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Lying in Sam Taylor's *The Island at the End of the World*

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"The flood changed everything, of course."
(Taylor 96)

Noah's flood (Genesis 5: 32-9) is a biblical story to which novelists in recent times have often returned. In an article on Julian Barnes, I identified works belonging to two generations of rewritings of the Noah myth in contemporary literature. A first generation includes works by established writers such as Julian Barnes (*A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters,* 1989), Jeanette Winterson *(Boating for Beginners*, 1985), Timothy Findley *(Not Wanted on the Voyage*, 1984), and Sarah Maitland and Micheline Wandor *(Arky Types,* 1987). A second generation of such rewritings has recently emerged, and includes texts by beacons of their generation such as Margaret Atwood *(Oryx and Crake,* 2003; *The Year of the Flood,* 2009; *and Maddaddam,* 2013), and Maggie Gee *(The Flood,* 2004), and also lesser-known writers, among whom is Samuel Taylor *(The Island at the End of the World*, 2009). I further suggested three categories into which these works might be split, those which make little or no overt reference to the Noah myth beyond their titles, those which are set in biblical times, and retell the story in such a way as to give voice to the lesser-known characters, and metafictional parodies which use the account in Genesis as a fluid frame of reference.

The Island at the End of the World (TIEW) comes into the third of these categories, which is also the largest and the most complex, and within which certain sub-categories discerned by other critics can also be distinguished. To take up one of these, in his work on floods in literature, *Anthropocene Fictions*, Adam Trexler identifies two types of flood novel, those that describe the situation "before" the flood and those that describe what happens "after" the event (Trexler 86). In the first case, the threat is felt or in some way communicated, measures may be taken, and arks or other vessels built; in the second case, the accent is on survival—which, while it is becoming an important strand in contemporary literary criticism, is not my immediate concern here. *The Island at the End of the World* is slanted towards the second of Trexler's categories, although analeptic passages describe the period of what might be termed warnings and preparations. Importantly, in this respect, Taylor's novel enters the territory of climate change fiction, which is Trexler's primary concern as a critic in this work. However, *The Island at the End of the World* is less easily defined, in that the deluge in question only takes place inside the head of Father, one of the main characters and narrators, although he manages to a great extent, and for some years, to make his fantasy seem real to his children.

While it seems there has indeed been a series of floods in Los Angeles, caused by earthquakes (30)—Father refers to his "first flood" (17), which took place in 2005 when he was five years old, and to "the great wave that crashed down on us" (16), apparently a tsunami which took place when he was an adult—it finally proves that no deluge,[1] in the sense of a totalising disaster, has taken place, and that there is no drowned world. Taylor's novel consists in unravelling the lie which the narrative posits.

The world that never ended, the flood that never was

Going back to the Bible very often means destabilising the text as it has been handed down to us, in one way or another and to one extent or another. One of the characteristics of many postmodern narratives is that they set out to dismantle what Lyotard calls the "metanarratives" (or "grand narratives"), by which he means "the grand stories which structure the discourses of modern religion, politics, philosophy and science" (Nicol 11), and which are, in the contemporary world, "on the wane." Nicol comments further: "Postmodern subjects simply don't believe in metanarratives any more. They instinctively acknowledge instead the rhetorical function of a narrative, and appreciate that alternative narratives could be fashioned from the same group of events" (Nicol 12). Writers such as Barnes, particularly, have taken issue with the "grand narratives" of the past by proposing alternatives and problematising the very idea of what Hutcheon calls "cultural authority" (Hutcheon 138). To this extent, the idea of positing a contemporary Noah as a liar is entirely appropriate.

Lies and lying are a constant, overt preoccupation of *The Island at the End of the World,* and are often discussed by the characters. For example, Father quotes the New Testament (Revelation 22: 15) to emphatically condemn to hell "WHOSOEVER LOVETH AND MAKETH A LIE" (TIEW 14); Alice suggests to Finn that Father may be lying and Finn indignantly refutes it (28), although some time later he wonders whether Father might indeed have lied (63). Father quotes the verse from Revelation again (87) just before he lies himself by accusing his nephew, who is telling the truth, of lying (89), and Alice finally labels Father "the Liar" (204). But how does lying work at the level of the textual apparatus of this novel? I would like to propose a reading which takes into account the narrative strategies used to uncover lies and to build bastions of truth, and the circuits by means of which the reader becomes involved in these processes. Before beginning to approach these questions, it

[1] Here I follow Trexler's distinction between the terms "deluge"—which he uses to mean "global floods," sometimes of "supernatural" origin—and "flood," which he employs to denote events in "specific, local places" (Trexler 84).

is necessary to give a brief *résumé* of the events of the novel, albeit with the *proviso* that it is difficult in this case to separate events from narrative acts.

It emerges that a family, consisting of a father (whose given name is Ben [163]), and three children, Alice, who is in her early teens, Finn, who is about eight,[1] and Daisy, who is still a small child, are living on what the children believe to be an island not far from a now-devastated Los Angeles, following an event the children believe to have been a flood sent by God to punish humankind for its degeneracy. They arrived at this place some years previously in an ark, which now stands on dry land, and which they continue to use as a base. They subsist by working the soil and hunting, and the children are educated by means of the few books which they believe are the only ones to have been saved from the flood—the Bible, Shakespeare and "the Tales." The children believe that their mother, Mary, was drowned in the flood, and that they are, if not the last people on Earth, among a very small number of survivors.

Against the children's belief in this set-up emerges a counter-story, in which each element which goes to make up their world is refuted. The island proves to be an entirely imaginary construct: it is not even surrounded by sea, but lies in a remote valley near Mono Lake in California, where Father managed to create the illusion of an island (TIEW 164, 193-194). This he achieved by using his experience of building infinity pools in order to create a vast pool which seems to merge into its surroundings, in this case creating a false horizon, which allows the children to believe that they are surrounded by sea. Los Angeles, it turns out, has not been devastated but can be clearly seen from the top of the "Knowing Tree," constructed by Father as a watchtower, but presented to the children as forbidden, like the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden ("[O]f the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat […]: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" [Genesis 2: 17]). Although there were minor and localised floods, there never was a deluge, Father has a secret library of many more than three works as well as a computer, Mary is not dead and the population of the world has not been reduced significantly, if at all.

More than anything, Father is no Noah: his belief that he ever was called to build an ark and sail his family to safety seems to stem from a background of mental illness involving what he interprets as humiliation by his wife's family. Following what seems to be a an episode of mental illness on Father's part ("my so-called nervous breakdown" [90]), which leaves him struggling to provide for his children, Christian, Mary's brother, sets up the job with an

[1] The children's ages are measured in "moons." Assuming that "a moon" denotes a 28-day cycle, Finn, who is aged 104 moons (TIEW 7), is 7.97 years old when his narrative begins, and 8.4 years old when it ends (110 moons [TIEW 111]).

infinity pool company (163), but when Father comes to be working on Christian's own property, his brother-in-law refuses to treat him any differently from any other worker, or to acknowledge kinship by letting him inside the house (90). It is shortly after this final ignominy that Father receives his divine "calling" to set out on his Noah-like adventure: "God spoke to me through the hissing baby monitor. He said the end of all flesh is come before me, for the earth is filled with violence, and behold I will destroy them. Behold I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, and everything upon the earth shall die, all but YOU" (97).

The main part of this quotation is from Genesis 6: 17, in which God speaks to Noah ("And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein *is* the breath of life, from under heaven; *and* every thing that *is* in the earth shall die"), while the last three words "all but YOU" are a very much more emphatic, even megalomaniac, version of the verse which follows: "But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee" (Genesis 6: 18).

Father pulls off his coup, and then disappears to the "island" with his family for a significant stretch of time, telling his children that most or all of those left behind drowned. This episode of history is celebrated in the words of "[Daisy's] favourite song," adapted from the more usual nursery rhyme beginning "It's raining, it's pouring, old man's snoring":

> It's raining it's poring
> The neighbors ignoring
> They laft at our boat
> Till we started to float
> And they were all dead in the morning. (TIEW 25)

Father thus founds this entire chapter of his life and those of his children on a central untruth.

While the most obvious instrument of the uncovering of Father's lies is the children's cousin, Will, who witnesses Father's humiliation at his own father, Christian's, hands, and who later comes to visit them on the "island," the various narratives contained in the novel also work together to play more subtly on truth and lies, and it is this aspect of the novel that I would like to examine.

The novel is entirely narrated by means of what James Phelan calls "character narration" (Phelan, *Living* 6), that is, it is narrated by the characters within it. More specifically, what Phelan terms "serial narration" is employed (*Living* 197): that is, the voice of more than one character is used to tell the story. The first part of the novel is shared fairly equally between

Father and Finn, while in the second part Alice's voice alternates with Father's, and Finn only intervenes to narrate the last chapter, an alternation which is not without significance as will be seen below. Phelan calls character narration "the art of indirection" (*Living* 7), and according to this critic, "[A]n author communicates to her audience by means of the character narrator's communication to a narratee. The art consists in the author's ability to make the single text function effectively for its two audiences [...] the narratee and the authorial audience" (*Living* 1).

It must be borne in mind that the acts of character narration in *The Island at the End of the World* have no apparent narratee other than the implied reader of the novel. No interlocutor is suggested, as it may be in certain acts of character narration—for example, in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, where Offred's narrative is framed by the Epilogue as a series of tape recordings, the conceit being that Offred is narrating her story following her liberation. Similar devices are employed in novels such as Margaret Drabble's *The Gates of Ivory*, in which the passages of character narration by Hattie Osborne include references to a "you," which is presumably to be understood as the implied reader (for example, "You can imagine how annoyed I was" [26]), or Blake Morrison's *The Lost Weekend*, in which a sustained act of character narration begins, similarly, with the phrase "You know how it is with friends" [1]), in order to set up a place for the reader. The three narratives which make up Taylor's novel, Father's, Finn's and Alice's, are largely stream-of-consciousness accounts of the thoughts and actions of each character, addressed to nobody in particular, unless it be the character him- or herself. As a qualification of this, it must be acknowledged that Father's narrative includes the writing of a letter, addressed to Will, and of a diary, which he rereads himself and which is also read by Alice. Both Father's acts of homodiegetic[1] writing serve to advance the plot because they are read by other characters, but the main part of the novel consists of narratives which are not addressed to other characters, but function rather along the axis of "Sujet to a" in Lacan's Schéma L (Evans 169): that is to say, the characters communicate with themselves, and that this may be understood to take place through the intermediary of an imagined other which is a reflection of the narrating subject rather than a "grand Autre" (Lacan). With these *provisos*, how can Taylor's "art of indirection" in this novel be analysed in terms of unreliable and lying narrators?

Father: "They must not know"

[1] Genette distinguishes between two kinds of narratives, that in which the narrator is absent from the narrative he or she narrates, which he calls heterodiegetic, and that in which the narrator is a character in that narrative, which he terms homodiegetic (Genette 252).

From very early on in the text, "clues" are provided as to Father's lack of veracity, or transparency. How these are received depends to some extent on the alertness of the implied reader: some seem to "pop out" on a second reading, such as the description of the "silent, waveless sea [...] which has guarded this island since the flood" (6). This description can at once be neutralised by the reader as containing nothing out of the ordinary, or be read as rather odd: why would the sea not make a noise or have waves, and why is there a suggestion that the sea has in some way moved ("since the flood")? Father's status as a liar is confirmed as his narrative goes on: the italicised phrase "*They must not know"* (15) makes it clear that some deceit is being perpetrated on the children.

The creation of a new world in which a group of "new people," in this case, children, may live, once more recalls an aspect of Atwood's work. In her *Maddaddam* trilogy, also a rewriting of the Noah myth, a group of the human survivors of the Waterless Flood—a series of pharmacological, chemical and other attacks on the population and the environment, which have severely reduced the population—must look after the Crakers, a post-human race devised, or "created," by Crake (like Father in *The Island at the End of the World,* Crake likes to put himself in the position of God). In order to help the Crakers to survive, and to help them make sense of the world around them once they have left the shelter of the laboratory in which they were created, the surviving human beings build a world based on lies. This they do by adapting reality into a Bible-inspired mythology which is sufficiently familiar for the Crakers to relate to (in the example below, the "egg" recalls the dome in which they were first placed by Crake), but at the same time sufficiently wonderful to serve as a mythology:

> In the beginning, you lived inside the Egg. That is where Crake made you.
> Yes, Good, kind Crake. (11)

The human survivors adapt the reality—"Crake, an unethical, megalomaniac scientist, created you inside a laboratory and then tried to kill off most of the inhabitants of the country/world"—into something the Crakers can understand and hand down to their children, transforming bare facts into a myth about origin.

The lies differ in type and scale—for example, in *Oryx and Crake,* Snowman/Jimmy "cook[s] up a new directive from Crake" (156), who has been elevated to the status of some kind of god, when necessary, in order to persuade the Crakers of the wisdom of a course of action which will serve to protect them. The treatment of the Crakers as children, to whom good must be done but from whom the truth must be concealed, raises many questions, harking back to many ethical, extra-textual issues surrounding postcolonialism, and forward to

posthumanism—but what the lies have in common is that they are all benign, and designed to help the Crakers adapt to their new reality, outside the safety of the dome, and to assure their future. This is not by any means true of the lies perpetrated by Father in *The Island at the End of the World*, on those who, by virtue of their extremely young age and lack of experience of the world, are almost as innocent as the Crakers.

Father also builds a simplified world, but his lies are not benign, and neither are they always told for the good of the hearer. One particularly pernicious falsehood is the lie that Mary is dead, which deprives the children of any hope of a reunion with their mother, who finally proves to be still alive and still living in California. Moreover, Father emerges as a violent character, prone to fits of rage, who lies to save himself. This is illustrated early on in the gratuitous killing of Snowy, Finn's white cat, who finds himself in Father's path at the wrong moment:

> And then the God-damned cat comes out of nowhere and yows […]
> I've never liked cats. […] I kick it out of the way. […] I can see the damn red stains at the edges of my vision now, and I kick it aside again, harder this time, but it makes no difference, the scrawny white fucker comes back again […] and finally the cat the trees the grass the sky everything in my vision turns deep scarlet […] It hits a tree and falls to the ground with a small crump. (18)

Finn reports that Father gives him a version of events which is far from the truth: "Caught in a trap" (20).

However, these are specific lies within the great lie that is life on the island, which has far-reaching effects on the children, and particularly on the eldest daughter. Father deprives the adolescent Alice of a chance of normal psycho-sexual development, and indeed mating with someone other than himself. Alice rails at her isolation, without knowing that it has been enforced upon her needlessly: "You grew up surrounded by thousands of people […] What do you think is going to happen to me? Who else will I ever meet, here on this island? […] If we're the only people left in the world […] then you'll die and we'll die and that will be the end" (135).

Alice's protest at this enforced seclusion recalls Liz Jensen's deployment of Donne's *Meditation* 17 in her rewriting of the Noah myth, *Ark Baby*. The famous passage of that text runs, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main" (Donne 1107). Jensen plays on this idea both ethically and metafictionally in order to underscore the inevitable interdependence of both characters and texts (see Mundler

Otherworlds 78-80). It is true that given Father's pre-Apocalyptic[1] isolation of his children, the usual considerations of descendance are not pertinent (the end is, in any case, nigh). However, ultimately, Father is unable to isolate the "text" which he has "written" for his children to inhabit from other texts, and following Alice's speech, above, Father reports "flash[ing] on Lot's daughters preserving their father's seed" (135; see Genesis 19: 31-32), a vision of incest. While the verb "flash" suggests that this has only just occurred to him, his hostile behaviour towards Will, in addition to his long sequestering of his daughter, both suggest that incest could always have been a part of his intention, whether consciously or unconsciously. This novel is rich in references to both "the Tales" and Shakespeare, and elements from *Donkey-Skin* may well be mobilised by the reader here, while *The Tempest* is specifically mentioned ("she starts quoting Shakespeare at me, implying that I'm Prospero, and Will her Ferdinand" [135]).

However, Father goes further than any one episode of ethically-compromised, lying behaviour: his lies are generalised and grandiose. He takes himself first for Noah. Noah is described in Genesis as "a just man, and perfect in his generations," and it is said further that "Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6: 9), and Father's identification with Noah seems to suggest that he regards himself as called to a particular purpose by virtue of his own extraordinary qualities. Once on the island, however, Father goes further: the product of childhood abuse ("And I remember *(please forget)* my father barking DON'T BE A COWARD" [17]) and mental breakdown, he paradoxically elevates himself to the status of God in his children's world, depriving them of all that is not his own creation, with its jumbled vision of biblical elements, Eden, the Flood and Apocalypse. The fact that he is a lying god sends the reader back once more to the postmodern questioning of the grand narratives.

As a character, then, Father's ethics are clearly compromised, and he is quite apparently a liar, and this is reflected in the narration. Firstly, the extraordinarily dense network of quotation—mostly biblical, but also including Shakespeare and other literary works—allows a number of "clues" to be sown in the reader's mind as to the nature of Father's character. The novel opens on Father's letter to Will, which begins, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (3). This is a quotation from I Kings 21:20, in which Ahab, known as a "wicked king," addresses Elijah, who replies "I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." The ideal reader, in the Iserian sense,[2] might therefore make the

[1] I use the word "Apocalypse" here in the sense in which James Berger employs it: he sees the various "holocausts" of the twentieth century—the Shoah, the nuclear bomb, ecological disasters—as each constituting an end, but also as anticipating the one, great Apocalypse to come (Berger 22).
[2] See Iser 69.

connection between Father and wickedness from the very first line of the text. Moreover, the very presence of such frequent quotations also has the effect of interfering with what Per Krogh Hansen terms "the verisimilar characteristics of interior monologue" (Hansen 321), which alerts the reader to the possible or probable unreliability of the narration. Elke D'hoker reinforces this point, commenting that "the narrator's peculiar verbal habits" can be used as an important means of signalling his or her "deviant interpretation or judgment of the narrative events" (D'hoker 150), and this is so in spite of the fact that Father's narrative so often mobilises what was once considered an authoritative text. Thus, even if the reader realises that Father often quotes the Bible without actually being able to identify his quotations, an overall sense of instability will nonetheless emerge, coupled with a questioning of Father's own authority.

Secondly, the narrative also contains more subtle effects, one of which is created by the use of present-tense and first-person narration. Per Krogh Hansen calls "first-person, present-tense narration" an "as-if" form, through which the narrating subject tries to recreate a situation from the past by describing it from the incidents' perspective" (318). This is very markedly the case, for example, in *The Handmaid's Tale* (see above). However, although "the Afterwoods", a small forest, is part of the topology of the island, *The Island at the End of the World* has no such temporal or narratological "afterwards." Indeed, apart from the intercalated texts, which date from the past (Father's diary, extracts from Mary's letter), it takes place entirely in the present. The "as-if" nature of the narrative, the sense of something being made up as it goes along, is echoed by the stylistic trick of using unfinished sentences with or without a full stop, which is common to all the narrating characters (Father: "They must neverever" [90]; Finn, "But there's a." [47]; Alice, "I feel" [125]).

Ethics and form, then, come together in Father's character narration, and Phelan makes another point which is pertinent here, introducing the notion of "estranging unreliability," which he defines as "unreliable narration that underlines or increases the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience" (Phelan, *Estranging* 9). He develops this by adding that "in estranging unreliability, the authorial audience recognises that adopting the narrator's perspective would mean moving away from the implied author's," concluding that "in that sense, the adoption would be a net loss for the author-audience relationship" (Phelan, *Estranging* 11). The final straw in the "estrangement" of the reader can be considered to come when Father's character narration culminates in him calling Will a liar when he seems to cast doubt on Father's version of events:

> "You're from [...] the world that got drowned by the flood."
> Silence, the flicker of a frown. "What..."
> "Don't you lie to me, boy. You may be young but you're old enough to remember the Great Flood. How did you survive it?"
> His mouth opens and closes. "I, er... I guess I was lucky." (88-89)

The word "lie" is thus redefined by Father to his own advantage, its meaning completely reversed, which requires that the reader move apart from him ethically, while Will has no other option but to appear to become complicit in Father's version of events, and the dialogue becomes an exercise in prevarication:

> "The flood changed everything, of course. No one could go through that and still be the same person"
> [...].
> "Right." He nods. "I understand." (96)

Finn's personal lexicon

Finn's narrative, conversely, can be considered to exhibit "bonding" unreliability, in which, according to Phelan, "the discrepancies between the narrator's reports, interpretations or evaluations have the paradoxical result of reducing the interpretive, affective or ethical distance between the narrator and the authorial audience" (Phelan, *Estranging* 11). Father's narrative and Finn's are not of equal ethical value to the reader: Phelan goes on to observe that where "bonding" unreliability occurs, "the authorial audience recognises the narrator's unreliability," but that this unreliability "includes some communication that the implied author—and thus the authorial audience—endorses" (Phelan, *Estranging* 11). However, in the case of Finn's narrative, a certain amount of decoding is necessary in order for the reader to arrive at this position.

Finn's narrative recalls that of Allie Fox's son Charlie in *The Mosquito Coast*, in which a young son is the observer-narrator of a megalomaniac father. Allie Fox is also bent on creating an ideal society of which he can be master, or God, also much given to quoting the Bible, and is fleeing a "war" (Theroux 24) which seems to exist only in his imagination just as the deluge only exists in Father's in *The Island at the End of the World*. Allie Fox's apparent desire is to make a better world for his children and to protect them, and he feels a need to "survive" against the odds rather than to follow the path of least resistance. However, whereas Charlie narrates very conventionally, with his narrative not much more than a cover

for the implied author—he uses "mask narration,"[1] in James Phelan's terminology (Phelan, *Estranging* 9)—Finn communicates by means of a very particular lexicon consisting of phonetically-transcribed words (for example, "I-land" for Island).

Because of these characteristics, Finn's narrative is of more immediate interest to me here than Alice's. However, it should nonetheless be noted in passing that Alice's narrative, which is educated and self-conscious, also acts as a foil to Father's in a number of interesting ways, not least among which is the implicit intertextual reference to *Alice in Wonderland*: Alice is beginning to suspect that she is a character in Father's much less innocent fantasy, but lacks the means to deconstruct this suspicion. On two occasions she protests to Father against the network of secrets and lies within which she is living: "Tell me the secret or I'll find out for myself" (52); "I don't know what I want to know, that's the whole point, isn't it? How can I know until I know? [...] Lots of things don't make sense here" (142). Finn has a less confrontational, and apparently unconscious, way of taking issue with the secrets and lies. His narrative could be considered to be very ignorant, since he seems to have inherited and magnified his mother's inaccurate written expression, manifested in the extracts of her letter which are quoted in the text ("I'm leaveing," "unfare" [198]), while Alice inherits and magnifies her father's gift for language. Nonetheless, the transcription of Finn's stream of consciousness, and the ways in which it is used to foil Father's narrative are striking, and Finn's very particular vocabulary has the characteristic of causing truth and lies to coincide within the same utterance.

In terms of the phonetic transcription and uneducated register, Finn's narrative can be compared with the intradiagetic narration of the Frozen Woman, a character in *Ark Baby* (see above), which also deploys several different narrators. This character writes a letter, extracts of which are strategically scattered throughout the novel using a technique in which one narrative cuts in on another in order to highlight a particular nodal point (Mundler, 2016 49). The Frozen Woman's illiteracy is a source of humour—at one point she congratulates herself proudly on having learnt to write as a girl (Jensen 325). She writes, for example, of the man who captured her and held her prisoner: "HORIS, wuz is first name" (Jensen 39). However, although the phonetic spelling of the name allows for an association between "Horace" and "horrible" or "horror," the way she writes, as opposed to what she writes, is not otherwise much exploited. The phonetic spellings in *The Island at the End of the World*, I

[1] Phelan defines "mask narration" as "a rhetorical act in which the implied author uses the character narrator as a spokesperson for ideas that she fully endorses," commenting further that "the implied author employs the mask of the character narrator as a means to increase the appeal and persuasiveness of the ideas expressed" (Phelan, *Estranging* 9).

would argue, are to be read very differently, which may be demonstrated by analysing some examples from Finn's lexicon.

Spelling words in a particular way might seem paradoxical, since Finn is apparently communicating only with himself, and thus going through the process of symbolisation could seem redundant, but spelling is much exploited as a technique in character narration in this text. In some cases, Finn's misspellings may give the reader pause, or even lead to confusion—for example, "pucker lips" (77) and "mirror-cull" (99) are not immediately decipherable as "apocalypse" and "miracle." In other cases, misspellings serve to make words seem less banal and more meaningful, for example, listening to a piece which Alice plays on her violin as she goes through a sexual awakening which her brother is too young to understand, he comments, "Its beauty full and fear full" (24). Similarly, "no thing" rather than "nothing" creates emphasis ("Winters no thing but a memory now" [37]), and seems to make Finn's observations new and perceptive, while the transformation of "alone" into a noun ("Ahm a lone" [63]) in a passage where Finn mourns his dead cat serves to create special emphasis. Finn can also be very creative with language, creating neologisms ("Paint I shrawk" [78], combining "shriek" and "squawk" when he is introduced to the to-him bizarre idea of women wearing make-up), and using words in his limited vocabulary very poetically. Again, he turns one part of speech into another, in this case, adjectives into reporting verbs when transcribing a conversation with Will ("sure Finn he calms [...] Finn He gentles" [101]). Such usage rivals with the literate and well-read Alice's "The final petals fall to the ground" (146, 152) to describe the loss of her virginity to Will.

The inaccuracy of Finn's language sometimes allows him to communicate more than accurate terms would convey. For example, following the arrival of Will, his courtship of Alice and the threat to the whole set-up which Will represents, Father experiences what Finn calls "a heart ache" (117), which causes him to fall down and lie on the ground (116). In this case, Finn's term is much more descriptive than "cardiac trouble," or whatever a real diagnosis would be, since it indicates, without saying anything so complicated, that Father's pain is psycho-somatic. By employing such techniques, this novel solves the problem of deploying so young an "observer narrator"[1]: Finn does not always know how to interpret what he sees, but he tells his story in such a way, and in such language, that the reader understands more than he intends. Similarly, his confusion of the words "hole" and "whole" allows a message to be communicated to the reader which goes beyond what Finn consciously says as he talks to his

[1] In "observer narration," "a character narrator other than the protagonist [is used] to tell the tale." While Finn is part of the story, and so also comes into Phelan's category of "serial narrator," he can also be considered an "observer" in that he does not actually know the story as such, and so cannot be considered, at least consciously, to tell it (Phelan, *Living* 197).

dead cat: “so Snowy I say youve been dead for a hole moon now an I realy miss you” (62). “Hole,” with its suggestion of gaps and hollowness, is much more privative than “whole.”

“Shure as I no I live on an I-land”: “Ustopia” and fictionality

The key point regarding Finn’s diction is to be found in the very first paragraph of his narrative, which contains the sentence, “shure as I no I live on an I-land and my Ma died when I wer lil” (7). This sentence is very important in that it introduces the idea of unconscious doubleness: Finn is making two statements at the same time, but without being aware that he is doing so. In the first reading of this statement, which could be said to be addressed to himself, he confirms his own beliefs and continues the familiar pattern of his own thoughts, but a second reading of the same statement, which may be carried out by the implied reader, tells a different story. The equivalence of “know” with “no” completely undermines the reliability of Finn’s affirmation, so that both the island and the death of his mother are cast into doubt from this very early stage in the novel, but without seeming to be so, so that the illusion of the fantasy can be maintained, which is the condition for the overall effectiveness of the novel. Ultimately, “I no” must be read as “I believe something which you, the reader, must question.” This extends to a different area in the novel, to what Finn calls “the No-ing tree” (9): it is clear in the light of the opening of his narrative that the concept of “knowing” in this context is in some way negated, and it will prove that the “No-ing tree,” once climbed, will “say no” to, or deny the truth of, Father’s whole enterprise.

“I-land” is among a group of similarly-transcribed nouns, such as “I-lids” (7), “I-balls” (13), “I-brows” (40), and “I-dear” (84), and adjectives including “I-scold” (22, 106). While “I-scold” seems pertinent because a scolding may well be delivered in an ice-cold manner, among the words with an “I” prefix, “I-land” is of the most interest. The phrase “I live on an I-land” (without the verb “no”) is absolutely true: Finn does live on an “I-land,” with the “I” signifying the subjectivity of his father, just as the “I” in “I-brows” or even “I-dear” sends the reader back to the idea of something belonging to a person. Furthermore, the “land” the place over which Father rules, his own, entirely subjective, creation, and the separation of “land” from the previous syllable by means of a hyphen emphasises the relation of this word to fictional or fantastic constructs such as “the Land of Oz” in *The Wizard of Oz*, “Neverland” in *Peter Pan*, or, once more, “Wonderland” in *Alice*.

Thus, the apparently simple statement at the beginning of Finn’s narrative (“shure as I no I live on an I-land and my Ma died when I wer lil” [7]) interestingly combines truth-telling with lies: indeed, truth is established by means of lies which seem, paradoxically, to be

transcribed "transparently." Finn's language, and the use he makes of his personal lexicon, can thus be related to the language of utopia and dystopia, islands, incidentally, being an oft-used setting for such tropes. Arguably, this novel comes into the category of what Margaret Atwood calls "ustopia," the "continuum within which utopia becomes dystopia" *(In Other Worlds* 64), the slide, in this case, from the one to the other being dependent on the discovery of Father's original lie, which is the very subject of the novel. I have previously discussed the codified and monologic language of ustopia (see Mundler, 2016 14-15), arguing that meaning tends to undergo one of three processes (Mundler, 2016 73): limitation, change/reversal and stretching by means of euphemism. Finn's use of *"no"* to unconsciously bring into question what he claims to *know* can be read as an example of the second of these processes, while "i-land" is, for the reasons discussed above, an example of the third (Father's redefinition of the word "lie," above, is a good example of the first).

Finn, in spite of himself, is deploying a dystopic language which does indeed tend towards codification and monologism. However, this is subverted and thrown off course. I have previously used the term "meta-ustopia," an embellishment of Atwood's term, to denote ustopic texts which question and problematise language (Mundler, 2016 15). In this case, Finn's narrative works with, or against, the language of Father's narrative in order that intratextual irony may operate. The point is that Finn tells his truth with his own words, he creates his own islands of meaning, in a reflection of Father's construction of the Island, but that the mendacious nature of his own words—a mendacity for which he is not responsible—is revealed when read in conjunction with Father's narrative. Thus, not only does the novel propose "a secret communion of the author and reader behind the narrator's back" (Booth 300), but a further layer of refraction and interaction between the two narratives. Moreover, Finn's narrative works similarly against the reader's own, greater, knowledge of the written language, which in itself creates an irony that questions the reliability of what Finn says.

It is also possible to look at Finn's language in another way: Father seeks, but in his case deliberately, to impose a univocal discourse. He rejects Babylon, the name he uses to designate the "contaminated" world they have left behind (33, 87, 96), and more specifically Los Angeles. Some have argued that the term "Babylon" has the same root as "Babel",[1] and this association allows a link to be made with the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1),

[1] Ashby argues as follows: **"**Babel and Babylon are the same city. In fact, *Babel* is a transliteration of the Hebrew word בָּבֶל ("Ba-bel"), while *Babylon* comes from the Greek Βαβυλῶνος ("Babylonos"). In all 233 occurrences of *Babel* in the Old Testament, it is translated *Babylon* in Greek. What is more, both the ancient Babel in Genesis 10-11 and the more recent Babylon of Daniel's day are said to be located in the plains of Shinar (Gen. 10: 10; 11: 2; Daniel 1: 2)" (Ashby).

in which a confusion of languages is visited on humankind as punishment for trying to build a tower tall enough to reach heaven. In *The Island at the End of the World*, this in turn allows an association with the idea of the "knowing tree" built by Father: it is extremely tall, so much so that its upper branches "vani[sh] in the mist" (5), and it "reaches heaven" in that it allows for a clear view of what Alice deems "the whole world" (205). But Father does not succeed in rejecting the "babble" of Babel, and imposing one, single discourse: Finn's simple, uneducated, semi-literate diction works to undermine this univocity Father seeks, even though Finn communicates what he himself is "not conscious of and does not wish to convey" (D'hoker 165).

The novel ends with what can be interpreted as a recognition on Finn's part of the fictionality of Father's world. By this stage, Alice is gone, and Father, vanquished and brought down, lies weeping in the arms of his youngest child, Daisy, but there is also an interesting shift of ontological level. Finn, the narrator of the last chapter, although he has been silent for the rest of Part II, reports on the scene as follows:

> There there shes saying. There there. Don't cry Pa it were just a bad dream
> [...]
> Weare all going to live haply
> Everafter.
> (215)

This can be read as Finn's acknowledgment of a radical change from experiencing Father's version of events as reality, characterised by certitudes ("shure as I know..." [see above]), to experiencing Father's "reality" as a story only, a tale which, while it can be related to reality, does not constitute that reality, but is only a commentary on one version of it.

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