Sennett's companionable work offers hundreds of similar examples and insights to detain the reader (I was fascinated by his distinction between all-purpose and fit-for-purpose tools), without convincingly explaining why the present-day workplace, 'in which objects are rapidly being transformed by digitalisation into signs and technology itself is widely regarded as creating wealth and change', is quite so hostile to craft. Sennett (who is no romantic) puts in a good word for Linux system developers as public craftsmen, but I remain sceptical: how do you draw the line between form and function in artefacts that are ever more living, buzzing bundles of semiotics (mobile phones)? How can we talk eloquently of work done for its own sake, when for the average technocrat working on 'flexitime', what exists as a practice hardly exists as knowledge at all? What remains of craftsmanship when we are taught that 'having a career' is what life is about? The ultimate teasing question being asked by Sennett is: how reasonable is it to be rational? More bespoke insights can be expected in the next two volumes of what is a projected trilogy.

Iain Bamforth

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THE THOUSAND AUTUMNS OF JACOB DE ZOET DAVID MITCHELL

2010, *Sceptre, Hodder and Stoughton, HB, 480 pages, £18.99, 9780340921562*

Fans of David Mitchell will not be disappointed by his wonderful fifth novel. They may be disappointed that he has eschewed any pyrotechnics with his chapter lay out and there are no running themes from his previous books (including *Cloud Atlas*) in this tour de force. However, this is his most accomplished novel. This is a novelisation of a true encounter of a British war ship in the only port with communication with the West in 18th century Japan. We follow the exploits of a young Dutch trader, Jacob de Zoet, hoping to make his fortune and impress his high class love's father back in Holland.

Mitchell wears his extensive knowledge of 18th century Japan lightly, but uses the ban on any Christian books wonderfully and with great literary tension early in Jacob's arrival in Nagasaki. From there on in the reader is whisked along with all the intrigues on both sides of the bamboo curtain which separates the infidel Christians from the rest of the Japanese, who are equally desperate to have a piece of the trading action with the corrupt Dutch East India Trading company.

With beautiful language, and intense storytelling, Mitchell draws us into this hidden world and takes us to places we could never conceive with the

consummate ease of a great writer. He straddles the gap between literary novels and popular novels and I will be very surprised if he does not win the Booker this year. Add it to your summer reading list and just wallow in its sumptuousness.

Chris Johnstone

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