Metafictional Traits in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the British writer's, Ian McEwan's, novel *Atonement*. It shows how he successfully employs metafictional elements to reveal the artificial nature of the text and also to remind the reader constantly that he is reading fiction. In this literary work, McEwan tries to expose the provisional nature of history and reality. He shows the reader how imagination can be destructive and how it can affect one's reality. Also, he shows how history and historians are not to be trusted.

Shortlisted for the fiction Booker Prize in 2001 as well as winning several other prizes, McEwan's *Atonement* is considered a masterpiece of postmodern fiction. Probably the best phrase to describe this novel is 'fiction within fiction'. From the opening epigraph till the concluding part, it is concerned mainly with the process of writing fiction and how fiction affects the life of the characters indulged. The epigraph is quoted from Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* in which the main character, Miss Catherine Morland is being rebuked for her inefficiency to differentiate between fiction and reality which affects the way she responds to her surroundings. And as Brian Finney puts it, "she is the victim of reading fiction — the Gothic romances of her day…" (70) This in fact gives the reader a hint or foreshadows what is lying ahead; the destructive role that fiction will play in the characters' lives. McEwan's Protagonist, Briony Tallis, resembles Austen's in that they are both affected by fiction but Briony takes a further step and uses fiction in an attempt to correct the destruction it caused her to do (Finney).

On his choice of the epigraph, McEwan comments that:

Catherine Morland, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* was a girl so full of the delights of Gothic fiction that she causes havoc around her when she imagines a perfectly innocent man to be capable of the most terrible things. For many, many years I've been thinking how I might devise a hero or heroine who could echo that process in Catherine Morland, but then go a step further and look at, not the crime, but the process of atonement, and do it in writing—do it through storytelling, I should say (Reynolds and Noakes 20).

Finney mentions on the behalf of McEwan that a lot of his writings are a kind of pastiche and that they somehow contain a parodic element. For example, *The Cement Garden* is described as the urban version of *The Lord of the Flies*. Also, *The Innocent* is seen as a subversion of the spy genre. So, *Atonement* here is no exception. It is actually formed on Elizabeth Bowen's work *The Heat of the Day*, "with a dash of Rosamund Lehmann of *Dusty Answer*, and, in [Briony's] first attempts, a sprinkling of Virginia Woolf" (McEwan, Begley 56). At least one reviewer has seen a parallel between *Atonement* and Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) "with its restive teenage girl in the big house" (Lee 16). Elizabeth Bowen also directly influences the form the final novel takes" (Finney).

Fragmentariness is an essential postmodern trait that McEwan incorporates in *Atonement* is. *Part One* of the novel is built up of the accounts of individual characters' experience. They deal with their respective views and psychological processes. Therefore, the reader finds learns of the experience of Robbie Turner, Briony, Cecilia and Emily Tallis. There are also several episodes which at the moment of the first reading, some episodes might feel kind of out of context but eventually reader reveals how these episodes are interwoven perfectly in the plot. The fragmented nature of the narrative becomes more prominent in *Part Two*. This part is narrated by Robbie, giving his own point of view of events where he recounts different episodes, going back and forth in his memory. The reader is introduced to Robbie's experience in the war and then he recounts the flashbacks of the events from his past at the Tallises', scraps from the letters he exchanged with Cecilia. What is worthy to notice in this part is that Robbie is called by his surname 'Turner' in the parts that talk about the war and this is actually symbolic of the sense of alienation caused by the war. While in the other parts that talk about his past life, he is referred to as 'Robbie'. A similar note can be made on the third part; during Briony's work as a nurse at the hospital she notices that her name on the badge is "N. Tallis" and not "B. Tallis". When she tries to complain about it or attempts to have it corrected, she's replied to with, "You are, and will remain, as you have been designated. Your Christian name is of no interest to me. Now kindly sit down, Nurse Tallis."(259) Finally, it must be noted that the structure of part two and three are different from the first part; Part one is divided into numbered chapters while the sections in the latter two are only divided by line spaces and the use of two-line initials (Michlová 64).

One of the reasons that makes this novel fall under the category of metafiction is that it is packed with intertextual references, a postmodern metafictional device. A very interesting example is the play that the novel begins with, written by Briony, where the girl

marries a doctor. At the end of the novel, Briony refers to Robbie as Cecilia's medical prince (the fact that he wanted to become a doctor one day). So, this can be considered a complex form of intertextuality. It is like three layers of fiction perfectly interwoven.

McEwan has talked, in an interview, about literary connections. He mentioned how, in his schooldays, he read *The Go-Between* by L.P. Hartley and he was really struck by that story of a child being a messenger between two lovers as the child carries notes back and forth and this is where McEwan got a similar idea for *Atonement*. There are other similarities between the two novels, among which are the setting of hot summer, the class issue, and most importantly, the confusion a child gets when introduced to adult sexuality in an early age. Finney mentions in his essay that McEwan had said in another interview, "I didn't want to write about a child's mind with the limitations of a child's vocabulary or a child's point of view. I wanted to be more like Henry James in *What Maisie Knew*: to use the full resources of an adult mentality remembering herself" (Finney).

It seems that McEwan has modeled his protagonist Briony Tallis on the figure of Jane Austen. Many similarities can be detected between the two. Briony resembles Austen in the temperament and also in some particulars of her life. First of all, both Jane Austen and Briony started writing at a very young age. Also, they are both described as having always known that they wanted to be writers and wrote extensively in their youth. Again, both of them have written plays to display during family gatherings and to entertain their guests. "Briony's *The Trail of Arabella* is written and performed much in the same fashion as Jane Austen's juvenile plays" (Carrubba). Jane Austen had an older sister called Cassandra. Surprisingly, Austin's sister also resembles Btiony's in that both of their names begin with a C. another thing is that Cassandra is separated from her fiancé due to his death which occurred before their marriage; parallel to this is Cecilia's separation with Robbie when he dies at the battle of Dunkirk before they could ever reunite. Both Austen and Briony are close to their elder sisters because they were the two sisters in a large family. Jane Austen was close to her older brother Henry, who later became her literary agent and parallel to this is Briony's relationship with her brother at the beginning of the novel. Austen was like Briony in that they both came of age at a time when England was at war. In Austen's life the English fought in the American Revolution and in the Napoleonic Wars. The majority of Briony's youth is during World War II. Both women were concerned with what it means to write a novel, and they both questioned traditional gender and social class roles (Carrubba).

The play that Briony writes for the welcoming of her brother, *The Trials of Arabella*, is in fact an allusion to Samuel Richardson's classical novel *Clarissa*. If one pays closer attention he will find that Arabella, Briony's protagonist, has the same name as Clarissa's sister. This will naturally remind the reader of the novel *Clarissa* and the treatment of sentiment. In fact, if one proceeds further in the novel he will notice that McEwan has referred to Richardson's novel *Clarissa* through his character Cecilia. When she meets Robbie just before the fountain scene, he asks her about her opinion of the novel she is reading which is *Clarissa*. She describes it as "boring" and she continues to show her preference in Fielding. Unlike her, Robbie believes that Fielding is psychologically crude. In an article that tackles McEwan's employment of postmodern techniques in his novels, it is stated that the reference to Fielding and Richardson and Cecilia's choice of Fielding carries a sexual explicit message. This can be attributed to the fact that Fielding's works may imply "a taste for the blood and sensual" (Han & Wang 138). If the reader has read E. M. Foster's *A Passage to India*, he can very much relate to *Atonement*; in both novels there is a rape scene. In the first novel Dr. Aziz is falsely accused of raping a schoolmistress named Adela Quested. Many similarities can be detected in between these two novels. For example, Briony and Adela both commit the same mistake, that is of the false accusation, and they both cause a long lasting damage to the victim. Now, comparing the two victims, both of them are not believed when they try to defend themselves. Also, they are both discriminated; Aziz is racially discriminated whereas Robbie is seen as a victim of class distinction. Since Robbie is the housemaid's son, he is more likely to be accused. While the real criminal, who happens to be Mr. Marshall and because of his high estate, is never put under the question (Han & Wang 138).

In order to show and emphasize the artificial nature of his text, McEwan incorporates some other literary figures into the fabric of it. Reflecting on his life in prison, Robbie describes the way he and Cecilia use to communicate since every letter sent and received is censored in the prison. Their letters are coded with reference to various characters in literature. Robbie likens himself and Cecilia to literary figures he used in the letter such as Venus and Adonis, Duke Orsino and Olivia, Tristan and Isolde, Troilus and Criseyde, and so on. It is important here to note that all these characters suffer in one way or another, it is only Emma and her lover Mr. Knightly who have a happy ending. Miserably, he even compares himself to Prometheus who is chained to a rock and is suffering from life there:

The irony, like descriptions of Briony's melodrama scene and others, is obvious in the novel, discriminating the writer's quotations as intertexts instead of sources. "Both Kristiva and Jacque Derrida argue that any text seen as intertext entails productivity". That is to say, the intertexts which *Atonement* related render more meaning to the original text and make it more productive in many ways. It is safe to draw the conclusion that the application of the intertextuality renders the novels of McEwan more aesthetic significance and postmodern elements (ibid).

Since *Atonement* is a self-begetting novel, it can also be considered as a bildungsroman novel. The term 'bildungsroman' is the German for 'the novel of formation', growing up, or coming-of-age (Logan 93). This technique traces the development and growth of the protagonist in relation to her/his surrounding culture and society. As an example of the Bildungsroman, one can trace Briony's perception of the fountain scene and her judgement of Robbie; as a teenager, she is naïve, subjective and misinterprets the scene which leads to disastrous consequences. Then, in the third part, the young Briony contemplates the past and realizes her wrong doing and the reason behind her false accusation. When the reader finally meets the elder Briony, he can see how she is aware of all what's mentioned previously, revealing the maturation of her character throughout the book (Strezova 8).

McEwan is keen to show the development of Briony's fiction writing from modernism to postmodernism. The effect of modernism is clear in her writing style of her first serious attempt at writing which is much affected by Mrs. Woolf. The effect is ironically criticized in the rejection letter to her submission to the illustrious *Horizon*. In fact, it can be said that it is McEwan who is criticizing modernism. Eventually, she will learn how to step away from " modernism's denial of reality and evasion of responsibility—more precisely, of her own harmful errors of perception—towards a sense of the author's "duty" as commitment to 'disguise nothing'"(369) (Pedto).

McEwan's technique in writing Atonement can be perfectly described as postmodern. The novel can be also described as fiction about the process of writing fiction, or simply put 'metanarrative'. The text can be defined as ambiguous because the omniscient narrator steps into the text in several ways. The fiction and reality are fused together leaving the reader to make his own decision about the narrator who tells him the provisional truth at the end of the novel. What makes *Atonement* a typically postmodern novel is the complicated narrative structure. The novel involves both, the internal and external narrators. At first the narrator appears to be external and

adopting the omniscient point of view. Later, however, it comes to light that the narrator is one of the characters, a part of the narrative discourse itself. On the whole, there are several different narrative viewpoints involved in the novel including that of Briony's sister Cecilia, her mother Emily, and frequently of Robbie. According to Chalupský, the author achieved "the effect of a dissolved totality" and a sense of detachment through conveying different characters' points of view (Chalupský 2006: 7). The fountain scene, for example, is presented twice, first as if the narrator was in the centre of the scene, and second, Briony's interpretation is provided. Cecilia and Robbie's lovemaking in the library is also dealt with twice. Briony's point of view is that of a naive and prejudiced young girl while the second account is given from the lovers' viewpoint and reveals their passion and affection for each other. The author, however, depreciates the credibility of the characters' accounts by signing the third part of the novel with the initials BT. The reader suddenly realizes that all the points of view are probably figments of Briony's imagination and this inkling is confirmed in the last part of the book which serves as an epilogue or postscript where Briony informs the reader of her lifelong struggle to face up to the consequences of her crime. (Michlová 61)

The final passage is thus a concentration of the concept which Reynolds and Noakes (2002) call "the theme of life as fiction". Briony as the narrator of this text, emphasizes the omnipotence of a novelist whose imagination is entitled to "set the limits and the terms" (371). She reserves the privilege of creating the reality of her own although she indirectly reveals the true course of events at the same time. She also admits there have been eight versions of her novel within fifty-nine years the last of which gives the happy lots to Cecilia and Robbie. On the last page Briony advocates this act trying to forgive herself:

I like to think that it isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them at the end. I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me. . . . Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at The Trials of Arabella? It's not impossible. (370 – 371)

Future events are foreshadowed from the beginning the omniscient narrator's entering the text every now and then. The first foreshadowed is related to Briony's plans with her first play which she wants to rehearse to honour her brother's arrival. After her mother's positive judgement of the play, the narrator indicates that "Briony was hardly to know it then, but this was the project's highest point of fulfillment" (4). Another foreshadowing of future events

warns the reader, more openly, that Briony is going to write her own atonement in the form of a novel:

Six decades later she would describe how at the age of thirteen she had written her way through a whole history of literature, beginning with stories derived from the European tradition of folk tales, through drama with simple moral intent, to arrive at an impartial psychological realism which she had discovered for herself, one special morning during a heatwave in 1935 (41).

McEwan tackles history in a different way in this novel. Unlike the previous one, he does not try to falsify history and attempts to shed the light on what history books do not mention. He dedicated a whole chapter to one of the important events that occurred during the Second World War which is the Dunkirk retreat. In the concluding part of the novel, Briony mentions that she had a first-hand account of what happened in Dunkirk through Mr. Nettle, Robbie's friend during the war. She goes on to say how an old Colonel gives her some advice after reading her script. He corrects some of the inaccurate details about the army like, "You have your RAF chappie wearing a beret. I really don't think so. Outside the Tank Corps, even the army didn't have them in 1940. I think you'd better give the man a forage cap" (339). As she takes the advice whole heartedly, Briony makes no attempt to correct what she wrote for she believes that it is not a novelist's job to write or even care about facts. She says "If I really cared so much about facts, I should have written a different kind of book" (340). Here it would be relevant to refer to Aristotle's concept of the poet. Aristotle believes that it is the historian's job to write about things that happened and it is the poet's job to write of what might happen (Fischer 319). This applies perfectly to Briony. She does not give a full honest account of Robbie's experience in the battlefield. Instead, she fictionalizes it. She builds him a fictional reality, a provisional one.

In one of the interviews, when asked about his visit to the Imperial Army Museum, McEwan mentions that he got access to the soldiers' and nurses' letters which helped him add more details to his novel. He goes further to say how a tea-stained letter from a young lieutenant to his fiancée caught his attention. Reading the letter, McEwan could feel the fear the lieutenant felt, "All hell is breaking loose around him. He guesses that France has fallen, and that all mainland Europe has gone…" (McEwan). He also noticed the simple and ordinary wish of that guy; he wanted his fiancée to buy the house they dreamed of for so long. The desire for a simple and ordinary life is something he noticed in most of the letters he read. He goes further to comment that, "these letters are a fabulous resource of intimate human detail that you don't really find in the history books." Details

that history books fail to mention or feel like they are unnecessary. A history book would give an account of what happened at the battlefield but would not delve into each and every soldier's experience and here comes the novelist's role. Reading Robbie's experience gives the reader a very accurate account of the hardships he has gone through (ibid).

Ian McEwan puts fiction and historical facts together thus, blurring the line between history and fiction. So he makes a new whole by recounting the past in a novel way. McEwan depicts the history of the Dunkirk retreat showing a paradoxical relationship with the past, which is mythologized and glorified in many artistic depictions. In his detailed description of the horrors of the war, McEwan succeeds at attracting the reader, making him ponder on these details that he might not find in a history book. "So here fiction provides a number of possibilities ignored by the historians. Those possibilities, whether they are real history of the past or not, are no less real in his fictionalized world" (Han, and Wang 137). Here, it can be said that the writer of fiction is somehow a kind of historian, because when he incorporates history in his fiction, it becomes fictionalized. The writer's design of plot and structure reflects his attitude towards history. The examination of the novel itself makes the reader ponder the story's relationship with the past, between fiction and history (ibid).

As far as personal history is concerned, again the narrator cannot be trusted. To illustrate further, one can notice that, through Robbie's point of view, he realizes that when a teenager, Briony threw herself into the water to see if he would save her, which he did. Then she thanks him and tells him that she loves him. Robbie thinks that this might be the justification for her actions against him. Later, the adult Briony mentions that incident and she clarifies how it is a teenage crush that got forgotten shortly after: "and there came back to her from years ago, when she was ten or eleven, the memory of a passion she'd had for him, a real crush that had lasted days. Then she confessed it to him one morning in the garden and immediately forgot about it" (323).

One must put in mind that even Robbie's point of view is the outcome of Briony's imagination, and the fact that she mentioned it again with that little note of "immediately forgot about it" is an indication that she is not honest in her narration. Also, it may be a clue that this crush lasted more than she claims and that it is the main reason behind her accusation of Robbie as the one who attacked Lola by the lake; jealousy to be more accurate. According to Bentley, this motive is not mentioned earlier because the teenage Briony was not conscious of it (Bentley 155). In the third part when she remembers

the incident she can finally recognize the reason for her behavior and how it is a subconscious reaction to Robbie's rejection. Here, one can detect the maturation of Briony's understanding and it also shows the way in which the interpretation of past events is affected by memory (ibid).

From the very first part, the reader is introduced to a literary work of the thirteen year-old Briony, and through it, the reader can see how she tends to use literature to affect others' lives. She believes that the fictive world of literature can affect the real world. Also, Briony views people around her as characters. As she imagines her brother's reaction to the play she wrote for him, she imagines:

…little playlets in themselves, every one of which featured Leon. In one, his big, good-natured face buckled in grief as Arabella sank in loneliness and despair. In another, there he was, cocktail in hand at some fashionable city watering hole, overheard boasting to a group of friends: Yes, my younger sister, Briony Tallis the writer, you must surely have heard of her. In a third, he punched the air in exultation as the final curtain fell, although there was no curtain, there was no possibility of a curtain (4).

The omniscient narrator then reveals the purpose of her play; she's written it to affect her brother, to "provoke his admiration and guide him away from his careless succession of girlfriends, towards the right form of a wife…" (ibid) It is as if she is trying to control others' reality through her fictional world.

Arnold H.Modell defines imagination as different scenes created in the mind while one is reading a novel, or it could be a mixture of feelings, thoughts and images that get into one's consciousness. But he also says that it is an "unconscious process" (126). In another book, *The Imagination and its Pathologies*, which is edited by James Phillips and James Morely, imagination is described as a very powerful tool in the hands of man and he can use it not just to react to the world but also can re-create it. But this endless power of imagination can be both creative and destructive (7).

Being thoroughly submerged in her wild imagination and fantasies, Briony tends to perceive the world around her as a story. And, being the attention seeker that she is, she demands that the story be built around her. When she sees her sister's encounter with Robbie at the fountain, she misinterprets what is before her. At first, she thinks it is just like a fairy-tale where the poor boy proposes to the rich girl. But when he raises his hand suddenly and Cecilia strips out of her clothes to jump into the fountain, the fairy-tale image is shattered in Briony's head. She thinks that he is threatening Cecilia and she is helplessly doing as she told. As her cousins from the north

appear into the scene, she feels that she is losing the attention slowly. It starts when the elder cousin, Lola, asks her to take the role of Arabella in her play; the role that she thought of for herself. Grudgingly, she agrees. When the wrong version of Robbie's apology letter (meant for Cecilia) falls in Briony's hand, she reads it and is horrified (or is she jealous to know that, her once crush, is in love with her sister instead of her?!) to know how he thinks of her sister and she feels the urge to protect her. Again, at the dinner table, all the attention is directed towards Lola's bruised arm. When she witnesses the attack on Lola, she assumes that she saw the attacker, even though it is dark. She gives Lola no chance to say who she thinks it might be. Briony does not lie when she insists that Robbie is the guilty one, her distorted perception of reality deceives into believing so.

Throughout the novel, McEwan hints frequently to the artificiality of Briony's world and how unrealistic it tends to be. Having such a wild imagination, Briony often occupies herself with daydreaming thus creates a world of her own through the use of her writing (Michlová 60):

The pages of a recently finished story seemed to vibrate in her hand with all the life they contained. Her passion for tidiness was also satisfied, for an unruly world could be made just so. . . . A love of order also shaped the principles of justice, with death and marriage the main engines of housekeeping, the former being set aside exclusively for the morally dubious, the latter a reward withheld until the final page(7).

As the events accelerate before Briony's eyes, she is obliged to face the tough realities of life. She also realizes that it is difficult to cope with them, Michlová goes on to argue that:

The selectivity of memory and the relativity of one's experience manifest themselves in many events of her [Briony's] life – her account of the fountain scene, Robbie and Cecilia's lovemaking in the library, the crime of rape. On the other hand, she finds her child world very restrictive: "Pen in hand, she stared across the room towards her hard-faced dolls, the estranged companions of a childhood she considered closed. It was a chilly sensation growing up" (McEwan;116) and she longs to severe "the sickly dependency of infancy and early childhood" (McEwan; 74). Paradoxically, she is haunted by guilt about her childhood mistake for the rest of her life (Michlová 60).

The physics theory mentioned in the previous chapter can be also applied to *Atonement*, to Briony in specific. Her energy is very strong and her thoughts are so powerful that they affect the people around her in a destructive way. As she misinterprets the fountain

scene, she begins to think of Robbie as a bad person who might cause harm to her sister. This thought begins to attract other incidents that make her believe what she thinks of him is real.

When Robbie asks Briony to give his letter to Cecilia, her curious nature urges her to open the letter and is shocked by its content. For Robbie and Cecilia the letter is but a revelation, a confession of love that Cecilia wanted him so badly to make. I believe that the law of attraction is what causes Robbie to pick and then send the wrong version of his letter. The intense power of his love for her causes his fingers to unconsciously grab the typed letter and not the hand-written one. However, Briony views the whole thing differently for now she sees Robbie as a sexual "maniac", this is the word that Lola uses to add to the idea. Again, the negative thoughts control Briony's body directing her towards the library door that was closed, which is an unusual thing. When she gets in she sees what she thinks an attack on her sister: "The scene was so entirely a realization of her worst fears that she sensed that her overanxious imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books. This illusion, or hope of one, was dispelled as her eyes adjusted to the gloom" (116).

It can be said that Briony's sense of reality is distorted by her thoughts and her imagination. This distortion is confirmed during the rape scene which is mentioned briefly earlier. As it is very dark outside that night, Briony can barely make out the figure of the person who attacks Lola. Briony asks Lola about the identity of the attacker and before getting the answer she claims that she saw him and she knows it is Robbie. She tells the policeman "I know it was him" (169). When the brain believes something, the senses oblige and from this one concludes that Briony is not lying because she really believes it is Robbie whom she saw and again McEwan confirms that by saying "If you have your mind set in a certain way, you will see things in a certain way. And Briony is determined that this man, not that, committed this crime. So it's not the crime itself but how it is perceived through her love of literature and her burning ambition to be a writer" (McEwan).

This non-existing reality destroys Robbie and Cecilia's own reality, their life together. Robbie's life in the army seems like a dream, an illusion and yet it is his current reality which he always escapes by thinking of his beloved. He is waiting for his life, their story, to "resume". His hope in survival is what keeps him going. He does everything in his power to stay alive just for the hope that he will be reunited with Cecilia. Her words, "come back to me" is what give him the power to fight through. But sometimes, hope is just another illusion, another temporary reality for humans to keep them

going. Just like June in *Black Dogs*, they both have faith in something which keeps them fighting till the end. However, he encounters moments of confusion, of mind tricks:

It was his mind. Periodically, something slipped. Some everyday principle of continuity, the humdrum element that told him where he was in his own story, faded from his use, abandoning him to a waking dream in which there were thoughts, but no sense of who was having them. No responsibility, no memory of the hours before, no idea of what he was about, where he was going, what his plan was. And no curiosity about these matters. He would then find himself in the grip of illogical certainties (232).

Briony's attempts to understand herself, to perceive truth or reality through narrative, develop as she grows up. As a teenage writer, she attempts to force others' lives to adjust to her own narrative frame; McEwan admits in an interview that "She wants things to fit with the story she has in her head." Gradually she learns how to enter other's own narrative, "she willfully imagines herself into the foreign and uncertain terrain of an Other's narrative world" (K. O' Hara 83). This is evident in her conversation as a nurse with the wounded soldier who is dying. He believes that she is the girl he is in love with. She does not deny his claim in an attempt to create one last happy provisional reality for this person. What is interesting here is that she also gets to live this reality, for she confirms his question of loving him and for a moment she believes that she does. In her will to empathize, Briony resembles Jeremy from the previous novel.

As she realizes her mistake and the damage she caused the two lovers too late, she tries to amend things by weaving fiction into her reality. As postmodern thinking puts into question the concept of reality and truth blurring the line between fiction and reality, "McEwan uses Briony's lie and her ambivalent relationship to versions of truth to demonstrate the necessity of ethics" (Ellam 60).

Briony is so taken by her writing abilities that she perceives everything around her as a story. When she witnesses what happens between Robbie and Cecilia at the fountain, she is probably old enough to acknowledge how complex is what she is witnessing and yet too young to be able to acknowledge it as a reality, not as story. She immediately puts them in the context of her story and she contemplates how she can write it from three different points of view:

She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view; her excitement was in the prospect of freedom, of being delivered from the cumbrous struggle between good and bad, heroes and villains. None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly

good. She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral. She need only show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive. (Claire Messud) (38)

In fact Briony does judge them, as persons and as her characters when she determines the good and bad around her. More likely, she tends to take the role of God and in this case, Cecilia and Robbie are a representation of Adam and Eve (in the fountain scene). She determines what fate they should face and that's what leads to the separation of the two lovers. She casts them out of heaven, based on false judgement (ibid).

In the second Part of *Atonement* which deals mainly with the World War II events, one may feel that the focus shifts from Briony to Robbie alternately. Since this part tackles the issue of war, McEwan makes sure to speed up the narration pace in order to keep up with the rapid events, the horrors, unease and the strive for survival in the face of modern warfare. As a result of this speed, a shift occurs from the actual world to the world of fancy in the end (this can be noted in the part where Robbie loses contact with reality while he is dying). This is an indication that the vastness and speed of the events overwhelm the perceptive powers of man. The chain of horrifying scenes takes over the characters' senses, getting them in a state of shock and mind-numbness and so they lose the ability to see or hear appropriately. This state of vision limitation caused by speed, is best described by Virlilio as he says (qtd in Rohani, Pirnajmuddin, and Akhavan 104): "This continual increase in speed has led to the development of a megaloscopy which has caused a real infirmity because it reduces the field of vision. The faster we go, the more we look ahead in anticipation and lose our lateral vision." Actually, McEwan refers to this effect of war in *Black Dogs* as well when he says:

He [Bernard] was struck by the recently concluded war not as a historical, geopolitical fact but as a multiplicity, a near infinity of private sorrows, as a boundless grief minutely subdivided without diminishment among individuals who covered the continent like dust, like spores whose separate identities would remain unknown, and whose totality showed more sadness than anyone could ever begin to comprehend; a weight borne in silence by hundreds of thousands, millions, like the woman in black for a husband and two brothers, each grief a particular, intricate, keening love story that might have been otherwise (140).

So, that is what war does. It frustrates the human mind making him perceive everything around him as an illusion.Since the third part of *Atonement* is narrated by old Briony it means that all the events are conveyed through her own observations. The reader finds

Briony punishing herself by writing various versions of the story; the story in which she was, as a young author, eager to be in control of all the images, events and occasions. Till the end of this part the reader would not realize that many of these reported images are the mere creations of the naïve Briony's imagination and are not taken from the true reality of the later sections. In this part everything is revealed, the decorated narrative is turned into harsh reality. Here Briony gives the actual images of what she decorated in the earlier parts. For example, the father that she represents as "nice" in the first part turns to be having an affair. Another fact revealed is about her brother Leon; it turns out that his marriage life was not so successful since he has gone through four marriages and dumped several women whereas in the second part Briony describes him as the protective brother who is looking after his ill wife, "Leon heroically nursed his wife, and then raised his boisterous children with a devotion that amazed us all." (335). The truth never unfolds completely until the end of the novel and that leaves the reader, before that, with a feeling of being deceived by images dictated by the implied author (Rohani, Pirnajmuddin, and Akhavan 105).

Cecelia and Robbie are never united because they both die in the final years of the Great War and it becomes clear at the end of the novel that all the provided versions of reality are mere 'fictions'. As the author of the novel, Briony reveals that she plans to mass publish her own invention of reality in the form of a novel in which she reunites the lovers and gives them a happy ending. Thus, literature here is used as a means to cover truth and manipulate reality; literature, like cinema, makes logic of "representational function of art, that is, its capacity to re-present an image of the world, is replaced by specific mode of 'presentation'" (James 111). It appears that art fails to resist virtualization, however, it must be a mode to be "critical or oppositional in relation to contemporary culture of speed, acceleration and virtualization" (James 108). Ironically enough, Briony attempts to stake her authorial power, just like media's controlling power; "When I am dead," she says, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, we will only exist as my inventions. Briony will be as much of a fantasy as the lovers who shared a bed in Balham and enraged their landlady. No one will care what events and which individuals were misrepresented to make a novel". (211) (Rohani, Pirnajmuddin, and Akhavan 105).

James Acheson states that *Atonement* is "performative in that while it is about the main character's desire to return to a state of 'at-one-ness', at the same time it *is* her act of atonement. However, the meaning of any performative utterance depends on its felicity, its appropriateness in context" (32). The real question here is whether

the victims of her crime would have tolerated her efforts and if Briony's Atonement is resulted from love or it is a mere act of bad faith or both. From this perspective, Briony's use of an effaced third-person narration and free indirect discourse are problematized. Her desire to atone is complicated by her desire to arouse in us desire for her narrative. Part Two is exemplary of that seduction. Her moving identification with the mind of the man who was her victim is an atoning act of love and respect. But is it also a violation, a colonization? If we, as readers, are seduced, if we are so immersed in the pleasure of the world Briony invents that, forgetting our literary training, we suspend disbelief and cheerfully disavow any distance between text and reality, do we risk becoming 'victims' of the text? Of course not; since Robbie, and indeed Briony, are fictions, there can be no violation – and yet. The process of being drawn into Briony's/McEwan's doubled narrative is a little like the process of being seduced by the attractions of Milton's Satan, and thus, as Stanley Fish has argued, experiencing in small the seduction and fall of humanity. As we have seen, McEwan's realism holds up a nicely polished mirror to show us reality, but with *Atonement* he allows us to experience the ethics of writing and reading that reality (Acheson 32).

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خصال ما وراء السردية في رواية أيان مكيون' الكفارة '

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الخلاصة

يناقش هذا البحث رواية الكاتب البريطاني إيان مكيون (الكفارة) حيث يبين كيف يوظف و بنجاح عناصر ما وراء السرد ليُظهر طبيعة النص الاصطناعية و ايضاً ليذكر القارء بإن ما يقرأهُ هو قصة. في هذا العمل الأدبي يحاول مكيون إظهار الطبيعلة الزائلة للتأريخ و الواقع. يحاول ايضا ان يبين للقارئ كيف ان الخيال ممكن ان يكون مدمراً و كيف انه من الممكن ان يؤثر على واقع الشخص. يحاول مكيون كذلك ان يبين كيف انه لا يمكن الوثوق بالتأريخ و المؤرخين.