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Class #6.1: *Cloud Atlas 5*

ENGL 10: Global Fictions

Jeon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIHS1lLzqOo>

Well, my yarn's nearly done'n'telled now. Meronym'n'me forded the far side, an' I prayed my thanks to Sonmi tho' there weren't no Valleys Civ'lize to save no more, she'd saved my skin one last time. I s'pose the rest o' the Kona platoon was too busy with their died'n'drowned to come trackin' us two, yay. We crossed the Lornsome Dunes an' fin'ly reached Ikat's Finger with no ax'dents. No kayaks was waitin' yet, but we dismounted an' Meronym used her Smart on that crossbolt-mauled calf o' mine. When she pulled the bolt out, the pain traveled up my body an' hooded my senses so true-be-telled I din't see the Maui kayaks arrivin' with Duophysite. Now my friend had a choice to settle, yay, see, either she loaded me in that kayak or left me on Big Isle not able to walk nor nothin' jus' a short ride off from Kona ground. Well, here I am yarnin' to you, so you know what Meronym settled, an' times are I regret her choosin', yay, an' times are I don't. The chanty o' my new tribe's rowers waked me halfway 'cross the Straits. Meronym was changin' my bleedin' bindin', she'd used some Smart med'sun to numb its pain a hole lot.

I watched clouds awobbly from the floor o' that kayak. 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. Who can say where the cloud's blowed 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.

Duophysite saw my eyes was open an' pointed me Big Isle, purple in the sou'eastly blue, an' Mauna Kea hidin' its head like a shy bride.

Yay, my Hole World an' hole life was shrinked 'nuff to fit in the O o' my finger'n'thumb.

* * *

Zachry my old pa was a wyrd buggah, I won't naysay it now he's died. Oh, most o' Pa's yarnin's was jus' musey duck fartin' an' in his

loonsome old age he 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.

Do I b'lief his yarn 'bout the Kona an' his fleein' from Big I? Most yarnin's got a bit o' true, some yarnin's got some true, an' a few yarnin's got a lot o' true. The stuff 'bout Meronym the Prescient was mostly true, I reck'n. See, after Pa died my sis'n'me s'ivvied his gear, an' I finded his silv'ry egg what he named *orison* in his yarns. Like Pa yarned, if you warm the egg in your hands, a beaustome ghost-girl appears in the air an' speaks in an Old-Un tongue what no un alive und'stands nor never will, nay. It ain't Smart you can use 'cos it don't kill Kona pirates nor fill empty guts, but some dusks my kin'n'bros'll wake up the ghost-girl jus' to watch her hov'rin'n'shimm'rin'. She's beaustome, and she 'mazes the littl' uns an' her murmin's babbybie our babbits.

Sit down a beat or two.

Hold out your hands.

Look.

What do you mean? What "next stage" of what?
Of the theatrical production, set up while I was still a server in Papa Song's.

Wait, wait, wait. What about . . . everything? Are you saying your whole confession is composed of . . . scripted events?

Its key events, yes. Some actors were unwitting, Boom-Sook and the Abbess, for xample, but the major players were all provocateurs. Hae-Joo Im and Boardman Mephi certainly were. Did you not detect the hairline cracks in the plot?

Such as?

Wing-027 was as stable an ascendant as I: was I really so unique? You yourself suggested, would Union truly risk their secret weapon on a dash across Korea? Did Seer Kwon's murder of the Zizzi Hikaru fabricant on the suspension bridge not underline pure-blood brutality a little too neatly? Was its timing not a little too pat?

But what about Xi-Li, the young pureblood killed on the nite of your flite from Taemosan? His blood was not . . . tomato ketchup!

Indeed not. That poor idealist was an xpendable xtra in Unanimity's disney.

But . . . Union? Are you saying even Union was fictioned for your script?

No. Union prexists me, but its raisons-d'être are not to foment revolution. Firstly, it attracts social malcontents like Xi-Li and keeps them where Unanimity can watch them. Secondly, it provides Nea So Copros with the enemy required by any hierarchical state for social cohesion.

I still can't understand why Unanimity would go to the xpense and trouble of staging this fake . . . adventure story.

To generate the show trial of the decade. To make every last pure-blood in Nea. So Copros mistrustful of every last fabricant. To

manufacture downstrata consent for the Juche's new Fabricant Xpiry Act. To discredit Abolitionism. You can see, the whole conspiracy has been a resounding success.

But if you knew about this . . . conspiracy, why did you cooperate with it? Why did you allow Hae-Joo Im to get so close to you?

Why does any martyr cooperate with his judases?

Tell me.

We see a game beyond the endgame. I refer to my *Declarations*, Archivist. Media has flooded Nea So Copros with my Catechisms. Every schoolchild in corpocracy knows my twelve "blasphemies" now. My guards tell me there is even talk of a statewide "Vigilance Day" against fabricants who show signs of the *Declarations*. My ideas have been reproduced a billionfold.

But to what end? Some . . . future revolution? It can never succeed.

As Seneca warned Nero: No matter how many of us you kill, you will never kill your successor. Now, my narrative is over. Switch off your silver orison. In two hours enforcers will escort me into the Litehouse. I claim my last request.

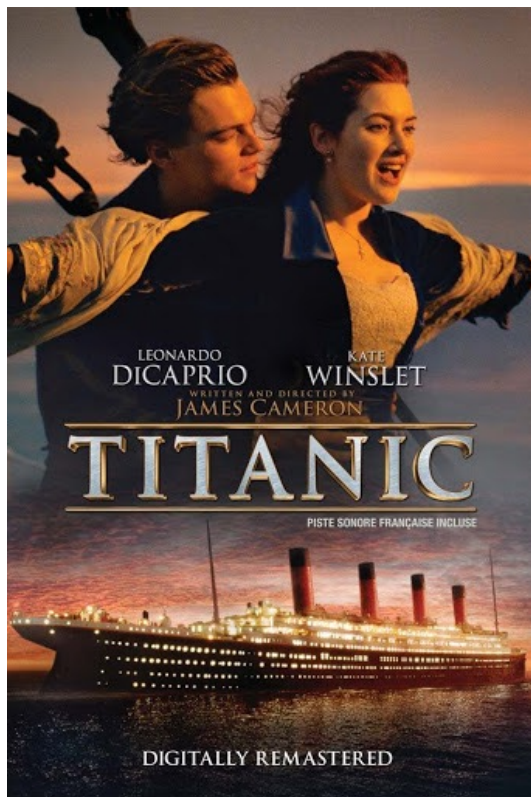
. . . name it.

Your sony and access codes.

What do you wish to download?

A certain disney I once began, one nite long ago in another age.

embedded in the temporality



wheeling wherever the sea will take them, wheeling around her, playing cards in Alice. She kicks off her shoes. Her lungs shriek, curse, beg. Every pulse is a thump in Luisa's ears. Which way is up? The water is too murky to guess. Up is away from the car. Her lungs will collapse in another moment. Where's the car? Luisa realizes she has paid for the Sixsmith Report with her life.

41

Isaac Sachs looks down on a brilliant Pennsylvania morning. Labyrinthine suburbs of ivory mansionettes and silk lawns inset with turquoise swimming pools. The executive-jet window is cool against his face. Six feet directly beneath his seat is a suitcase in the baggage hold containing enough C-4 to turn an airplane into a meteor. So, thinks Sachs, you obeyed your conscience. Luisa Rey has the Sixsmith Report. He recollects as many details of her face as he can. Do you feel doubt? Relief? Fear? Righteousness?

A premonition I'll never see her again.

Alberto Grimaldi, the man he has double-crossed, is laughing at an aide's remark. The hostess passes with a tray of clinking drinks. Sachs retreats into his notebook, where he writes the following sentences.

- Exposition: the workings of the actual past + the virtual past may be illustrated by an event well known to collective history, such as the sinking of the Titanic. The disaster as it actually occurred descends into obscurity as its eyewitnesses die off, documents perish + the wreck of the ship dissolves in its Atlantic grave. Yet a virtual sinking of the Titanic, created from reworked memories, papers, hearsay, fiction—in short, belief—grows ever “truer.” The actual past is brittle, ever-dimming + ever more problematic to access + reconstruct: in contrast, the virtual past is malleable, ever-brightening + ever more difficult to circumvent/expose as fraudulent.
- The present presses the virtual past into its own service, to lend credence to its mythologies + legitimacy to the imposition of will. Power seeks + is the

right to “landscape” the virtual past. (He who pays the historian calls the tune.)

- Symmetry demands an actual + virtual future, too. We imagine how next week, next year, or 2225 will shape up—a virtual future, constructed by wishes, prophecies + daydreams. This virtual future may influence the actual future, as in a self-fulfilling prophecy, but the actual future will eclipse our virtual one as surely as tomorrow eclipses today. Like Utopia, the actual future + the actual past exist only in the hazy distance, where they are no good to anyone.
- Q: Is there a meaningful distinction between one simulacrum of smoke, mirrors + shadows—the actual past—from another such simulacrum—the actual future?
- One model of time: an infinite matryoshka doll of painted moments, each “shell” (the present) encased inside a nest of “shells” (previous presents) I call the actual past but which we perceive as the virtual past. The doll of “now” likewise encases a nest of presents yet to be, which I call the actual future but which we perceive as the virtual future.
- Proposition: I have fallen in love with Luisa Rey.

The detonator is triggered. The C-4 ignites. The jet is engulfed by a fireball. The jet's metals, plastics, circuitry, its passengers, their bones, clothes, notebooks, and brains all lose definition in flames exceeding 1200 degrees C. The uncreated and the dead exist solely in our actual and virtual pasts. Now the bifurcation of these two pasts will begin.

42

“Betty and Frank needed to shore up their finances,” Lloyd Hooks tells his breakfast audience in the Swanekke Hotel. A circle of neophytes and acolytes pays keen attention to the Presidential Energy Guru. “So they decide Betty'd go on the game to get a little cash in hand. Night comes around, Frank drives Betty over to Whore Lane to ply her new trade. ‘Hey, Frank,’ says Betty, from the

Veronica, and Mr. Meeks waved me off at the station. Ernie promised to take the flak if the law were ever to catch up, as he's too old to stand trial, which is ruddy civilized of him. He and Veronica were headed to a Hebridean location where Ernie's handyman-preacher-cousin does up falling-down crofts for Russian mafiosi and German enthusiasts of the Gaelic tongue. I offer my secular prayers for their well-being. Mr. Meeks was to be deposited in a public library with a "Please Look After This Bear" tag, but I suspect Ernie and Veronica will take him with them. After my arrival at Widow Manx's, I slept under my goosedown quilt as sound as King Arthur on the Blessed Isle. Why didn't I get on the first train south to London, there and then? I'm still not sure. Maybe I recall Denholme's remark about life beyond the M25. I shall never know what part he played in my incarceration, but he was right—London darkens the map like England's bowel polyp. There is a whole country up here.

I looked up Mrs. Latham's home number at the library. Our telephone reunion was a moving moment. Of course, Mrs. Latham smothered her emotion by lambasting me, before filling me in on my missing weeks. The Hoggins Hydra had ripped the office apart when I failed to show for my three o'clock castration, but years of financial brinkmanship had stood my redoubtable pit prop in good stead. She had captured the vandalism on a cunning video camera supplied by her nephew. The Hogginses were thus restrained: steer clear of Timothy Cavendish, Mrs. Latham warned, or this footage will appear on the Internet and your various probations shall hatch into prison sentences. Thus they were prevailed upon to accept an equitable proposal cutting them into future royalties. (I suspect they had a sneaking admiration for my lady bulldog's cool nerves.) The building management used my disappearance—and the trashing of my suite—as an excuse to turf us out. Even as I write, my former premises are being turned into a Hard Rock Cafe for homesick Americans. Cavendish Publishing is currently run from a house owned by my secretary's eldest nephew, who resides in Tangier. Now for the best news: a Hollywood studio has optioned *Knuckle*

Sandwich—The Movie for a figure as senselessly big as the number on a bar code. A lot of the money will go to the Hogginses, but for the first time since I was twenty-two, I am flush.

Mrs. Latham sorted out my bank cards, etc., and I am designing the future on beer mats, like Churchill and Stalin at Yalta, and I must say the future is not too shabby. I shall find a hungry ghost-writer to turn these notes you've been reading into a film script of my own. Well, sod it all, if Dermot "Duster" Hoggins can write a bestseller and have a film made, why the ruddy hell not Timothy "Lazarus" Cavendish? Put Nurse Noakes in the book, the dock, and on the block. The woman was sincere—bigots mostly are—but no less dangerous for that, and she shall be named and shamed. The minor matter of Johns Hotchkiss's vehicle loan needs to be handled with delicacy, but fouler fish have been fried. Mrs. Latham got on the e-mail to Hilary V. Hush to express our interest in *Half-Lives*, and the postman delivered part two not an hour ago. A photo was enclosed, and it turns out the V is for Vincent! And what a lard-bucket! I'm no Chippendale myself, but Hilary has the girth to fill not two but three airline economy seats. I'll find out if Luisa Rey is still alive in a corner of the Whistling Thistle, my de facto office and a wrecked galleon of a back-alley tavern where Mary, Queen of Scots, summoned the devil to assist her cause. The landlord, whose double measures would be quadruples in management-consulted Londinium, swears he sees Her ill-starred Majesty, regularly. *In vino veritas*.

That is more or less it. Middle age is flown, but it is attitude, not years, that condemns one to the ranks of the Undead, or else proffers salvation. In the domain of the young there dwells many an Undead soul. They rush about so, their inner putrefaction is concealed for a few decades, that is all. Outside, fat snowflakes are falling on slate roofs and granite walls. Like Solzhenitsyn laboring in Vermont, I shall beaver away in exile, far from the city that knitted my bones.

Like Solzhenitsyn, I shall return, one bright dusk.

California in downtown B.Y. which claimed the lives of two people. Five directors at Seaboard Power have been charged in connection with the conspiracy, and two have committed suicide. Three more, including Vice CEO William Wiley, have agreed to testify against Seaboard Corporation.

The arrest of Lloyd Hooks two days ago was seen as vindication of this newspaper's support for Luisa Rey's exposé of this major scandal, initially dismissed by William Wiley as "libelous fantasy culled from a spy novel and wholly unworthy of a serious response." . . . *Cont. p. 2, Full Story p. 5, Comment p. 11.*

"Front page!" Bart pours Luisa's coffee. "Lester would be mighty proud."

"He'd say I'm just a journalist doing my job."

"Well, exactly, Luisa!"

Seaboardgate is no longer her scoop. Swanekke swarms with reporters, Senate investigators, FBI agents, county police, and Hollywood scriptwriters. Swanekke B is in mothballs; C is suspended.

Luisa gets Javier's postcard out again. It shows three UFOs zooming under the Golden Gate Bridge:

Hi Luisa, it's OK here but we live in a house so I can't jump across balconies when I visit my friends. Paul (that's Wolfman but Mom says I can't call him that anymore though he kind of likes it when I do) is taking me to a stamp fare tomorrow, then I can choose what paint I want for my bedroom and he cooks better than Mom. Saw you again on TV last night and in the papers. Don't forget me just because you're famous now, OK? Javi

The other item of mail is an airmailed package from Megan Sixsmith, sent in response to Luisa's request. It contains the final eight letters Robert Frobisher wrote to his friend Rufus Sixsmith. Luisa

uses a plastic knife to slit the package open. She removes one of the yellowed envelopes, postmarked October 10, 1931, holds it against her nose, and inhales. *Are molecules of Zedelghem Château, of Robert Frobisher's hand, dormant in this paper for forty-four years, now swirling in my lungs, in my blood?*

Who is to say?

press one's audience with one's mental fiber, to vent anger, or just because one lacks the necessary suffering to sympathize. Cowardice is nothing to do with it—suicide takes considerable courage. Japanese have the right idea. No, what's selfish is to demand another to endure an intolerable existence, just to spare families, friends, and enemies a bit of soul-searching. The only selfishness lies in ruining strangers' days by forcing 'em to witness a grotesqueness. So I'll make a thick turban from several towels to muffle the shot and soak up the blood, and do it in the bathtub, so it shouldn't stain any carpets. Last night I left a letter under the manager's day-office door—he'll find it at eight A.M. tomorrow—informing him of the change in my existential status, so with luck an innocent chambermaid will be spared an unpleasant surprise. See, I do think of the little people.

Don't let 'em say I killed myself for love, Sixsmith; that would be too ridiculous. Was infatuated by Eva Crommelynck for a blink of an eye, but we both know in our hearts who is the sole love of my short, bright life.

Along with this letter and the rest of the Ewing book, I've made arrangements for a folder containing my completed manuscript to find you at Le Royal. Use the Jansch money to defray publishing costs, send copies to everyone on the enclosed list. Don't let my family get hold of either of the originals, whatever you do. Pater'll sigh, "It's no *Eroica*, is it?" and stuff it into a drawer; but it's an incomparable creation. Echoes of Scriabin's *White Mass*, Stravinsky's lost footprints, chromatics of the more lunar Debussy, but truth is I don't know where it came from. Waking dream. Will never write anything one-hundredth as good. Wish I were being immodest, but I'm not. *Cloud Atlas Sextet* holds my life, is my life, now I'm a spent firework; but at least I've been a firework.

People are obscenities. Would rather be music than be a mass of tubes squeezing semisolids around itself for a few decades before becoming so dribblesome it'll no longer function.

Luger here. Thirteen minutes to go. Feel trepidation, naturally, but my love of this coda is stronger. An electrical thrill that, like

Adrian, I know I am to die. Pride, that I shall see it through. Certainties. Strip back the beliefs pasted on by governesses, schools, and states, you find indelible truths at one's core. Rome'll decline and fall again, Cortés'll lay Tenochtitlán to waste again, and later, Ewing will sail again, Adrian'll be blown to pieces again, you and I'll sleep under Corsican stars again, I'll come to Bruges again, fall in and out of love with Eva again, you'll read this letter again, the sun'll grow cold again. Nietzsche's gramophone record. When it ends, the Old One plays it again, for an eternity of eternities.

Time cannot permeate this sabbatical. We do not stay dead long. Once my Luger lets me go, my birth, next time around, will be upon me in a heartbeat. Thirteen years from now we'll meet again at Gresham, ten years later I'll be back in this same room, holding this same gun, composing this same letter, my resolution as perfect as my many-headed sextet. Such elegant certainties comfort me at this quiet hour.

Sunt lacrimæ rerum.

R.F.

How we hear of
(or for things)
~ the burden that
becomes our universe
feels pain.

...the candlenut tree in the courtyard is pleasant in the memory of recent evil. The sisters go about their duties, Sister Martinique tends her vegetables, the cats enact their feline comedies & tragedies. I am making acquaintances amongst the local avifauna. The *palila* has a head & tail of burnished gold, the *akohekohe* is a handsome crested honeycreeper.

Over the wall is a poorhouse for foundlings, also administered by the sisters. I hear the children chanting their classes (just as my schoolmates and I used to before Mr. & Mrs. Channing's philanthropy elevated my prospects). After their studies are done, the children conduct their play in a beguiling babel. Sometimes, the more daring of their number brave the nuns' displeasure by scaling the wall & conduct a grand tour above the hospice garden by means of the candlenut's obliging branches. If the "coast is clear," the pioneers beckon their more timid playmates onto this human aviary & white faces, brown faces, *kanaka* faces, Chinese faces, mulatto faces appear in the arboreal overworld. Some are Rafael's age & when I remember him a bile of remorse rises in my throat, but the orphans grin down at me, imitate monkeys, poke out their tongues, or try to drop *kukui* nuts into the mouths of snoring convalescents & do not let me stay mournful for very long. They beg me for a cent or two. I toss up a coin for dextrous fingers to pluck, unerringly, from the air.

My recent adventures have made me quite the philosopher, especially at night, when I hear naught but the stream grinding boulders into pebbles through an unhurried eternity. My thoughts flow thus. Scholars discern motions in history & formulate these motions into rules that govern the rises & falls of civilizations. My belief runs contrary, however. To wit: history admits no rules; only outcomes.

What precipitates outcomes? Vicious acts & virtuous acts.
 What precipitates acts? Belief.

Belief is both prize & battlefield, within the mind & in the mind's mirror, the world. If we believe humanity is a ladder of tribes, a colosseum of confrontation, exploitation & bestiality, such a humanity is surely brought into being, & history's Horroxes, Boerhaaves & Gooses shall prevail. You & I, the moneyed, the privileged, the fortunate, shall not fare so badly in this world, provided our luck holds. What of it if our consciences itch? Why undermine the dominance of our race, our gunships, our heritage & our legacy? Why fight the "natural" (oh, weaselly word!) order of things?

Why? Because of this:—one fine day, a purely predatory world shall consume itself. Yes, the Devil shall take the hindmost until the foremost is the hindmost. In an individual, selfishness uglifies the soul; for the human species, selfishness is extinction.

Is this the doom written within our nature?
 If we believe that humanity may transcend tooth & claw, if we believe divers races & creeds can share this world as peaceably as the orphans share their candlenut tree, if we believe leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable & the riches of the Earth & its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass. I am not deceived. It is the hardest of worlds to make real. Torturous advances won over generations can be lost by a single stroke of a myopic president's pen or a vainglorious general's sword.

A life spent shaping a world I want Jackson to inherit, not one I fear Jackson shall inherit, this strikes me as a life worth the living. Upon my return to San Francisco, I shall pledge myself to the Abolitionist cause, because I owe my life to a self-freed slave & because I must begin somewhere.

I hear my father-in-law's response: "Oho, fine, Whiggish sentiments, Adam. But don't tell me about justice! Ride to Tennessee on an ass & convince the rednecks that they are merely white-washed negroes & their negroes are black-washed Whites! Sail to the Old World, tell 'em their imperial slaves' rights are as inalienable as the Queen of Belgium's! Oh, you'll grow hoarse, poor & gray in caucuses! You'll be spat on, shot at, lynched, pacified with medals, spurned by backwoodsmen! Crucified! Naïve, dreaming Adam. He

who would do battle with the many-headed hydra of human nature must pay a world of pain & his family must pay it along with him! & only as you gasp your dying breath shall you understand, your life amounted to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean!"
 Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?

