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Rethinking the Arcadian Revenge: Metachronous Times in the Fiction of Sam Taylor

In a recent discussion of modernism, Peter Osborne argues that the terms "modern," "modernity," and "modernization" need to be understood through their shared philosophical status as temporal constructions. The emergence of the modern within Western philosophy is predicated on a subjective notion of successive ruptures that distinguish the new from the old. Replacing an older understanding of cyclical temporality, since the fifth century the modern (*modernus*) (389) thus utilizes a linear, Christian version of eschatological historical time while exerting what Osborne refers to as a "performative logic of temporal negation" (392). In the nineteenth century, this temporal experience of modernity was formulated in Germany as *Neuzeit* (modernity; literally, "new time"): a new epochal concept unique in its linguistic reference to the contemporaneity of present time (*Zeit*), as opposed to the preceding periodizations of *Miettelalter*, *mittlere Zeiten* or *Altertum*.[1]

In the later years of the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century, this negating "absolutization of the present" (Osborne 390) as the time constitutive of producing the new came to dominate the utopian progressivism first of German Social Democracy and subsequently of the Communist Second International. Thinkers like Karl Kautsky and Joseph Dietzgen applied Darwinist

evolutionism to their theories of the proletarian revolution, harnessing the telos of progress as an uninterrupted *Heilsgeschichte*, or dominant history that fused the progress of industrial and technological modernisation with the social and political progress of history itself (Jennings 50). This is exemplified in Georgi Plekhanov's promise that the proletariat is "seated in that historical train which at full speed takes us to our goal" (qtd. in Leslie 174). Walter Benjamin famously shared his complete rejection of such vulgar Marxist appeals to teleological formulations of additive, linear historical time with Trotsky. Both Benjamin and Trotsky identified a similarity with the fascist Popular Front ideology of the conception of history as a triumphal dogma of progress that had become an empty continuum of repeated patterns of *Immergleiche*, the always-the-same historical narratives that represented themselves within a hermetic, totalized universe of progressive sequences, like a Fordist assembly line. Benjamin's critique of this uncritical celebration of the German working classes qua agents of revolutionary change in the posthumously published *Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen* ("Theses on the Philosophy of History"), was also echoed by Max Horkheimer who later observed—with direct reference to Plekhanov's metaphor of the historical train—that the goal of the German working class must no longer be "the acceleration of progress, but rather the jumping out of progress" (qtd. in Buck-Morss 168).

Arresting the "realm of devouring Chronos"

At first glance, perhaps, the conceptualization of historical time in German Marxist theory of the early decades of the twentieth century might seem tangential to a discussion of contemporary British fiction. However, there is an increasing concern in British novels of the twenty-first century with foregrounding temporal experience through disruptive, nonlinear and non-contemporaneous narrative frameworks. Influenced by an earlier generation of experimental British writers concerned with the powerful critique available to speculative fictions—notably Doris Lessing, J. G. Ballard, and Muriel Spark—a generation of younger and/or pre-canonical novelists are offering new ways of imagining subjectivity and challenging traditional realism by explicitly experimenting with narrative times. Writers like David Mitchell, Jon McGregor, Maggie Gee, Hari Kunzru, John Burnside, Caryl Phillips, and Marina Warner produce innovative engagements with time through their narratives of futurity, apocalypse, transmigration, and haunting. A shared preoccupation with rupturing conceptions of linear historical progress brings these novelists together, and their dynamic body of fictions demonstrates the ways in which literary texts can contribute to critical and philosophical theories of historical time.

Arguably the most inventive and exciting writer to engage with temporality in the twenty-first century is Sam Taylor. His debut novel, *The Republic of Trees* (2005), offers an astonishing, dystopian vision of adolescent revolutionary idealism that responds to three influential predecessors (which are all also first novels): William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978), and Iain M. Banks's *The Wasp Factory* (1984).[2] The novel spans the course of one summer, during which a group of expatriate British teenagers retreat into a forest in the foothills of the French Pyrenees to establish their own utopian republic, founded on the principles of

Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Recounted through the unreliable narration of Michael, whose drinking and accident-prone tree-climbing inaugurate amnesiac bouts of temporal disorientation, Taylor's increasingly sinister narrative progresses toward the inevitably authoritarian consequences of its revolutionary experiment. Michael and his comrades—Isobel, Louis, and Joy—establish a new time for their anticapitalist republic that attempts to overturn history, chronology and memory: "Gravity and memory. They felt like the same force. Pulling you down, sucking you back. I thought about what Louis had said—a revolution. King Gravity and Queen Memory. If we could execute those two—and Prince Time, too, perhaps—oh, what a world this could be! The blade, suspended above me, might never fall. The sky might stay blue for ever" (92-3). Michael's imagined—and desired—suspension of what he elsewhere refers to as "the universal tyranny of time" (5) responds to a revolutionary tradition of arresting historical time and inaugurating qualitatively alternative temporal structures. Those millenarian expectations typically contained within the revolutionary rupture are nowhere more evident than in the attempt to decimalize time into ten-hour days and ten-day weeks during the French Revolution, whose new calendar was inaugurated *post festum* on 24 November 1793.

By choosing the French Revolution as the (increasingly) repressed context for his characters' actions, Taylor structurally invokes a series of historical actions and their ideological mediations that have become focalized around several core questions of temporality: the will to power that becomes articulated by a revolutionary class through a perceived rupture in the lived time of the ancien régime; the desire to arrest, or jump outside of, historical progress; and the utopian ambition to inaugurate a calendric system capable of expressing the new revolutionary time. Michael's desire to execute "Prince Time" and arrest a whole set of associated temporal sequences—including, presumably, his own adult development and the inevitable return to normality that the Naval Officer in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* most notably heralded—articulates a blistering vision of static perfection freed from what the German utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch called the "realm of devouring Chronos" (*Principle* 1181). The impossible attempt to suspend into permanence the utopian blue of his forest-bound revolutionary horizon positions Michael within a tradition of revolutionaries aiming to arrest historical time; as Benjamin notes, during the 1830 July Revolution revolutionaries fired on the clock towers of Paris in an effort to explode the continuum of history ("The Storyteller" 262).

As the forest republic descends into an increasingly brutal, authoritarian regime Michael suffers a severe concussion from a fall, which further complicates his sense of temporal reality. Slipping in and out of consciousness, Michael becomes less able to distinguish between his waking and his dreaming selves, and the loss of temporal grasp he experiences each time he regains consciousness gives rise to the feeling that he is slipping in and out of time:

> "You were out cold. Oh, I'm so relieved" . . .
> "Out of time," I muttered.
> Joy shook her head, and dust flew from her hair into the sunbeam. The motes became frantic. "No. not at all," she said. "You're not out of time. You're *in* time. We waited for you. Now you're back, we can go

ahead. Do you understand?"
"No," I said, and she laughed.
"Take your time, Citizen Michael. There's no rush. Take all the time you want."
　　　But there was no time, I knew that. No time like the present. Was this the present? Or was this some other, more obscure tense? The perfect conditional. The unreal past. (217)

Lapsing "out[side] of time" becomes, for Michael, indistinguishable from being stuck "*in* time." Both operate within a differentialized structure of the present that contains strands of the future ("the perfect conditional") as well as the ("unreal") past. This mode of temporality can usefully be considered through Bloch's theorization of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-contemporaneity or non-simultaneity). In his analysis of fascism in *Heritage of Our Times*, Bloch argued that the German population did not all live within the "same Now" and that many classes—particularly youth, agrarian peasantry, and the impoverished urban middle classes—built their cultural life around shared behaviors, hopes, and ideological beliefs that were non-contemporaneous with industrial capitalism. Indeed, these groups were often antimodern, antiurban, and sometimes even feudal in their fear of proletarianization. Taken at a more abstract level, Bloch's model of non-contemporaneity furnishes us with a temporal structure of the present (as experienced both subjectively and collectively) that is resonant with multiple alternative currents of pasts still alive and futures already emergent, whose ceaseless, processual oscillations fundamentally resist any linear chronologization.

Metachronous Times

　　　Interestingly, Michael's temporal dialectic (outside of time/stuck in time) is not unique to *The Republic of Trees*. It is my argument that what distinguishes a caucus of early twenty-first-century British fictions is their foregrounding of temporal experience. Such fictions demonstrate what I call, drawing on Bloch's notion of non-contemporaneity, *metachronous* times: that is, times in which multiple simultaneous pasts and futures are operative within the present. Bloch's unsystematic theorization of anticipation is crucial to grasping the latent utopian potential that metachronous times cast. In a similar manner to Dasein which, as Heidegger states, is "authentically futural" – "futural" denoting a process of being that is always-already suffused with potentiality, rather than referring to a time which is oriented towards a future that is not yet actual (311) – Bloch understands the temporality of being-in-the-world as encompassing a fluid encounter with past experiences as well as projections of imagined futures so that being itself becomes dimly perceptible as an ever-fluctuating process rather than an ontological category.[3] My contribution to Bloch's philosophy of the "not yet" in using the term metachronous lies not only in its application to a range of twenty-first-century fictions but also in its reference to those narrative times that raise the paradox of subjective positions that sit outside of temporal representation. These metachronous times thus reveal a differentialized, simultaneous expression of residual pasts as well as

"futural" anticipations (in the Heideggerian sense) within an immanently understood present, and yet can—in some cases—also refer to vaguely posited times that are paradoxically external to time.

Consider, for instance, John Burnside's 2008 novel *Glister*. Narrated from an "everlasting present" (59), Burnside's narrative presents us with an example of metachronous times: metachronous not only in the sense of occupying multiple simultaneous times, but also in the sense of the problematic positioning outside of, or above, the time of human history. The novel's self-professed unreliable teenage narrator, Leonard, claims that his story is being related from some sort of afterlife:

> *nothing* slips away, not even the self. Nothing vanishes into the past; it gets forgotten and so becomes the future. It continues into a place that some people in the Innertown would call the afterlife—even though they know, in their hearts, that there is no afterlife, because there is no after. It's always now, and everything—past and future, problem and resolution, life and death—everything is simultaneous here, at this point, in this moment (2).

This simultaneity of all past and future temporalities within a non-contemporaneous and contradictory present transcends the frontier between the times of living and the times of death. From his narrative position of otherness—the apparent continuation of his existence beyond death—Leonard achieves the perspectival clarity with which to understand this processual, multilayered nature of the present and to realize that "everything is transformed, everything *becomes*, and that becoming is the only story that continues forever" (2). Burnside resists defining the time after death from which Leonard retrospectively narrates his story, merely calling it "the point where every story begins and ends" (2), the place in which the storyteller—as Benjamin writes—gains his authority.

Similarly, Jeanette Winterson inscribes a temporal dialectic comparable to Michael's experience of lapsing "out[side] of time" and being stuck "*in* time." In her 2000 novel, *The PowerBook,* Winterson continues her Woolfian fascination with subjective "liquid time" (243), offering us a differentialized understanding of temporality as multiply diffuse, always provisional, and open to an infinitely polysemous series of revisitings, erasures, and reworkings. The chameleon-like narrator Ali(x) (by turns, male, female, and cross-dressing), refers to a narrative location in which time is successfully halted: "[the] place where time stops. Where death stops. Where love is. Beyond time, beyond death" (109-10). However, this arrest of time also suggests a temporal location that is somehow outside of time, metachronously reflecting on totalized historical processes. The leitmotif of being outside time recurs throughout *The PowerBook*: Ali(x)'s infancy is recalled as "a brief eternity waiting for time to begin" (157), while she refers to the religiosity of her nuclear family as existing "like angels on the edge of time, glowing and intense" (195). Meanwhile, in her narrative of George Mallory's final moments on the summit of Mount Everest, Ali(x) pronounces Mallory as "outside time," describing how he laughs when his watch stops because "it was so silly really, his watch going tick, tick, tick, when time had stopped long since and there was no time" (151-2). The temporal exteriority invoked within such moments outside of time—moments where "there is no

time" (206)—is contrasted with moments when Ali(x) refers to herself and her lover as immanently "caught in time" (209). As quarries of time, "caught in time, running as fast as we can," Ali(x) and her lover offer an ontological alternative at this point to the "time without end" (103) previously assembled through Ali(x)'s childhood memories, or her fictionalization of George Mallory's final earthly moments. Winterson's dialectical shifting between contradictory modes of temporal experience—between immanence ("caught in time") and transcendence ("outside time")—contributes to a carefully woven desuturing of any definitively or finally resting temporal location.

The challenge to linear temporality offered by Taylor, Burnside and Winterson reveals the problematic "meta-" aspect of metachronous times in positing narrative temporalities that are paradoxically external to historical time. Such aesthetic experiments with narrative time raise the specter of temporal exteriority. For Osborne in *The Politics of Time,* the ontological status of the "timeless end" is surely problematized as a mode of historical totalization through its strongly theological connotations: "What is the ontological status of an end posited in exteriority and thereby paradoxically present, phenomenologically, within the very thing to which it is by definition exterior (time)? In particular, to what extent can it be understood independently of the *theological* connotations with which it is invariably associated in the context of the Judaic-Christian tradition?" (113). The paradox of representing a time both within and outside of time thus signals an increasingly postsecularist shift in twenty-first-century narratives. The engagement of British writers like Taylor, Mitchell, Gee, McGregor, Winterson, Warner, Jim Crace, and Ali Smith with the fantastic, otherworldly or spectral suggests a distinct set of interests and anxieties concerning the return to religious language as a way of engaging with questions of futurity and the end of the world that have become pervasive throughout British culture in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As John A. McClure has observed in his recent study *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison*, what we might call postsecular literature "maintains and revises a modernist tradition of spiritually inflected resistance to conventionally secular constructions of reality" (143). Similarly, Andrew Tate has observed a "return of the miraculous" (1) or "sacred turn" (3) in twenty-first-century fiction: "encounters with the uncanny, the unexplained and, occasionally, the divine have slipped their generic boundaries and quietly crossed the threshold into the predictable world of everyday, mimetic realism" (10).

Accompanying this move away from purely secular values and practices is a manifest fascination with narrative representations of (post-)apocalypse in twenty-first century fiction; in Britain, as elsewhere.[4] Our understanding of apocalypse derives from the opening Greek word of the Book of Revelation ἀποκάλυψις (translated as apocalypse or revelation) whose linguistic similarity to ἀνακάλυψσις, a word that—during the late first century Common Era when Revelation was written, describes the lifting of a veil such as the bride's veil during a wedding ceremony—has resulted in its concomitant etymological meaning of "unveiling" (Huber 159). Interestingly, while representations of literary and filmic apocalypse have unquestionably entered the mainstream of European and Anglophone culture in recent years, scholarship of the origins of apocalypse in Jewish texts of the Hellenistic period, the rediscovered ancient Akkadian and Ugaritic literatures, and Greco-Roman and Persian apocalypticism has similarly intensified over the last three decades.[5]

The blurring between secular visions of end-of-the-world disaster and narratives whose apocalyptic reworking of religious figures and themes signals their postsecular interests responds, of course, to the continuation in the twenty-first century of imagining environmental collapse. As Terry Gifford argues, the moral sea change in British attitudes toward the environment and global warming—as monumental as the change in public opinion toward the slave trade two hundred years ago—impacts literary study by necessitating an investigation of literature's bucolic heritage on a global scale. Gifford writes that "We [used to be able to] retreat to Arcadia; now Arcadia has its revenge on us. . . . The borderland in which we cross-dressed, transgressed, tried out various roles and relationships, with external nature and our internal nature, now surrounds us with new kinds of borders, demanding new kinds of behaviours, new codes, new relationships with both our potentialities, and our pollution" (246). This Arcadian revenge has led many writers and commentators to envisage a future in which humanity is wiped out: not necessarily by nuclear holocaust as was frequently portrayed in the "Golden Age" of science fiction in the 1950s, but by environmental catastrophe and climate change. What is remarkable about some of these twenty-first-century fictions, however, is their rejection of what Michael Chabon has called the "cold-eyed" "conventional hard-edged naturalism" of "classic" British science fiction and apocalyptic fiction like M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901), John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1957), and John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) ("After the Apocalypse"). Although novels like Taylor's *The Island at the End of the World*, Gee's *The Flood* (2004), Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), and Crace's *The Pesthouse* (2007) represent apocalyptic landscapes, the verdant—and even, at times, benevolent—portrayal of nature in these novels is a far remove from darkly dystopian depictions of mushroom clouds or the post-apocalyptic life of brute survival. Rather, they owe more to the early New Wave natural disaster fictions like Ballard's novels of the 1960s—*The Wind From Nowhere* (1961), *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Burning World* (1964), and *The Crystal World* (1966)—than to more recent apocalyptic narratives and such blockbuster science fiction disaster movies as *Terminator 2: Judgment* Day (1991) or *Independence Day* (1996).[6]

Returning to our central question of time, apocalyptic representations within narrative raise questions of temporal complexity very similar to those we have just considered in light of the term metachronous times. As James Berger notes in *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, the apocalypse is structurally unrepresentable as such and can only be apprehended through the survival of its witness-narrator. Surely, as he notes, this suggests the paradox of an end that both does and does not take place: "What does this mean, this oxymoron 'After the end'? Before the beginning and after the end, there can only be nothing" (Berger xi). There can be no apocalyptic thinking, therefore, without its simultaneous post-apocalyptic frame of reference. Moreover, the post-apocalypse in actuality precedes the apocalypse, since this is the temporal perspective occupied by the narrators of end-of-the-world accounts.

Recreating Eden

Following several recent fictions of the biblical Flood,[7] Taylor's third novel *The Island at the End of the World* opens with a recognizable post-apocalyptic future: cold, hard, and sunk beneath an apparently post-nuclear "low dead-ash grey" sky (4). The location, we learn, is an island where Ben has lived with his children for seven years since a Great Flood. However, Taylor quickly departs from generic post-apocalyptic tropes to reveal a self-sufficient paradise of sunflowers and cherry trees, honey, milk and wine, centered around the fully-furnished Ark where Ben and his children live with their dog, Goldie. "The sky's permanently blue," Ben tells us, "the air's warm and smells like heaven, everything we've planted is in bloom, the children are happy . . . all's glorious. It's fucking wonderful" (197). Taylor's novel is narrated through the contrapuntal, oddly mediated and yet seemingly stream-of-consciousness narrative voices of Ben and two of his three children: eight-year-old Finn and his teenage sister Alice. Ben's first-person narrative is splintered with a violent Old Testament sense of righteousness, his voice slipping between the unctuous supplicant Noah and his vengeful patriarch, God; Finn's contracted, broken language echoes the phonetically transliterated dialect of post-apocalyptic Kent in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980); and Alice's study of Shakespeare lends her adolescent yearnings a distinctly otherworldly, Elizabethan texture.

Taylor gradually reveals to us that the Great Flood was preceded by a "Year of Disasters" (96): a series of religious presages directed at the fallen Babylon (Los Angeles), where Ben remembers "the evils that stalked this land before the Great Wave crashed down and swallowed them all up" (3). This futuristic, flooded world is connected with the present-day reality known to Taylor's readers through Ben's memories of his "first flood" (17), which submerged the "City of Devils" (New Orleans) in 2005 when Ben was five years old. The flood, known in the novel as Hurricane Katrina, is followed by another ecological disaster in 2031, a massive earthquake in Los Angeles that prompts Ben's religious conversion and the renunciation of his promising career in advertising: "After the quake, I could no longer fake interest in what particular combination of words would best help sell sugar-pumped breakfast cereals to borderline obese 6- to 10-year-olds in the fucking Midwest" (34). We gradually discern from his journal entries that Ben understood the earthquake as God's vengeful response to a fallen and defiled, money-grabbing world: "and lo the sun became black and the moon became as blood, and . . . the senators and the shareholders and copywriters hid themselves in the lobbies of skyscrapers, and said to the skyscrapers, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, for the great day of His wrath is come" (33). Capitalist excess ("the wonderful world of money" [32]), Ben concludes, is the target of God's wrath: the Babylonian damnation of avarice, war, and soulless advertising, "all the bullshit pouring from the moving mouths on TV, in the Coke and Sprite we drunk and the Nike and Gap we wear" (164). After quitting his job, Ben achieves "a sense of freedom, of rightness, [he's] never known before" (34), a religious salvation in which God conveys—through the TV pixels and Ben's baby monitor—that the Earth will be flooded and that Ben has been singled out to build an ark and avoid destruction.

Taylor's satiric critique of twenty-first-century capitalism through the genre of post-apocalypse becomes complicated, however, when it is revealed that Ben has constructed his island at the end of the world and that there was no flood in the first place. As she reads his stolen journal near the end of the novel, Alice learns about the

lengths Ben went to in order to escape from the Babylonian "City of Angels" (16). Having discovered the wilderness of giant redwood forests in the Sierra Nevada,[8] Ben realized that he had found his utopia in the "most gloriously empty valley":

> M[ary] said "What kind of world have we brought our children into?"
>
> She sobbed. I comforted her, hugged and kissed her, then asked how she would feel about moving away from the city. Moving to a place where the war would never reach us. A place far away from all the earth's troubles.
>
> "Oh God, if only we could," she said.
>
> "What if I told you we can do exactly that, Mary?" (166).

Ben's place "far away from all the earth's troubles" is transformed into an island after a winter's hard labor digging a giant moat around the base of a mountain. However, the fledgling island remains anchored to its surroundings, despite Ben's best efforts to construct a hermetically contained retreat, and the encroachment of the outside world into his self-sufficient family sphere becomes Ben's most feared enemy. The novel opens with a stranger bobbing on the waveless horizon, threatening to puncture Ben's Eden and deconstruct the myriad of increasingly complex narratives he has fabricated to control and contain his children. Throughout the novel, Ben's violent temper escalates—nourished by prolonged bouts of drinking reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's Snowman in *Oryx and Crake*—as the possibilities that his children will discern the cracks in his well-worn narratives of biblical salvation multiply. Ben is plagued by the incoming figure of the stranger, who washes up onto their shores and earns the love of Ben's children before Ben has a chance to kill him. The stranger, we learn, is Ben's own nephew, sent from Ben's wife (Mary, it turns out, didn't die in the flood but fled the island) to rescue Alice, Finn, and Daisy from their volcanically dangerous father. Meanwhile, Nature provokes Ben with a drought that reveals the horizon of land beyond his enormous moat: "if it doesn't rain soon," Ben reflects, "the crops will die, the lake will vanish, we will all die of thirst, the horizon will grow wider than the sea . . . and the Day of Doom shall be the end of this time" (71).

For Ben, the island constitutes an alternative temporal modality outside of capitalism: "the Promised Land" (70), replete with its own calendric substitute where one counts moons instead of years. Ben exists in a perpetual present, haunted by the outside world and his own memories of the past, as well as by the spectral future that perpetually encroaches into his apparently paradisiacal present and carries with it the possibility that his children will discover that they are not alone in a drenched, post-apocalyptic world. Ben fabulates the past into a disconnected time of nefarious capitalist excess, before their "redemption": "Another world" (96), "a lifetime ago, a world away. . . . All gone. In the past. Lost forever" (16). He teaches his children about the "other world" (79, 88), or what Finn phonetically calls the "befor world" (77), through popular songs adapted to suit his flood-narrative and endless retellings of the story of their salvation. Meanwhile, the future is crystallized in the "dark mark" (35, 53, 93) of the stranger (Will) threatening to "contaminat[e] our island with traces of Babylon" (35) and poison the minds of Ben's children. The adolescent Alice, however, is desperate to escape their isolation and connect what she sees as their dystopian present with a past she dimly

remembers and a future she can only dream about. Her language is heavily influenced by her reading of Shakespeare,[9] whose plays offer her "another time, before the before" (129); that is, a glimpse into the blasphemous Babylonian "before" of an irreligious capitalism that preceded their biblical rescue from drowning. She longs to ask Will about the people and places that exist outside the parameters of their closed world, "about before, about beyond" (146), but is paralyzed by the power of her own hopes and fears.

Alice struggles to remember this pre-island world, but believes that "there is something real there, something uneroded by time" (125). Her hope is spurred on by Ben's refusal to explain the mysteries of their isolated existence; mysteries he unwittingly engenders by telling her there is a "Knowing Tree" in the out-of-bounds giant sequoia "Afterwoods":

> Finally one night I was so tired so sorry for her I gave her what I thought was a crumb of hope. I said You're not old enough to know the whole truth but, and told her about the Tree of Knowledge. A mistake. THE mistake. Fatal I should never have mentioned it. Because that crumb was not a crumb it was a seed, and it's been growing ever since, growing roots and leaves, stronger and longer and now has flowered. (54)

Taylor's phonetic pun Afterwoods/afterwards thus consciously reaffirms the threat that the future plays—in Finn's words, "[t]owring over us like all ways" (9)—in undermining Ben's engineered Arcadia. Ben's Tree of Knowledge becomes the focal point around which Alice's projected hopes and fears about the outside world crystallize. Her hope, however, is "almost more unbearable than [her] fear" (125). Although the prospect of knowledge pertaining to the outside world fuels Alice's hopes that her mother might still be alive somewhere, it also contains the fear that Mary is really dead and that they are actually alone in the world: "It's the not knowing, I suppose: the event on the horizon, still invisible, at least to me. . . . Hope, Hope, and, like a shadow issuing blackly from its heels, fear" (174-5). Similarly, in Taylor's second novel, *The Amnesiac*, hope and fear are depicted as structural inversions of the same anticipatory emotion. "What is fear," asks James, "but hope in the dark? What is hope but fear bathed in light?" (*Amnesiac* 149). Although they carry within them the utopian anticipation of something beyond the present world, for James hope is "the more dangerous and unbearable variation" of fear (243), and he calls hope "that sly, insinuating monster" (274).

Taylor, then, reminds us of the dangers of utopian social engineering, even at the scale of the individual family. In this sense, *The Island* retells both the story of utopian beginnings set out in Taylor's first novel *The Republic of Trees* and the central investigation of what Taylor has called "the horror of hope" in his second novel *The Amnesiac* ("Interview"). This slippery dialectic in Taylor's novels between utopian hope and dystopian fear is integrally bound up with questions of temporality. In *The Island*, both the future—explicitly connected with the forest of Afterwoods—and the past exceed Ben's tyrannical control. The past forms a vast and threatening iceberg of memory submerged beneath his consciousness, what James refers to in *The Amnesiac* as "the noisy, brutal chaos underneath. The past" (114). However, even Ben in his more sober moments admits that it is impossible to bury the past entirely and—after the shock of realizing he has a heart condition—decides to keep a journal in order to record

the truth about the island in the event of his death: "I had always believed myself invulnerable, immortal, here in this Eden. But . . . after that day, I knew I had to leave them some clue to their past, to the nature of the world beyond this island. Just in case" (30-1). Interestingly, the temporality that characterizes Ben's personal "Eden" of delusional escapism is shared by James in *The Amnesiac*, whose "time of absolute optimism" (45) depends on complete dissociation from either the past or the future: "I thought about the present and felt happy. I thought about the future and my mind was as blank and light as the walls that I painted. I never, ever thought about the past" (45-6). The present tense, for Ben, constitutes "tangible reality" (*Island* 57), correlated through the undeniably material contours of the island with its harsh winters and balmy summer nights. Like Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Ben can only rely on the visual materials around him to coordinate his sense of temporal reality, having submerged the past—along with what he knows to be true about the world—beneath a narrative of biblical apocalypse and redemption: "Often, I find, it is better to forget what you KNOW, and to believe only what you can SEE with your own two eyes" (*Island* 36).

Alice's attempts to glean knowledge of the outside world and of a time beyond Ben's amnesiac present positions her as struggling toward a utopian temporal connection between past, present and future. Her freedom is contingent on networking the static time of the island both with the family's true past ("before") and her own imagined future ("beyond"). Alice, therefore, can only construct an independent future for herself beyond the violent dictates of her father's regressive "island" utopia through smashing his despotic, "pure" present. In this sense, the knowledge she gains of the outside world in the novel's climax—perched precariously atop the Knowing Tree's viewing platform—not only opens up a possible future for her beyond the island, but also restores her childhood past—the memories she is sure she has but that Ben has consistently brainwashed her into not believing: "I feel as if something precious has been stolen from my life. And I can't even remember what it is" (125). Ben's control over his children thus depends on his control of time and of their understanding of their own pasts. As Michael realizes in *The Republic of Trees*, any successful republic or utopian community requires not only an alternative mode of time but, crucially, authority over how it represents its past to its members: "The important thing about history is that there is only one version. All competing versions must be erased, deleted, rewritten. There is no space in history for regrets or alternatives. History is a line—it is a single path. If the path forks, then only one of the forking paths can be history. The other path is nothing. It leads nowhere" (134-5). Ben's attempt to engineer Eden, his rewriting of his family's history and their seemingly cataphatic delivery from a watery apocalypse, is foreshadowed in *The Amnesiac* by James' alter ego John, who desires to "defy the laws of physics and metaphysics and actually turn back time" (371-2). Having orchestrated the suicide of his rival, John determines to enter his personal, lovers' utopia with Angelina by turning back the clock to live out an alternative future: "Now [Ivan] was slain, there was no reason why the two of us could not recreate Eden" (372). James' attempt to "recreate Eden" with his former lover reveals not only the static nature of any imposed, authoritarian utopia but also the temporal stagnation that accompanies totalitarian closure. He longs to live in a "temporal vacuum," what he also refers to as "that timeless Paradise that all lovers inhabit" (312), and what Michael defines in *The Republic of Trees* as the valley of sexual consummation where "time would stand still"

(60).[10]

     The dystopian nightmare of Ben's island thus emerges out of his similar attempts to engineer utopia and arrest time; that is, to literally arrest his children's psychological and intellectual development through a complete divorce from "that other world" (79), "The world we left behind. The world that got drowned by the flood" (88). This arrest of time not only forecloses any futural time of alternative possibility but also actuates a total negation of the past. As Winston tries to explain to Julia in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,*, IngSoc's totalitarian control of time extends to the eradication of historical alternatives so that—in Benjamin's words—"*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins" (255): "History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present, in which the Party is always right" (Orwell 162).

Natural Historical Time

     Taylor's characters in *The Island at the End of the World* are thus trapped in the Orwellian "endless present" of a historyless, engineered utopia. Meanwhile, Taylor's portrayal of the omniscient sequoia landscape—crystallized in the image of the magnificent "Knowing Tree"—reveals significant implications for a correspondence between nature and temporality, particularly when read comparatively alongside the representations of natural environments (notably forests) in *The Republic of Trees* and *The Amnesiac*. Throughout *The Island,* the omnipotence of the natural world is overcoded with pathetic fallacy. Will—synonymous with the temporal rupture of the outside world as it finally penetrates Ben's "pure" present—arrives during a "tempest" (126) and is accompanied by an end to the painful drought and a harmonious time of plenty for the family. Meanwhile, the characters turn to nature to glean the religious significance of their situation. Finn, for instance, stares at the mercurial sky as he grieves for his cat, observing in his phonetic English that the sky is "like the face of God up there. Blank an spression less an terrible bright" (63). Similarly, Ben confronts the sky for meaning: "I stare into the pitiless blue. I stare into the face of God" (114). Finally, nature exceeds Ben's control and Alice—led on by Will, who has become her lover—commits the ultimate act of filial disobedience, ascending the "sacred and forbidden" (201) Knowing Tree to discover the horizon of the outside world: "I stand up, and walk to the edge. What I see changes everything. My whole life. The whole world. The sea is not a sea. The island is not an island. I shudder, reeling back from the shock – and the glory" (205). Watching them on the platform, Ben realizes that Alice can no longer be controlled and, through her adolescent development into a postlapsarian state of knowing adulthood, "is become as one of us" (201). After the novel's climax, we learn that Alice and Will are no longer on the island, but it remains unclear whether Ben has killed them or whether they successfully escaped the viewing platform of the Knowing Tree. Ben blames his Knowing Tree for being his enemy in facilitating Alice's final moment of freedom (knowledge), calling it "this brazen traitor" (209). Brandishing a chainsaw, he starts to sabotage the enormous roots of the tree in an attempt to prevent his remaining two children, Finn and Daisy, from ever discovering this secret knowledge of the outside world: "No more will you lead them on, no more will you steal my children,

O Tree of Knowledge. […] I must nip the devil in the bud I must cut him off at the roots I must saw his fucking soul in two to save my innocents" (210). As he saws maniacally, the wood-dust from the tree's roots afflict Ben like the past he has tried desperately to erase: "[d]ust, clouds of dust, everywhere, blinding my eyes, filling my mouth, sticking to my skin, like the Past" (210). The tree's felling signifies the inauguration of a new, even more tyrannical phase of Ben's utopian program, in which time really will stand still and "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying" (210). Despite the violence of Ben's sabotage and his castigation of the tree—whose branches he describes as "like the sinners of Babylon vainly waiting and praying to be let into Paradise" (190)—this outburst serves only to reinforce the agency of the natural world. Although Ben declares that there shall be no more sorrow or crying, the novel ends with his drunken, infantile weeping, comforted by the toddler Daisy who, as Finn observes, tells him Grimm-like fairytales of " haply [e]verafter" (215). Nature, of course, cannot be controlled by Ben even on such a small scale as his island.

Ben's utopian/dystopian exit from the world through the construction of his "island" is thus a failed retreat into nature that, as Jacob Taubes writes in *The Political Theology of Paul*, "is a very important category—an eschatological category" (73). It is here that the eschatological implications of what we might call Ben's pseudo-apocalypse become fully apparent, and we realize that Taylor is enacting a structural reversal of the usual categories of apocalyptic time. Apocalyptic representation, as I mentioned earlier, presents us with a temporal paradox since its narration of the end of time raises the contradiction that a temporal event that is exterior to time can only be narrated within a temporal framework. Moreover, the narrative theme of apocalypse brings together disjunctive temporal spheres beyond the problem of representation and the unavoidable framework of "after the end." Indeed, the judgment of last things—eschatology—introduces into the narrative present both a consideration of all past events and actions, as well as those that remain to come. Reconsidering Jewish messianism, Giorgio Agamben refers to this time still to come not as "the end of time," but as "the time that remains between time and its end" (62). Within apocalyptic narratives, then, there exists a time ambiguously located between chronological time—"the realm of devouring Chronos" (*Principle* 1181)—and the totalizing, futural apocalyptic eschaton. The concern with the end of historical time that the genre of apocalypse raises thus forces us to confront what Steven Connor calls "the persistence and proximity of the *not yet* [that] introduces the end of history into history itself, turning it into an always already" (203).

This proximity of the "not yet" punctures our understanding of chronological time and necessitates a more differentiated temporal framework. Interestingly, although Connor does not demonstrate any awareness of this, the philosophical formulation of the "not yet" was developed by Ernst Bloch, whose concept of "non-contemporaneity" (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) I cited earlier. Coined in 1907, and developed throughout his long career until his death in 1977, the not yet (*Noch Nicht*) was the central, organizing motif within Bloch's vast and extraordinarily wide-ranging philosophical oeuvre, which he used to consider both the utopian surplus from previous cultural forms residual within the present, as well as the futural "anticipatory consciousness" (*Vorschein*) of emergent, radically other ways of being already at work in the present (Waibl and Herdina 18). For the purposes of our consideration of the fiction of Sam Taylor, however, Bloch's brief

and almost entirely ignored writings on natural historical times raise some very significant questions concerning both the metachronous representation of time in contemporary British novels such as *The Island at the End of the World*, as well as the theorization of time within current post-apocalyptic, ecocritical, and utopian frameworks for literary analysis.

Bloch considers this anthropocentric division of historical time in *Atheism in Christianity*, where he argues that despite the Church's appropriation of various pagan myths—including Stoicism and Gnosticism's engagements with the nature-religions of the Egyptian and Babylonian states, and the pagan origins of Christmas and Easter—Nature is largely feared and demonized in the Bible. However, these myths deconstruct any logos-centered understanding of human history, progress, and teleology and furnish "deep-reaching memories which still enable nature to be seen not just as a cold shoulder, or a source of terror, or a mere receptacle for the past" (*Atheism 191*). Bloch's interrogation of Nature in terms of eschatological time and messianic justice introduces one of his most radical critiques of both Judeo-Christian theology and dialectical materialism: the positing of natural historical time. In *The Philosophy of the Future*, Bloch poses the problem of the "pure past" of Nature, whose potentialities have been muzzled by manifold philosophical categories of historical time; from Herder and Ranke through to Hegel. In such formulations, Nature is identified as "pre-historical" (134), a static raw material "virtually inert to process" (134), whose time is qualitatively different from the more "dense" (134) category of historical time. Consequently, as Bloch writes, "the formally so much longer duration of natural time, because it extends before human history, is longer only according to *the mode of the past*, but not according to the *mode of the future* which, as generally supposed, is wholly predominant in human history" (133-4).The "pure past" of Nature—along with other supposed pure pasts including, in Hegel's formulation, the non-industrialized civilizations of early nineteenth-century India and China—reveals the absurdity of the application of "rigid-Euclidean" (135) formulations of space in constructing linear understandings of progress as a "homogeneous succession of events in time" (132). "Wouldn't it be really absurd," Bloch asks, to maintain that "the vast moving universe and its motion, wholly unmediated with us in the multitude of its stars, has its 'continuation' *pure and simple* in the *existing* history of mankind, and has achieved its substantial goal in existing cultures? So that . . . the time of the previous history of Nature would appear empty, and—in contrast to the time of human history—without any noteworthy future mode of its own? (136). Bloch sees such notions of historical time as falsely dichotomizing the freedom of technological progress with the "pre-history" of Nature—understood as a terminated cycle whose lumbering after-effects serve only to reveal its entropic lassitude. In contradistinction to this "empty, futureless natural time" (137), Bloch proposes an alternative time of Nature; what he calls the anticipatory, "*tomorrow* of Nature" (137) replete with the futurity of natural diachronic processes.

Returning to our consideration of Taylor's *The Island at the End of the World*, Bloch's reflections on a non- (or post-)anthropomorphic conceptualization of historical time allow us to interrogate the temporal implications of Ben's engineered apocalypse. Read through a Blochian lens, we can identify that Taylor reverses the relegation of nature to pre-history: it is not pre-industrial nature that is trapped within the "pure past" of pre-history, but humanity (personified in the figure of Ben) that occupies a history-less

pure present. Ben, not Nature, suffers in an empty, futureless time, while the Sequoia forest (and the Knowing Tree in particular) bears witness to the repressed geographical and historical truth of the family's situation, becoming the site of ultimate temporal knowledge: the only location on the entire island whose altitudinous viewing platform offers a panorama of the outside world with its temporal connections of the past that Ben left behind as well as the future he refuses to acknowledge—connections Ben simultaneously wishes to retain (as evidenced by his decision to build the platform), yet that he denies his children in an effort to arrest their development and shield them from knowledge and its perceived biblical sinfulness. Like the apocalyptic event itself, the natural time signified by the Knowing Tree resists categorization or narrative coherence since, as Theodor Adorno has argued, "The dignity of nature is that of the not-yet-existing; by its expression it repels intentional humanization" (83). Paradoxically, however, this not-yet-existing of natural futurity requires our attempts to render it in anthropomorphic narrative terms, precisely in order to retain its unthinkability. Taylor's narrative representations of natural historical time might therefore be usefully considered in terms of the question of eschatology, or final judgment. In *Theology of Hope*, Jürgen Moltmann asks, "Can a distinction be made between historic eschatologies and cosmic eschatologies, between eschatologies within history and transcendental eschatologies? Does the Eschaton mean merely 'future', or is it applied to the absolute future as opposed to history?" (125). Moltmann's suggestion that eschatology refers not only to human history but, more broadly, to the history of the cosmos—and his differentiation between an absolute (messianic) futurity as opposed to a historical futurity—suggests a differentiation between the non-contemporaneous times experienced by man and those suggested in the natural environment.

This differentiation is strikingly articulated in *The Republic of Trees*. As Michael's republic enters its own Robespierrean revolutionary terror and the group starts executing its least obedient members, Michael returns to the trees—his former comfort zone—and realizes that the world "had not ended; nature was enduring, unconcerned" (206). The post-apocalyptic endurance of "unconcerned" nature offers Michael an escape from the brutally out-of-control, amnesiac present in which he presides over the remaining members of the republic on account of his callous detachment, and he rejects the past (memory) as well as the future (dream, conscience) in favour of an animalistic celebration of what Bloch calls "the darkness of the here and now" (*Principle* 187); whose temporal proximity to the subject renders it mysterious, unfathomable, and unthinkable :

> The horizon was clear and I could see the whole, vast span of the Pyrenees. Snowless, in the summer light, the mountains looked flat, almost like film-studio cut-outs, yet there was a living gleam to their brown flanks that made me think of cows or horses. They seemed to breathe and pulse, even as they loomed there, dwarfing us all. Ideas and words, republics and gods, all withered in their shadows. . . . In the euphoria of the moment, I lost my balance. The forest swam below my feet. I felt blazingly, precariously alive. (220-3)

At the moment when he feels most alive, Michael falls to what we might assume is his

death. Similarly, one of James' several alter egos in *The Amnesiac* goes into the forest to die alone, an act that echoes the "near-ecstatic 'abandonment to nature'" he had developed in his philosophical volume, *The Light* (246). Ryal's enlightening, near-ecstatic "abandonment to nature," as well as Michael's feeling in the forest of being "blazingly, precariously alive," suggest that nature gives Taylor's characters their humanity, paradoxically at the moments when they are revealed as being at their least human and most barbaric. Although Ben reaches toward this natural eschatological experience, his powerful commitment to remaining within a pure present prevents him from achieving Ryal's "abandonment to nature." Meanwhile, James discovers in *The Amnesiac* that the only way to resolve this temporal dilemma is to occupy a mode of pure presentness through the oblivion of forgetting and the simple escapist desire to live in the now: "The only way to live in the present is to forget trying to grasp it, to float in its current, not to think at all" (140).

James' dilemma of being "always marooned in the present" (379) foreshadows Ben's solution to the problem of controlling time—and nature—in *The Island*. As David Wood has argued, "If we think of time as a series of discrete presents, or simply 'live in the present,' relational complexity is dead" (213). It is this "relational complexity" of time—what Wood elsewhere refers to as the "deep temporal complexity" uncovered by an attention to ecocritical impulses in fiction[11]—that Ben is unable to achieve. While he attempts to escape the besmirched world of capital through a retreat into nature, Ben's exercise in American pastoralism fails to strike the correct balance between nature and civilization.[12] Unlike Prospero's magically conjured, chimerical island, Ben's construction of a bucolic enclave offers neither a "landscape of reconciliation" (Marx 72) nor improves his relations with his children, and Taylor's biting satire instead utilizes the biblical narratives of Genesis, Eden, and the serpent—with its twin sins of awakening through knowledge and carnality—to offer a dystopian projection of Noah's inebriated patriarchal tyranny. If we read *The Island at the End of the World* in conjunction with Taylor's first two thematically-interlaced novels, *The Republic of Trees* and *The Amnesiac*, we can identify that *The Island* continues Taylor's aesthetic preoccupation with presenting nature as living and pulsing—magnificently dominating the dwarfish attempts of mankind to create order, meaning or control. As such, these novels reveal that Taylor's characters understand Nature's almost-religious occupation of an infinite time that surpasses anthropocentric temporality and endures beyond humanity's apocalyptic ruptures.

Bloch's overlooked model of natural historical time thus has particular significance for my analysis of Taylor. Firstly, his explicitly eschatological model considers Nature beyond the reductive dichotomy (beloved of the pastoral tradition) of the Arcadian retreat or utopian garden paradise and its antithesis of the savage wilderness or apocalyptic ecocatastrophe. Here, Nature—in an explicitly Marxist sense—refers not to the domestication of the landscape in order to yield resources essential to industrial productivity, but more importantly to (wo)man's own nature; alienated from itself, its social communities and its non-human surroundings by the exploitative processes of the capitalist extraction of surplus value. Meanwhile, Bloch's sketch of the temporalities of Nature might help us to orient ecocriticism in the direction of a return to the primacy of praxis without committing either the "referential fallacy"— declaring "there is no such thing as nature" because it is a linguistic concept of our own

making—or the "semiotic fallacy"—declaring that nature can only be signified within human culture (Coupe 2). This concern with a progressive politicization of the non- or post-human environment helps, perhaps, address the problems that have faced the genre of pastoral in recent years as David James and Philip Tew have observed: "Arcadian or bucolic traditions are either misunderstood or misrepresented as simply a contraction into conservative nostalgia" (13).

Given that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic representations, as Berger notes, offer "a total critique of any existing social order" (7), it is interesting to consider the reasons for Taylor choosing to set his narrative of patriarchal tyranny in present-day America. The US has an inherent relationship with apocalypse in terms of the representation of its New World possibilities as either paradisal or hellish, the protracted slaughter of indigenous inhabitants by European settlers, its constitutional break from Europe, and the subcontinent's continuing struggle with natural disasters.[13] Similarly, Jim Crace's *The Pesthouse* (2007) imagines a distant post-apocalyptic American future that, although ravaged by an inscrutable natural disaster, offers a distinctly utopian, pastoral representation the survival of the (adoptive) nuclear family as an abiding logic of community.[14] British novels such as Taylor's *The Island at the End of the World* and Crace's *The Pesthouse* can thus be identified as exploring a concept of nature that fundamentally critiques what John Urry has called modernity's understanding of the natural world as a "realm of unfreedom and hostility" (9-10).

Frank Kermode famously referred to the apocalyptic imaginary as "our deep need for intelligible Ends" (8), which projects us "past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle" (8). This statement neatly encapsulates the temporal complexity of the ways in which writers respond through their use of narrative to the question, as Connor notes, "of how we are to live in and out of history" (204). Nature, perhaps, offers one narrative strategy for imagining a temporality whose non-contemporaneous impulses can help us orient ourselves within a world that far exceeds our own control, enabling us to trace the bucolic heritage in literature without lapsing into what Bloch pejoratively called the uncritical pastoralism of "pure Pan" (212). The literary genres of post-apocalypticism and of pastoral are, then, foregrounded in the twenty-first century both in terms of current planetary ecoscarcities and imagined apocalyptic catastrophes; as well as in light of increasingly postsecular attempts to frame narrative time through questions of final judgment and non-, post-human and/or deus ex machina agencies. As Dominic Head has recently asserted, the novel continues in the twenty-first century to offer us unique temporal perspectives:

> the structure of the novel is one that demonstrates the horizontality of time, and can deliver the complete temporal consciousness that is sometimes felt to be missing in everyday life, governed by short-term goals and ephemeral cultural forms […] through its fluid yet cohesive use of time, the novel fashions a mode of temporal understanding that is unavailable in other forms of writing, and that assists our comprehension of the individual's ongoing role in social history. (2)

In this sense, Taylor's first three novels explore metachronous narrative times as a way of satirically critiquing the linearity of ceaseless capitalist expansion, but also in order to highlight the futility and barbarity of attempts to arrest chronological time. The subtext of

Taylor's novels suggests that rather than shooting at the clocks, we need to consider an alternative understanding of temporality in which industrial modernity's implacable distinctions between the human and the natural can be reconsidered.

Notes

[1] As Koselleck observes: "in the German, *Zeit* only appears as a formal determination of generality in the

[2] Taylor has acknowledged these influences. See Somerset's review of *The Republic of Trees.*

[3] For a useful discussion of Bloch's development of a processual metaphysics and the philosophy of the "Not-Yet-Conscious," see Hudson (88-96).

[4] Critics who have commented on the vogue for contemporary "literary" novelists to utilize science fiction generic elements include Matt Thorne, Kai Maristed, Michael Chabon and Ursula K Le Guin, who writes that "Formerly deep-dyed realists are producing novels so full of the tropes and fixtures and plotlines of science fiction that only the snarling tricephalic dogs who guard the Canon of Literature can tell the difference." The utilization of science fiction tropes within late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literary fiction continues across Europe and North America. See: John Updike's *Toward the End of Time* (1997), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2007), David Maine's *The Flood* (2009), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009); and in French and German fiction, catastrophe bestsellers including Franz Schätzing's *The Swarm* (2004) and Michel Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island* (2005).

[5] Collins and McGinn observe that "[o]ver the past thirty years, more scholarship has been devoted to apocalypticism than in the previous three hundred" (p. ix).

[6] For a discussion of the move to the mainstream of apocalyptic narratives in the 1990s, see Luckhurst 231.

[7] For other recent fictions of post-apocalyptic and biblical floods, see Will Self, *The Book of Dave* (2006); David Maine, *The Flood* (2004); and Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (2009).

[8] The fictional detective, Martin Thwaite, recollects admiring "the ancient Redwood trees in Sequoia" in *The Amnesiac* (307). Given the dense interlacing of themes in Taylor's novels and the geographical detail we are supplied with concerning the location of Ben's "island," we can speculate fairly accurately that it is Ash Mountain in Sequoia National Park, California. Interestingly, the largest Giant Sequoia tree in the park, General Sherman, not only fits the profile of Ben's "Knowing Tree" in *The Island at the End of the World*, but has its own utopian history: it was renamed the "Karl Marx tree" by the inhabitants of Kahweah Colony, a utopian Socialist community that existed in Sequoia National Park between 1886 and 1892. See Boal et. al. (4).

[9] The children are only allowed to read three books on the island—the Bible, the complete works of Shakespeare and Grimm's fairytales (45).

[10] Christoph Wulf similarly notes that "Adam and Eve's life in Paradise was outside time" (51).

[11] According to David Wood, the "plexity of time" or "time's deep temporal complexity" is composed of four strands: (1) the invisibility of time; (2) the celebration of finitude; (3) the coordination of rhythms; and (4) the interruption and breakdown of temporal horizons (213).

[12] Leo Marx considers Shakespeare's utilization of the Elizabethan tradition of pastoral/bucolic garden

retreats in *The Machine in the Garden*, arguing that *The Tempest* is "a prologue to American literature" (72).

[13] For a concise summary of America's relationship with apocalypse, see Berger (133-4).

[14] For a fuller discussion of Crace's utilization of the genre of post-apocalypse in *The Pesthouse,* see Edwards' "Microtopias" (770-774).

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