the ninety-sixth bar and told me to mark the MS *triste*. Then he asked me, "So what d'you think?"

"Not sure," I told him. "It's not at all like you. Not much like anyone. But it hypnotizes."

Ayr was now slumped, à la a Pre-Raphaelite oil painting entitled *Behold the Sated Muse Discards Her Puppet*. Birdsong foamed in the hour-before-dawn garden. Thought about J.'s curves in the bed, just a few yards away, even felt a dangerous throb of impatience for her. V.A. was unsure of himself for once. "I dreamt 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. The food was soap, the only drink was cups of lather. The music in the café was"—he wagged an exhausted finger at the MS—"this."

Rang for H. Wanted Ayr's out of my room before daylight

Her anger was almost physical, a kick in your humble correspondent's face. Fair enough, I had accused her of trespassing on her mother's estate. Wide awake, I stumbled to my feet, all apologies, explaining I had spoken whilst dreaming. Quite forgot about the lake. Plunged right in like a b. fool! Soaked! Luckily the pond was only navel-high, and God had saved Ayr's precious Nietzsche from joining me in the drink. When Eva eventually reined in her laughter, I said I was pleased to see her do something other than pout. I had duckweed in my hair, she answered, in English. Was reduced to patronizing her by praising her language skills. She batted back, "It does not take much to impress an Englishman." Walked off. Couldn't think of a snappy response until later, so the girl won the set.

money, esp. dirty.

Now, pay attention while I talk books and lucre. Poking through an alcove of books in my room, I came across a curious dismembered volume, and I want you to track down a complete copy for me. It begins on the ninety-ninth page, its covers are gone, its binding unstitched. From what little I can glean, it's the edited journal of a voyage from Sydney to California by a notary of San Francisco named Adam Ewing. Mention is made of the gold rush, so I suppose we are in 1849 or 1850. The journal seems to be published posthumously, by Ewing's son (?). Ewing puts me in mind of Melville's bumbler Cpt. Delano in "Benito Cereno," blind to all conspirators—he hasn't spotted his trusty Dr. Henry Goose [*sic*] is a vampire, fueling his hypochondria in order to poison him, slowly, for his money.

Something shifty about the journal's authenticity—seems too structured for a genuine diary, and its language doesn't ring quite true—but who would bother forging such a journal, and why?

To my great annoyance, the pages cease, midsentence, some forty pages later, where the binding is worn through. Searched high and low in the library for the rest of the damn thing. No luck. Hardly in our interests to draw Ayr's or Mrs. Crommelynck's attention to their unindexed bibliographic wealth, so I'm up a gum tree. Would you ask Otto Jansch on Caithness Street if he knows anything about this Adam Ewing? A half-read book is a half-finished love affair.

Wolf vs. double
HALF-LIVES: THE FIRST LUISA REY MYSTERY 119
stimulating to her
man
reproducing.

"All the news without fear or favor."
"Beat it."

Nancy O'Hagan makes a not-bad face as Luisa sits at her desk and takes out Sixsmith's rescued letters.

In his office, Grelsch lays into his punching bag. "Dogged!" Wham! "Cussed!" Wham! "Indefatigable!" The editor catches his reflection, mocking him.

A Sephardic romance, composed before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, fills the Lost Chord Music Store on the northwest corner of Spinoza Square and Sixth Avenue. The well-dressed man on the telephone, pallid for this tanned city, repeats the inquiry: "*Cloud Atlas Sextet* . . . Robert Frobisher . . . As a matter of fact I *have* heard of it, though I've never laid my sticky paws on an actual pressing. . . . Frobisher was a wunderkind, he died just as he got going. . . . Let me see here, I've got a list from a dealer in San Fran who specializes in rarities. . . . Franck, Fitzroy, *Frobisher* . . . Here we go, even a little footnote. . . . Only five hundred recordings pressed . . . in Holland, before the war, my, no wonder it's rare. . . . The dealer has a copy of an acetate, made in the fifties . . . by a liquidated French outfit. *Cloud Atlas Sextet* must bring the kiss of death to all who take it on. . . . I'll try, he had one as of a month ago, but no promises on the sound quality, and I must warn you, cheap it *ain't*. . . . It's quoted here at . . . one hundred twenty dollars . . . plus our commission at ten percent, that makes . . . It is? Okay, I'll take your name down. . . . Ray who? Oh, Miss R-E-Y, so sorry. Normally we ask for a deposit, but you've got an honest voice. A few days. You're welcome now."

The store clerk scribbles himself a to-do note and lifts the stylus back to the start of "¿Por qué lloras blanca niña?," lowers the needle onto shimmering black vinyl, and dreams of Jewish shepherd boys plucking their lyres on starlit Iberian hillsides.

World in *Cloud Atlas* –
From minor to
universal.

- Some people
- Some place
- Some Time

- Everyone
- Everywhere
- Forever

PROBLEM:

How representative are the Minor characters?

https://cloudatlas.fandom.com/wiki/Sloosha%27s_Crossin%27_an%27_Ev%27rythin%27_After

Still. I felt the exhilaration of a journey begun, and I let my guard drop. A volume I once published, *True Recollections of a Northern Territories Magistrate*, claims that shark victims experience an anesthetic vision of floating away, all danger gone, into the Pacific blue, at the very moment they are being minced in that funnel of teeth. I, Timothy Cavendish, was that swimmer, watching London roll away, yes, you, you sly, toupeed quizmaster of a city, you and your tenements of Somalians; viaducts of Kingdom Brunel; malls of casualized labor; strata of soot-blitzed bricks and muddy bones of Doctors Dee, Crippen et al.; hot glass office buildings where the blooms of youth harden into aged cacti like my penny-pinching brother.

Essex raised its ugly head. When I was a scholarship boy at the local grammar, son of a city-hall toiler on the make, this county was synonymous with liberty, success, and Cambridge. Now look at it. Shopping malls and housing estates pursue their creeping invasion of our ancient land. A North Sea wind snatched frilly clouds in its teeth and scarpered off to the Midlands. The countryside proper began at last. My mother had a cousin out here, her family had a big house, I think they moved to Winnipeg for a better life. There! There, in the shadow of that DIY warehouse, once stood a row of walnut trees where me and Pip Oakes—a childhood chum who died aged thirteen under the wheels of an oil tanker—varnished a canoe one summer and sailed it along the Say. Sticklebacks in jars. There, right there, around that bend we lit a fire and cooked beans and potatoes wrapped in silver foil! Come back, oh, come back! Is one glimpse all I get? Hedgeless, featureless fields. Essex is Winnipeg, now. Stubble was burnt, and the air tasted of crisp bacon sarnies. My thoughts flew off with other fairies, and we were past Saffron Walden when the train juddered to a halt. "Um . . ." said the intercom. "John, is this on? John, what button do I press?" Cough. "SouthNet Trains regrets that this service will make an unscheduled stop at the next station due to . . . a missing driver. This unscheduled stop will continue for the duration that it takes to locate an appropriate driver. SouthNet Trains assures you we are

striving hard"—I clearly discerned a background snigger!—"to restore our normal excellent standard of service." Rail rage chain-reacted down the compartments, though in our age crimes are not committed by criminals conveniently at hand but by executive pens far beyond the mob's reach, back in London's postmodern HQs of glass and steel. Half the mob owns shares in what it would pound to atoms, anyway.

So there we sat. I wished I had brought something to read. At least I had a seat, and I wouldn't have given it up for Helen Keller. The evening was lemon blue. Trackside shadows grew monolithic. Commuters sent calls to families on mobile phones. I wondered how that dodgy Australian magistrate knew what flashed through the minds of the shark-eaten. Lucky express trains with nonmissing drivers shot past. I needed the loo, but it didn't bear imagining. I opened my briefcase for a bag of Werner's toffees but came up with *Half-Lives—The First Luisa Rey Mystery*. I leafed through its first few pages. It would be a better book if Hilary V. Hush weren't so artsily-fartsily Clever. She had written it in neat little chapteroids, doubtless with one eye on the Hollywood screenplay. Static squealed in the speakers. "This is a passenger announcement. SouthNet Trains regrets that as a suitable driver for this train cannot be located we will proceed to Little Chesterford station, where a complimentary coach will transport passengers on to Cambridge. Those able to are recommended to make alternative travel arrangements, as the coach will not reach Little Chesterford station [how that name chimed in my memory!] for . . . an unknown duration. Further details can be found on our website." The train crawled a mile of twilight. Bats and wind-borne rubbish overtook us. Who was driving now if there wasn't a driver?

Stop, shudder, doors open. The abler-bodied streamed off the