

Homeric and Platonic Forces in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*
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1. Diagram of Stories (by Title) in *Cloud Atlas*

1a The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing

2a Letters from Zedelghem

3a Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery

4a The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish

5a An Orison of Sonmi-451

6 Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After

5b An Orison of Sonmi-451

4b The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish

3b Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery

2b Letters from Zedelghem

1b The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing

2. Plato *Republic* 614b

Ἄλλ' οὐ μέντοι σοι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, Ἀλκίμου γε ἀπόλογον ἐρῶ, ἀλλ' ἀλκίμου μὲν
ἀνδρός, Ἡρὸς τοῦ Ἀρμενίου, τὸ γένος Παμφύλου·

It's not an Alcinous-story I am going to tell you, more a brave man's story — a hero
from Pamphylia, Er the son of Armenius. (Tom Griffith, tr.)

3. Lucian *Verae Historiae* 1.5

αἰτία δέ μοι τῆς ἀποδημίας καὶ ὑπόθεσις ἢ τῆς διανοίας περιεργία καὶ
πραγμάτων καινῶν ἐπιθυμία καὶ τὸ βούλεσθαι μαθεῖν τί τὸ τέλος ἐστὶν τοῦ
ὠκεανοῦ καὶ τίνες οἱ πέραν κατοικοῦντες ἄνθρωποι.

The reason and occasion for my journey were intellectual curiosity, an interest in new
experiences, and a desire to know what the ocean's end was and what men lived
beyond it.

4. Mitchell *Cloud Atlas* 508

If we *believe* humanity is a ladder of tribes, a colosseum of confrontations,
exploitation & bestiality, such a humanity is surely brought into being... . Why?
Because of this: — a purely predatory world *shall* consume itself... . 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.

5. Mitchell *Cloud Atlas* 507

“My recent adventures have made me quite the philosopher... . 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.”

6. Plato *Timaeus* 20e-21a

Ἄκουε δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, λόγου μάλα μὲν ἀτόπου, παντάπασι γε μὴν ἀληθοῦς, ὡς ὁ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφώτατος Σόλων ποτ' ἔφη. ἦν μὲν οὖν οἰκείος καὶ σφόδρα φίλος ἡμῖν Δρωπίδου τοῦ προπάππου, καθάπερ λέγει πολλαχοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῇ ποιήσει· πρὸς δὲ Κριτίαν τὸν ἡμέτερον πάππον εἶπεν, ὡς ἀπεμνημόνευεν αὐτὸς πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὁ γέρον, ὅτι μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τῆσδ' εἴη παλαιὰ ἔργα τῆς πόλεως ὑπὸ χρόνου καὶ φθορᾶς ἀνθρώπων ἠφανισμένα

Now, Socrates, listen to an extraordinary tale, but a tale of absolute truth, as Solon, the wisest of the seven sages once told it. Solon was a relation of our great-grandfather Dropides and his great friend, as he himself often states in his poetry. Dropides told Critias, our great-grandfather, that there were great, amazing, and ancient deeds accomplished by this city which have been effaced by time and the destruction of our citizens—as the old man related this to us in turn. (Diskin Clay, tr.)

7. Mitchell *Cloud Atlas* 309

“[M]ost o’ Pa’s yarnin’s was jus’ musey duck fartin.”

8. Plato *Critias* 121c

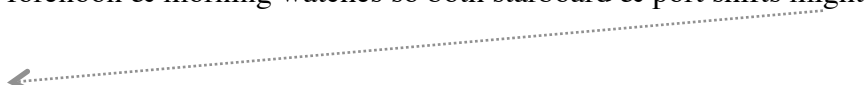
θεὸς δὲ ὁ θεῶν Ζεὺς ἐν νόμοις βασιλεύων, ἅτε δυνάμενος καθορᾶν τὰ τοιαῦτα, ἐννοήσας γένος ἐπιεικὲς ἀθλίως διατιθέμενον, δίκην αὐτοῖς ἐπιθεῖναι βουληθεὶς, ἵνα γένοιτο ἐμμελέστεροι σωφρονισθέντες, συνήγειρεν θεοὺς πάντας εἰς τὴν τιμωτάτην αὐτῶν οἴκησιν, ἣ δὴ κατὰ μέσον παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου βεβηκυῖα καθορᾶ πάντα ὅσα γενέσεως μετείληφεν, καὶ συναγείρας εἶπεν—

But as Zeus, god of the gods, reigning as king according to law, could clearly see this state of affairs, he observed this noble race lying in this abject state and resolved to punish them and to make them more careful and harmonious as a result of their chastisement. To this end he called all the gods to their most honored abode, which stands at the middle of the universe and looks down upon all that has a share in generation. And, when he had gathered them together, he said— (Diskin Clay, tr.)

9. Mitchell *Cloud Atlas* 19, 475

End of story 1a 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

Start of story 1b **join** us. I am sorry to write, no man from either shift braved the first mate’s displeasure by attending, but we shall persist in our efforts undiscouraged. Rafael was up the masthead & **interrupted** our prayers with a treble cry of “Land! A-hoyyyyy!”



10. Mitchell *Cloud Atlas* 509

I hear my father-in-law’s response: “Oho, fine, *Whiggish* sentiments, Adam. But don’t tell me about justice... . 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?

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