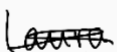


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Essay title	A lie or a truth?
Word count (excl. quotations)	675
Course	English Literature & Culture for TCS/minor (EN1V14003)
Date	23-01-2017
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A lie or a truth?

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Blind Assassin* was received with mixed reviews, some of them very positive and some not. However, one can't argue that *The Blind Assassin* is a very diverse, complex story in which the reader can choose to believe or not believe Iris' words. In this essay I argue that Iris Chase Griffen is considered unreliable as a narrator of the truth in *The Blind Assassin*.

Iris might not remember everything correctly, due to her age. She is in her early eighties when she writes her memoirs. This makes it clear for readers that she might not be able to remember every detail of her past, or that some details of her past that she remembers might be different from what really happened. Iris even admits that she is not able to remember everything correctly or entirely (Atwood 292). Throughout the novel she admits to the readers that she can't seem to remember Richard well and that she can't seem to place the events in a chronological order (Filtness 52). The not remembering of details due to Iris' age is of course not her fault, though it does make her unreliable as to telling the truth.

Our narrator does not believe herself that the entire truth can be written down and that she herself wrote down everything truthfully or entirely. 'Iris appears to be admitting her own unreliability as a narrator' (Ingersoll 547). Iris believes that someone can only write down the truth if they 'assume that what you set down will never be read' (Atwood 345). If nobody, including themselves, will ever read the story, the truth will be told. At first, it seems that Iris is writing this story for no one in particular, but as becomes clear later on in the novel, she is writing her memoirs for her granddaughter Sabrina (Atwood 627). Therefore, it is probable that Iris did not write the entire truth (Filtness 53). Iris has also admitted that what she wrote, in her memoirs, was wrong, 'because of what I've omitted' (Atwood 484). She admits to have omitted certain details, which might have been important to the history of her family or what might have changed the way Iris will be seen by Sabrina. In this paragraph Iris is considered an unreliable narrator, due to the fact that she omitted certain details and even admitted that one can't write the entire truth.

Iris does not have a reason to write the truth, at least not the subjective truth of her past, but does have a reason to omit certain things. Iris is the only living member of her family, the only living member to be able to tell the truth. On top of that, she is going to die very soon. For many readers this might seem as a reinsurance of Iris' reliability as a narrator, but it does not necessarily have to be that way (Domínguez 59). It also means that there is no one who

can negate her truth, everything she writes is supposedly the truth since no one disagrees (Robinson 355). Iris has her own reasons for writing down her story. According to Wilson, Iris writes her story 'to gain power' and to 'justify her life' (135). These reasons do not necessarily force Iris to tell the entire truth, even might be a reason to leave certain details out, so there is no reason why Iris would be telling the entire truth.

Iris does however have a reason to keep certain things hidden. Iris feels that sometimes it might be better to tell a lie, than the truth. Her reasons for keeping things hidden can be attributed to her relationship with her sister Laura, 'about whose life the novel's main narratives contain significant gaps and silences' (Robinson 348). Iris believes that telling Laura the truth about her relationship with Alex Thomas was a reason, if not the main reason, for Laura to commit suicide (Filtness 52). For this reason, Iris is inclined to sometimes tell a lie for someone's own good and probably for her own good. When she is writing her memoirs, nothing is stopping her from omitting certain details that might make her look bad or might hurt Sabrina in some way.

Throughout these paragraphs I have tried to prove that Iris is an unreliable narrator in the *Blind Assassin*. Iris said, 'you want me to put two and two together. But two and two doesn't necessarily get you the truth' (Atwood 484). Iris might be an unreliable narrator, she is a truthful unreliable narrator!

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