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Landslide: a memoir?

and

‘From the mouth of babes’: Considering memoir’s validity solely from a child narrator (or, *sans* adult narrator)

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
January 2025

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My hands are not the ones tapping the keyboard, although I still believe they are,

and these words you are reading are entirely hers, which I still believe are mine.

Amy Tan, *Where the Past Begins*

...the human brain...captures many complex relationships in the form of narrative structures...

we may also conceive of each of our lives as a journey constituted by narration.

Monica Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*

Abstract

This PhD thesis serves a dual purpose: a creative excerpt from *Landslide*, my (debated) 'memoir'; alongside critical commentary on its specific writing process within the broader contexts of memoir, narratology, and child narration.

The memoir is an itinerant coming-of-age journey across continental United States at the turn of the twenty-first century, chronicling my experiences from (roughly) ages four to eighteen. It is set against the backdrop of a turbulent, maladjusted family dynamic marked by divorce, narcissistic abuse, and alienation—all of which hinder personal development. *Landslide* explores the tension between family loyalty and personal identity amid the constant cycle of 'un-settlement'; cultural and political reflections on America's landscape; the impact of a millennial's particular education; and the resilience required to break generational cycles of habitual dysfunction. The excerpt provided presents 'Part One: Texas' and 'Part Two: Utah'—though the narrative does extend to 'Part Three: Midwest', 'Part Four: San Diego', and 'Part Five: Maryland'.

The critical commentary investigates the challenges of writing a childhood memoir with a child narrator only—'erasing' the adult narrator entirely. Through a practice-based approach that references *Landslide*, I address such questions as: can a child authentically narrate a memoir on their own? Would it still qualify as memoir? How can one 'truthfully' depict a child's perspective and internal logic? I explore how 'authenticity' in memoir is subjective, tied to 'emotional' (rather than 'absolute') truth: traditional notions of ethical accountability in memoir-writing seem to stifle narratorial innovation particularly, preventing the genre from evolving. Through my advocation

for a ‘cautious experimentation’, I propose re-approaching memoir in a manner that embraces unique approaches, valuing emotional resonance *alongside* factual precision. My research desires to further develop the borderlines of memoir by presenting its potentially ‘untapped’ potential to further provide fresh perspectives to personal history, and memory.

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All photographs are taken by the author's family, with permission.

Introduction

I sense this child narrator has always been within me, somehow.

Upon reflection, it's striking how deeply intertwined the memories of my youth are, with the child who once narrated them. Like oral folktales passed down through generations, these origin stories I've held in near-recitation feel inseparable from the narrator-protagonist, who both experienced *and* told. It's almost comical, then, to recall how—on that low-fog morning in Edinburgh, nervously awaiting feedback from a room full of (mostly) fiction writers—my Master's workshop collectively chimed one singular, harmonious observation:

'Cut the adult. Leave the child narrator'.

I'm paraphrasing, of course; but to them, my memoir felt unanchored, uncertain in terms of narrator. They urged me to 'lean into' this curious, childlike chronicler I had allowed to emerge unconsciously, even though I had been aiming for the opposite. My adult narrator, they said, felt forced.

They were right, of course.

Even so, I couldn't help but find their aversion somewhat amusing. It was likely a reaction to its clumsy, drafty execution—were I to ignore their advice, I might have refined the adult narrator in a way that might have made sense for my memoir. Why wouldn't it? It's made sense for so many a memoir before mine. From *The Book of Margery Kempe* and Caeser's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico,* to the ever-popular *Just Kids* by Patty Smith and *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, to even more contemporary splashes like *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert or Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, adult narrators seemed to reign supreme. Gérard Genette, in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, contends that 'subsequent' narration is common in most narrative

discourse, while F. K. Stanzel and Norman Saadi Nikro (respectively) emphasize the dominance of mature, reflective narrators within memoir.[1] [2] [3] In this vein, Robin Freeman and Karen Le Rossignol (as well as Barrie Jean Borich) collectively observe that the traditional memoirist—an *adult* author—presents themselves within the text as a thinly disguised narrator, which they claim is 'integral' to the narrative itself.[4] [5] This adult narrator therefore adopts an 'explanatory' role (analysing events within broader contexts, exploring characters' motivations, and offering philosophical or moral insights) via an 'overt' narrating style.[6] Such commentary works to clarify or expand the text, Elizabeth Welt Trahan argues in 'Genre and the Memoir': these adult narrators often implement 'framing structures' to guide their purpose, inviting readers to form their own judgments.[7] This may explain why they are seemingly so effective in memoirs (or, *preferred*): memoir appears to benefit *most* from a narrator who *embodies hindsight*. The simplest choice, therefore, would be to stick with the adult.

Despite their advice ringing in my head, however, it only reinforced what I already knew (but wasn't ready to admit): I disliked the idea of *only* utilizing an adult narrator for childhood memoir. Not because I believed them to be poor narrators**,** but because I wasn't convinced they were *always* the 'ideal' choice, so to speak. Stanzel suggests that adult narrators *can* convey a more 'detached, less intimate' perspective on themselves, making their narrative motivations seem

[1] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 220.
[2] F. K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. by Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 102.
[3] Norman Saadi Nikro, 'Edward Said and AutoBioGraphy' (Göttengen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), p. 433.
[4] Robin Freeman & Karen Le Rossignol, 'Writer-as-narrator: engaging the debate around the (un)reliable narrator in memoir and the personal essay' (Geelong: Deakin University, 2015), p. 3.
[5] Barrie Jean Borich, 'What Is Creative Nonfiction? An Introduction' < https://barriejeanborich.com/what-is-creative-nonfiction-an-introduction/ > [accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[6] Monica Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, trans. by Patricia Häusler-Greenfield and Monika Fludernik (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), p. 27.
[7] Elizabeth Welt Trahan, 'Genre and the Memoir' (New York: Modern Language Association, 2008), p. 256.

more ‘literary-aesthetic’, he explains, than ‘existential’.[8] I could feel this sort of emptiness as a reader, both aloof and deliberately kept at bay; Thomas Larson and Andrea Hammel further categorize adult narrators as sometimes ‘inconsistent’, ‘overly fickle’ or even ‘passive’.[9] [10] Stanzel even declares these time-honoured adults as the ‘laziest’ approach to novel (or novel-*style*) writing—rather ironic, I found, considering their immense popularity within memoir.[11] Lisa Dale Norton likewise characterizes the ‘reminiscent’ narrator as sometimes ‘awkward’ in their storytelling; a point Linda Steinmetz seems to expand on, asserting their proclivity to ‘lose sight’ of the narrative’s emotional core in favour of an ‘elaborate’, or ‘overly intricate’, structure. This I certainly agreed with (particularly within my own written attempts): despite their many qualities, adult narrators seemed to remain safely along the *oh-so-temptingly* superficial, surface-level shores of the genre.[12] Steinmetz continues to observe that, much like adults in society, adult narrators are also held to a higher standard of narrative responsibility—for they are ‘expected’ to deliver essential information to readers (unless a clear reason for withholding exists).[13] Therefore, in always being called upon to explain *every* narrative gap and inconsistency, the adult narrator can come across as ‘too intrusive’.

Anne O’Leary, in ‘Tatty as Child Narrator’ criticizes the use of adult narrators in memoirs: arguing that their cynical and critical tone seems to arise from excessive *interference*, which can

[8] Stanzel, pp. 11, 98 & 102.
[9] Thomas Larson, *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading & Writing Personal Narrative* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 54.
[10] Andrea Hammel, ‘Between Adult Narrator and Narrated Child: Autobiographical Writing by Former Members of the Kindertrasporte’ (Philadelphia: Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History, 2005), p. 63.
[11] Stanzel, p. 7.
[12] Lisa Dale Norton, ‘Writing Narrative Nonfiction: The Protagonist, Part 1: Child narrator vs. Reminiscent narrator’ < https://authorlink.com/writing-insights/writing-narrative-nonfiction-the-protagonist-part-i-child-narrator-vs-reminiscent-narrator-2/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[13] Linda Steinmetz, ‘Extremely Young & Incredibly Wise: The Function of Child Narrators in Adult Fiction’ (Luxemborg: Atert-Lycée Redange, 2011), p. 126.

lead to heavy judgment (and overdramatization) of events.[14] Hammel likewise critiques their repetitiveness of interruptive commentary, whilst Genette condemns such as an 'invasion of the story'.[15] [16] Stanzel, as well, questions whether this narrator *has* the authority to intervene as much as they do, for such 'meta'-narration can *meddle with* and *disrupt* the 'illusion' of reality.[17] This constant disturbance seems to 'unbalance' the narrative, Nils Gunder Hansen argues in 'The Question of Unreliability in Autobiographical Narration'—and I certainly agree.[18] Tara Westover's narrator, in *Educated*, frequently employs this, such as stating 'Fourteen years after the incident with the Weavers, I would sit in a university classroom and listen to a professor…'.[19] Michael Toolan explains this via their frequent use of *prolepses*—which, while common, can feel abrupt and jarring, undermining or completely removing narrative suspense by revealing future events before they 'naturally' unfold in the story's chronology.[20] William Edmiston, in 'Focalization and the First-Person Narrator: a Revision of the Theory', also notes that the retrospective viewpoint will likewise 'correct' their earlier thoughts, with their *current* beliefs[21]—yet this raises the question: is this genuine honesty, or revisionist history?

I appreciate Annie Dillard's take on this, in 'To Fashion a Text', who advises memoir narrators to steer clear of 'clinging to the reader like a drunk', frequently disrupting the narrative flow with assertions of an 'almighty' retrospective authority.[22] Wayne C. Booth similarly

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[14] Anne O'Leary, 'Tatty as Child Narrator' < https://headstuff.org/culture/literature/tatty-as-a-child-narrator/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[15] Hammel, p. 63.
[16] Genette, p. 259.
[17] Stanzel, p. 18.
[18] Nils Gunder Hansen, 'The Question of Unreliability in Autobiographical Narration' (Odense: Res Cogitans, 2018), pp. 150-1.
[19] Tara Westover, *Educated* (London: Windmill Books, 2018), p. 36.
[20] Michael Toolan, *Narrative: a critical linguistic introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), p. 46.
[21] William F. Edmiston, 'Focalization and the First-Person Narrator: a Revision of the Theory' (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 736.
[22] Annie Dillard, 'To Fashion a Text' (Boston: Mariner Books, 1987), p. 170.

dismisses such interruptive commentary as 'patronising' and frequently 'superfluous'—as if the adult narrator speaks upon a 'sudden stroke of lightning […] just as the orator raises his arms to make a dramatic point about God'.[23] Gornick criticizes these interferences as 'wearisome' in their futile attempts to impart wisdom; whilst Steinmetz notes that an adult narrator can unintentionally alienate readers by appearing *pedantic*, or clashing in tone.[24] [25] Abigail Gosselin, in 'Memoirs as Mirrors: Counterstories in Contemporary Memoir', claims adult narrators can encourage a sensationalistic and judgmental 'gaze' of the 'other', whilst Genette describes it as a 'difference in personal experience' that gives these narrators the authority to treat the reader (or other characters) with such condescending or ironic superiority.[26] [27] 'Adults do not talk to us,' Toni Morrison explains—'they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information'; this may be because adults often feel *superior* to those they have an advantage over, either by age or experience.[28] Therefore, as Philip Gerard argues in *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life*, I too find it tempting to rely on obscurity: hiding behind complex language or flaunting knowledge to impress readers. However, I agree that the true merit of memoir lies in *embracing* earnestness: presenting these densely-woven narratives in a natural, unadorned (and unbroken) manner.[29]

Alongside their more 'disruptive' or 'arrogant' tendencies, adult narrators also face criticism for exhibiting 'Machiavellian'-type behaviours. Claire King, in 'To Boldly Write in the

[23] Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 6.
[24] Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), p. 90.
[25] Steinmetz, pp. 90 & 132.
[26] Abigail Gosselin, 'Memoirs as Mirrors: Counterstories in Contemporary Memoir' (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), p. 133.
[27] Genette, p. 252.
[28] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, (Penguin Random House UK, 1970), p. 13.
[29] Philip Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life* (Lake Zurich: Waveland Pr Inc, 2004), pp. 176-7.

Voice of a Child', observes them to be 'manipulative'—altering their language in order to make their narration more appealing and thus, risking distortion.[30] I find this particularly curious; wouldn't this 'threat' also risk the integrity of memoir itself? Erich Goode continues King's point in 'Narrating the Transgressive Self': noting how adult narrators *frame* themselves in relation to what is deemed 'admirable', *selectively* sharing their narrated memories whilst simultaneously *justifying* their actions.[31] It's not hard to see how, perhaps, the adult narrator can come across as an 'authorial'-like figure (rather than traditionally first-person). Monica Fludernik, in *An Introduction to Narratology*, describes the retrospective first-person narrative with a strong narrating self as *equivalent* to the authorial narrator; further outlining how many criticize its attempts at adopting a 'quasi-divine perspective' as 'too neat (content-wise) and too confused and sprawling (formally) for some people's taste'.[32] This might be my greatest frustration with adult memoir narrators: they often '[forget] their part', as Stanzel argues, momentarily 'abandoning' their viewpoint to adopt an almost 'omniscient'-like lens.[33] Therefore, in this sagacious 'imitation' such narration finds controversy—for they are 'clearly not all-knowing', Fludernik decries, 'or all-telling'. In selectively allowing access to some characters' thoughts, while withholding information to create suspense, the adult narrator of memoir works unscrupulously towards, I feel, a potentially misguided attempt at what memoir (particularly, *childhood* memoir) could be.[34] And yet it seems so uncommon (almost *forbidden*, in a way) for a memoir to exist without one.

Their overwhelming dominance started to wear on me, blocking any progress towards a completed draft. I felt *forced*, somewhat, to narrate my memoir in a manner that didn't feel true.

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[30] Claire, King 'To Boldly Write in the Voice of a Child' < https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/advice/boldly-write-voice-child > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[31] Erich Goode, 'Narrating the Transgressive Self' (London: Sage Publications, 2014), p. 59.
[32] Fludernik, pp. 93 & 130-131.
[33] Stanzel, p. 208.
[34] Fludernik, p. 113.

This was the root of the issue: I wanted to let my child speak—unfiltered, without any interference from an adult. Would that work? Is it acceptable?

Could a memoir exist, without an adult narrator present?

Some would say yes. In fact, some already have. *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt comes to mind, often cited with an 'immediate' narration of a child.[35] [36] *The Liar's Club* by Mary Karr is likewise categorized as 'child-narrated', by many.[37] [38] Even more recently—memoirs like *Educated* by Tara Westover, or *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jennette McCurdy—all seem to elicit the same classification; one I find curious.[39] [40] Even in fiction—the ever-popular 'Scout', and 'Maisie'—all labelled by many as some of the most 'classic' representations of child narrators.[41] [42] However, I find myself strongly doubting these claims: to me, these are not child narrators at all—but *adult* narrators, recounting the events of child *protagonists*.

It seems many interpret the mere *appearance* of a literary child as 'proof' of a child narrator—rather than recognizing the narrative as the *child's* story, conveyed through the *lens* of an adult narrator. Alfred Mugambi Ong'ang'a thoroughly discusses this in 'Adoption of Adult Voice and the Integrity of the Child Narrator in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Dreams in a Time of War*',

[35] Susan Tetlow Harrington, 'Angela's Ashes' (Salisbury: Literature/Film Quarterly, 2001), p. 58.
[36] Fred Miller Robinson, '"The One Way Out": Limerick and *Angela's Ashes*' (St. Paul: New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua, 2000), p. 10.
[37] Kiera V. Williams '"Between Creation and Devouring": Southern Women Writers and the Politics of Motherhood' (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 33.
[38] Megan Brown, 'The Memoir as Provocation: A Case for "Me Studies" in Undergraduate Classes' (Baltimore: *College Literature*, 2010), p. 128.
[39] Dr Vander Zee, 'Narrative Style: *Dream House* & *Educated*' < https://blogs.charleston.edu/autobiography/2021/10/22/narrative-style-dream-house-educated/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[40] Nina Li Coomes, 'Don't Judge *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Its Title' < https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2022/08/im-glad-my-mom-died-jennette-mcurdy-book-review/671189/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[41] Mary McCue Swietek, 'William Faulkner, Harper Lee, and the Rise of the Southern Child Narrator' (Cookeville: Tennessee Technological University, 2009), p. 1.
[42] Jessa Crispin, 'Here's why you shouldn't write a novel with a child narrator' < https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/shouldnt-write-novel-child-narrator/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]

where the supposed child 'narrator' is *actually* an adult, recounting events as a child *eyewitness*.[43] Larson and Marah Gubar likewise describe how these so-called 'child narrators' often betray themselves as adult narrators in disguise—usually by speaking in the third person, or shifting from 'we' to 'I' (sometimes mid-sentence). This undeniably complicates the reader's ability to identify with the narrator.[44] [45] However, Genette explains that autobiographical narratives often require incorporation of a broader social chronicle—one that may extend beyond the narrator's own knowledge.[46] Understandable—but would we classify this as 'true' child narration? A narrator who—though a professed 'child'— seems to *know* more than that child could, at the time? Many employ 'precocious' child narrators to address this linguistic challenge: Steinmetz observes that the fictional 'child' narrator Momo, in Romain Gary's *Life Before Us*, adopts more 'adult' language than 'most' children, because he was raised in a 'less protective' environment (as evidenced by the remark, 'I stopped being ignorant when I was three or four, and I sometimes miss it'). However, the novel does not clarify exactly *how* Momo 'ceased' to be ignorant—or even has the *awareness*, as a proclaimed 'child narrator', of his own ignorance—thus revealing themselves as an adult narrator in disguise.[47] [48] Even the oft-cited Scout, of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, has been rightfully reevaluated by many as an *adult* narrator who reminisces about her six-year-old self *as protagonist*; similar to Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, who's adult narrator's presence is

[43] Alfred Mugambi Ong'ang'a, 'Adoption of Adult Voice and the Integrity of the Child Narrator in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Dreams in a Time of War*' (Nairobi: Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa, 2022), pp. 5-8.
[44] Larson, p. 43.
[45] Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 50-1.
[46] Genette, pp. 250-251.
[47] Steinmetz, p. 102.
[48] Romain Gary, *The Life Before Us* (New York: New Directions, 1986), p. 1.

palpable alongside the child's worldview.[49] [50] Additionally, Toolan notes that in the early chapters of *Great Expectations*, the narrator is Pip as an adult, with an extensive vocabulary—who differs from the focaliser, Pip the child protagonist.[51] By contrast, John Earl Basset, in '"*Huckleberry Finn*": The End lies in the Beginning' points out that Huck is not a thinly-veiled 'stand-in' for Twain—but purely the child narrator Huck, all by himself.[52]

What many of these narrators appeared to function as (particularly within childhood memoirs) were *dual* narrators: their responsibilities divided (often unevenly) between the adult, and the occasional presence of the child. Multiple scholars (such as Edmiston, Hammel, and Michael Steinberg) refer to childhood memoir narrators as 'dual' in perspective and voice; the 'tension' between the two, they argue, allows both immediate experience and long-term impact to unfold in (hopeful) harmony. [53] [54] [55] *Liar's Club* and *Angela's Ashes* certainly employ this, often relying on the adult narrator to mediate between past trauma and present understanding; Helma Van-Lieprop Debrawer argues that this bridges both narrators together in 'healing'.[56] Thomas Larson, in *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading & Writing Personal Narrative*, describes this dynamic somewhat sarcastically: 'At times, it is the child remembering (*wah, wah,* how I was wronged by selfish parents and a nasty brother). At other times, it is the adult remembering *inside of* and *for* the partially formed consciousness of the child'. He calls this 'layered simultaneity' the

[49] David Koranda, 'Child narrators' < http://www.jumpspace.cz/jine/english-essays/child-narrators/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[50] Hurst, pp. 24-5 & 107.
[51] Toolan, p. 60.
[52] John Earl Bassett, '"Huckleberry Finn": The End lies in the Beginning' (Champaign: American Literary Realism, 1870-1910, 1984), p. 92-3.
[53] Edmiston, p. 738.
[54] Hammel, pp. 68 & 71.
[55] Michael Steinberg, 'Finding the Inner Story in Memoirs and Personal Essays' (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2003), p. 187.
[56] Helma Van Lierop-Debrawer 'How the Reader Matters: Autobiographies of childhood for young readers' (Groningen: European Journal of Life Writing, 2018), p. 27.

key to delineating between the childhood memoirist's remembering *and* remembered selves. [57] This relationship in the first-person often invites discussion of the various 'I's' at play: the mature narrator-author ('"I"-now', 'narrating "I"), and the past narrator-hero ('"I"-then', 'experiencing "I").[58] [59] Robyn Warhol-Down segregates them by narratorial 'level' (the intradiegetic 'story world' and the extradiegetic 'present-day world'), whilst Thomas Couser prefers the terms 'inside narrator' (character narrator) and 'outside narrator' to delineate the duality.[60] [61] However you describe it, these subdivisions of co-narration are explicitly based on the narrator's *age*: with the former focusing on 'scene' (or 'showing'), the latter capitalizing on 'summary' (or 'telling'). Because first-person narration remains tied to personal experience, balancing internal perspectives of reflector-characters with external perspectives of teller-characters is paramount, Stanzel and Sven Birkerts argue, for childhood memoirs' success: as they chart 'transformative growth'.[62] [63] Genette notes how these narratives often bring the hero (child narrator) to the adult narrator's present perspective by their conclusions, maintaining a gap between them until their convergence.[64] Therefore, employing only a single 'I' threatens 'emotional flatness', Sue Silverman argues in 'From Innocence to Experience: Multiple Voices in Memoir'; as both Paul Zakrzewski and Vivian Gornick (respectively) declare that, without such, these narratives risk

[57] Larson, pp. 36 & 56.
[58] Nicole E. Meyer, 'Review of the memoir and the memoirist: reading and writing personal narrative' (Honolulu: Biography, 2009), p. 875.
[59] Paul Zakrzewski, 'How do I craft a sophisticated narrator in a memoir of childhood?' < https://www.essaydaily.org/2019/01/paul-zakrzewski-how-do-i-craft.html > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[60] Robyn Warhol & Robyn Warhol-Down, 'The space between: a narrative approach to Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*' (Baltimore: College Literature, 2011), 3.
[61] Thomas Couser, *Memoir: an introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 57.
[62] Stanzel, p. 82.
[63] Sven Birkerts, *The Art of Time in Memoir: Then, Again* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2007), p. 37.
[64] Genette, p. 33.

psychological depth, meaning, and even integrity altogether.[65] [66] [67] Therefore, to achieve 'ideal' first person narration, and thus produce a memoir that emerges 'truthfully', the childhood memoir *must*, it seems, balance their two perspectives as *two distinct narrators* in order to achieve 'symmetry of tone'.[68]

Even so, I still had my reservations. I'd never been particularly fond of 'dual' narration to begin with: I often attach myself to one narrator, with the other nothing more than an annoyance to the reading process. This 'harmonious', or 'equal' narratorial balance seemed better in *theory*, than *practice*: many childhood memoirs I'd come across still relied almost wholly on their adult narrator—ignoring their child narrator until convenient, for a scene or two. McCourt quickly retreats from his establishing 'child' narrator in the same manner that both Karr and Westover imitate. They're enticed enough, it seems, by the child narrator to touch briefly upon it—*if only for a second*—before quickly retreating back, once again, into the safer, seemingly 'sturdier' confines of adult narration. It all just reads, to me, as a confused, poorly-crafted adult narrator most of the time (rather than an 'equal' narrating style). Is this as far as childhood memoir narrators go?

Following my workshop's advice, I became increasingly intrigued by the idea of 'complete' child narration (or what one might call a 'sole' child narrator, perhaps): where the complete and total absence of the adult narrator seemed to allow the narrative to *fully centre* on the child's *experiencing self*, as both protagonist *and* narrator. Such rich examples of this I found in the child narrators of Emma Donaghue's *Room*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and even Christopher Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the*

[65] Sue William Silverman, 'From Innocence to Experience: Multiple Voices in Memoir' (Lansing: Fourth Genre, 2004), p. 121.
[66] Zakrzewski, 'Sophisticated'.
[67] Gornick, p. 10.
[68] Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 27.

Nighttime. The reader finds themselves, perhaps a bit uneasily, alone with the child—and while that space holds a significant amount of fear, it could also offer a profound sense of freedom (if managed correctly).

Despite these personal revelations, most examples of 'sole' child narration I found appear to exist mainly in fictional novels; my attempts to identify a similar narrative approach within memoir proved incredibly scarce. The closest I could find were *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, and *The Part that Burns* by Jeannine Ouellette—alongside Anne Frank's classic *Diary of a Young Girl*. Both Walls's and Ouellette's frequent emphasis on a childlike lens, alongside Frank being obviously a child *author* herself, seem to be the most 'complete' representations of child narrators steering memoir. However—once again—these works would only immerse themselves *so far* into their supposedly 'complete' child narrator, before shifting back into focus: the adult voice (though fairly hidden) always taking control once more (Frank's father, Otto, even editing Anne's original narrator before publication with a deft pen). However Sandra Cisneros's highly autobiographical 'novella' *The House on Mango Street*, Ray Bradbury's hybrid narrative *Dandelion Wine*, and Chris Westoby's *The Fear Talking*, for one, could all arguably be both 'sole' child narrated works, and memoirs (or 'memoir-like'). But the fact that I, personally, have tremendous difficulty locating even a *handful* of childhood memoirs that so *exclusively* give the reigns to their child narrator (like mine), makes me wonder if there is something 'wrong', 'forbidden' or even *foolish* in what I thought was a completely original approach to personal narrative. Why don't more memoirists fully commit to their child narrator? Does it feel incongruous somehow, to the form?

This brings me to both my creative and critical impetus: could the adult narrator be entirely removed from a memoir—specifically *childhood* memoir—whilst still retaining the essence of the

form? Or would such a choice fundamentally undermine it: creating a narrative that is neither memoir, nor child-narrated? Is the structure of memoir *so dependent* on what only an adult narrator can offer? And if so, what exactly is that contribution? Why couldn't a child narrator fulfil the same role, left on their own?

Is it possible to meet the expectations of memoir, without involving an adult narrator?

And what would it look like—to craft my childhood memoir, entirely from a 'sole' child narrator?

Would you read it?

‘From the mouth of babes’: Considering memoir’s validity solely from a child narrator (or, *sans* adult narrator)

Chapter One: Imbalanced Voice

Focalising one's childhood memoir solely through the experiencing child self can pose several challenges: such as the imbalanced mimesis of voice, the inherent unreliability of their perspective, and a potential dismissal as 'fictional' (which raises ethical concerns). This critical analysis will examine such charges to assess whether the child narrator can independently lead their own memoir—or whether these issues ultimately *exclude* them from the genre's narratorial possibilities (thus highlighting the limits of memoir's experimental scope, and the reach of a 'sole' child narrator).

1.1. Voice

The child narrator's voice is highly distinctive, yet surprisingly difficult to portray. Their 'specific' language model reflects a particular way of thinking that, obviously, contrasts with an adult.[69] [70] Generally speaking, most seem to agree that the successful evocation of child's voice depends on features that characterise real-life child speech (or, observable speech patterns from children in reality). Mary Jane Hurst, in *The Voice of the Child in American Literature,* explains that the linguistic functions observed in studies of children's natural speech are also reflected in their literary speech; with distinctions further shaped by age differences (e.g., a four-year-old sounds different from a twelve-year-old, etc.).[71] These can be generally classified by their simple yet imaginative *lexis*, and their direct yet discursive *syntax*.

[69] Koranda, 'Child'.
[70] Fludernik, p. 85.
[71] Mary Jane Hurst, *The Voice of the Child in American Literature* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), p. 48.

Hurst and Rebecca Rae Garonzik both emphasize a predominantly 'simplistic' language style as the hallmark of child narrator's speech—right down to their vocabulary.[72] [73] This 'extremely straightforward' lexicon, Leech and Short describe in *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, is both constrained *and* frequent in repetition.[74] Alicia Otano finds that child narrators typically use language that revolves around action verbs with *basic* subjects and objects, or state-of-being verbs.[75] In addition, a child narrator's linguistic choices often read as atypical, strange, or simply absurd. Steinmetz suggests that children form a 'social subculture', or a 'micro-society' of their own, which implies they also possess a 'partially self-contained language'. This often results in the invention, or creation, of their *own* lexis: treating most verbs as 'regular' rather than recognizing irregular forms.[76] Hurst uses the examples of 'free' when a child is meant to say 'three', to indicate a difficulty with the 'th' sound—or 'bringed', to show ignorance with correct verb conjugation, and so on.[77] This is seen in such works as *Extremely Loud*, where the child narrator creates verbs such as 'skateboarded' and 'tambourining'; in *Room* where the child narrator not only describes a melted spoon as 'Meltedy Spoon', but likewise incorrectly refers to many common nouns as proper nouns (such as 'Lamp', 'Wardrobe', 'Oven Wall', 'Skylight' or, of course, 'Room'); even *As I Lay Dying,* where one of its child narrators Vardaman conjugated improperly verbs like 'kilt', 'grabbler', and so on (however, dialect plays a key factor here, as well). [78] [79] [80] I employ this, albeit sparingly, in my own memoir as my child

[72] Hurst, p. 18.
[73] Rebecca Garonzik, '"To name that thing without a name': Exploring the Link Between Poetry and the Child's Voice in Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street' (Lansing: Letras Femeninas, 2011), p. 142.
[74] Leech and Short, p. 164.
[75] Alicia Otano, *Speaking the Past: Child Perspective and the Asian American Bildungsroman* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2012), p. 9.
[76] Steinmetz, p. 50.
[77] Hurst, p. 21.
[78] Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 1-2.
[79] Emma Donaghue, *Room* (London: Picador, 2015), p. 13-25.
[80] William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Vintage Classics, 1996), p. 20.

narrator says, ‘Ma tells me it means don’t worry, a house will be builded there soon so I don’t’.[81] This reflects the unique logic children create, with their alternative verbal habits serving as one expression of their reasoning. David Koranda surmises this to be the result of the child narrator’s greater *flexibility* of forms and pronunciation (compared to adults), highlighting examples of playful language like ‘deebriss,’ ‘sweeside,’ ‘dongbulla,’ ‘scaffole,’ and ‘creckant,’ alongside childish gibberish like ‘Nonsense! Sky, fly, pie, soup, hoop, croup—gorgeous’.[82] Because storytelling, fantasy play, and games all rely on an *imaginative* use of language, children’s verbal expression often reflects this equally fantastical (yet ironically simplistic) language play that, in turn, is mimetically produced for child narrators.[83] Additionally, child narrators often exhibit an unclear use of *pronouns*, where it is uncertain to *whom* (or *what*) they are quite literally referring to. Likewise, what child narrators *don’t* include, or ‘negate’ by use of *negatives,* also plays into their unique phraseology. Richard Ely, Ann MacGibbon, and Allyssa McCabe explain this via ‘non-existence’ (i.e., ‘We didn’t have no cat or anything’), ‘non-occurrence’ (i.e., ‘We didn’t even stop to eat’), and/or ‘in-ability’ (i.e., ‘He can’t even stand up and walk); indicating the child’s recognition of what might be relevant to their own understanding of the story.[84]

Additionally, child narrators also tend to speak in short, simple, or compound *sentences*, free of complex modifying phrases and clauses.[85] Some obvious examples within my narrative are the declarative motifs in the form of strings of noun phrases (‘Big sky, yellow desert, white space’; ‘Dark fences, bricks, butt-naked’; ‘Orange sky, red dirt, purple sunset’; ‘Orange dust, no clouds, open road’; ‘Red rocks, blue mountains, purple sky’.[86]) that display an almost immediate,

[81] Amanda-Marie Kale, *Landslide* (unpublished manuscript), p. 25. [my italics]
[82] Koranda, ‘Child’.
[83] Hurst, pp. 46 & 60.
[84] Richard Ely, Ann MacGibbon and Allyssa McCabe, ‘She Don’t Care: Negatives in Children’s Narratives’ (Detroit: Merrill-Palmer, 2000), p. 466.
[85] Hurst, p. 15.
[86] Kale, pp. 15, 18, 22, 95 & 166.

impulsive regurgitation of information—pure naming of things—both seen and felt; back to *As I Lay,* whose child narrator Vardaman reports his observations frequently through the use of simple syntax: 'I am not crying now. I am not anything. Dewey Dell comes to the hill and calls me. Vardaman. I am not anything. I am quiet. You, Vardaman. I can cry now, feeling and hearing my tears'.[87] This inclination towards an overly straightforward *syntax* reflects one way child narrators process information mimetically: through brief, direct declarative statements that lack complexity and reasoning, often appearing impulsive or minimally analytical. Hurst suggests that children's early word combinations reflect a type of case system, relying more on semantic roles than on parts of speech or syntactic functions. This can be seen in typical early two-word phrases like 'cookie hot' (a patient-state construction) or 'doggie run' (an agent-action construction).[88] *As I Lay* utilizes some two-word combinations, like 'not-fish' and 'not-blood'—as well as my own memoir ('not-ocean', 'not-died', 'not-smiling', 'not-scary', 'not-here', 'not-Mormon' and 'not-normal').[89] [90] Leech and Short characterise such as a 'naïve narrative style,' where there is no clear indication of the connections between events or their relative significance.[91] This suggests a narrative approach resembling *reportage*, similar to what Toolan identifies in his study on how children acquire narrative habits: 'Recount' emerges as the first narrative-style children grasp, while 'report' is the initial expository-style genre they master.[92] The reliance on simple sentences that primarily 'report' (over analyse) further reinforces the impression that the child narrator lacks situational awareness or evaluative thought—emphasizing a straightforward recount of observable facts, and internal connections. Often their syntax will be repetitive, or questioning—in both their

[87] Faulkner, p. 56.
[88] Hurst, p. 21
[89] Faulkner, p. 57.
[90] Kale, pp. 54, 87, 124, 244, 250.
[91] Leech and Short, p. 176.
[92] Toolan, p. 190.

insistent curiosity, or persistent reiteration of new information: Steinmetz argues that the child narrator *echoes* the language of their surroundings to convey their lack of precise linguistic knowledge.[93] In that same vein, their syntax often presents as 'why' questions, that are 'piercing, challenging, problematic, penetrating, and frequently unanswerable'.[94] Take the opening of *Extremely Loud*, which is saturated with impossible questions like 'What about a teakettle? What if the spout opened and closed when the steam came out, so it would become a mouth, and it could whistle pretty melodies, or do Shakespeare, or just crack up with me?'[95] Children's intense curiosity is equally persistent, determined, and insatiable; they will continue asking questions 'until they get the answers they are seeking, or at least any answer at all'.[96] Take this scene from *Room*, below:

> I take my mouth back, I say, "How come we never see him in TV?"
>
> Ma yawns and sits up.
>
> "All the times we're watching, we never see him, how come?"
>
> "He's not there."
>
> "But the bottle, how did he get it?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> The way she says it, it's strange. I think she's pretending. "You have to know. You know everything."
>
> […]
>
> "Jack—"
>
> Jack what? What does *Jack* mean?
>
> Ma leans back on the pillows. "It's very hard to explain."
>
> I think she can explain, she just won't. […].[97]

Conversely, the child narrator's highly compound, run-on syntax preserves the perceived 'simplicity' of their reasoning whilst simultaneously hinting at an early engagement with potentially 'critical' thought. According to Leech and Short, child narrators often 'string together

[93] Steinmetz, p. 103.
[94] Hurst, pp. 46 & 61.
[95] Foer, p. 1.
[96] Steinmetz, p. 89.
[97] Donaghue, pp. 72-4.

sequences of paratactic and coordinated main clauses' rather than using subordination, or breaking sentences into smaller parts; similarly, parataxis, in contrast to hypotaxis (or syntactic subordination), avoids conjunctions that indicate logical relationships, making it a more straightforward form of syntactic structure.[98] Toolan describes this as a sequence of events arranged in temporal order, often connected by 'and then' as a conjunctive link, or framed with an opening orientation (and reoriented conclusion).[99] Returning to Faulkner, we see the same narrator employ such, as shown:

> Cash tried but she fell off and Dark jumped going under he went under and Cash hollering to catch her and I hollering running and hollering and Dewey Dell hollering at me Vardaman you vardaman you vardaman and Vernon passed me because he was seeing her come up and she jumped into the water again and Darl hadn't caught her yet […][100]

My own narrator employs something similar, when she says

> There's this plastic whiteish-pinkish thing like a kiddie pool that just showed up one day and you'd have to be real careful cause it could scratch you if you didn't watch out for the crack down the side and I'd have to hurry to play with the water before it got smaller and smaller and then it's just gone.[101]

This further implies their two-dimensional perspective, Leech and Short argue, prioritizing the visual field where objects are located over the objects themselves (instead of the three-dimensional view, typical of adult perception).[102] As a result, a child's narrative structure tends to follow a 'non-linear,' stream-of-consciousness-type presentation, as children often narrate without awareness of the larger context or objectives of the story. Therefore, the child narrator presents a more disorganized and structurally complex narrative, in comparison.[103] Consider *Extremely Loud*

[98] Leech and Short, p. 165.
[99] Toolan, p. 190.
[100] Faulkner, p. 150.
[101] Kale, p. 22.
[102] Leech and Short, p. 165.
[103] Hurst, p. 18.

again—where Oskar consistently narrates without a clear sense of where the narrative is headed or a linear progression of the events in the present:

> And at the finish line at the end of the New York City Marathon it would sound like war.
>
> And also, there are so many times when you need to make a quick escape, but humans don't have their own wings, or not yet, anyway, so what about a birdseed shirt?
>
> Anyway.
>
> My first juijitsu class was three and a half months ago. Self-defense was something that I was extremely curious about, for obvious reasons [...][104]

Oskar exhibits a looser relationship towards the structure and temporal order of his narrative, as many child narrators are wont to do; within my own narrative, my child narrator is more inclined to find themselves 'interrupted' by their own seemingly 'random' observations, anecdotes and tangents ('Down here they spray-paint the house-numbers on curbs but also nail them by the front door which is weird, cause every time Wile. E. Coyote hammers nails into brick he gets that small crack that leads to a bigger crack then *bam* and *poof* and the trumpets go *wah-wah*'), or even ignoring the bigger picture at hand to focus on something seemingly 'mundane', or 'out of focus' ('Ma will sigh then Dad will snap, *Jesus Christ, Leanne!* and there's my chance. I crouch like a bug now, a grasshopper or Jiminy Cricket *wee!* but *shh* over the edge of the steps, slide down fast').[105] Toolan's study refers to these as 'leap frog' narratives, where the child narrator 'jumps from one event to another in an unsystematic way, omitting key events'.[106] Hurst acknowledges that while the significance of temporal order in children's narratives is not fully understood—since children appear to perceive time and sequence differently from adults—research shows that, after

[104] Foer, pp. 1-2.
[105] Kale, pp. 25 & 27.
[106] Toolan, p. 181.

a certain stage, children are generally capable of comprehending and expressing temporal sequences in personal narratives.[107]

1.2. Hard to Read

These commonly observable features of child's speech are often the 'foundation' of their narratorial translation. However, capturing the 'right' child's voice can be challenging—at times, seemingly impossible—to render effectively in written form. In other words, their voice can simply be too arduous, or incomprehensible, to digest as a reader.

Couser is quick to point out that authors of child narration, who attempt to construct their voice as an 'inchoate' flow of thoughts, feelings, and actions, are not only 'laborious' to write, but 'tedious' to read.[108] 'One can sense', Couser argues, 'even in a short excerpt how cloying and annoying [their voices] can become on a large scale'.[109] In this vein, many argue that not all child speech is portrayed effectively—and employing these eccentric (though arguably *mimetic*) voices can 'offend' some readers.[110] Leech and Short define these distinctive voices as 'character mind styles' which, as a result, can be more readily identified as unconventional. Consequently, if readers find the voice overly *unusual* in style, or excessively grating in format, they may feel discomfort or disengagement—potentially 'turned off' by the narrator altogether.[111] This can disrupt what Prince defines as a 'readerly text': or, a narrative that can be interpreted or understood using clear constraints, conventions, and codes that align with 'established' reading strategies.[112] It makes me think of Fludernik's very reasonable question: who could realistically capture such a

[107] Hurst, p. 99.
[108] Couser, *Memoir*, p. 61.
[109] Thomas Couser, 'Presenting Absent Fathers in Contemporary Memoir' (Dallas: Southwest Review, 2005), p. 646.
[110] Hurst, pp. 12-13 & 148.
[111] Leech and Short, p. 162.
[112] Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: *University of Nebraska Press*, 2003), p. 81.

distinctive and painstakingly imitative narratorial voice, without driving both the reader and themselves 'mad'?[113]

If such contentious voice is the 'sole' speaker in a memoir, therefore, where might this become problematic? When the narrator's meaning is *too* difficult for the reader to grasp, it can potentially impede their understanding of not only of basic *facts*, but (more crucially) the memoir's central truth. Steinmetz explains that the more *consistent* a character is in their actions and statements, the more 'positively' the reader will respond.[114] The narrator must do 'everything possible to make themselves accessible', Wayne C. Booth declares; however, the excessive creativity of voice, coupled with a gradual distortion of their narrative speech, can render the child narrator *as a whole* too inaccessible to the reader.[115] Multiple scholars emphasize 'good' writing to be subtly elegant, with an avoidance of heavy stylisation; these can threaten to 'overshadow' the narrative, they contend.[116] Therefore, the 'showiness' of a child narrator's more ostentatious voice could, arguably, hinder their ability to narrate effectively; Koranda strongly asserts that, despite their charm, the child narrator's authentically 'incoherent' voice ultimately renders them, quite frankly, 'unworthy' of publication. 'If the stories narrated by children were to be *truly* narrated in that way,' he declares, 'nobody would want to read them'.[117] While I'm inclined to believe many of these scholars are steering dangerously close toward patronization (do we *really* only want to read 'adult' voices?), if the *memoir* narrator's voice becomes too 'interpretive', it risks leaving the reader only *guessing* about both the literal events that shape the plot and the deeper themes that underpin the narrative. Without providing this essential clarity, a 'sole' child

[113] Fludernik, p. 101.
[114] Steinmetz, p. 30.
[115] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 105.
[116] Gerard, p. 11.
[117] Koranda, 'Child'.

narrator may fail to meet the fundamental expectations of a memoir narrator, if their voice is too challenging to follow.

Koranda, however pushes back on his own point—observing that, despite this, the voice of a child narrator doesn't need to *strictly* adhere to mimetic representation.[118] Steinmetz and King concur, arguing that child narrators need not use 'stereotypical' childlike language, or restrict themselves *so wholly* to a child's limited vocabulary, in order to create an effective voice.[119] [120] Its complexities *can* be conveyed through a range of explicit and implicit narrative strategies designed to *closely* mimic a child's voice: such as being mindful of actual child language patterns, tailoring their speech to align with their narrative aims whilst maintaining key linguistic norms, and so on. This heavily stylized presentation is just *one* avenue an author can take—albeit the most immediately noticeable option.[121] The key to crafting an accessible child narrator's voice could be embracing an unadorned, more 'pared-back' approach: Van Lierop-Debrawer asserts that using a 'diary-style' method of short, straightforward sentences is sufficient, whilst Koranda notes a simpler, more internally focused prose can be more 'authentic'.[122] [123] *Room*'s reliance on this stands in stark contrast to *Extremely Loud*'s often 'excessively' rambling-style of child narration. Therefore, the potential threat to memoir's readability (and by extension, its *integrity*) can perhaps be mitigated *if* writers adopt a more straightforward, 'bare-bones' approach to the 'sole' child narrator's voice: replacing impenetrable stylization with an uncomplicated, plain-style presentation.

1.3. Unbelievable

[118] Koranda, 'Child'. [my emphasis]
[119] Steinmetz, p. 50.
[120] King, 'Boldly'.
[121] Fludernik, p. 71.
[122] Van Lierop-Debrawer, p. 18.
[123] Koranda, 'Child'.

With this being said, however, such attempts to cull these charges in a non-mimetic manner also appear to run the risk of being 'too unbelievable'. Ouellette, Hurst, and Laura Miller have all criticized a 'believable' child's voice; King, as well, highlighting her own reader criticisms ('the voice sounds older than five'; 'the narrator did not sound believable as a young child', etc.).[124] [125] [126] [127] This accusation of 'unbelievability' often stems from the child narrator's voice deviating from conventional expectations of realism: Alexis Kienlen, in 'Creating the Voice of the Child Narrator Not an Easy Task for Authors', observes that the challenge of crafting effective child narrators lies in an 'authentically' consistent voice so as to mimic a sense of 'lifelikeness'.[128] This, as Fludernik suggests, aids in the connection a narrator has to the reader; for their perceived 'authenticity' is a direct result of the mediation level of narration, and thus creates a mimetic effect.[129] Readers hold certain expectations of voice when it comes to child narrators of any age, often shaped by prior experiences with children or childish behaviour; without these mimetic features, the reader's 'suspension of disbelief' could be hindered if such expectations are not met.[130] An authors' reluctance to incorporate 'authentic' child speech in their narrators can seemingly reflect a *lack of commitment* to all that child narration requires. This can likewise prove problematic for memoir, which prides itself on authenticity (or, at least the *illusion* of): Van Lierop-Debrawer highlights authenticity and voice as two fundamental concepts in life writing.[131] So, if a memoir claims to be narrated entirely from a 'child', then that child's voice needs to be

[124] Jeannine Ouellette '"That Little Voice: The Outsized Power of a Child Narrator' < https://www.assayjournal.com/jeannine-ouellette-that-little-voice-the-outsized-power-of-a-child-narrator-assay-92.html > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[125] King, 'Boldly'.
[126] Hurst, p. 66.
[127] Laura Miller (as cited in Steinmetz, p. 129).
[128] Alexis Kienlen, 'Creating the Voice of the Child Narrator Not an Easy Task for Authors' (Alberta: The Daily Herald Tribune, 2013), p. 7.
[129] Fludernik, p. 61.
[130] Steinmetz, p. 25.
[131] Van Lierop-Debrawer, p. 23.

clearly identifiable to whatever age the narrator claims. If not, the memoir could run the risk, potentially, of presenting itself as unbelievable in *fact*, as well as *voice.*

On the other hand, many scholars observe that concepts of the 'child' (and thus, their *voices*) are elusive—contending that it is easier to think of the child narrator's voice as a *concept*, rather than an individual.[132] In this regard, how are we to assess the 'unbelievability' of a child narrator's voice? Is there a universal standard for determining authenticity? Numerous authors emphasize the inherent difficulty of successfully creating a 'believable' child voice: even Henry James himself proclaimed his permanent aversion to 'sole' child narrators, for this very reason:

> Amusing therefore as it might at first blush have seemed to restrict myself in this case to the terms as well as to the experience, it became at once plain that such an attempt [at child narration] would fail […] [as he] could not content [myself] with the poverty and simplicity of a child's producible vocabulary.[133]

Steinmetz, King, and Norton all advise authors to either study children's speech patterns and expressions via observation, or mentally revisit one's own childhood mindset to enhance 'believability'.[134] [135] [136] Fludernik likewise argues that the inclusion of seemingly 'superfluous' details can enhance the text's 'realism'—and as such, trigger 'metonymic associations' and 'activate familiar frames' that can convince readers the voice closely mirrors reality.[137] However, real-life speech is full of hesitations, repetitions, and interruptions, rarely consisting of complete, grammatical sentences: Brian Donnelly, for example, notes that no one assumes an Elizabethan nobleman spoke with the poetic fluency of Hamlet's soliloquy.[138] 'Realistic' voices often repeat themselves, or stammer, or digress; and the conventional practice, Gerard notes, involves 'cleaning

[132] Steinmetz, p. 24.
[133] Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010) p. x.
[134] Steinmetz, p. 48.
[135] Norton, 'Reminiscent'.
[136] King, 'Boldly'.
[137] Fludernik, pp. 54-55.
[138] Brian Donnelly, 'Inventing a Voice: Irish Fiction from 1800' (Tokyo: The Harp, 2000) pp. 65-74.

up' quotes in order to present their message clearly.[139] Therefore—if we allow this grace towards 'realistic' voices on the page, do we extend the same towards child narrators? Steinmetz counters Laura Miller's criticism of *Extremely Loud*'s voice, arguing that the child narrator's specific and unique circumstances render all claims of 'psychological unrealism' speculative—for who can say, truly, that any particular narrator's voice is 'inaccurate'?[140] Does a universal standard exist? And when we consider this within memoir—how are we to know, as readers, that such a voice isn't authentic to the author, *as child?* I'm reminded of what Oscar Wilde once said: 'The man who calls a spade a spade should be compelled to use one. It is all he is fit for'.[141] This entire concept of 'believability' is inherently vague, since both the narrator and the idea of childlike language are uniquely shaped by the author's individuality, and interpreted differently by readers.[142] Therefore, this question of 'voice accuracy' is, seemingly, less important than the effect these narrators create: the novel's message and content take precedence over the child's authenticity, with success measured by whether the reader understands the intended message.[143] For, as King wisely notes, it's impossible to craft a universal child narrator's voice that will satisfy everyone.[144]

Considering all this, however, the 'sole' child narrator's voice *still* exists in a 'catch-22', of sorts—too mimetic, it's alienating; not mimetic enough, it's fraudulent. How should their voice be represented within a memoir, specifically: so as to prevent a confusing barrier to truth, nor allude to any danger of false portrayal?

1.4. Balance

[139] Gerard, p. 202.
[140] Steinmetz, pp. 128-129.
[141] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Classics, 1891), p. 215.
[142] Steinmetz, pp. 33, 138 & 142.
[143] Steinmetz, pp. 80, 130 & 132-133.
[144] King, 'Boldly'.

Ultimately, I believe writers should strive for a careful balance when mimetically representing a child's voice—skilfully reflecting the unique nuances of child's speech, whilst also ensuring the narration remains clear, coherent, and accessible for the majority of readers to follow comfortably, over an extended period.

My own journey towards said 'balance' involved developing a 'chart', so to speak—quite literally *mapping out* how my child narrator's voice would balance readability, with believability (*see chart*). For the purposes of this dissertation, the breakdown focuses primarily on the ages represented in the excerpt included, which spans roughly four- to nine-years old. This chart was used as a 'guide' in my creative writing, and was based on my own creative decisions discussed with supervisors and peers alike. Although I have not gone into extensive research on child language development, these choices are both subjective and legitimate: working under the guise that as long as I establish my own consistent pattern of representation, these choices will be (personally) validated. However, I did reference not only my own understanding of children's language from personal interactions, memories of my speech as a child, and sparse home videos but also representations of child narration I wished to mimic in some part (*Room, Extremely Loud*, *Glass Castle,* etc.). Likewise, Toolan's own study of child language development (in *reality*, not within literature) illuminated not only my understanding of my child narrator, but *how* and *why* children develop in their language and narrative abilities.

In my earlier years, I aimed to emphasize *subtlety* of mimesis: such as brief instances of alliteration, or onomatopoeia; occasional dropped articles and improper capitalizations; and the more semi-frequent misspelled (or made-up) words, here and there. As my narrator grows up, these mimetic features are gradually removed and thus replaced, very slowly, with an ever-so-slightly 'mature'-sounding voice, by contrast. This allows my narrator's evolving age to be implied

Figure(s) 1.1. 'Voice Rules'

{age/feature}	**FOUR**	**FIVE**	**SIX**	**SEVEN**	**EIGHT**	**NINE**
Onomatopoeia ('bam')	X					
Run-on Sentences ('and then')	X	X	X			
Very Short Sentences ('Today I'm five.')	X	X	X			
Lack of commas	X	X				
Alliteration ('big black bird')	X	X	X	X	X	X
Illogical side-by-side phrases ('my head my knees')	X					
Made-up words ('thumpy')	X	X				
Misspelled words and ungrammatical words ('builded'; 'Grannma')	X	X	X			
Hyphenates ('kit-cat')	X	X				
Over-explaining ('that means')	X	X	X	X		
Juvenile/simple descriptions ('big green trash smell'; 'insides smile big')	X	X	X			
Dropped words ('how long till graduate')	X					
'Colloquial'-type spellings ('gonna'; 'till'; 'cause')	X	X	X			
Exaggerations ('whole wide world'; 'best friend forever')	X	X	X	X		
Abundance of questions	X	X	X	X	X	
Capitalizing regular nouns to resemble names/titles ('Rental')	X					
Repetition ('way way back')	X	X	X			
Mixed focus/priorities ('Spy Scene' when parents fighting in background, etc..)	X	X	X	X	X	

	BIRTH	**ONE**	**TWO**	**THREE**	**FOUR**	**FIVE**
Courtney's speech	Mainly indirect; onomatopoeia	Mainly indirect; onomatopoeia, phonetic spellings	Somewhat indirect; less onomatopoeia, phonetic spellings	Exaggerated version of my 'baseline' child's voice	My 'baseline' child's voice, at four years-old	My child's voice, at five years-old

naturally, at different stages of the memoir. I've intended to maintain enough imitation to keep her voice 'authentic' in feel, without overdoing it. The balance isn't perfect—I tend to favour simplicity, over strict believability. As King wisely notes, all voices are constructs—and what *truly* matters is creating a voice that is engaging enough to 'suspend disbelief'.[145] I believe this is generally the most effective approach for a child narrator's voice; however, it ultimately depends on the specific narrator, their unique traits, and (most importantly) the ages they represent throughout the narrative.

This approach can enhance memoir by demonstrating how clear communication *is achievable* with a child's voice as the 'sole' narrator—it simply requires the skill, time, and patience to find the right balance. Moreover, it offers a refreshing perspective in a genre dominated by mature narrators, where childlike voices are often briefly (and superficially) explored.

Therefore—while an imbalanced child's voice *can* impact memoir, it does not *necessarily* undermine its success from a 'sole' child narrator's vantage point (provided the memoirist carefully crafts a *balance* between mimetic child representation, and narratorial coherence). The greater challenge for such a narrator seems to lie not *only* in their unique voice, but their contentiously 'unreliable' perspective.

[145] King, 'Boldly'.

Chapter Two: Unreliable Perspective

Given their limited perception and inherent immaturity, the biased, narrow-minded, and generally inexperienced child narrator might seem, perhaps unsurprisingly, ill-suited to serve as the sole narrator of memoir. Is there room for the child narrator's unreliable perspective to stand alone, without being counterbalanced (or replaced) by an adult narrator? Or is reliability exclusively tied to the adult narrator?

2.1. Unreliability

Dan Shen, Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon all collectively categorize describe *first-person* unreliability, specifically, to stem from their 'involved', more distinctive 'mind style'— as opposed to the more distanced, authoritative (and thus, 'believable') third-person.[146] [147] This is because most first-person narrators are, generally, very subjective and almost wholly biased. Shen explains that most narrative theorists, following Booth's definition, consider narrative unreliability to stem from the narrator's *discourse* instead of their personality—therefore, 'unreliability' arises when the narrator inaccurately reports facts. Greta Olson, in 'Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators', provides an in-depth analysis of narratorial unreliability, asserting that narrators will be deemed 'unreliable' if their discourse falls short of the standards of reliability—specifically, the ability to '*report*, *interpret*, or *evaluate* events and characters [...] sufficiently'.[148] This creates a conflict between the narrator's explicit discourse and the author's implicit discourse, suggesting that even *factual* unreliability involves a discord between both the

[146] Dan Shen, 'Unreliability' (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2011), pg. 5.
[147] Martha Bortolussi & Peter Dixon, Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Emperical Study of Literary Response (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 84.
[148] Greta Olson, 'Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators' (Columbus: Narrative, 2003), p. 158.

narrator, and the *implied author's* standards. Various textual indicators of a first-person narrator's unreliability are often in the form of contradictions between the narrator's views and the real facts, gaps between the narrator's report and the true outcome, and internal inconsistencies in the narrator's logic.[149]

Furthermore—if the first-person narrator is likewise a *child* narrator (even more so, a child narrator *sans* adult narrator), then the degree of unreliability can increase tremendously. This is usually shown when the experiencing self is 'uncorrected' by the narrating self—and, as a result, the reader will seemingly 'always' remain in doubt.[150] Therefore, child narrators risk an even greater *bias* in their narration, as Stanzel suggests, because they appear 'suspicious' on their own—only quelling such apprehension if the reader is explicitly *signalled* that scepticism is warranted.[151] This is where an adult narrator would usually provide clarity; however, if excluded, this elevates reader uncertainty. *Extremely Loud* attempts to mitigate this through an occasional framing device of the child narrator's letters from his grandfather – though *Room*, in contrast, employs no such device and the reader is left to parse the pieces of 'Ma', in order to even understand that the protagonists are victims of a kidnapping. Sandi Hutcheson directly examines bias in memoir, noting that readers typically resist being 'told how to feel'—as the form's strength lies in *encouraging* readers to bring their own emotions to the story; excessive influence in either direction can alienate readers, who dislike feeling pressured to take a particular side.[152]

Scholars suggest that bias is most apparent in child narrator's tendency toward *nostalgia*, often resulting in an overly *romanticized* (or *woeful*) depiction. As Bunkong Tuon notes in

[149] Shen, p. 7.
[150] Olson, p. 93.
[151] Stanzel, p. 150.
[152] Sandi Hutcheson, 'Managing the angry voice: how to convey anger in memoir without alienating readers' (Pittsburgh: *Creative Nonfiction*, 2013), pp. 67 & 68.

'Inaccuracy and testimonial literature: the case of Loung Ung's *First they killed my father: a daughter of Cambodia remembers*', a child's perspective can make the story seem 'misleading, overly dramatic, and exaggerated'; whilst Steinmetz argues that child narrators are inherently 'romantic', as their focus skews toward the *exceptional*, rather than the ordinary.[153] [154] Both *Room* and *Extremely Loud*'s narrators indulge in the 'childlike wonder' and 'optimism' of their vantage-points, which could perhaps make it more difficult to parse the tragedies both these narrators exist within. In crafting one's child narrator, the author can likewise project their *own* subjective and idiosyncratic view of childhood; in this, Penny Brown contends that the narrator can come across as excessively sentimental (or even *embarrassing*).[155] Katrien Vloeberghs, in 'Untimely childhood in literary holocaust memoirs and novels for the young', adds that this approach risks creating a *revisionist* history, where these same authors may be tempted to depict their childhood the way they wish it had been, rather than as it truly was.[156] In addition, Van-Lierop Debrawer argues that the 'romantic trope of innocence' has been a longstanding feature of the memoir genre (particularly 'traumatic' ones), and is often introduced as early as the cover page:

> Although the photos [on the cover page] often strongly allude to the happy and playful child, the book titles tend to be more ambiguous. They challenge 'the photographic image and its connotations of innocence' and function 'as ominous forewarnings of the text's content' (63) which most of the time contest the Romantic idea of a happy childhood, such as Bad Blood. A Memoir (Sage 2000), Out of Darkness (Knight 1998) and Shadow Child (Fraser 1998) […] While this photo alludes to a happy and innocent childhood, the title challenges this romantic notion by referring in a somewhat cryptic manner to a possible threat.[157]

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[153] Bunkong Tuon, 'Inaccuracy and testimonial literature: the case of Loung Ung's *First they killed my father: a daughter of Cambodia remembers*' (Oxford: MELUS, 2013), p. 107.
[154] Steinmetz, pp. 93-4.
[155] Penny Brown, *The Captured World: The Child and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in England* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), pp. 9-10.
[156] Katrien Vloeberghs, 'Untimely childhood in literary holocaust memoirs and novels for the young' (Brooklyn: *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, 2009), p. 56.
[157] Van Lierop-Debrawer, p. 16.

The child narrator within trauma-driven memoirs becomes 'troubling,' Steinmetz contends, as their access to intense emotions and imaginative qualities (which might seem overly sentimental or self-indulgent in adult narrators) comes at the expense of fully addressing the central trauma within the narrative.[158] I liken this to what Anne Fogarty describes her essay: 'A baby crying can be many things but never soothing'.[159] Vloeberghs agrees, noting that child narratives of traumatic events can be so emotionally powerful they appear 'too vulnerable', she claims, to directly confront such issues:

> Finding the words [and] verbally constructing a narrative out of remembered events is exactly what is being problematized in the face of overwhelming traumatic events […] which cannot be integrated into an existing framework, into a causality, a linear temporality, in other words: into a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, or closure of some kind […] The narratological choice for a child perspective is one of the most complex strategies of alienation in literary texts about [trauma] […] In the use of the figure of the child as a narrating instance, a fruitful and ongoing negotiation with the so-called 'limits of representation' becomes apparent.[160]

Exploring trauma through the lens of a child narrator seems inherently 'too' complex—as many argue that trauma can only be fully (and accurately) understood in adulthood. This process may be further compromised, therefore, if the narrator remains a *victim*, still vulnerable to their circumstances.[161] Without the balance of an adult narrator, the narrative appears to be weighed down by an idealized, victim-centered (and likely *unrealistic*) portrayal of events.[162]

The child's miscomprehension can often result in an innocent and untruthful portrayal of events; to some critics, this is a deliberate authorial ploy to misrepresent truth, in order to influence the reader's response. As a result, the child narrator can be viewed as a highly 'manipulative' (even

[158] Anne Fogarty, '"It was like a baby crying": representations of the child in contemporary Irish fiction' (Tokyo: Journal of Irish Studies, 2015), p. 13.
[159] Steinmetz, p. 91.
[160] Vloeberghs, p. 52.
[161] Jay Rajiva, 'The seduction of narration in Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*' (Bloomington: Research in African Literatures, 2013), p. 83.
[162] Steinmetz, p. 93-94.

dangerous) threat onto their texts—further amplifying their seemingly destructive unreliability. Hurst identifies 'naughty' child narrators, who 'manoeuvre' the text in somewhat 'obvious' ways.[163] This challenges the typical view of the child as 'innocent', 'pure', or 'unsullied'—as their narrators can be an 'unconscious instrument of evil', Fogarty boldly declares, both calculating and (unintentionally) destructive.[164] This can influence both the first person and the child narrator's 'ulterior motive,' Goode argues, presenting the details of their lives they *want* audiences to hear—both narrating *and* justifying in a manner that can undermine authenticity.[165] Moreover, a child narrator may 'push the embellishing envelope', Larson argues; indeed, some have even accused the child narrator of outright *lying*.[166] Steinmetz, for one, questions whether child narrators ever actually reveal themselves as they 'truly' are—or do authors indulge in the 'stereotype' that (unbeknownst to *me*) 'all children are liars'?[167] Bassett cites *Huckleberry Finn* to show how child narrators may lie or exaggerate to survive, whilst Timothy Dow Adams cites *Black Boy*'s child narrator as one whose survival is *built* on falsehoods.[168] [169] Though I'm less inclined to charge *all* child narration as inherently 'untruthful', I can perhaps contend that their apparent tendency to 'fib' so easily is a result of their inexperience in handling its consequences. However, Hurst takes this line of thinking further: countering that even child narrators *without* malice may still use manipulative language and/or be susceptible towards *being* manipulated—as children tend to 'seek attention' from their surroundings, for one.[170] Mugambi illustrates how such manipulation stems from the *author's* deliberate choices, which are aimed at influencing the reader's perception of a

[163] Hurst, p. 45.
[164] Fogarty, p. 17. [my emphasis]
[165] Goode, p. 59. [my emphasis]
[166] Larson, p. 27.
[167] Steinmetz, pp. 50-51. [my emphasis]
[168] Bassett, p. 96.
[169] Adams, p. 50.
[170] Hurst, p. 45.

particular message or event in a specific (though less objective) light.[171] Whether they are the perceived manipula*tors* or the manipulat*ed*, the reader is nevertheless left 'uncertain': is this child narrator influenced by what they *think* I want to hear, or by the mouthpiece of *others?* As Gubar, in *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* smartly declares:

> […] of all the techniques that authors employ to mold and manipulate the child […] using a child narrator is the most *sneakily seductive*, since this move enables an author to obscure [their] own presence and purpose(s) in addressing the child, thus smoothing the path of identification. In other words, writers set up the child as a *surrogate storyteller* in order to *trick* [readers] into identifying with an adult-produced picture of what children should be like (8). Thus, Mavis Reimer argues that the act of using of a child narrator is "not simply a coercive domination, but rather a domination that also manufactures consent" (51). Quoting Pierre Bourdieu, she maintains that "instead of telling the child what he must do" such texts tell "him what he is, and thus lead him to become durably what he has to be" (50).[172]

Where this could quite obviously undermine *memoir* is reader trust. Gerard emphasizes that such trust in the memoir narrator is 'obviously' crucial, as memoir readers expect honesty in *every* moment.[173] In fact, a 'trusting' disposition is often viewed as a *requirement* of the memoir—and perhaps obviously so, as it must be assumed that the author is, at *all* times, telling the truth (if not, legal and moral consequences to follow).[174] Though readers of memoir are more sophisticated than this binary suggests, it is not so much an over-generalization to say that abusing the reader's trust results in little value gained; so much so that Gornick, in *The Situation and the Story,* warns against flirting with dishonesty, advising that 'when one makes a romance out of not knowing, the reliable reporter is in danger of becoming the untrustworthy narrator'.[175] A 'sole' child narrator, therefore, *could* jeopardize the memoir's trustworthy 'requirement', as their singular perspective (lacking an adult counterbalance) might undermine the credibility of the entire narrative. Haddon's

[171] Mugambi, p. 8.
[172] Gubar, p. 41. [my emphasis]
[173] Gerard, p. 37.
[174] Judith Barrington, 'Writing the memoir' (Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 2002), p. 27.
[175] Gornick, pp. 10 & 11.

child narrator in *Curious Incident* proclaims an inability to lie, but often proves the contrary. Therefore, if the child narrator is seen as a *liar*, the issue within memoir is clear: as it suggests they may be inclined (whether consciously or unconsciously) to present invention as truth.[176] However, memoir is often 'synonymous with lying', many perceive: due to its 'paradoxical ambiguity' and, more recently, an increase in hoaxes (*re:* James Frey's infamously *fabricated* 'memoir', *A Million Little Pieces*).[177] Therefore, the memoir narrator must constantly 'reign in' any potential inclination to lie, Adams declares in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*—for the memoir can be 'discordant', but never disingenuous, or deceptive.[178] Therefore, do we consider all child narrators capable of 'Frey'-levels of deception, even unintentionally? Or, as Adams more persuasively puts, 'should we trust a professed liar's confession of lying?'[179]

Maybe so—for, if the narrator's *intentions* are not to deceive or report inaccurately (whether due to ignorance or a failure to convey the truth), then does unreliability become more of a 'nuanced' interpretation? One that potentially frames the child narrator's unintentionality as a 'counter' to such controversial claims? Hansen directly questions this by asking how one should reflect on the difference between 'deliberate deception', and accidental?[180] 'Gaps and imbalances' in narration are not always indicators of intentional manipulation or ethical failure, Knight points out, because memoir narrators often implement an 'intentional self-preservation,' to protect oneself, without being dishonest.[181] For example: in analysing the controversial works of Rigoberta Menchú against James Frey, Couser concludes that the former's 'distortions' lacked 'self-aggrandizations', and thus, are accidental (unlike the latter).[182] Therefore, do we consider the

[176] Adams, p. 34.
[177] Adams, p. 4.
[178] Adams, p. 40.
[179] Adams, p. 45.
[180] Hansen, p. 148.
[181] Hansen, p. 151.
[182] Couser, *Memoir*, p. 88.

child narrator's 'bias' as an *intentional* deception, or simply a result of an inadvertent, 'natural' fallibility? In 'The Implied Author, Deficient Narration, and Nonfiction Narrative', James Phelan examines what he refers to as 'unintended off-kilter narration,' suggesting that not all first-person narration is truly unreliable, but simply 'deficient'—particularly if unpremeditated.[183] Freeman and Le Rossignol further explore this concept via 'fallibility', which may simply reflect the narrator's natural capability for error—highlighting a lack of intention to deceive, even though the reader may still be misled.[184] James Ferry likens it to being a 'proverbial child caught with [their] hand in the cookie jar'.[185] Jane McKee suggests that motives can govern all actions, prompting us to consider not just whether a child's unreliability is intentional, but whether this 'unintention' might be sufficient for them to stand independently in the realm of memoir.[186] Therefore, one of the most 'effective' strategies in implementing a sole child narrator within memoir is *'clear* intention around what is revealed and when'.[187] Similarly, Adams points out that the child narrator's inconsistencies are 'deliberately *embarrassing* in their transparency', and therefore appear *unable* to be purposely unreliable.[188] Olson expands this further, highlighting how

> the pertinent question is to *what extent* the narrator is exposed, or whether [they expose themselves] as dispositionally untrustworthy. Readers attribute internal inconsistency and self-contradiction to narrators they judge to be lacking in trustworthiness. We predict that they will continue to contradict themselves and take on a reading strategy that questions and revises all that they say. To my mind the separation of narrators into untrustworthy or fallible applies for all narrators traditionally labeled unreliable. […] "Narration that falls short is reliable up to a point; narration that distorts is simply unreliable" ("Can Readers" 6).[189]

[183] James Phelan, 'The implied author, deficient narration, and nonfiction narrative: or, what's off-kilter in *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*?' (Philadelphia: Style, 2011), p. 133.
[184] Freeman & Le Rossignol, p. 9.
[185] James Ferry, 'The unreliable narrator: simplifying the device and exploring its role in autobiography' (Philadelphia: Style, 2011), p. 87.
[186] Jane McKee, 'The Symbolic Imagination of Romain Gary' (Maynooth: The Maynooth Review, 1982) pp. 60-71.
[187] Ouellette, 'Outsized'. [my emphasis]
[188] Adams, p. 83.
[189] Olson, p. 104. [my emphasis]

In society, we tend to (generally) view children as innately 'good' and/or intuitively 'right'; Swietek and Leila Kamali both examine how, historically, children were seen as the embodiment of goodness, 'untouched' by the evils of the world as they represented 'innocence' and 'purity'—which could only be tainted by the outside world.[190] [191] The entirety of *Room* deals with this; as it's child narrator Jack moves from innocence to experience only when he's come to terms with the gravity of his kidnapped situation post-escape, in the latter half of the narrative. Whilst this notion of the child as a 'paragon of virtue' (and thus 'un-calculating') may be an exaggeration, this overwhelming stereotype can influence both reader *perception* and author *creation*: if children are 'good', then how could they intentionally mislead the reader? Steinmetz points out that, by contrast, an *adult* narrator's bias is more likely to stem from a world-weary, perhaps 'pessimistic', perspective; a child narrator's 'lack', in this regard, would seem to 'protect' them from narrating in *such* an unreliable manner.[192] Their more 'optimistic' or 'unconditioned' mindset, therefore, might work in tandem with their generally accepted view as being 'too honest'; as both Steinmetz and Jennifer Muchiri argue this as an 'undeniable truth'; the child narrator plainly stating their truth, and expecting readers to accept their narrative at face-value.[193] [194] While they might not fully grasp the balance between *bluntness* and *sensitivity*, it seems child narrators cannot *truly* be accused of dishonesty if they are 'unapologetically' frank; as Steinmetz explains that a child's honesty (and their ability to openly criticize their surroundings due to honest ignorance) often results in a narrator who is 'completely, even painfully, honest':

> […] because children are generally not calculating. Whatever a child says is commonly blurted out, without any second thought or hidden agenda. Of course, this observation is

[190] Swietek, p. 20.
[191] Leila Kamali '"He Looked Like A Man": Narrating Child Identities in the Meditative Nonfiction of John Edgar Wideman' (Normal: Obsidian, 2012), p. 31-2.
[192] Steinmetz, pp. 39 & 95.
[193] Steinmetz, pp. 70-71 & 117.
[194] Jennifer N. Muchiri, 'The child narrator in George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*' (London: OmniScriptum, 2010), p. 27. [my emphasis]

> an oversimplification […] Usually though, young people are straightforward, say what is on their mind and answer questions *honestly*. In fact, research has shown that children find it *challenging to control their body language, whenever they are lying*. So, when a child is untruthful, he quickly puts his hands in front of his mouth or hides them behind his back. These indications help the adult and reader to identify, when a child is lying.[195]

Truthfulness is crucial in understanding how 'advantageous' child narrators are to any narrative, as they always 'reflect their reality exactly as it is'.[196] In this, they present events to the reader *without colouring them*, Ausmita Sarkar notes—as they '[narrate] the facts *in their entirety*' and '*without* judgment'.[197] Similarly Natalia Rachel Singer notes that employing a younger perspective in memoir emphasizes heightened observational and memory skills, enhanced precision in describing concrete details, and, most importantly, a genuinely honest and vibrant voice.[198] Now imagine if this was *entirely* told from said perspective: is the memoir misleading, irrefutably 'unreliable', if told from the sole vantage point of a child who is (arguably) innately 'good', honest to a *fault*, and good intentioned? As Larson aptly puts:

> I have said that the mind which understand[s] the child's growth in awareness of self and family does so after the fact: that mind was not in the child's day-to-day reaction to events, not part of the lizard-feeling little boy I was. And yet *who else was feeling those things but the little boy I used to be*? *Who else was packing away those feelings but that long-ago self? I do not experience childhood after I'm grown*. […] Despite my partisanship, I cannot help or save or right that little boy now. I can only try to be honest about him now for then.[199]

2.2. Limited Perspective

Similarly, first-person narrators exhibit quite limited perspectives. Edmiston and Toolan both confirm this—as a 'spatiotemporally restricted observer' is, quite obviously, working within a limited perspective.[200] [201] Shen, furthermore, notes that unreliability often arises from factors such

[195] Steinmetz, pp. 81-2. [my emphasis]
[196] Steinmetz, p. 82.
[197] Ausmita Sarkar, 'The child narrator of the graphic novel' (Bengaluru: Azim Premji University, 2017), p. 3.
[198] Natalia Rachel Singer 'Nonfiction in the first person, without apology' (Pittsburgh: Creative Nonfiction, 1993), p. 68.
[199] Larson, p. 56. [my emphasis]
[200] Edmiston, p. 734.
[201] Toolan, p. 62.

as limited knowledge—which increases significantly when the first-person narrator is a child.[202] When the narrative is *so* focalized to the experiencing self, it nearly *erases* the 'balance' of the narrating self; thus, this 'disconnected simplicity', as Michael Vander Weele describes it, leads to a narrator who is (so to speak) narrating 'without'.[203]

This heightened limited perspective of the child is reflected in narration that includes significant *omissions*, which can potentially disrupt the flow of the narrative. Gornick explains that such restriction results in narration that *seems* to be unfolding something significant, or relevant—only to halt, suddenly, and without warning. 'This far I go, the writing says. No further'.[204] The narrator must provide *some* contextual details, Fludernik laments, or even a *semblance* of a coherent narrative action, at some point; without it, the risk of a 'subterranean chasm' between reader and narrator threatens the overall *aim* of any narrative. [205] Likewise, a child narrator often centers on the 'wrong' focal point (as noted prior)—similar to a 'short attention span'—as a result of what they are barely able, or unable, to comprehend.[206] Steinmetz offers a concrete example by pointing out how the child narrator's limited perspective in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is demonstrated through a 'fixation on nature' that shifts to a preoccupation with a toy train in town. Similarly, in Matthew Kneale's *When We Were Romans*, the child narrator narrows their focus by 'commenting on his environment and describing the people he meets in detail,' whilst overlooking the more significant issue of his mother's mental instability.[207] In doing this, the narrator is purposely 'dragging the reader away', one could say, from where the story *actually* is—and therefore, further limiting the scope these narrators can bring to the table. In diverting both

[202] Shen, p. 10.
[203] Michael Vander Weele, 'The Human Effort to Exchange Stories and Uwem Akpan's Child Narrators' (Notre Dame: Religion & Literature, 2015), p. 128.
[204] Gornick, p. 133.
[205] Fludernik, p. 131.
[206] Steinmetz, p. 82.
[207] Steinmetz, p. 4.

themselves *and* the reader from the narrative action, various external factors also seem to exclude them: Paul Goldberg offers an example from Sonia Guralnik's 'Sue?o prometido', where the child narrator frequently finds themselves *physically* external to a scene (i.e., behind a closed door, etc.) because children are often prohibited from entering certain adult spaces—often, where the action is occurring.[208] *Room*'s narrator is frequently external to scenes of his mother and paternal kidnapper, when he is physically locked in the wardrobe until his kidnapper exists. This, obviously, can quite *literally* limit their narrating abilities. Such a *narrow* viewpoint can 'stifle' the reading experience, as Gerard observes that these 'claustrophobic' attachments can make readers feel 'trapped' in such a singular perspective—leading to a 'suffocated' and 'stifling' reading experience.[209] Stanzel attributes these shortcomings to a 'too-literal adherence' of the first-person perspective—which, he claims, does more harm than good. This is often called 'hyper-restriction', or 'paralipsis': i.e., the total commitment of the experiencing self, to the complete rejection of the narrating self.[210] Would this be my narrator? A 'paralipsis-child', steering a truth-narrative? Who would want to, as Zakrzewski poses, read 'page after page after page' of a memoir, with a narrator who is *so* restrained as this?[211]

In this regard, child narrators seem nearly *incapable* of managing their narratives successfully, often struggling to guide their readers back to a cohesive thread.[212] Tamar Yacobi highlights various types of narratorial unreliability: the 'sloppy or ambivalent' narrator (appearing to point to the child narrator) who leaves an excess of 'incongruous elements' scattered throughout

[208] Paul Goldberg, 'Writing away from home: migratory moments in short stories by Sonia Guralnik' (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review, 2003), p. 10.
[209] Gerard, p. 116.
[210] Stanzel, p. 214.
[211] Zakrzewski, 'Sophisticated'.
[212] Vander Weele, p. 127.

their texts, rather than structuring them cohesively.[213] This accusation of mismanagement is significant, if one were to entrust the reins of a true story to such a narrator. Many seem to cite this as an issue with the child narrator's *intellect*, (more so than their limited *viewpoint*)—both Couser and Stanzel declaring that narration is typically 'subdivided' by 'level of knowledge', which further results in a 'a subjective and [only] conditionally valid view of events'.[214] [215] I challenge this notion, however, as I find it reductive and misleading to dismiss *all* children (and, by extension, all child *narrators*) as *wholly* unintelligent. Their limited scope is a universal aspect of 'youth'; their collective label as 'ignorant' is an over-generalization. However—if a reader's understanding relies on the narrator's ability to *accurately* convey their *meaning*, then a child-narrated memoir (without adult narratorial influence) would likely require 'a significant amount of general background knowledge' to 'interpret even the simplest sentences'.[216] This will quite obviously *alienate* readers, who will find themselves having to pay *very* close attention in order to understand any of the narrative action.[217] 'The writer labors so the reader won't have to,' Gerard wisely states—and rightly so. The reader shouldn't have to find the act of reading *so* arduous, *so* incomprehensible, that a child-narrated memoir is like learning a perplexing new language, or solving an impossible riddle.[218] If a 'bad' memoir is one where 'the line of clarification remains muddy, uncertain, [and] indistinct', does my rejection of the adult narrator mean I've likewise wholly rejected my narrating self—resulting in a memoir so limited, it borders on a half-truth?[219]

[213] Tamar Yacobi, 'Package deals in fictional narrative: the case of the narrator's (un) reliability' (Columbus: Narrative, 2001) p. 228.
[214] Couser, *Memoir*, pp. 61-2.
[215] Stanzel, p. 89.
[216] Steinmetz, p. 78.
[217] Gornick, p. 104.
[218] Gerard, p. 97.
[219] Gornick, p. 92.

Perhaps not: as some scholars argue that such a 'hyper-restrictive' style could achieve some semblance of 'balance' without compromising narrative integrity. For instance, the child narrator's limited perspective *can* be mitigated through various 'alternative' forms of adult presence: Muchiri asserts that the child narrator's connection to the other adult characters in the narrative can be 'enough' to influence the sole child narrator.[220] Foer does this within *Extremely Loud* by incorporating ancestral figures to contextualize the child's development; and Romain Gary, likewise, makes sure the reader is given adult commentary via direct dialogue or indirect action in *The Life Before Us,* so as to support 'gaps' where the child cannot, seemingly, touch.[221] Even my own child narrator leans heavily on what she witnesses and interacts with from her mother, father, grandfather and other adults – such as reciting tales of her parent's early marriage that are outside of her memory and/or existence. Child narrators often *mimic* adult behaviour and expressions, anyway—including the language they hear from their parents, guardians, or other authority figures.[222] Steinmetz notes that while children may not always listen to their elders, they consistently imitate them; exemplified by Momo (of *The Life Before Us)*, who embodies a miniature version of the adults around him.[223] This adult perspective and/or voice *can*, subtly, permeate the narrative—for the author *must* include some element of an adult reality in their work—though again, this need not always be a *narrator*. [224] Therese Fischer highlights how, furthermore, scholars and readers question whether child narratives are, frankly, just simplified versions of adult narratives, modelled after what they absorb from their elders.[225] Maybe so; as Steinmetz contends that adult influence is so significant, that even without the adult as *narrator*,

[220] Muchiri, p. 32.
[221] Steinmetz, p. 131.
[222] Rajiva, p. 85.
[223] Steinmetz, pp. 42-43.
[224] Steinmetz, p. 80.
[225] Fischer, pp. 179-80.

distinguishing between it and the child narrator becomes 'nearly impossible', as the adult's impact inevitably compensates for the child's limitations:

> […] functions of the child narrators are *similar* to those of adult narrators. Adult narrator and child narrator *are both puppets* that are meant to transmit a novel's message in the most accurate and in the most appealing way for the reader [and] *both* raise social and ethical questions and they can discuss any topic that the author wants to put at the centre of his novel […] [226]

On this, Steinmetz highlights an equally intriguing point: since the author is always the source of the narrator's words, regardless of the narrator's age—and as the author of a child narrator, particularly in memoir, is almost invariably an adult—Steinmetz argues that the narrative will inevitably remain 'internally coherent' because the adult author ensures it. As the 'creator' of the storyteller, the implied adult author works diligently to shape the child narrator in a way that conveys the intended literary message subtly, while *also* allowing the implied adult reader to analyse the child-narrated events independently.[227] When

> the reader is an adult and the narrator a child […] the intellectual distance between child narrator and reader remains, […] Consequently, the reader stays intellectually ahead of the child. However, the child's understanding grows more rapidly than the adult develops his worldview, because there is more unfamiliar knowledge that a child can assimilate. The adult [reader] has limited access to completely new material, which he can learn from and so, the intellectual space between child narrator and adult reader remains established […] [228]

In fact, the implied author *expects* a sophisticated understanding from their equally 'adult' readers, Mary K. Lee says, in order to interpret what is left 'unsaid'; there needn't be a 'dumbing down' of narration, in this regard, as the average reader is as intelligent, if not *smarter*, than the author.[229] I don't expect my readers to think that my child narrator's explanation of her favorite 'spy' game is because she enjoys it; it's because she's found a way to cope with the frequent and proximal fights

[226] Steinmetz, p. 137.
[227] Sarkar, p. 3.
[228] Steinmetz, pp. 25-26.
[229] Lee, p. 39.

of her parents, who repeat the cycle of *fight-leave-return*—and I know the adult reader can very clearly pick up on that, without my child narrator stating it directly. Similarly, children can engage in fluent conversations and, despite their limited worldview, demonstrate the ability to craft surprisingly complex narratives (beyond simple reporting) which mirror an adult's narrating style.[230] Hurst revisits the example of *Huckleberry Finn*, emphasizing how the child narrator's deliberately incomplete narrative reveals his true storytelling skill, showcasing a nuanced sensitivity to language that defies his youthful 'less intelligent' stereotype.[231] Some child narrators are intentionally crafted to appear smarter or more mature than the typical child, often portrayed as 'precocious' or 'smart-alec-y'; in many respects, these child narrators often are 'differently abled', usually on the autistic spectrum.[232] Oskar in *Extremely Loud*, for one; and Christopher, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Jane Housham observes that child narrators on the spectrum can feel 'fresh and engaging,' a sentiment echoed by Lena Fultz who, reflecting on her experience reading Donna Williams' *Nobody Nowhere: The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic Girl*, remarked, 'I'd never felt so dumb and ignorant after reading [the child narrator].' Fultz was captivated by their remarkable expressions: such as describing swallowing coins and shiny rocks as a toddler because their beauty made her want them to become a part of her.[233] [234] Thus, child narrators cannot be reduced to a monolith (particularly with such a charged

[230] Lee, p. 83.
[231] Hurst, pp. 104 & 120.
[232] Steinmetz, p. 41.
[233] Jane Housham, '*Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend* by Matthew Green – review', <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/mar/20/memoirs-imaginary-friend-matthew-green-review> [Accessed 7 Nov 2024].
[234] Lena Fultz, 'The Value of a True Story: Memoir as a Writer's Primary Source', (Baltimore: *Goucher College Library*, 2018), p. 3.

claim as 'ignorant') to rationalize inconsistent or incoherent behaviour, as they are far more nuanced and complex than often assumed.[235]

From this, the child narrator's 'blind spots' can, as well, be a great tool to build suspense (and thus, enhancing the memoir narrator's journey of 'discovery'). Steinmetz credits their unpredictability and probing nature as the foundation of such 'suspense', which she claims can only work to 'enhance' the narrative's appeal.[236] Suspenseful texts often lack clear temporal boundaries beyond the immediate narrative focus, Toolan explains; and thus, these omissions within narration can heighten narrative tension by combining conflict and delay, resisting analysis, and leave readers in a state of enigmatic suspension—eagerly awaiting resolution.[237] Returning to my 'spy' scene example in my own narrative—the potential delay in understanding why the narrator focuses on detailing the rules of her 'game', instead of the strange action that seems to be dangling in the periphery, heightens the sense of unease and likewise supports the child narrator's own 'coming-to-terms' with the reality of her living situation. In delaying the revelation of truth, such 'suspense' is exciting both for both readers and authors, King praises, exemplifying the principle of 'show, don't tell'.[238] In fact, Sarah Chauncey suggests that the memoir narrator's role *is* to heighten suspense, fostering mystery by emphasizing both what is unknown and what the reader is eager to *discover*; and the child narrator, similarly, moves through the world as 'a buffet of discovery, Ouellette describes, constantly exploring and uncovering their surroundings.[239] [240] Kamali observes that childhood is both a state of 'being' and 'becoming' (the former highlighting

[235] Kirin Narayan, 'Tools to shape texts: what creative nonfiction can offer ethnography', (London: Anthropology and Humanism, 2007), p. 134.
[236] Steinmetz, p. 23 & 90.
[237] Toolan, pp. 100-1.
[238] King, 'Boldly'.
[239] Sarah Chauncey 'The tricky issue of POV in memoir' < https://janefriedman.com/pov-in-memoir/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[240] Ouellette, 'Outsized'.

agency, the latter reflecting *maturation*), thus positioning the child narrator as a 'being' who is perpetually engaged in the process of 'becoming' through their narrative can emphasize further this notion of 'discovery'.[241] By inadvertently creating a significant amount of suspense, the child narrator embodies what Gerard calls 'the heart of every good story', and provides the element that memoirs often seek (and flourish) with.[242] Birkerts even questions *how* 'genuine' discovery can even be recognized, if the memoir narrator does not reveal their development through chaos and confusion? [243] This would seem to work very highly in the child narrators' favour—as many scholars suggest that they hold a distinct advantage here, over the adult narrator. Steinberg, for one, reveals that

> […] the [child] narrator's internal struggles to come to terms with a deeply disturbing predicament, a confusing dilemma that he couldn't, *at the time*, *understand or interpret*. […] In truth, *the adult narrator is no longer that kid*. What's *authentic*, though, is the numbing humiliation and despair the boy was feeling *in that moment.* And in order to *re-create* his disappointment, I, the writer, had to fully imagine and recall *what it felt like to be that kid in that particular situation*. […] Once again, the important story is the internal struggle, *the story of the narrator's thinking*—[their] confusions and guilts, questions and fears, reflections and speculations. How then, I ask you, does one measure the *reliability of someone's thought process*?[244]

Both the memoir narrator and the child narrator appear to share the same goal of 'uncovering' an experience, relying on a lack of preconceptions, and providing their own explanations for the reader to engage with and interpret.[245] The form allows these narrators to explore *without* knowing their destination—embracing tentativeness, speculation, and misunderstanding.

Therefore—in narrating 'without', these narrators seem to parallel this idea that limitations are a source of strength: both within memoir, and within child narration.[246] Sarker's analysis of

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[241] Kamali, p. 30 & 41.
[242] Gerard, p. 127.
[243] Birkerts, p. 121.
[244] Michael Steinberg, 'Did it really happen that way? The memoirist as unreliable narrator' < https://www.triquarterly.org/craft-essays/did-it-really-happen-way-memoirist-unreliable-narrator > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024] [my emphasis]
[245] Birkerts, pp. 25 & 22.
[246] Crispin, 'Here's Why'.

Persepolis revels how child narrators, in fact, *broaden* their narrative potential with such limitations: for they require *clarity* and *intentionality* about what they know, and don't know.[247] Likewise, in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* the child narrator 'transcends' their limitations when they creatively employ a keen sense of *body language* to communicate to the reader, when words fail.[248] Heidi Fettig-Parton aptly summarizes that the employment of the (*partial*) child narrator's restraint ironically allowed her, in some manner, to write 'without restraint' in her memoir—a sentiment echoed by Foer, of *Extremely Loud*: 'Their limitations define them', he declares, acknowledging the 'sole' child narrator's deficiencies whilst equally celebrating their ability to transcend them.[249] [250] Could these be similar to the omissions that are intrinsic to the memoir form? Larson highlights that a story with a limited temporal scope contains not *less*, but *more* material—as some of the best memoirs are structured by a narrator who can 'speak what they know only obliquely'.[251] In fact, limitations are common in *all* art forms—and forcing writers to be more inventive, economical with language, and 'focused' does not diminish the narrative's integrity.[252] Therefore, if 'restraint enhances any work where we want readers to *feel*, not just *understand'*, then it would seem the sole child narrator in memoir would exemplify these 'limited strengths' twofold.

2.3. Lack of Maturity

Finally, this first-person 'sole' child narrator of memoir, who is inherently (and controversially) both unreliable and limited, can ultimately be criticized for a more profound lack of 'maturity' (as opposed to 'ignorance'). Allison James and Alan Prout, in ''A New Paradigm for the Sociology

[247] Sarkar, p. 9.
[248] Hurst, p. 110.
[249] Heidi Fettig Parton, 'Why write child narrators? Jeannine Ouellette has the answers: a 2022 hippocamp recap' < https://hippocampusmagazine.com/2022/08/why-write-child-narrators-jeannine-ouellette-has-the-answers-a-2022-hippocamp-recap/ > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[250] Joshua Wolf Shenk, 'Jonathan Safran Foer: Living to Tell the Tale' < http://motherjones.com/media/2005/05/jonathan-safran-foer > [Accessed 7 Nov 2024]
[251] Larson, pp. 22-3.
[252] Gerard, p. 91.

of Childhood', view the immaturity of children as a 'biological fact of life', both 'spatially' and 'psychologically' confined to experiences (or, lack thereof).[253] When discussing a child's immaturity, terms like 'innocent' and 'purity' are commonly used—i.e., their 'innocent purity and passivity', or playing a 'redemptive and salvationary role of innocence'.[254] [255] Even Gubar stresses that the child narrator *must* be innocent, as their 'moral purity' is what distinguishes them.[256] This aligns with historical views of childhood (particularly the Romantic ideal): where the child is seen as both 'immaculately' innocent whilst almost wholly 'unaware'.[257] In his essay on John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Darius Jackson points out the child narrator's slips of immaturity, such as his inability to recognize the German word 'Führer' and his complete obliviousness of his father's role as a Nazi commanding officer at Auschwitz, only commenting on how 'fantastic' his father's uniform looked.[258] This can likewise be seen in *Persepolis,* where Sarkar shows the child narrator's depiction of violence through a 'clinical, doll-like representation of the body,' withholding any blood or more explicit imagery due to the narrator's limited comprehension of the situation. [259] Van Lierop-Debrawer effectively demonstrates this in their analysis of *Hoe moet dat nu met die papillotten?* by Dutch author Rita Verschuur, where the child narrator 'reduces her grief about the divorce to a manageable size,' leaving the deeper pain behind concerns like her hairstyle unspoken.[260] Similarly, Goldberg's study of Guralnik's 'Los cordeles' explains how the

[253] Allison James and Alan Prout, 'A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems' (London: Falmer, 1997), p. 7.
[254] Maureen Moynagh, 'Human rights, child-soldier narratives, and the problem of form', (Bloomington: Research in African Literatures, 2011), p. 54.
[255] Steinmetz, p. 18.
[256] Gubar, p. 41. [my emphasis]
[257] Fogarty, p. 10.
[258] Darius Jackson, '"I know it's not really true, but it might just tell us...": The troubled relationship between *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and understanding about the Holocaust' (London: Holocaust Education: Contemporary Challenges and Controversies, 2020), p. 144.
[259] Sarkar, p. 6-7.
[260] Van Lierop-Debrawer, p. 21.

'migratory moment' becomes mysterious and impressionistic, as the child narrator remains unaware of the broader sociopolitical factors driving her family's departure.[261] Even Ferry's analysis of *Forrest Gump* highlights how the child narrator cannot directly address harsher realities, such as describing a sexual abuser as 'a very loving man' who 'was always kissing and touching [Jenny] and her sisters'.[262] According to Vander Weele, these incomprehensible situations are rarely 'absorbed' in full, highlighting how the child narrator's lack of maturity prevents them from developing analytical thinking without adult assistance.[263] Steinmetz explains that children have fewer experiences to draw from or avoid, suggesting it may be more effective for a child narrator to address 'digestible' topics rather than complex themes, as their inexperience regulates their ability to offer 'adequate' insight.[264] How could a child narrator bear such responsibility alone, therefore, if they are 'less accustomed to deriving meaning and actions from broader social contexts'?[265] Or, if they 'do not have sufficient information to understand the past', how can a child narrator effectively create what is expected of a memoir? [266]

Moreso, some argue that there is a degree of 'inappropriateness' (especially in memoir), when a 'immature' child narrator is tasked with addressing 'too mature' themes. As Steinmetz explains, this occurs because readers often expect certain 'challenging topics' to be reserved for adult audiences, assuming that children are not suited to address them appropriately.[267] Koranda discusses this in his analysis of Frank O'Connor's *My Oedipus Complex*, where such uncertainty

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[261] Goldberg, p. 7. [my emphasis]
[262] Ferry, p. 24.
[263] Vander Weele, p. 103.
[264] Steinmetz, p. 89 & 96.
[265] Goldberg, p. 7.
[266] David Mura, 'Story & Narrative Voice in Memoir' < https://gulfcoastmag.org/online/blog/story-and-narrative-voice-in-memoir/#:~:text=David%20Mura,-Apr%2027%2C%202015&text=Memoir%20presents%20a%20past%20self,the%20past%20self%20viewed%20them. > [7 Nov 2024]
[267] Steinmetz, p. 56.

caused the author to 'avoid excessive explicitness' from the child narrator, occasionally resorting to outright 'censorship' in the process.[268] But is this narrating truthfully? Or cautiously? The concept of 'childhood' (particularly in the European-American tradition), is often associated with the promise of 'protection' and 'preservation' of children's virtue—which is why Gubar argues that literary representation can sometimes be problematic, due to the 'traumatic' nature of their experiences.[269] As Ouellete explains,

> a great many [adult readers] are adamantly averse to reading about a child being hurt, let alone molested. One member of my short-lived book club once said she avoids any story in which children are not lovingly tucked into bed at night. Even when readers are willing to enter literary worlds in which children get hurt, those same readers likely do so already braced to push the material away if it becomes unbearable.[270]

Steinmetz suggests that much of this discomfort arises from an 'imbalance' in tone, where the child narrator's naivety can diminish the narrative's gravity, resulting in a tone that may feel overly idealistic or even kitschy.[271] This is evident in the criticism of *Extremely Loud*, where critic Laura Miller condemns the narrator's 'cutesiness', which she feels clashes with the graver subject matter of 9/11.[272] Ouellette seemingly concurs, arguing that the most important aspect is for a narrator's voice to match the tone of the material and be attuned to the story's mood—particularly when considering child narrators within traumatic spaces (like memoir).[273] In fact, Mark Anderson, in 'The child victim as witness to the Holocaust: an American story?', raises an important question: wondering if a child narrator can ever accurately portray traumatic or true events without 'simplifying' or 'distorting' them? [274] This 'problematic' charge, it seems, is the result of

[268] Koranda, 'Child'. [my emphasis]
[269] Gubar, p. 54.
[270] Ouellette, 'Outsized'.
[271] Steinmetz, p. 135.
[272] Steinmetz, p. 127.
[273] Ouellette, 'Outsized'.
[274] Mark M. Anderson, 'The child victim as witness to the Holocaust: an American story?', (Bloomington: Jewish Social Studies, 2007), p. 2.

'reducing' their experiences, narratively, to a 'naïve message' of sorts: 'suspended' in meaning and thus 'weakening' the narrative's overall 'transformative' power.[275] How does this narrator overcome these controversies, in order to at least *attempt* a successful narration of their memoir? Can they?

However, the lack of maturity in a 'sole' child narrator can bring distinctive qualities to a narrative—and potentially a childhood memoir as well. For one, many counter-claim that child narrators are (ironically) often *surprisingly* capable of exhibiting a normative level of maturity in their narration. Much like the famous slogan of talk show host Art Linkletter—*'kids say the darndest things'*—children's narration can reveal a surprisingly perceptive and astute perspective, defying this presumed all-encompassing 'limitation' of their immaturity.[276] Charles Baxter offers an excellent personal example of this, showcasing a perceptive observation made by a child, on a train:

> When we cross a river […] the girl says to her mother, "I'm frightened! We'll all fall into the river. We will be *destiny*." […] I immediately write down the sentence and am simultaneously plunged into despair about how to convey on a page the way the girl sang out the word "destiny." Months later, the girl's misuse of the word "destiny" doesn't interest me so much as the joy that the little girl conveyed in role-playing a little girl who is frightened. She had mastered her own emotions by acting them out theatrically, for her mother. Her lack of fright—the subtext being her joy—projected itself distinctly through her happy inflection'.[277]

These (perhaps *unconscious*) displays of mature thought can find their way into literature; as many have *praised* child narrators for their remarkable depth and complexity, re-shaping their hitherto

[275] Naomi Sokoloff, 'Review: Hamida Bosmajian *The Holocaust and Literature for Children: Literature, and the Holocaust* and Lydia Kokkola *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature* (Bloomington: Prooftexts, 2005), p. 176.
[276] Šárka Bubíková, 'Narrating as a child, reading as an adult: Ways of employing a child narrator in the American novel', (New York: Theories and Practices, 2011), p. 265.
[277] Charles Baxter, *The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2007), p. 97.

'limited' judgement on the potential of a child narrator.[278] At times the child narrator may even exhibit *greater* maturity than the adult, who, as Steinmetz argues,

> […] use[s] deliberate language, both verbal and physical, in order to manipulate other people [..] So in a way, adults are made to believe that they pull the strings and that they manage to coax their children into compliance. Yet, seen from another perspective, children are more creative than adults, because they manage to extract the best or most beneficial for their own wellbeing. A child narrator manages to convey this duality in understanding and in looking at one and the same idea from different perspectives, because the child narrator is directly speaking from his frame of mind and reveals an attitude that remains undisclosed to the adults in the novel. Consequently, the child narrator makes the adult reader the accomplice of his world and explains to the adult reader how much understanding a child has of the adult point of view. Thus, reader and child narrator form an informed entity that stands in contrast to the other characters in the novel, who do not know what the narrator is thinking or saying about them or about himself'.[279]

Garonzik suggests this 'unexpected insight' can stem from their *detachment* to the adult world; in fact, children may possess a certain type of 'instinctual' perception that adults, arguably, may lose over time.[280] This may arise from their heightened observational skills, which in turn enhance their tendency to ask questions (as noted prior). Edmiston highlights the child narrator's use of 'eavesdropping' or 'spying' as a key technique for acquiring information, even while remaining physically distanced from the action.[281] Goldberg offers an example from Guralnik once more, where the child narrator, though confined to observing from an adjacent room, still manages to glean a contextual understanding of the interaction among the older family members present.[282] In fact, how many of us have been subjected to the ever-persistent *stare* of a child?

> Like a camera with a zoom lens, a child narrator might see things magnified or from unusual angles unnoticed by other protagonists. And child narrators have the agency to bring our attention to these details in arresting ways. […] Because children are less restricted by the social norms and conventions governing what people should look at or away from, they have more license to observe openly and unflinchingly. […] A child's uninhibited stare, when deftly captured in a narrator, can amplify that narrator's ability to reveal certain truths, often difficult ones. Observations around personal or social

[278] Parton, 'HippoCamp'.
[279] Steinmetz, pp. 88-9.
[280] Garonzik, p. 142.
[281] Edmiston, p. 732. [my emphasis]
[282] Goldberg, p. 10.

> shortcomings that would feel critical from an adult narrator may feel more neutral from a child.[283]

Steinmetz views this as leveraging their ability to subtly comment on shortcomings rather than immediately highlighting other characters' flaws.[284] Similarly, such observational misunderstandings often prompt child narrators to rely extensively on questioning language to navigate their uncertainty. Hurst and Steinmetz note that questions are used as an exploratory tool, often forming an adjacent habit of repeating *and* questioning observable, 'new' information aloud, to deepen their understanding. [285] [286] Children's insistence on questioning (often *'why'* questions) reflect a determination to receive answers which, as Hurst suggests, may stem from their inferior social power position—as inquisitive speech is often labelled as 'powerless'.[287]

Similarly, whatever the 'span' of their age within a narrative (whether one *year*, or over a *decade*), the child narrator *will* mature, undoubtedly— offering readers the growth and hindsight they anticipate by the story's end. Claire Marrone examines the learning and maturation of Alice Munro's child narrator in *Dear Life*, whose development fluctuates throughout the narrative of the 'growing child,' while Christine Dwyer Hickey's *Tatty* portrays their narrator's growth from ages four to fourteen.[288] [289] Steinmetz argues that portraying the gradual development of a child narrator's maturity is a challenge for any author—but that their 'learning curve' is easier to define compared to an adult narrator, who may be more 'resistant' to change.[290] Similarly, O'Leary and Bubíková insightfully observe that a child narrator (while still a *child*) can *reflect on* and *interpret*

[283] Ouellette, 'Outsized'.
[284] Steinmetz, p. 138.
[285] Hurst, pp. 60 & 62.
[286] Steinmetz, pp. 102-3.
[287] Vander Weele, p. 132.
[288] Claire Marrone, 'States of perception and personal agency in Alice Munro's "Dear Life"' (Chicago: The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association, 2017), p. 93.
[289] O'Leary, 'Tatty'.
[290] Steinmetz, p. 80.

their own growth; thus, the ability to be 'retrospective' is not exclusive only to adult narrators.[291] [292] Van Lierop-Debrawer highlights this, observing that the child only becomes fully aware of the horrors of war as she grows into an older child (read: *not* adult).[293] This is often conveyed via 'flashbacks' (like my own insertions to memories from previous states, etc.); for the child narrator is, likewise, not constrained to chronological storytelling either.[294] Similarly, Edmiston observes that the child narrator, like the adult narrator, can inform the reader about details already known to their experiencing self, such as, 'I forgot to mention that I had seen her three times.'[295]

In another vein, this 'unexpected maturity' may stem from early exposure to hardship—where neglect or lack of care forces experiences beyond the child narrator's years.[296] In memoirs, such situations are often considered commonplace; as Romain Gary jokes, 'It's a laugh when you think of the things minors aren't allowed to see and all the other stuff they are'.[297] Thus, a child narrator tackling complex or 'darker' themes can create a stronger *emotional* impact on the adult readers—who may feel instinctively more *protective* over the young narrator.[298] Garonzik highlights their 'simplistic conversational tone' as a way to contrast the potentially *sombre* realities of their narratives—allowing them to address serious topics in an engaging yet 'understated' manner.[299] When Laura Miller criticized *Extremely Loud* for its 'too cute' narrator (of a 9/11 narrative), Steinmetz responded by challenging Miller's narrow view on 'who is allowed' to express internalized trauma, asking: 'Why can't a child's light-hearted voice offer as much relief

[291] O' Leary, pp. 47-8 & 114.
[292] Bubíková, p. 265.
[293] Van Lierop-Debrawer, p. 27.
[294] Steinmetz, p. 53.
[295] Edmiston, p. 741.
[296] Steinmetz, p. 101.
[297] Gary, p. 149.
[298] Swietek, p. 6.
[299] Garonzik, p. 141.

and a fresh perspective on grief as a solemn and serious attitude?' [300] Thoughtful engagement with 'adult matters' is not limited to those with 'melancholic' tones—*Room*'s narrator makes the reality of a kidnapped existence full of wonder about the meaning of life, while *Extremely Loud*'s narrator takes the tragedy of losing one's father to a national terrorist attack into an uplifting journey about adolescent grief. Dramatic irony emerges from the gap between a child narrator's perception and the adult reader's awareness, allowing the child narrator to soften the impact of risky messages or mature themes—a key advantage in childhood memoirs.[301] Alternatively, their ironic 'impulse' can also inspire great amounts of *sympathy;* such as in William Golding's *Billy the Kid*, where the reader only discovers at the narrative's end that the 'sudden kindness' of the child's surroundings is a direct result of their father's sudden death, unbeknownst to the narrator.[302] Ouellette herself explains that, after grappling for *years* with mature subjects (like incest, child abuse, and graphic violence), it was *only* through the 'ironically charged' perspective of her child narrator, that she was even able to *complete* her memoir.[303] This is also evident in Donaghue's *Room*, where the child's portrayal of his mother's repeated rapes is ironically framed as a 'game': 'Then Old Nick creaks the bed. I listen and count fives on my fingers, tonight it's 217 creaks. I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don't know what would happen if I didn't count, because I always do'.[304] The tension between the knowing reader and the unknowing narrator can, as Bubíková describes it, evoke a 'sad relief': the child's immaturity shields them from fully grasping the situation, whilst the reader witnesses trauma unfolding alongside the child's obliviousness.[305] This can somewhat 'shock' the reader—for the child's narration is, often, so

[300] Steinmetz, p. 127.
[301] Michael Seraphinoff, 'Through a Child's Eyes - a special role of the child as narrator in Macedonian literature' (Columbus: Occasional Papers in Slavic Studies, 2007), p. 2.
[302] Koranda, 'Child'.
[303] Ouellette, 'Outsized'.
[304] Donaghue, p. 18.
[305] Bubíková, p. 268.

jarring that it simultaneously makes the reader both 'shudder', *and* 'laugh'.[306] Child narrators, therefore, may be the 'ultimate' victims—eliciting enormous 'wells' of sympathy from their audience: according to Seraphinoff, the child narrator's vulnerability deeply 'touch[es[the readers' hearts'.[307] In 'Two child narrators: defamiliarization, empathy, and reader-response', Marco Caracciolo explores the connection between sympathy, child narration, and their audience—discovering that child narrators 'encourage' readers to engage sympathetically by 'enriching and expanding their familiarity with thought processes different from their own'.[308] Leech and Short, additionally, highlight the 'empathetic response' child narrators uniquely beget, whilst Moynagh focuses on the concept of the 'sympathetic want': suggesting that regardless of likability, their 'victimhood' will inevitably evoke sympathy from their readers.[309] Child narrators uniquely 'mobilize sentiment' because the goal is to make readers *feel* something—not just comprehend it. By highlighting the child's subordinate position in society, they evoke compassion—and thus, *inspire* readers to act on those emotions.[310]

With such a 'superpower' in the child narrator's repertoire, it only perplexes me *more* how they are so seldom seen to (*wholly*) narrate their own memoir. Despite their inherently immature and limited perspective (which can *never* change), they possess a remarkable ability to transcend these limitations: forging connections with readers that are insightful, meaningful, and deeply engaging. Who wouldn't want such a narrator for their memoir?

Perhaps the issue lies beyond perspective, or voice. It may not be wholly reliant their 'unbalanced' tone, or subjective viewpoint which can render them so *elusive* over childhood

[306] Steinmetz, p. 135.
[307] Seraphinoff, p. 6.
[308] Marco Caracciolo, 'Two child narrators: defamiliarization, empathy, and reader-response in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* and Emma Donaghue's *Room*' (Berlin: Semiotica, 2014), p. 201-2.
[309] Leech and Short, p. 146 & 221.
[310] Ouellette, 'Outsized'. [my emphasis]

memoirs. Perhaps it has more to do with their charge of *fictionality*—which (if true) would certainly work against them ever serving as a complete (and legitimate) memoir narrator.

Chapter Three: Fictional Narration?

3.1. Memoir's Controvers(ies)

Memoir is a genre that is, to a large extent, defined by its constraints. Edmund White declared that memoirists are bound by an *unbreakable*, *non-negotiable* contract to completely, wholly and fully *tell the truth*, no matter what—any perceived freedom to alter, invent or condense would irrevocably alter the work as 'fiction'.[311] In fact, memoir readers today *expect* a factual account—and, as a result, pay close attention to plausibility of plot, details, and so on. This aligns with White's statement—as 'the importance of narrative truthfulness' holds memoir to a high standard, imposing quite serious rules over form.[312] These constraints are often referred to as a 'pact'—specifically, 'the autobiographical pact,' a term coined by Philip Lejeune. Rooted in authenticity and trust, life-writing involves a constant negotiation with readers: while we possess the 'right' to tell our life stories, this right operates within boundaries, governed by rules that can be held accountable if broken.[313] In simpler terms, memoir seemingly offers little to no freedom to fictionalize.

Ironically, this strict adherence to non-negotiable truth is precisely what gives rise to memoir's most significant controversies—as any deviation from these seemingly unyielding boundaries can ignite debate. These are well-founded; as legitimate instances of 'hoaxes' do exist and thus, damage the genre's integrity far more than the well-intentioned majority ever could. A

[311] Edmund White, Unknown Title. Lecture at the Sydney Writers Festival (Sydney: Sydney Writer's Festival, 2006) [my italics]
[312] Karin Doerr, 'Memories of History: Women and the Holocaust in Autobiographical and Fictional Memoirs' (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2000), p. 60.
[313] Eakin, p. 113-4. [my italics]

notorious example is James Frey's bestselling memoir *A Million Little Pieces*, which was publicly criticized by Oprah Winfrey on national television after she had initially praised it, only to discover that much of the story was fabricated:

> Weirdly, Frey's humiliating experience should have been a cautionary tale for memoirists, but instead it became a template, and not just because he pretended lies were truth, but because he longed for "street cred" as a drug addict and ex-con. Somewhere in the new millennium, fame and shame got married. Their parents were 1980s talk shows, which evolved into shock shows (Jerry Springer, et al.) where people confessed their sins before studio audiences and hoped for absolution. Lament, repent, let us all rise and . . . clap? […] the confessional place shifted from the church to the television studio. This move, from sacred and secret to profane and public, increased the audience a million-fold. A few years and better hand-held video cameras later and the confessor didn't even have to visit a television studio—anywhere could be the scene revelation on reality TV.[314]

The concern that truth in memoir could be exploited (especially since 'telling all' is highly profitable entertainment), is valid for a genre that, in its intimate nature, is also criticized for narcissism.[315] If a child narrator were introduced into this highly charged arena, how might it impact memoir's strict adherence to truth? Could it potentially invalidate both the narrator and the memoir itself?

The general discourse on this issue is often unclear: some strongly defend memoir's right to creatively 'shape' and 'design'—while others firmly reject its claim to truth. Most seem to fall in between, recognizing both its narrative choice and its pursuit of truth—however general discourse here still volleys between the two, a consensus yet unreached (it seems). The child narrator's role may be particularly challenged by arguments against certain narrative *styles* within this space—styles that some scholars argue undermine memoir's truth-seeking purpose by being 'too fictional', in themselves, to ever be considered *non*fiction.

3.2. Child Invented & 'HDAB'

[314] Balée, p. 603.
[315] O'Dair, p. 42.

To begin, some argue that literary children—whether as narrators or characters—are inherently fictional and 'invented' concepts; Ouellette quite directly claims that 'all child narrators are illusions'. Both Koranda and Michael Seraphinoff agree, describing them as 'a figure of literary invention' and, intriguingly, as nothing more than 'a game for the audience— who must 'accept' their challenge in order to 'fully engage' with the material.[316] [317] Many describe child narration as an 'undeniable construction', or a 'writerly strategy,' whilst Fogarty refers to them as a 'deep-rooted illusion […] one of our most sacrosanct *fictional* devices'.[318] [319] [320]

> Historical investigations make clear that notions of the child are slippery, mutable and freighted with competing social, religious and ontological values. […] But mostly what we hear are adults *imagining* childhood, *inventing* it, in order to make sense of their world. […] Cunningham recognizes that concepts of the child are at once plural and conflicting and that they are always in the end effect *adult inventions*. The child hence in his discomfiting account of things *is a projection or fiction*. […] The historian Philippe Ariès put forward the contentious claim that our current concept of childhood as a separate life phase is a product of the early modern period and was *constructed* by the upper classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[321]

In this regard, the child narrator is simply a 'projection' of the adult author—unless the child narrator is based on *actual* diary entries, or the author is a child themselves.[322] Thus, if the adult author wholly 'creates' their child narrator from their fictional imagination, which the reader in turn likewise 'imagines', then this created figure only *pretends* to be 'real'—as no literary child, it seems, narrator or otherwise, could truly be considered authentically presentable.[323] Fogarty goes on to explain that child narrators are a precise act of 'ventriloquism' and 'translation', noting how the pursuit of *verisimilitude* can prompt writers to *invent* a child's consciousness (based on recalled experiences and memories), leading to a 'reconstructed' narrator who portrays said

[316] Seraphinoff, p. 1.
[317] Koranda, 'Child'.
[318] Larson, p. 169.
[319] Steinmetz, p. 128.
[320] Fogarty, p. 24-5. [my emphasis]
[321] Fogarty, p. 16. [my emphasis]
[322] Koranda, 'Child'.
[323] Hurst, p. 27.

'consciousness' to the reader.[324] By proposing that the author of a child narrator in their own memoir employs not just one but *multiple* narrative techniques, it leads many to question whether they are driven by 'dramatic exaggeration', or 'embellished truth'.[325] This clearly conflicts with the fundamental premise of memoir; Larson critiques the 'phantastic' portrayal of one (arguable) child narrator within memoir:

> I don't deny that McCourt enacts the terrors and loneliness that he felt as a boy under his father's thumb. I quarrel with the idea that the voice of the child who feels much and understands little is adjudged the most appropriate for the narrative of how we come of age. I quarrel with the idea that feeling trumps intelligence—it leads to a dead end in the writing and reading and analyzing of memoir. To say that access to one's voice (as a teen, a new father, a Marine, a nun) and the feelings behind it means one has found the way to write a memoir—as McCourt claimed for himself---is limited and misguided. This is not to say that McCourt, in all this Rousseuian naturalness, has misguided us. But it is to say that there's something overbeguiling about this voice, something staged, something literary and, therefore, expedient.[326]

Genette seems to refer to this idea—noting that if 'the Hero overtakes the Narrator' in autobiographical narration, the outcome is like an 'asymptote': constantly approaching something it can never reach.[327] Thus, if no version of the child on the page can be considered truthful in any sense, it would seem to follow that they are unfit to narrate a memoir, on their own. Where does that leave my memoir, then?

Many scholars suggest that this 'invention' claim arises from child narrators frequently emphasizing 'HDAB': or, what Couser terms 'high-definition autobiography', and 'hi-def memoir'. Ferry likewise questions its authenticity of events, given the focus on seemingly 'unmemorable' details and thus, aligning with Albert Stone: 'The richness of dramatic detail and complexity of emotion […] suggest that the episode must be in large part imagined'.[328] [329]Adams

[324] Fogarty, p. 10.
[325] Larson, p. 102. [my emphasis]
[326] Larson, p. 52.
[327] Genette, p. 226.
[328] Ferry, p. 80.
[329] Albert Stone, *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of American Identity from Henry James to Nate Shaw* (Philadelphia: *University of Pennsylvania Press*, 1982), p. 126.

agrees, observing that their narration seems 'too literary, too studied' and overall 'too much a narrative' to be considered an authentic portrayal.[330] This 'hyper-detailing' can lead to the 'imitation of subtext', pushed too far toward the 'immediacy' of effect in a manner that becomes 'problematic': in particular, utilizing present tense (as I do) could seriously add fuel to this fire.[331] Couser notes that narrative, whether fictional or nonfictional, 'minimizes or eliminates narratorial perspective' when overly reliant on *scene* (or *showing,* over 'telling'); this focus on detail has become a trend in memoir, he claims, over the past two centuries (a key characteristic of modernist *fiction*).[332] Couser strongly criticizes this trend as a 'phenomenon', explaining that the 'corrosive effect of HDAB' extends beyond misleading self-characterization—as memoir readers are 'shown' details no narrator could realistically remember and thereby requiring the same suspension of disbelief as a novel (which he considers 'counterproductive'). As a result, he 'finds himself doubting' the general truth of memoirs that rely on implausibly specific details, seeing them as more *art* than *fact*.[333] Without room for an 'illuminating' narrator, such verisimilitude makes the representation *vivid*—but less credible: 'it exposes itself as simulation at best, invention at worst'.[334] Couser's disdain for this 'fly-on-the-wall narrator', who he claims can only ever 'pretend' to be within the past scene, is mainly in its effective denial of memoir's 'ethical obligation' of *adult* retrospection—making it, quite literally, a 'regressive technique'.[335]

When the child narrator engages with—let's face it—*multiple* elements of Couser's HDAB, it may be that they reveal themselves as more of a *persona* than memoir typically allows. Larson explores the role of persona, arguing that its inherent 'inauthenticity' stems from being a

[330] Adams, p. 85.
[331] Couser, *Memoir*, pp. 74-5.
[332] Couser, *Memoir*, pp. 68-70.
[333] Couser, *Memoir*, p. 74.
[334] Couser, *Memoir,* p. 175.
[335] Couser, 'Fathers', p. 647.

'faux me': 'fiction equals persona', he argues, which was 'never designed' to lead one toward the personal truths of their lives.[336] In essence, Larson views persona as a 'mythic' and 'desirous' version of ourselves which, within memoir, is at odds with the form's 'aim' to reveal the authentic, and expose the inauthentic.[337] If we accept the claim that certain aspects of narratorial presentation 'cannot' exist within the confines of memoir without risking accusations of narrative falsification (combined with the critique that child narrators are inherently 'constructed' figures), where does that leave my memoir? Can it still be considered a memoir at all?

Or does my reliance on a sole child narrator push it into a more hybrid space—a 'new' territory that seeks to confidently (or successfully?) straddle the line between truth and—*well*, not truth?

Could my narrative find a home there, instead?

3.3. An Alternative Genre?

When exploring the line between fiction and nonfiction, it feels irresponsible to not consider the possibilities presented by autofiction. Popularized by authors like Serge Doubrovsky, who coined the term (and later by Karl Ove Knausgård and Rachel Cusk), autofiction exemplifies the intersections of *life*-writing with *fictional* narrative. Genette, however, expands this definition to include the shared name of both the author, and the protagonist; thus emphasising a more *fictional* imbalance of a novel that 'alludes' to a nonfiction-style narrative.[338]

Autofiction seems to allow for more *flexible* approaches to nonfiction storytelling—alternatively *embracing* the open fictionalization of personal experiences. Thomas Spear echoes this sentiment, noting that their 'appeal' lies in 'ambiguity' (and 'distortion') of personal

[336] Larson, p. 105. [my emphasis]
[337] Larson, p. 129.
[338] Majorie Worthington, 'Fiction in the post-truth era: the ironic effects of autofiction' (London: Critique Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 2017), p. 472.

experience.[339] Though they are not the same, autofiction is often *mistaken* for memoir (as noted) because the protagonist shares the author's name. Therefore, the extra-textual author's presence 'haunts' these texts more, Worthington argues; not fully appearing as their biographical self, but existing through the character who *mirrors* them.[340] If anything, it appears to employ 'persona' more directly.

The genre affectively 'blurs' the lines between truth and invention, as the events and experiences depicted *may* be fictionalized or exaggerated. Most autofictional texts outright 'create' events and situations that *have not occurred*; even Doubrovsky himself admits to rearranging his narrated experiences in a 'radically altered, novelistic structure' (beyond, potentially, what memoir 'allows').[341] In this, distinguishing between memoir and autofiction has become challenging: as the key difference between autofiction and contemporary memoir lies in the fact that autofiction is *primarily* fictional (even if it includes some referential elements), whereas memoirs remain primarily committed to *accuracy* (through a narrative 'frame'). Therefore, autofiction *challenges* Philippe Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact,' which asserts that a work is autobiographical when the author, narrator, and protagonist share the same name (as autofiction uses this 'identity of name' but places the author-character in *fictional* situations), as well as remaining in contract with the reader to, again, 'tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth', etc.[342] Worthington argues that the focus is not on identifying when these novels shift from fact to fiction, but rather on the narrative *effect* they create, by referencing a supposed nonfictional reality; autofiction here

[339] Thomas Spear, 'Celine and "autofictional" first-person narration' (Baltimore: Studies in the Novel, 1991), p. 359.
[340] Worthington, pp. 472 & 477
[341] Worthington, pp. 472-3
[342] Worthington, p. 473.

occupies a liminal space that requires readers to adjust continuously, as the work alternates between biographical truth and fiction (often within the same sentence).[343]

This emerging hybrid genre undeniably offers writers a sense of creative freedom, allowing their narratives to exist comfortably in this liminal, slightly ambiguous space—one that sidesteps intense scrutiny regarding the narrative's 'accuracy'. Despite autofiction's still-elusive and hard-to-define nature—seemingly designed to evade the relentless demands of fact-checking whilst embracing the poetic license of fiction—it also presents certain reservations for me, personally, in achieving my narrative goals. My work is not fiction in any sense; everything I've written stems from my own personal experience, not my imagination. While it remains debatable whether I have unintentionally crafted a 'fictive' narrator, I do not intend to present my writing as anything other than true—fully and unequivocally. Autofiction's deliberate ambiguity hinders my ability to fully *commit* to my real narrative experiences *'as real'* and, by extension, the voice of my child narrator. By forgoing a clear claim to honesty I may escape narratorial scrutiny, but at the cost of undermining both the authenticity of my experiences and the significant effort I have invested in crafting my truth, *as truth*.

However—if memoir truly *is* the rigid narrative framework many assert it to be, I'm not certain I have much choice. My only alternative—aside from labelling it pure fiction—*might be* to let it dwell within the ephemeral realm of autofiction. While this would mean accepting that many readers *may* view my narrative as (mainly) fabricated, it would allow them to engage with my child narrator without hesitation or reservation.

Is this the solution, then—both for my narrative, and for other memoirs seeking to push similar boundaries? Do we require an even *newer* hybrid genre (possibly just another form of

[343] Worthington, p. 472.

fiction, in disguise?) to make room for such experimentation? Does memoir unequivocally exclude this *level* of narratorial innovation, drawing a firm line?

Perhaps it's time to reconsider and redefine memoir's purpose, aim, and intention, in order to truly understand if my narrative could find its place within its 'delicate' framework. Maybe it *can* accommodate the 'sole' child narrator, fully and independently—and, perhaps, my work could be among the first, to take that bold step?

After all, what *is* memoir's actual intention?

3.3. Genre (Re)-Understanding

First and foremost, memoir is distinct from both autobiography and biography. Couser suggests that when 'self' life-writing focuses on specific periods or events, it is better classified as *memoir* rather than autobiography: as memoirs often centre on a single dimension of life, while autobiography tends to provide a more multidimensional account.[344] Unlike the sweeping chronology of autobiography, memoir focuses on the immediate and specific, often grappling with recent or even unfolding events rather than waiting for a significant time to provide distance or clarity.[345] Birkerts explains that while memoir is inherently autobiographical, autobiography is *not* necessarily 'memoiristic'; the distinction, again, lies in their focus of *time*. Autobiography traces the straightforward 'line' of one's *entire* life ('auto' for self, 'bio' for life, and 'graphy' for line), leaving 'little ambiguity' about its purpose, and likewise is always 'inherently incomplete'.[346] When crafting a memoir, however, one selects specific 'time periods' to cover: Birkerts highlights 'coming-of-age' as an especially popular time period for memoirs to cover, and likewise another key distinction from autobiography.[347]

[344] Couser, *Memoir*, p. 23.
[345] Larson, p. xi.
[346] Birkerts, pp. 51-2.
[347] Birkerts, p. 51.

This is because memoir is often classified by many as a form of 'creative nonfiction' (instead of simply a subgenre of nonfiction, by itself). Wendy Bishop and David Starkey explain that 'creative nonfiction' was popularized by Lee Gutkind in 1993, when he established a literary magazine of the same name.[348] Gutkind, in his 'godfather' role, defines the genre by: 'real life' (rooted in personal experience), 'reflection' (the writer's emotional engagement), 'research' (deep understanding to gain credibility), 'reading' (learning from exemplary writers), and '*'riting*' (the artistic passion and inspiration behind the craft).[349] The genre's core purpose remains consistent: to present a *subjective*, *personal* truth that *complements* the 'official' historical record. Unlike fiction, which can be dismissed as mere invention, creative nonfiction builds trust with the reader by grounding its narrative in real people and events—blending a presentation of personal significance within its real-life, historical context.[350] Often known as the 'fourth genre', creative nonfiction can encompass *various* subgenres under one label: with memoir being helmed as the *'king'* of them all.[351]

Within this, creative nonfiction is 'allowed', in a way, to incorporate 'elements' of 'creative' storytelling.[352] Birkerts reminds readers that memoir inherently functions as a '*narrative conceit'*: where life is shaped and structured to fit a specific pattern.[353] It shifts between richly detailed, sensory scenes with description and dialogue, and concise narrative summaries: engrossing readers by delivering factual information in a vivid, emotionally engaging, and enjoyable manner. [354] Gutkind argues that understanding 'scene' is crucial to comprehending the

[348] Wendy Bishop and David Starkey, *Keywords in Creative Writing* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006), p. 64.
[349] Bishop and Starkey, p. 65.
[350] William Bradley, 'The ethical exhibitionist's agenda: honesty and fairness in creative nonfiction' (Urbana: College English, 2007), p. 202.
[351] John Boe, 'From the editor: creative nonfiction' (Davis: Writing on the Edge, 2007) p. 3.
[352] Narayan, p. 130.
[353] Birkerts, pp. 33 & 35.
[354] Narayan, pp. 138, 140-1.

structure of creative nonfiction: as *scenes* incorporate elements typically associated with fiction (description, characterization, detail, etc.) while remaining firmly grounded in reality.[355] Crafting a unique story with scenes and reflection represents the 'stylistic' half, you could say—while the other equally important half is the substance (or, the 'nonfiction' part).[356] Facts form its foundation: the writer's subjective voice and imaginative framing bring meaning and significance to the genre, transforming raw life into an engaging narrative artifact.[357] As V.S. Pritchett succinctly states: 'It's all in the art. You get no credit for living'.[358] Gerard states that creative nonfiction, like all art, thrives on *paradox*; using *narrative* to tell engaging stories with 'fictive' devices that build toward a 'magic moment', where a significant change or realization occurs.[359] Consequently, fictional and factual texts have been known to, historically, 'borrow' elements from each other within their narratives anyway: memoirs incorporate 'novelistic techniques' whilst realistic novels often assume the structure of memoirs.[360] Gornick reflects on her experience listening to a spoken eulogy, concluding that her deep connection to the tribute stemmed from the fact that it was 'composed': the personal experience and intimate memories presented as a *narrative* (instead of anecdotes, or reportage) to *engage* and *immerse* the listener.[361] If 'fact well arranged can be art', then perhaps it's as Tara DaPra insightfully posits, in 'Writing memoir and writing for therapy': 'After all, what is the human experience, if not an attempt to order pain and chaos?'[362] [363]

[355] Lee Gutkind, 'Creative nonfiction in the crosshairs: Lee Gutkind responds to the never-ending debate' (Pittsburgh: Creative Nonfiction, 2004), p. 5.
[356] Gutkind, p. 6.
[357] Lee Gutkind, 'From the editor: the creative nonfiction approach' (Pittsburgh: Creative Nonfiction, 1996), p. 1.
[358] V.S. Pritchett (as quoted in Gornick, pp. 90).
[359] Gerard, p. 9.
[360] Peter Hühn, 'The problem of fictionality and factuality in lyric poetry' (Columbus: *Narrative*, 2014), p. 156.
[361] Gornick, pp. 4-5.
[362] Gerard, pp. 201-2.
[363] Tara DaPra, 'Writing memoir and writing for therapy: an inquiry on the functions of reflection' (Pittsburgh: *Creative Nonfiction*, 2013), p. 64.

In this context, the idea of 'persona' as a purely fictional device may not be as significant (or as problematic) as it appears; as Larson argues that the memoir narrator is, in fact, *already* a persona (regardless of age).[364] In fact, scholars like Gornick strongly advocate for the memoirist's 'persona': asserting that without such, 'there is neither subject nor story'.[365] The memoirist's persona does not have to be fully endowed with maturity, retrospective clarity, or other qualities we often assume are essential—Freeman and Le Rossignol highlight 'naivety and persuasion' as its distinct and desirable traits. Similarly, they question whether a memoir narrator's persona truly *needs* to be 'trustworthy,' implying that it is enough to be *perceived* by the reader as truthful, reliable, and/or capable of offering insight.[366] Furthermore, as the persona is not a reflection of the memoir *author*—but the memoir *narrator*—the persona need not be restricted by age, it seems; as long as the persona 'conveys their values'.[367] Thus, under this logic the child persona appears to serve rather effectively as a memoir narrator.

Therefore, many describe creative nonfiction as both 'flexible and dynamic', highlighting its diverse narrative possibilities; Robert Root notes, in 'Naming nonfiction (a polyptych)', that memoirs like McCourt's and Karr's (which utilize *elements* of child narration) have increased the visibility of literary nonfiction, showcasing the genre's potential.[368] Gosselin argues that by experimenting with structure, memoirs can more *realistically* capture aspects of lived experience, free from the constraints of the dominant paradigm.[369] Birkerts portrays memoir's canon hitherto as 'dull and dutiful', where experience is measured by a standardized or universal set of values, the structure of its 'conventional' narrative always reasserting itself.[370] Therefore, a lack of

[364] Larson, p. 150.
[365] Gornick, pp. 7-8.
[366] Freeman & Le Rossignol, p. 10.
[367] Freeman & Le Rossignol, p. 12.
[368] Robert I. Root Jr., 'Naming nonfiction (a polyptych)' (Urbana: College English, 2003), pp. 245-6 & 250.
[369] Gosselin, pp. 133-4.
[370] Birkerts, pp. 9-10.

experimentation *can* lead to a 'failure', Stanzel argues, of fully realizing the memoir's potential—where the opportunity to 'stretch the [form's] limits' should be embraced, not feared.[371] This deliberately challenges reader expectations; for, as contemporary writers increasingly blend previously distinct genres into hybrids, critics must also show similar flexibility.[372] Mark Freeman, in 'Telling stories: memory and narrative', observes that this is exactly what publishers tend to favour—something 'old but new', a 'variation on a familiar theme' that fits within marketable categories, whilst offering a 'contrarian twist'.[373] Memoirs have the power to transform personal and collective perceptions of their subject matter—but to achieve this, they must break free from the restrictive paradigm that sanitizes experiences, for the sake of marketability.[374] Furthermore, Vloeberghs openly states that memoirs by child narrators *can* 'challenge and creatively reshape the conventional pattern of expectation'—perhaps a call for my 'sole' child narrator to break through the boundaries of memoir?[375]

Memoir's careful consideration, it seems, of such narrative techniques appear to stem from what many view as its genuine purpose: to achieve *'emotional'* truth (over 'logical', or 'factual' truth). Michael Kersulov notes how the complex emotional states inherent in the paradoxical nature of memoirs often function as 'masks', which serve to uncover what is commonly referred to as '*emotional truth*'.[376] Interpreting emotional truth quite literally challenges the dominant view

[371] Stanzel, p. 82.
[372] Couser, *Memoir* , pp. 51-2, 67.
[373] Mark Freeman, 'Telling stories: memory and narrative' (Bronx: *Memory:* Histories, Theories, Debates, 2010), p. 264.
[374] Gosselin, p. 144.
[375] Vloeberghs, p. 59. [my emphasis]
[376] Michael L. Kersulov, 'Emotional truth with fictional images: reading and writing nonfiction comics in the secondary classroom' (Urbana: The English Journal, 2016), p. 7. [my emphasis]

of truth as belief-based states (such as 'generic truth'), which Adam Morton and Ronald de Sousa argue is memoir's 'gravest problem': *objectivity*.[377]

> A 'true likeness' is not one that is not false. When we say that Tolstoy's novels are true to life, we don't mean to claim that they are, after all, non-fiction. In these and some other domains we speak of truth, but assume we are not speaking strictly. Must this be the case for emotional truth? The phrase sometimes refers to kindred properties such as authenticity, a difficult notion worth elucidating, but about which [they] have little to say. [They] propose instead to take literally the idea of truth-valued emotions.[378]

In this case, a narrative establishes its own truth, yet 'whether it *is* true can never be part of the story'— raising further questions about whether this concept also applies to the relationship between an emotion and whatever, if anything, that emotion 'represents'.[379] Emotional accuracy, they claim, is similar to a 'rich myth, deeply connected to the details of some aspect of the world' (like creative nonfiction); whilst emotional *inaccuracy* tends to be shallow, artificial—akin to a 'Walt Disney substitute' that bears no *real* connection to *actual* experiences (similar to autofiction, or fiction).[380] In 'Emotional Memory', Robert Lewis highlights writings that are clearly not 'objective', yet remain 'true'; he categorizes these works as the 'epitome' of creative nonfiction.[381] Steinberg's proverbial 'baseball story' is not, as he asserts, 'about baseball'—but rather the conflict between the child narrator's wants against enduring his coach's methods.[382] The experience itself is not the complete truth; rather, it is how the experience *shaped and transformed the experiencer*; as David Mura astutely observes 'Story & Narrative Voice in Memoir': 'when we [engage with] 'The Story of Marie Curie', for instance, we aren't truly interested in the element radium—'we want to find out how her little dog Skipper died'.[383] 'Our sympathy for the queen in her grief makes

[377] Ronald de Sousa and Adam Morton, 'Emotional Truth' (Oxford: Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes, 2002), p. 247.
[378] de Sousa and Morton, p. 247.
[379] de Sousa and Morton, p. 248.
[380] de Sousa and Morton, pp. 272-3.
[381] Robert Lewis, 'Emotional Memory' (Cambridge: The Tulane Drama Review, 1962), p. 54 & 60.
[382] Michael Steinberg, 'Inner Story', pp. 185-6.
[383] Mura, 'Story'.

the story worth reading', Fludernik analogously notes, emphasizing how emotional truth can similarly help the reader interpret the story in a more meaningful way.[384] Therefore, 'rather than black-and-white distinctions', Nicole Meyer proclaims, variations of grey shade memoir's relation to authenticity and to the past.[385] This does not imply that creative nonfiction (including memoir) can disregard facts in favour of emotional truth—as autofiction sometimes does. Instead, emotional truth serves to enhance the *core* of the narrative, *complementing* rather than *replacing* factual truth. Unlike autofiction (or fiction), emotional truth is intended to work in *harmony* with the facts, creating a balanced and complete story; neither facts nor emotion alone can fully convey the whole truth of a narrative. 'Complete' truth in narrative (or the pursuit of) may only be somewhat achievable through the consistent and committed presentation of *balance*—both 'emotional', and 'factual'.

The only issue arises if we still consider memoir to be this 'absolute' source of truth. Memoir is built on *memory* (hence, the name)—and thus, we already sit on 'shaky' ground to begin with. Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger emphasize that 'memory serves as [a] structural and foundational link', within memoir; thus, when it turns into 'history' (or 'story', *narrative*), it becomes *separate* from the teller—rather than intrinsically part of them. As a result, memory can only be made 'accessible', they claim, through a process of *imaginative* re-interpretation.[386] Larson similarly explores how life, in general, seems to 'weaken' memories (especially those from childhood), questioning whether memories ever reveal themselves as they really are.[387] Thus, memoir's pledge to 'Mnemosyne' (the muse of memory) creates an 'enigma'; Adams, in

[384] Fludernik, p. 79.
[385] Meyer, p. 875.
[386] Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, 'Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory' (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2017) pp. 41-2.
[387] Larson, pp. 28-9.

discussing its 'manipulative nature', suggest memories create a sort of 'falsehood' many believe resemble 'private, pseudo-self mythologies'. [388] Even if a memoirist has access to all the resources needed for verification, remembering is often a form of 'forgetting'—prone to deception.[389] Therefore, many believe memoir is irrevocably a 'fiction'; as their more 'absolutist' views towards narrative truth reject anything short of complete objectivity as truly nonfictional. This, however, raises an important question: what would it matter, then, if my child narrator is perceived as 'too fictional'? Wouldn't she be merely at home, then, in such a 'fictional' form as many perceive memoir to be?

Ultimately, both the memoir and the 'sole' child narrator occupy an ambiguous space between fiction and fact—seemingly unable to settle on a universal solution, leading to a yet-still-unresolved debate. To claim memoir is to 'generally' claim truth but, as discussed, truth is not as *clear-cut* as we would like it to be. Perhaps the memoir and the child narrator *thrive* in the realm of subjective truth (balancing emotional and factual honesty in a way that complements their shared purpose); but, alternatively, they may only *exacerbate* each other's shared 'flaws'—pushing the entire endeavour further into the domain of fiction (or *autofiction*, at the very least).

So the question remains: do we allow a 'sole' child-narrated memoir (like my own) to exist within the boundaries of nonfiction? Or do we draw a line there; casting this type of experimental narrative (and, by extension, my *own*) into the more fictional realm—despite my sincere pursuit of truth?

[388] Adams, p. 168-9.
[389] Vloeberghs, p. 51. [my emphasis]

Conclusion

This analysis explores the viability of a 'sole' child narrator over memoir: addressing key challenges such as voice authenticity, narrative unreliability, and concerns about fictionality.

Commencing with the trickier task of balancing the child's 'mimesis' of voice—which has been condemned for being both 'unreadable' *and* 'unbelievable'—I found that achieving a unique (though not *impossible*) equilibrium, tailored to each author, is crucial for both coherence and credibility. In this, I outlined my conclusive approach (supplemented by a chart tracking my own approach to my narrator's maturing voice), which hopefully showcases said 'balance'. Following on, I studied the child narrator's inherent unreliability: which is mainly influenced by personal bias, vulnerability, and their very limited perspective. Though their naivety *can* hinder narration of 'adult' themes (an issue for most memoirs), it was also found that child narrator's do posses a surprising amount of maturity for their age, that could alleviate these concerns (alongside myriad avenues of adult guidance). Moving to memoir's contentious relationship with truth and genre, the 'sole' child narrator raises ethical and definitional debates: as children in literature are often seen as 'invented', and detailed scene construction risks pushing memoir into fiction. Autofiction emerges as a possible alternative, but without prioritizing truth, the narrative may as well reside in fiction. However, if we view memoir as part of 'creative nonfiction'—embracing narrative techniques for *emotional* truth—the child narrator may still be viable. Ultimately, the question of whether memoir is inherently fictional complicates the issue: but if memoir is already perceived as fictitious, concerns over the child narrator being 'fantasized' become moot.

Therefore—is *Landslide* a memoir?

Objectively, I've found a few answers: on the one hand, we can understand memoir to be a wholly personalized, subjective form of truth, often styled in a manner that mirrors the fictionalized novel. This could align with the definition of creative nonfiction—particularly if we consider it as a rightful subgenre of nonfiction. Within this context, the use of a 'sole' child narrator in memoir would be appropriate: utilizing narrative techniques that voice both emotional *and* logical truth successfully.

On the other hand, if we *don't* accept creative nonfiction as a viable subgenre, then my memoir could no longer be classified as such. Instead, it could be categorized as a fictional bildungsroman, 'based on a true story,' or maybe pass on into the sphere of autofiction. But if creative nonfiction itself is questioned here, than in the same vein it would seem inconsistent to accept autofiction as valid, as well. If my memoir is *not* considered nonfiction, any criticism of the child narrator being 'too fictional' would lose significance, as the entire narrative might be relegated to fabrication anyway.

A third possibility is to accept the narrative as neither strictly fictional nor nonfictional, living in the grey area between the two—a space that autofiction (or *another* hybrid subgenre) seeks to explore. This 'narrative limbo' could help further clarify (ironically) the distinctions between fact and fiction: especially as experimental narratives push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable. As these narratives progress, they may help improve the definitions of truth-telling in memoir.

Ultimately, the central concern appears to be in how we define memoir *as a genre*, and its freedom to 'play' within its constraints. The 'sole' child narrator could simply be another narrative tool in the memoirist's arsenal, its suitability depending on the allowances deemed 'acceptable'. If the child narrator is central to conveying the memoir's emotional truth, the author can creatively

address any limitations through alternative narrative choices, without necessarily relying on an adult narrator. However, if the child narrator is seen as 'fictional,' the narrative may lose its claim to memoir status; but this is not necessarily due to the narrative experimentation itself—rather, it suggests that *all* memoirs could be seen as fictional if they venture 'too far' beyond conventional boundaries. Therefore, the question of whether such narrative choices (like sole child narration) is 'allowed' in memoir seems to depend on if we prefer to further 'categorize' these new alternatives into sub-subgenres, continuing to interrogate the ever-elusive nature between fact and fiction. Similarly, it conflicts with our perception of narrative truth: do we view it as *absolute*, or *subjective*? Does each memory or experience hold its own validity, independent of time? Perhaps we will always be divided on this issue, and clearer boundaries will need to be drawn. I contend, however, that conversation about what truth in memoir consists of may yet need to evolve, as alternative formats of presentation (particularly within narration) could develop.

Personally, I believe my narrative *is* a memoir; though I approach this with caution. Memoir allows for some narrative experimentation, but it's important to be mindful of the risks involved. I don't think the temptation of memoirists 'straying too far' from established forms is as great as some suggest. The fear of blatantly 'fictionalizing' memoirs (again, like Frey) shouldn't discourage aspiring memoirists from sharing their truths in the most authentic way they can. I know that my writing is real and sincere; and by trusting my instincts (and my child narrator), I believe I conveyed a truth that would resonate with readers *more* than if I had forced an adult narrator uncomfortably into my memoir.

Therefore, I choose to stick with my 'sole' child narrator. This choice allows me to remain true to my voice and perspective—even if, consequently, many condemn my narrative as false. Though I respect the limits of memoir, I believe such limitations (in some aspects) to be more

nuanced than may seem on the surface. Experimenting within them (again, *especially* within narration) can be a valuable pursuit for memoir—as it can refresh the genre and push past the perceived stagnation of its conventions. It's necessary to explore new ways of telling stories, and the ongoing tension between fact and fiction can only help clarify the gradations of narrative truth.

Therefore, my answer is nuanced—*yes*, with caution. But this is an ongoing conversation. I see the 'sole' child narrator's role in memoir as a bold approach towards continuing with more authentic presentations of nonfiction storytelling, and I believe we should continue to experiment within these boundaries. Regardless if my narrative, as it stands, is never 'allowed' to exist within the traditional memoir halls, I've written it with the full knowledge and conviction that this narrative—this *memoir*, perhaps?—fully exemplifies *my complete truth*: both genuine, and meaningful.

My hope is that this research will motivate further (cautious) experimentation within memoir narration, without fear of falsehood in deviating from the norm. Thank you.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors for their patience, assistance, and steadfastness throughout my PhD journey. Special thanks go to my principal supervisor, Thomas Legendre: for his meticulous attention to detail throughout my memoir, his unwavering support of my project, and that he's not gotten sick of my childhood tales, or my childhood narrator, after four years. Thanks to Violeta Sotirova for sharing her expertise in stylistics, linguistics, and narratology, which shaped me into the academic I aspire to become. Special thanks to Jon McGregor: for his invaluable support and endlessly enriching conversations about both my creative work and critical research—I appreciate it more than I can express. I likewise extend my endless gratitude to my Master's writing workshop at the University of Edinburgh; without which, I would never have had the courage to let my child narrator speak.

Thanks to my 'Ma', Leanne: who never, for a second, doubted the potential of this memoir (even championing it!)—and likewise being a reliable 'memory' resource through many a late-night phone call, across the pond. A very special thank you to my dear friends and writing companions, Milagros and Natasha—my incredible 'League'—for your unwavering support, love, and friendship, which mean the world to me.

And thanks, finally, to Ben; whose patience and encouragement during these intensive years, by my side, deserve an award.