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**İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT**  
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME**



**IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT* AS A POSTMODERN  
LITERARY WORK AND ITS FILM ADAPTATIONS**

**MA THESIS**

**ELAF ABDULLAH SAAD AL-ZEHHAWİ**

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**İSTANBUL, JUNE 2024**

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25/06 / 2024

ELAF ABDULLAH SAAD AL-ZEHAWİ

## **PREFACE**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Asst. Prof. Ugur Diler. He has shared his knowledge and expertise with me, challenged me to think critically and creatively, and generously offered their support and guidance throughout. I am forever grateful for his belief in me and the countless hours they have invested in my learning. Thank you for inspiring me to be the best version of myself.

ISTANBUL, 2024

ELAF ABDULLAH SAAD AL-ZEHHAWI



## ÖZET

### POSTMODERN BİR EDEBİ ESER OLARAK IAN MCEWAN'IN *KEFARETİ* VE FİLM UYARLAMALARI

ELAF ABDULLAH SAAD AL-ZEHHAWİ

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Ian McEwan'ın *Kefaret'i* uzun zamandır hafıza, kurgu ve yazarın rolü temalarını irdeleyen en önemli postmodern romanlardan biri olarak kabul ediliyor. Romanın başarısı film uyarlamalarıyla daha da pekişmiştir. Postmodern Bir Edebi Eser Olarak Ian McEwan'ın *Kefareti* ve Film Uyarlamaları başlıklı bu tezde, romanın postmodern niteliklerini ve film uyarlamalarının bu temalar üzerindeki etkisini inceleyeceğim. Bu tezin ilk bölümünde, Ian McEwan'ın *Kefaret* romanının edebi bir incelemesi sunulmakta ve postmodernizm teorisi analiz edilmektedir. Postmodernizm geleneksel anlatılara meydan okur ve *Kefaret* de bir istisna değildir. McEwan, benzersiz, postmodern bir okuma deneyimi yaratmak için yazarın romanda bir karaktere dönüştüğü üstkurmaca kavramını kullanır. Bu bölümde, bu edebi aracın gerçek ve kurgu arasındaki çizgileri bulanıklaştırmak için nasıl kullanıldığı vurgulanacak ve okuyucunun gerçeklik algılarını sorgulamasına izin verilecektir. İkinci bölüm Ian McEwan'ın postmodern bir yazar olarak yaşamına ve yazım tarzına odaklanacaktır. McEwan'ın yazım tarzını analiz ederken, bu bölüm yazarın eserlerinde postmodern teknikleri nasıl kullandığını göstermeyi amaçlayacaktır. Bu çalışma, kapsamlı araştırma ve analiz yoluyla, McEwan'ın ideolojilerinin ve kişisel deneyimlerinin yazım tarzını nasıl etkilediğini ve *Kefaret'in* postmodernizmin değer ve ilkelerinin bir yansıması olduğunu keşfedecektir. Tezin üçüncü bölümünde roman ve iki film uyarlaması arasındaki farklar analiz edilecektir. Bu bölümde, filmlerin Ian McEwan'ın *Kefaret'indeki* postmodern temaları nasıl etkilediği incelenecektir. Ayrıca, her bir uyarlamada kullanılan farklı tekniklerin izleyici üzerinde nasıl duygusal bir etki yarattığını araştıracağız. Bu bölüm, filmin hafıza, kurgu ve temsil temalarını keşfetmek için parçalı anlatı yapısı gibi postmodern teknikleri kullanmasının birkaç spesifik örneğini vurgulayacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Film uyarlaması, Ian McEwan, *Kefaret*, Postmodern Edebiyat.

## ABSTRACT

### IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT* AS A POSTMODERN LITERARY WORK AND ITS FILM ADAPTATIONS

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Ian McEwan's *Atonement* has long been regarded as one of the most prominent postmodern novels, exploring themes of memory, fiction, and the role of the author. The novel's success has been further cemented by its film adaptations. In this thesis titled *Ian McEwan's Atonement as a Postmodern Novel and its Film Adaptations*, I will examine the novel's postmodern attributes and the impact of its film adaptations on these themes. The first chapter of this thesis presents a literary review of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, analyzing the postmodernism theory. Postmodernism challenges traditional narratives, and *Atonement* is no exception. McEwan uses the concept of metafiction, where the author becomes a character in the novel, to create a unique, postmodern reading experience. This chapter will highlight how this literary device is used to blur the lines between fact and fiction, leaving the reader to question their perceptions of reality. The second chapter will focus on Ian McEwan's life as a postmodern writer and his writing style. In analyzing McEwan's writing style, this chapter will aim to demonstrate how the author has used postmodern techniques in his works. Through thorough research and analysis, this study will explore how McEwan's ideologies and personal experiences have influenced his writing style and how *Atonement* is a reflection of postmodernism's values and principles. The third chapter of this thesis will analyze the differences between the novel and its two film adaptations. The chapter will examine how the films have affected the postmodern themes in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. Furthermore, we will explore how different techniques used in each adaptation have been used to create an emotional impact on the audience. This chapter will highlight several specific examples of the film's use of postmodern techniques, such as fragmented narrative structure, to explore the themes of memory, fiction, and representation.

**Keywords:** *Atonement*, Film Adaptation, Ian McEwan, Postmodern Literature.

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## INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism is a literary approach that has become increasingly popular in the mid of twentieth century. It has had a significant impact on the world of literature and has proven to be an incredibly important and influential movement. In their article Postmodernism, Fischer and Graham demonstrate that:

It is a term that is inseparable from the study of other known philosophies. Postmodernism's precursors include linguistic theory, semiology, phenomenology, and modernism, and were closely associated with German philosophers like Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. French philosophers like Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida contributed to making postmodernism what it is today (Fischer & Graham, 2014, p. 29).

Postmodernism typically refers to the style and theories that developed during and after the Second World War. It is a comprehensive reaction to the traditional ways of thought and modernism. Postmodern literature tends to challenge conventional forms and values, reject established conventions, mimic and parody existing works, and embrace experimentation and playfulness. Postmodernism is a complex concept that is often associated with literature and the arts. Simply put, postmodernism is an approach to literature and the arts that views conventional ideas and traditional forms as problematic and seeks to distance itself from them. The postmodern feeling of uncertainty, confusion, and even chaos is often seen as a reaction to a world in which no one interprets reality in the same way. Postmodern literature can be divided into two main branches: literary postmodernism and structural postmodernism. Literary postmodernism seeks to challenge traditional assumptions, conventions, and forms by questioning, satirizing, and creating something new. On the other hand, structural postmodernism focuses on changing existing structures and creating more fluid and fluidly structured pieces. The main features of

postmodern literature include pastiche, irony, the use of intentional playfulness and parody, self-referentiality, and a focus on intertextuality. Other elements of postmodernism include blurring lines between serious and humorous works, rejecting clear and rigid styles, and focusing on deconstruction, Worden states that:

The documentary aesthetic is central to our age, and it is ubiquitous in a variety of artistic and cultural forms. Nowhere is this more evident than the widespread popularity of the memoir over the past three decades. While the speculative documentaries that have emerged to address climate change and the environment attempt to broaden our frames of reference, the memoir has solidified a framework for privileging individual determination, recovery, and uplift that informs not just literature but social media posts, reality television programs, advertisements for pharmaceuticals, and so much more (Worden, 2020, pp. 127–146).

Much of this is credited to the proliferation of digital media, as it allows readers to interact with and interpret the text creatively and innovatively. Additionally, authors are now able to challenge the traditional conventions of storytelling through the use of avant-garde techniques, such as using multiple points of view or non-linear narratives. By breaking the rules of storytelling, these authors can test the boundaries of literature and create something entirely new. This includes certain notable works of fiction, such as Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, which constantly keeps its reader guessing, making it difficult to establish any absolute truth in the text. Other examples of postmodern literature include novels by Thomas Pynchon, Salman Rushdie, and Kathy Acker. Writers and theorists like Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, and Jürgen Habermas have also influenced the postmodern literary approach. Postmodern literature is not without its critics. Some see it as a confusing approach that lacks coherence and depth. Others are concerned that postmodern literature emphasizes surface meaning over substantive ideas. Despite these critiques, postmodernism has had

a major impact on the literary world and has shaped our perception of reality. It provides a way for readers to engage with the text on a more personal level and find meaning in their interpretations of the work.

Experimental approaches to writing, narrative fragmentation, and conscious play with form and language often characterize postmodernism. Experimentation in writing styles and structures is key to this approach, as is an examination of identity, gender, race, class, and culture alongside traditional subject matter. Writers within this genre often exist in a sort of twilight between literature and visual art, incorporating elements of both into their writing. In exploring postmodernism, there is also an emphasis on disrupting traditional notions of authorship and authority. In his article *Postmodernism*, Hassan states, “Anti-elitism, anti-authoritarianism. Diffusion of the ego. Participation. Art becomes communal, optional, gratuitous, or anarchic” (Hassan, 1971, p. 25). Writers are encouraged to adopt a more pluralistic approach to how a work is composed and presented. Synthetic forms such as collage, pastiche, and intertextuality may be employed. For example, voice and perspective may be interwoven to represent a multitude of experiences or identities or the reader may be incorporated as an active part of the narrative. The emphasis is on challenging received wisdom and notions of “truth” and “reality,” throwing into question established conventions. Postmodern works tend to be more free-flowing and non-linear regarding style and structure. They may depart from traditional notions of plot structure, character development, and narrative closure.

The postmodernist attitude can be seen everywhere in our society, from fashion to architecture, art, and literature. It is a challenging approach to literature, but it has produced some of the past century's most original and thought-provoking works. Through it, writers have broken down established norms and new ways of thinking and writing. Postmodernism is a significant movement that is often misunderstood. Still, its legacy has impacted today's culture, and the works of postmodern authors continue to provide an alternative view of the world and provoke us to challenge accepted beliefs. Hassan explains that:

We are still some way from attaining such an aesthetic, nor is it clear that Postmodern art gives high priority to that end. Perhaps we can start by revising Modernism as well as revising the pieties we have inherited about it. In *Continuities*, Frank Kermode cautiously attempts that task. A critic of great civility, he discriminates well between types of modernism, what he calls “palaeo- and neo-modern,” which corresponds perhaps to Modern and Postmodern, and takes note of the new “anti-art,” which he rightly traces back to Duchamp. But his preference for continuities tempts him to assimilate current to past things (Hassan, 1971, p. 16).

Ian McEwan’s novel, *Atonement*, was published in 2001. *Atonement* is a captivating novel that transcends genre. Today, we embark on a journey to dissect this multifaceted work. It holds a significant place in literary history. It explores themes of memory, guilt, and the deceptive power of storytelling through a complex interplay between past and present. *Atonement* has garnered critical acclaim for its skillful execution and engagement with postmodern themes. The 2007 film adaptation, directed by Joe Wright, sparked discussions about the fidelity to the source material and highlighted the unique strengths of each medium. Scholars have analyzed the intricacies of adapting *Atonement*, mainly focusing on its unreliable narrator, Briony Tallis, and the self-reflexive nature of the story. Kathleen D’Angelo’s analyses explore how the film employs visual storytelling to capture Briony’s perspective, providing a complementary lens to the introspective nature of the novel. Divadia et al. delves deeper into the postmodern aspects, examining the challenges of translating McEwan’s fragmented narration and self-referential techniques into a cinematic format.

This thesis proposes a comparative exploration of *Atonement*, specifically examining how the novel and film depict crucial narrative elements. The portrayal of Briony’s perspective and the power dynamics inherent in her storytelling will be central to this investigation. The analysis will acknowledge the inherent challenges of adaptation while celebrating the unique contributions

that each format brings to the story. By examining the film's utilization of cinematic techniques to convey the novel's postmodern critique of storytelling, this thesis aims to provide a fresh perspective on *Atonement*. This comparative approach will not only enhance our understanding of the story's themes but also reveal how the film can expand upon the ideas explored in the text. *Atonement* offers a captivating exploration of love, war, and the devastating power of imagination. But beyond its gripping narrative, the novel resonates with themes and techniques deeply embedded in postmodern literature.

British novelist Ian McEwan is widely acclaimed as one of the most important and successful writers of his generation. Among them, the best-selling *Atonement* and the Booker Prize-winning *Amsterdam*, his novels have achieved unprecedented global recognition and made him one of the most widely read authors in contemporary literature. Born in 1948, Ian McEwan was educated at the University of Sussex, after which he went on to work as a freelance journalist. During the early 1970s, McEwan wrote numerous short stories, many of which were published in magazines and weekly newspapers. A profound literary subtlety and nuance characterize McEwan's work. His books capture the complexities of life as a whole, whether at the interpersonal level within a single family or in broader social and political contexts. His novels paint a vivid picture of human life in its chaotic swirls, joys and sorrows, struggles and aspirations with metafiction. Metafiction is a literary genre that turns the mirror on itself, reminding the reader that they're engaged with a constructed world. Unlike traditional narratives, metafiction doesn't reject acknowledging its fictionality. Instead, it embraces it, playing with storytelling conventions and blurring the lines between reality and imagination. In an interview, Lynn stated that:

We run narratives about other people in our real lives, we make characters of them, necessarily, because it helps us to guess what they might do next.

Intention is very much bound up with the notion of character, the sort of person who might do this or that. It's all part of the way in which we

instinctively judge other people's behavior and see ourselves reflected back in their own view of us (Lynn & McEwan, 2007, p. 51).

McEwan has often depicted the interweaving of personal experience with world events and cultural movements, giving his stories an international resonance. He achieved perhaps his most significant accomplishment with the acclaimed novel *Atonement*, a critically acclaimed exploration of wartime experience, loss, and redemption in a world of chaos and uncertainty; it also explored issues of moral responsibility in a world increasingly dominated by technology and modern forces.

In 1978, Ian McEwan published his first novel, *The Cement Garden*. This novel, which was made into a feature film in 1994, explored themes of family relationships and the process of growing up. It established McEwan as a preeminent British novelist. McEwan has written over 10 novels and dozens of short stories and screenplays in subsequent years. His work has been wildly successful, both critically and commercially, and has earned him numerous awards. In 2000, he was awarded the Booker Prize for *Amsterdam*. The same year, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, an honor bestowed upon writers for their contribution to literature. Additionally, McEwan was an outspoken critic of the war in Iraq and a proponent of civil liberties. He is also an ardent environmentalist and regularly runs in charity races. His activism and charitable work have made him a beloved figure in literary circles. McEwan's work continues to be widely read and critically appraised. His latest novel, *Machines Like Me*, is a fascinating exploration of artificial intelligence and its possible implications for the future of humanity. His works explore themes such as family, coming of age, infidelity, terrorism, and war; Lynn, D., & McEwan, in *A Conversation with Ian McEwan*, state:

A deranged group of young men, or at least one of them is suffering from, as you say, a neurodegenerative disease- the leader of them, and it's specifically not Muslim terror intruding, it's something very local, very immediate (Lynn, & McEwan, 2007, p. 39).

Ian McEwan has been praised for his expansive and often postmodern approach to narrative. His works often involve unconventional plots, voice, and characterization. Postmodernism is an ever-evolving concept that has been used to describe many recognizable elements of culture and has had a great influence on the works of Ian McEwan. McEwan began writing during the early part of the twentieth century when postmodernism had already begun to take shape. Still, his novels weren't until he began to explore the influence they had on the literary world. His work often contains elements of pastiche and parody, allusion, reflexive subplots, and the dissolution of traditional boundaries between high and low culture. McEwan often uses a postmodernist inversion of traditional narrative his characters' biographies are often revealed slowly, sometimes long after the end of the story. This technique allows for a sort of postmodernist exploration of a character as events unfold in the background and often offers a chance for a multi-dimensional examination of the character's motivations and beliefs. In addition to these inversions, McEwan also looks to create a sense of metanarrative in his works. A metanarrative, also known as a grand narrative, is a broad and overarching story that attempts to explain the meaning and purpose of life and history. It's like a big-picture narrative that connects and gives context to smaller, individual stories. This technique allows him to draw on other works to create a more complex narrative. For example, his novel *Atonement* borrows heavily from Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*, further demonstrating his postmodern approach. His novel *Saturday* provides another prime example of the postmodernist approach.

IM: I'd have to qualify what you say, because *Atonement* could not have been written without all the experiments in fiction and reflections on point of view. And tricks with those and that sense drum from modernism and postmodernism of having other writing, other texts, the spirits of other writers moving through your pages as if they, too, were as much a part of the real world as forests and cities and oceans. I feel myself to be absolutely not

someone, as it were, trying to write Mozart symphonies in the time of Stockhausen (Lynn & McEwan, 2007, p. 51).

*Saturday* follows the events of a single day in London as we witness the protagonist's journey through the city. McEwan employs multiple narrative strands to replicate the feeling of city life realistically. This technique allows us to explore the city's various themes, whether race, class, or religion, thus giving us a greater insight into postmodernism. The overriding theme of McEwan's works is his central view of the human condition, which often veers into the tragic realm. But far from a pessimistic outlook of the human condition, McEwan offers a human dream: his vision of the power of love.

McEwan's work has been described as postmodern and a product of the literary avant-garde. He often plays with inversions and dialectics and frequently uses irony and humor to communicate his vision. His works have recurring motifs of psychological uncertainty, a blurring of reality, and an unreliable narrator. McEwan's novel *Enduring Love* is an example of his postmodern approach, McEwan states:

IM: Well, I feel a mixture of things. On the one hand, I think that there are things that are the case and there are certain other things that are not, and I'm not much in sympathy with the kind of relativism of say, postmodernist criticism. I think we do know more now than we knew ten years ago about the natural world, for example. Fiction has always, right from its inception, certainly in the eighteenth century, liked to blur the distinctions (Lynn & McEwan, 2007, p. 46).

The novel presents a complex narrative and a nuanced view of the human condition. At the core of the novel is the characters' inability to understand each other or the events in their lives. This lack of understanding is reflected in the narrative structure of the novel, which oscillates between introspection and

external events. Through this, McEwan is able to explore how the struggles in our daily lives shape our understanding of reality.

Beyond simply a novel about a moral miscue, *Atonement* also presents the topics of human nature, judgment, knowledge, and understanding through a postmodern lens. Through the example of Briony, McEwan drives home the point that storytelling is an essential part of humanity. Readers interpret, fabricate, and interpret stories of their own lives; thus, people must always keep an open mind, recognize our tendency to fill in the treacherous gaps with inaccurate assumptions and make an effort to seek truth and understanding. *Atonement* additionally explores the concepts of regret and absolution for the wrongs we've committed, as well as how to go about achieving it. Briony spends the majority of the novel trying to make up for her mistake, a gesture that is ultimately futile. McEwan instead suggests that a more balanced approach is best, calling on forgiveness, understanding, and compassion to fill the unfulfilled need for *Atonement*. Through its intricate and powerful narrative, *Atonement* conveys invaluable lessons to its readers. The novel speaks volumes on the fragility of human relationships, the power of storytelling and judgment, and the importance of understanding and seeking the truth before leaping to conclusions.

The story follows the life of two siblings, Briony and Cecilia, who experience a shocking, life-altering event. Through the accident, Briony learns the truth about her father's death and her own role in causing it. The siblings must deal with the consequences of Briony's choices, and she is forced to confront the guilt stemming from her actions. The novel provides a complex examination of love, betrayal, and the power of *Atonement*. Through the development of powerful characters and a detailed narrative, McEwan delivers a sweeping story of personal redemption and growth. Throughout the novel, McEwan explores the powerful and conflicting emotions underlying *Atonement*. He highlights the power of guilt and remorse, paralleling it with the inner struggle of *Atonement* and understanding. Readers follow Briony's journey to find forgiveness, understanding the profound impact of her actions on her relationships and the larger world. *Atonement* also explores themes of social

justice and the role of truth in a troubled society. Through growing political tensions, McEwan examines how individuals can cause great injustice when not motivated by a moral conscience. By highlighting how one person's actions can affect the wider society, McEwan subtly encourages readers to consider the responsibility of individuals in creating meaningful social change. It is a highly acclaimed work of fiction that uses the story of a family torn apart by a single misjudgement to explore the idea of *Atonement*, or remorse and redemption. Through a complex narrative that spans two timelines and alternating points of view, the novel delves into themes of guilt and forgiveness, of innocence lost and eventually found again.

*Atonement* is the story of 13-year-old Briony Tallis and her unfortunately misguided attempt that goes wrong in her family. As the novel progresses, Briony comes to understand the full magnitude of her mistake and the resulting heartache it causes. She gradually begins to understand the idea of *Atonement* and the implications of believing in absolution. In the story, McEwan lays bare the human vulnerability of mistaking what's false for what's true and of making judgment calls that have devastating effects. Finney states:

At the same time, certain continuities persist in his work. He remains fascinated with the forbidden and the taboo, which he continues to describe with non-judgmental precision. Further, he entices the reader into sharing his voyeuristic obsession with this material. As Kiernan Ryan observes, "The writer's and the reader's deepest pleasure consists less in their sense of ironic superiority to the benighted narrator than in the vicarious delight of identification, which is rooted in finding the scandalous secretly seductive and its apologists convincing (Finney, 2004, p. 69).

Written with a masterful depth of characterization, the novel also explores themes such as loyalty, ambition, and how guilt can linger long after decisions have been made. Throughout the story, the idea of truth and justice is revisited and re-examined, allowing readers to reflect on the consequences of a

single misjudgement, and the idea of *Atonement* that culminates in the novel's surprising and unexpected twist.

The novel's exploration of ideas around *Atonement* emphasizes the importance of understanding and reflection for anyone looking for it in its true form. This thoughtful and carefully crafted story remains an influential example of the power of literature to tackle complex issues and explore deep emotions. Finney explains:

I want to concentrate on the self-conscious use of narrative in *Atonement*, as this aspect has been seized on by a minority of reviewers to criticize what they understand to be an essentially realist novel that at the end inappropriately resorts to a modish self-referentiality. But I read this novel as a work of fiction that is from beginning to end concerned with the making of fiction. When we first meet its female protagonist, Briony, at the age of thirteen, she is already committed to the life of a writer. She ruthlessly subordinates everything the world throws at her to her need to make it serve the demands of her own world of fiction (Finney, 2004, p. 69).

The novel's themes of guilt and empathy stem from Briony's *Atonement* for her mistake. She spends her life trying to make amends for the damage she did to Flora, the child of Robbie, whom she wrongly suspected as the perpetrator. Briony's attempts to atone carry a strong message about the power of compassion and understanding, and the lengths to which we must go to try and do the right thing. The novel also explores the power of forgiveness.

Though the traditional Christian idea of *Atonement* is a central theme in the novel, McEwan uses a postmodern approach to examine the implications of Briony's actions. In using fragmentation, nonlinearity, and a focus on the psychological and emotional meanings of language and behaviour, McEwan deconstructs traditional notions of *Atonement* to explore the idea of multiple truths and the importance of self-reflection and repentance. Through this

approach, McEwan allows the reader to consider how we are defined by the way we treat others. At the same time, however, McEwan also highlights the importance of reaching for *Atonement* and understanding. Enhancing the roles that perception, misperception, and regret have on our lives, McEwan shows that the act of seeking and offering *Atonement* is an essential part of any process of reconciliation. As such, the novel is a powerful illustration of how postmodernism can be used to examine the complexities of *Atonement* and the importance of striving to understand our mistakes and repair our relationships.

The postmodernist approaches use in the novel are evident in the way the novel is structured. McEwan's novel is split into three sections, each showing a different perspective and offering an alternate narrative. In addition to narrative styles, postmodernist approaches also appear in the way in which the characters are developed. McEwan uses techniques such as discontinuities, ellipses, and interruptions to subtly hint at hidden character motivations. Moreover, McEwan's exploration of human emotions and feelings is skilfully done, allowing the reader to question their assumptions of certain characters and gain a new understanding of their motivations and the tragedy that befalls them.

The postmodern philosophical approach in *Atonement* focuses on themes of alienation and the tension between the individual and society. Through the narrative, McEwan examines the role of the individual in a rapidly changing world, as well as the power of relationships, memory, and the impact of history on the individual. McEwan's portrayal of Briony's character delves into the consequences of human actions, suggesting that guilt can be both a conscious and unconscious burden. Additionally, he explores the concepts of truth and reality, examining how they can be manipulated and distorted. All of these postmodern themes are subtly and sophisticatedly explored, offering readers the opportunity to reflect on their own understanding of the world. No single narrative is seen as being superior to another; rather, different narrative perspectives are embraced and explored from multiple angles. This is particularly apparent in the novel as it follows multiple different scenarios and characters and their narrative arcs. McEwan writes sympathetically of each perspective and provides a series of "what if" scenarios that explore how each

of the characters might have acted differently, how the events of the novel might have been different as a result, and how the different outcomes might have been experienced.

The aim of this research is to analyse how postmodern elements are interpreted in the novel and film, as well as how the mediums of literature and film differ in their utilization of postmodernist approaches. More specifically, this paper will explore the themes of disrupted linearity, fragmentation and multiple perspectives, intertextuality and intertextual reality, deconstruction, and self-reflexivity found in the novel and its film adaptation. By studying postmodernism in *Atonement* and its film adaptation, I can observe how this approach has been used to discuss themes of identity, morality, and individual impotence. The novel and the film adaptation encapsulate two distinct ways of approaching postmodernism, both of which lead to a more powerful and accurate representation of life's complexities. I also intend to explore postmodernism itself in the novel, with all its aspects.

This research will answer many questions that are related to the theory, the novel, and the film. What is the definition of postmodernism? What are the elements and the characteristics of postmodernism? Who are the pioneers of the theory and their contributions to the postmodern approach? What are some critical reviews that the novel and its approach gained? What are some of the literary styles that the author uses in his masterpiece? What are some of the ideas that the author holds towards the postmodernism approach in his life? What are the differences between the novel and its film adaptation?

The thesis consists of three chapters explaining the theory and the novel in literature. The first chapter is the literature review of the novel *Atonement* and some of the critics' opinions and thoughts, along with explaining postmodernism itself, with its definition, characteristics, pioneers, and impact on the literary arena. The second chapter widens the lens over some of the points that are related to the author's life and his literary style. The last chapter focuses on the study of the novel and its relation to the film adaptation directed by Joe Wright (2007).

# 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

## 1.1. Historical Background of the Study

*Atonement* transcends the realm of a simple narrative. Exploring memory, guilt, and the deceptive power of storytelling, it unfolds in a complex dance between past and present. Critically acclaimed for its masterful execution and its engagement with postmodern themes, *Atonement* found new life in a 2007 film adaptation directed by Joe Wright.

This transformation from novel to film has highlighted the unique strengths each medium possesses. Jayantika Chakraborty, in the 2018 study “The Role of Guilt in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” presents the complexities of guilt, using psychology to explain how it fragments our sense of self and then explores art as a window into healing. By examining how artists grapple with guilt, the film seeks to illuminate the path to overcoming it, achieving a more unified self, and ultimately transcending the burden of the past. Chakraborty states:

In an interdisciplinary approach of psychological study of artistic work, this project (film) illustrates the dynamics of guilt and atoning for it after over half a lifetime to reach psychological transcendence and attain a cohesiveness of the fragmented concept of “self” (Chakraborty, 2018, p. 55).

Understanding *Atonement* requires a multifaceted approach. In one of the previous studies, Eva Výborná analyses the utilization of intertextuality. It provides an introduction to the key theorists of intertextuality and specifically examines how intertextual techniques are employed in the novel. The study aims to demonstrate the different ways in which intertextuality enhances the narrative, how it interacts with other postmodern practices, and how it influences readers’ interpretation of the novel.

The thesis analysing both the novel and film fosters a deeper comprehension of the story's core themes. By examining how each medium approaches elements like Briony's perspective and the power of storytelling, readers gain a richer appreciation of the narrative's nuances. John Best illustrates in his 2021 article *Face Value: The Traps of Visual Storytelling in Joe Wright's Atonement* that the book makes you think for yourself about who's right and wrong and how guilt affects everyone involved. The movie, on the other hand, focuses mostly on Briony and makes it clear that she's responsible for the mess. It doesn't leave much room for you to decide how you feel about things: "However, while the novel consistently turns these questions back onto the reader, the film ultimately trains viewers' attention too squarely on Briony's persona and on her culpability in both the central event and her fictionalized retelling of it" (Best, 2021, p. 19). Furthermore, this study explores the adaptation process and reveals the creative decisions filmmakers make when translating a literary work. This analysis sheds light on how directors use specific techniques to shape the audience's experience and potentially enhance the story's emotional impact.

*Atonement's* engagement with postmodern theory adds another layer of intrigue. Postmodernism emphasizes subjectivity, fragmented narratives, and a questioning of grand narratives. Examining how the novel and film portray these elements allows us to understand the story's critique of truth and the limitations of storytelling itself. However, the novel and film are not identical twins. While both share the core narrative, there are key differences. The novel grants us direct access to Briony's inner thoughts and motivations, while the film needs to translate these internal struggles through visuals and acting choices. This shift can lead to a nuanced portrayal of Briony's emotions in the film, while the novel offers a deeper exploration of her thought processes. Additionally, the film condenses the story into a cinematic format, potentially sacrificing some of the novel's intricate details and character development. Conversely, the film utilizes visual storytelling techniques to create a more immediate emotional connection with the audience. The reasons why viewers and readers might be drawn more to one medium over the other are varied.

Some individuals simply prefer the immersive experience of reading and engaging with their own imagination, while others favor the visual spectacle and emotional immediacy offered by film. Accessibility also plays a role—novels offer portability and the ability to consume the story at one’s own pace, while films can be a more communal experience. Finally, personal preferences for depth versus breadth come into play. Novels often provide greater depth in character development and exploration of themes, while films may offer a broader emotional experience and a more visually engaging narrative.

Guilt is a cognitive or emotional experience that occurs when one realizes or believes accurately that they have compromised on their standards of conduct or have violated a moral standard and that they bear a significant responsibility for that violation. From the morphological point of view, the word “guilty” means ‘having done something illegal or being responsible for doing something wrong or for something bad that has happened’ (Chakraborty, 2018, p. 55).

Whether readers consider it a masterwork or a missed opportunity, *Atonement* has become a significant part of the modern canon of literature. In his work, *Commonweal*, Edward T. Wheeler describes *Atonement* as a challenging work that proves that mastery of wonderful writing structure can elevate a novel to be an artwork. Wheeler states:

A challenging and brilliant work, it rewards careful attention to the writer’s art. [...] The careful structuring of the work calls attention to its artifice and reminds us of two alternate assertions about what art does: Keats’s Romantic assurance that artistic beauty is truth and Auden’s disclaimer that poetry makes nothing happen. This novel shows how such seemingly contradictory statements can both be true at once. *Atonement* is a most impressive book, one that may indeed be McEwan’s finest achievement (Edward, 2002, p. 1).

The structure of the novel allows McEwan to present the entire narrative in a nonlinear way. He often jumps back and forth in time, leaving the reader to piece together elements of the novel as the story progresses. Moreover, the structure of the novel demonstrates the complexity of McEwan's writing. Even after the timelines merge in the present, the novel's structure allows readers to recognize the importance of each individual character. By encountering both the timeline of Briony's childhood and adulthood, we can gain a better understanding of the characters and appreciate how the story connects them. It also enables us to form a deeper connection with each character as readers witness their development throughout the story. Behrman, in the study *The Waiting Game: Medieval Allusions and The Lethal Nature of Passivity in Ian McEwan's Atonement: Studies in the Novel*, states:

Indeed, the intertextual quality of McEwan's novel about a young girl and the lifelong consequences of her terrible fabrication has fascinated critics of *Atonement*, particularly those who focus on the novel's first section. Brian Finney, for example, regards *Atonement* as a re-reading of the classic realist novel of the nineteenth century, just as it is a displacement of the modernist novel, particularly as instanced in the fiction of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence (Behrman, 2010, p. 453).

McEwan has used a variety of writing techniques throughout the novel to create a work of art. His meticulous attention to detail and his use of descriptive language create vivid imagery that truly draws the reader into the story. His use of suspense and surprise with the narrative allows the reader to stay engaged, and also gives insight into how the themes unfold. As a result, the reader becomes completely immersed in the novel, noticing small details and subtle connections between different parts of the narrative that make the story remarkable.

The novel broaches the concept of *Atonement* through a structure that allows for a blend of truth and imaginative invention, enabling the reader to feel something of the characters' shared experience of guilt and disruption deeply. McEwan skilfully renders subtle insights from the tilt of how we perceive ourselves, our place in life, and our responsibilities to those around us. Throughout the novel, the subtle use of foreshadowing, symbolism, and recurrent themes helps to illustrate the power of responsibility, fate, and *Atonement*. McEwan's thoughtful prose and complex structural choices are a feat of writing art, conveying the struggles, joys, and consequences of what can be gained or lost through the momentous choices we make in life. Behrman demonstrates:

Perhaps most significantly, McEwan's reliance on the literature of the Middle Ages helps him to develop fully one of the novel's dominant themes: the nature of waiting. McEwan's references to famed medieval lovers in Part One, for example, help to reveal his own couple's deep-seated anxieties regarding the true nature of their affair and of their partner's character. These apprehensions crop up because McEwan's lovers find themselves placed in a holding pattern, waiting for the moment when they can resume their aborted love affair. McEwan's allusions to medieval characters, as well as his use in the latter half of the novel of the Waste Land topos found in many Arthurian romances, underscore the often-poisonous effects of passivity (Behrman, 2010, p. 456).

McEwan utilizes the novel to highlight the potential danger of fictional narratives and their ability to lead to false conclusions and misinterpretations. Through the story of Briony, McEwan emphasizes the power of stories and how they can influence perception and even influence behavior.

On the other hand, McEwan's novel can be read as a defense of fiction writing, as it also makes several arguments in favor of its potential benefits. By describing the effects of a single lie, McEwan wants to highlight the power of fiction to give readers a framework within which they can process their ideas and feelings about life's events. This, he believes, will allow readers to gain a

richer understanding of their own and others' subjective experiences of life, as fiction often captures emotional nuances in a way that factual accounts fail to do. Additionally, *Atonement* also emphasizes the power of fiction to heal; with its fairytale-like ending, it illustrates the power of the corrective imagination to create a harmonious ending for the characters. McEwan also uses *Atonement* to defend the power of narrative and its ability to captivate and inspire. Briony's false accusation reflects the power of stories, the power to capture a moment in time, and the power to frame it within a narrative that can ultimately change the course of events. McEwan suggests that *Atonement* is a reflection of the power that stories have and the beauty they can create.

At its core, the novel is a searing critique of the particular ideologies that control much of society today. From the outset, McEwan starkly reveals the limitations people face in making decisions based on a narrow set of assumptions and expectations. There are the rigid class systems that limit free expression, the stultifying expectations of gender roles, the rigidity of personal identity, the presumptions of what makes for a good life, and the grip of the past on the present: "Hence, at each point in time, Briony's identity creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and elusiveness, enhancing the sense of ambiguity, and intensifying the undertone of guilt in the narrative" (Chakraborty, 2018, p. 58).

McEwan's critique of our society extends beyond just its demands for conformity or the limitations it places on our lives. It also critiques the exclusive attitudes that limit us from feeling empathy and compassion for others, particularly those from different backgrounds. The narrator of *Atonement* illustrates the potential capacity of people to transcend their background and rise above oppressive circumstances with their strong capacity for understanding and forgiveness. *Atonement* is a particularly potent reminder of how powerful adherence to conventions and established norms of behavior can be. As we follow the main characters' enactments of these conventions, we are all too aware of the tragedy unfolding. The oppressive expectations and the isolation they breed take their toll on everyone involved, and we cannot help but feel the crushing weight of it all. The novel *Atonement* is a poignant reminder

that in the more deprived and exclusive parts of society, life is often shaped by a narrow set of expectations and ideologies. In this way, the novel is both a criticism of the oppressive shape society takes and a celebration of a human capacity for empathy, understanding, and self-discovery. While it is definitely not a pleasant or uplifting read, this book sheds light on the power and consequences of our numerous exclusive expectations. It serves as a reminder to have compassion and understanding towards one another.

*Atonement* is a stirring defence of democratic generosity and its tenets of justice, reconciliation, and our communal responsibility to each other. It presses upon the readers to reflect upon our decisions, those both good and bad, and reconcile with those whom we have wronged. This novel underscores the importance of understanding, forgiving, and looking for ways to heal our wounds. It shows the reader the transformation of what these values can bring and how they can lead to a better society.

McEwan doesn't just draw inspiration from other famous writers who came before him, particularly those from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; instead, he also goes further back in history, finding themes and influences in the literature of the Middle Ages.

McEwan does not limit himself just to mining the works of his nineteenth and twentieth-century predecessors for literary inspiration, however, for he also plumbs the literary productions of an era much more remote: the Middle Ages (Behrman, 2010, p. 453).

McEwan also challenges the idea of punishment as a form of justice, a common practice of authorities throughout history. This idea is further developed as Robbie's sentence is carried out, and the consequences, such as the gap created between him and Cecilia, are clearly described. The title *Atonement* serves as an indication that this form of justice is not as effective as forgiveness and understanding in achieving a fair outcome. *Atonement* serves not only as an excellent source of entertainment but also as a thought-provoking piece of literature that can help us reflect on our society's sometimes oppressive

aspects and their consequences. Through its poignancy, this novel is a strong defence of the idea of democratic equality, which embraces the value of an individual's life without being bound by the things they are born into, such as their social class or gender.

*Atonement* defends the ideals of democratic ideas by exploring the class system. The novel takes a negative view of this system—it celebrates and promotes the idea that everyone deserves equal opportunities to succeed. The character of Lola exemplifies this ideal, as she, a working-class girl, is continuously portrayed as a victim of circumstances. Despite facing disadvantages, she is encouraged to pursue her own ambitions, which ultimately lead her to determination and success: “Maybe influenced by her mother, Lola is not a domestic angel but a provocative teenager who chooses to follow a path that eventually makes her a rich lady instead of a social outcast” (Lara, 2010, p. 44). *Atonement* presents the consequences of class and privilege, as well as the yearning for *Atonement*. It also defends a more democratic vision. By artfully depicting reality and delving into the complexities of human experience, this novel powerfully captures the challenges of reconciling past choices and emphasizes the need for a fairer society.

The novel *Atonement* poignantly expresses the ruthless and oppressive power of the class system, making it clear that it has long-lasting, hurtful effects, “one of the many social systems created and constructed by men to sustain male power” (Lara, 2010, p. 9). Even in the face of love and compassion, class distinctions still carry immense weight; suffering and injustices still befall those who struggle to traverse them. This injustice rings through the novel and highlights just how severe class disparity can be.

In *Atonement*, McEwan repeatedly uses drowning as a motif to symbolize different forms of struggle. Briony's misinterpretation of Cecilia's fountain incident, symbolized by drowning, fuels her betrayal. Later, Corporal Mace's staged drowning to protect an RAF officer mirrors Briony's deceptive actions. Finally, Robbie's sinking into the perilous wartime world represents his despair and danger. This interconnected motif highlights the characters' battles with

truth, perception, and the consequences of lies while reinforcing the novel's themes of guilt, war's darkness, and the elusiveness of *Atonement*.

McEwan also depicts Cecilia's escapade in the fountain as a drowning scene (29). This incident plays a critical role in Briony's betrayal of Robbie, although he remains unaware that she has witnessed it. Later in the novel, Corporal Mace feigns to drown the hapless RAF in 'the bloody sea' (238). He does so, ironically, to save the beleaguered young man from the increasingly hostile bar crowd. However, the mention of drowning at this point in the novel reminds readers that Robbie is sinking deeper into the perilous night world, a world marked, as Frye notes, by cruelty and horror (Behrman, 2010, p. 468).

Moreover, *Atonement* serves as a reminder of the invidious nature of the class system and the imperative for change. Starting in the pre-WWII English countryside, the novel paints a picture of a class-divided society, one where the upper class has financial, social, and educational advantages while the lower class continues to struggle with the burdens of oppression and the lack of opportunity they face. In the character's actions and their consequences, McEwan conveys the invidious nature of the class system and its enduring influence over their lives. Through his character development and story structure, McEwan clarifies how class influences one's life and determines one's outcome. He shows how an unquestioned adherence to a rigid class system can lead to the denigration of people below a certain level and how it can be the source of deep suffering and injustice. By pointing out the invidious nature of the class system, *Atonement* serves as a cautionary tale in a society where class remains a relevant and pressing issue.

The powerful characterization of the other female characters in *Atonement* further contributes to McEwan's exploration of gender. Cecilia is shown to be a trailblazer of sorts, acting independently while still being heavily

respected by those around her. Her independent spirit and refusal to succumb to the normative roles of female subordination stem from a deep inner strength and a rebellious attitude toward authority. Moreover, the female characters in McEwan's narrative are depicted as being in a perpetual state of negotiation with their subjectivity while they contend with a patriarchal world that seeks to control and dictate their actions and conform them to predetermined roles. The novel takes a reflective approach that allows readers to consider the messages of McEwan's words and his attitude toward the complex and oppressive gender norms that exist. *Atonement* invites readers to reflect on their preconceptions and stance on gender roles and to gain a better understanding of the impact that gendered stereotypes and expectations can have. It also serves to highlight the importance of acknowledging the complexities of gender dynamics and the implications that these conventions can have, not only in theoretical exchange but also in our real lives. On the one hand, Briony is expected to adhere to societal norms and internalize femininity as defined by her male-dominated society, "formed by and for middle-class women" and "the shift of feminist interests away from questions of women's independence to questions of women's relationship to men" (Lara, 2010, p. 42). On the other hand, Briony is a creative and intelligent young woman in a society that largely suppresses women's expression and individuality.

McEwan's novel explores how Briony navigates her society's norms and expectations throughout the novel. He employs a literary device, the palimpsest, to reveal the subtle yet powerful ways in which women's femininity is constructed and controlled by her society. Through this technique, McEwan aligns Briony's unique femininity to the cultural norms of her time, warning women of the femininity imposed on them by a patriarchal culture. A palimpsest is a text that has been completely rewritten over and over in the same medium. It is a physical representation of the ever-changing definitions and expectations of femininity in a patriarchal culture. Here, McEwan shows how Briony is constantly imitating and adjusting her femininity, following how she thinks society wants her to be. Through the use of the palimpsest, McEwan can reveal to the reader the invisible and insurmountable pressure placed on Briony

and other women of her time by expectations of femininity. *Atonement* explores the depths of human emotion as it considers the normalizing palimpsest to reveal femininity at the heart of the story. A palimpsest is a manuscript in which the original text has been erased, but the new text partly shows through. Using this metaphor, McEwan's novel layers and embeds his characters' subjective notions of normality, gender roles, and identity. Robinson, in the article *The Modernism of Ian McEwan's Atonement*, states:

McEwan reflects historically on the gender politics of interwar education through the unsympathetic opinions of Emily Tallis, who is scathing about the life her daughter has led. Emily's précis—smoking in the bedroom, “the Halls, the Maids' Dancing, the Little-Go, and the self-adoring slumming, the knickers drying before the electric fire and two to a hairbrush” (64)—perfectly captures the world that Judith Earle inhabits at Cambridge. However, as Lehmann does, Emily cannot admit that these first collegiate love affairs, rivalries, and jealousies were often between women (Robinson, 2010, p. 483).

The novel reveals how an individual's interpretation of femininity and masculinity can be accepted or rejected based on society's standards, as seen in the character of Lola, Briony's twin. Lola is not a traditionally feminine character, as she loves outdoor activities such as cycling, fishing, and sailing. Her strong, brave, and independent character is at odds with Briony's more traditional view of femininity, which leads to great tension between the two sisters and a clash between perspectives of norms. The feminist ideas in *Atonement* are further highlighted by McEwan's portrayal of female characters in the novel. He presents them as complex, three-dimensional individuals who transcend traditional gender boundaries and explores the power of female strength and courage in the novel. Through characters such as Briony and Cecilia, who are both strong and capable, McEwan challenges many of the traditional gender roles and expectations placed upon women of the time.

McEwan's novel is ultimately a timeless exploration of the often-conflicting ideals of femininity and gender roles, seen through the metaphor of a normalizing palimpsest. By appealing to different perspectives on gender roles, norms, and identity, McEwan's *Atonement* exposes its readers to the complexity of human life and emotions and encourages them to delve deeper into their own perceptions.

McEwan's *Atonement* is a poignant reminder of the subjugation of women to societal norms and a call to examine the often-invisible constraints imposed on them. Through this powerful narrative technique, McEwan reveals that the expectations of a male-dominated culture predetermine the personal experiences of femininity. He also captures the nuances of how these expectations shape the lives of women, showing how societal norms can be simultaneously oppressive and repressive yet rewarding in certain ways. As a result, McEwan's novel serves as an effective way to both highlight and challenge the conventions of femininity present in the early twentieth century.

Despite the intense drama and suspense, it evokes, *Atonement* is ultimately a love story. Briony's primary challenge lies in her unwavering belief that she possesses the power to shape her own fate. This belief leads her to exercise personal judgment over the events unfolding in her life, inadvertently inflicting immense suffering upon the two individuals dearest to her heart: her sister, Ceecee, and her childhood sweetheart, Robbie Turner. It's clear from the start that Cecilia holds a deep affection for Robbie, even though they have been separated by circumstance and class since they were kids. As young adults, they finally realize their special bond, and this is where the novel starts to become a love story. It's a story of both heart-breaking distance and incredible longing and redemption that comes from aching for something the characters could not have. However, Ceecee and Robbie's relationship carries the heavy burden of emotion in this novel. Both are tainted by Briony's wrongdoings, as she accuses Robbie of a crime he didn't commit and ultimately separates him from the woman he loves. Despite the tragedy of being unable to be together, it's clear that Ceecee and Robbie are deeply in love, and their love is so strong that it transcends all obstacles. The theme of *Atonement* is familiar: love can be

simultaneously powerful and delicate. It is a multi-layered love story, exploring both the potential and the consequences of one person's misjudgement.

A hallmark of *Atonement* is how it is both a war story and a story about personal relationships. As we follow the narrative, we come to understand how a single moment of misjudgement and the accusation of Robbie of raping Cecilia can have devastating consequences. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the accusation itself is yet another consequence and reflection of the socio-political forces of war. The nature of war, as depicted in *Atonement*, is horrific and immense. The novel shows a devastating war that was destructive in more ways than we can fathom and its lasting impact on individuals and societies. War is portrayed as an immense force, a source of radical transformation in which relationships, identities, and moral frameworks will be brutally redefined. It is precisely because of the way *Atonement* handles the impact of war that makes it such an enthralling read. We are deeply invested in witnessing how war continues to dominate our lives, how it shapes us and how it lingers long after we think it has disappeared. The long-term consequences of the war are still felt in the lives of the characters. For example, Robbie's fate is ultimately shaped by his unjust accusation and subsequent enlistment to fight in the war. However, as prefigured in the novel's title, there is still a chance of redemption even amid such a magnitude of chaos and destruction. In *Atonement*, Ian McEwan explores the many ways in which war shapes our lives. Although the novel is heavily focused on the personal relationships between the characters, its core is rooted in the destructive nature of war. By highlighting both the individual and societal consequences of such a conflict, McEwan brilliantly paints a picture of the destruction and endurance of war. *Atonement* is a beautiful and complex novel that is steeped in grief and loss but, at the same time, is full of humanity and hope. *Atonement* is indeed a novel of many stories, seamlessly interweaving several characters' journeys together, inspiring the reader to reflect on the fragility of life, the power of the past, and the significance of *Atonement*.

Kermode comments on the issue of suspending belief and disbelief when he says, "The pleasure it gives depends as much on our suspending belief as on

our suspending disbelief’ (Kermode, 2001, p. 372). One of the many pleasures of this book comes from its remarkable ability to play with our expectations, urging us to both suspend belief and disbelief at certain points to appreciate the story best. The triumph of *Atonement* lies in the way it presents opposing ideas and notions, allowing readers to consider the implications of each carefully. On the one hand, it requires readers to suspend belief, not question the events of the novel, but instead accept them in their entirety. This approach allows us to appreciate the delicately crafted tale through an impressionistic lens, savouring the nuances McEwan uses to craft his characters and story. This insistence on testing the boundaries of an author’s crafted reality is essential to pull apart the pieces of the story, consider the characters’ motivations and values, and question the reality of the events of the novel. The power of *Atonement* lies in its invitation to suspend our belief, allowing us to explore a world where one seemingly insignificant moment can alter the course of our lives. When we do this, a deeper and more powerful pleasure is revealed; as we understand the duality of justice, guilt, and redemption contained in Briony’s story, we can’t help being moved by its heart-breaking beauty.

On the other hand, *Atonement* also invites us to suspend disbelief and truly appreciate the internal complexities of each situation. By focusing on the relationships at work in the narrative, readers can appreciate how each character struggles to make sense of the world around them and how their choices, both good and bad, impact those they care about. To truly appreciate the novel, readers must accept the difficult truths of each situation to grapple with the moral dilemmas put forth by McEwan. The reader is asked to “suspend disbelief.” This allows for the necessary imaginative leaps and mental picture-building so the reader can truly visualize the story. It is an invitation to think beyond the mundane and accept the world of the novel imagined by McEwan as real. We can also suspend disbelief by not blindly following the prescriptive rules that our own real-world experiences may enforce. We can learn to be flexible in our beliefs and accept the complexities of any subject the author is attempting to depict. We are no longer limited by our own preconceptions but can accept the greater scope of all possibilities. When reading *Atonement*, we

are asked to consider a world where an adolescent girl's misinterpretation of a single moment can have a lasting and devastating impact on those around her. This requires us to not only suspend our disbelief but also to accept that this potential could exist. By inching ever closer to the truth, only teased by McEwan's barest touches, readers can make sense of the book's refusal to declare any one thing true or right.

Only by carefully considering and analysing each unique situation can any wisdom be acquired from *Atonement*. This delicate balance between suspending disbelief and suspending belief is integral to fully understanding the novel and savouring the most nuanced parts. By allowing the reader to suspend disbelief, McEwan is challenging them to dive into and inhabit the world he has constructed, to live and feel with the characters and their struggles. Simultaneously, he encourages readers to suspend belief, questioning the conventions and beliefs of the characters and his reality. This balancing act between credulity and scepticism allows readers of *Atonement* to reap the profound rewards it offers. By allowing oneself to both believe and doubt, the reader is ultimately able to reach a deeply immersive level of understanding and appreciation of the story and its characters. Kermode states that:

McEwan's skill has here developed to the point where it gives disquiet and pleasure. Perhaps to be disquieting has always been his ambition; the first stories were in various ways startling. By now, he is such a virtuoso that one is tempted to imagine that the best readers of this book might be Henry James and Ford Madox Ford. It is, in perhaps the only possible way, a philosophical novel, pitting the imagination against what it has to imagine if we are to be given the false assurance that there is a match between our fictions and the specifications of reality. The pleasure it gives depends as much on our suspending belief as on our suspending disbelief (Kermode, 2001, p. 372).

By accepting both belief and disbelief, we open ourselves up to the possibilities and appreciate the novel for the piece of art that it is. We also better understand the characters and the scenarios they inhabit and gain insight into how they cope with life's difficulties. We are allowed to explore the combined realities of the world and look at multiple perspectives. In this author-created world, we can find pleasure and a deeper understanding of the characters, their motivations, and the implications of their actions. As a result, we gain a greater appreciation of the novel and the pieces of art it creates. This tension between suspending belief and suspending disbelief makes *Atonement* so essential and powerful. By pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable and true, McEwan compels us to look into the very nature of remorse, redemption, and *Atonement* and draw our conclusions.

“McEwan asks readers to question the view that waiting for love is inherently noble, a view perpetuated by Cecilia's seemingly selfless refrain to her lover, Robbie” (Behrman, 2010, p. 470). This is especially evident in the last chapter of *Atonement*, where everyone has gone on their own path, and it's the first time we actually hear Cecilia's inner thoughts in complete silence. In this moment, we get a glimpse at the true extent of Cecilia's love for Robbie. We can see that even though they won't ever be together, Cecilia will always love Robbie without fail, forever and ever. Cecilia's refusal to let go of her love for Robbie through even the most difficult times is a testament to how noble love can be and how powerful it can be in overcoming any obstacle to ultimately keep two people together, even in the worst times. This truly inspirational and unforgettable portrayal of love reminds us of the beauty of never giving up on the one you love and always striving for unconditional and unwavering love. The novel expertly captures the poignant beauty of that doomed relationship, yet it never paints an overly sentimental picture. It ultimately tells a story of human resilience and the indomitableness of the human spirit. Consequently, what readers take away from *Atonement* is a powerful and enduring tribute to the resilient and noble love that Cecilia and Robbie share. Despite all the adversity they experience, her commitment never wavers, and this is conveyed through her heavy reliance on the phrase

“Forgiveness is impossible,” which signifies that no matter what the cost, she will never abandon him . The powerful sentiment of Cecilia’s refrain embodies her commitment not only to Robbie but also to their shared love, which is portrayed here as something noble and pure. Through Cecilia’s persistent love, readers are encouraged to recognize the beauty of selfless and devoted relationships, even if they know they will ultimately come to an end . For this reason, the powerful and enduring love story between Cecilia and Robbie translates into one of the most memorable romances in literature. Their story demonstrates that love is never to be taken for granted and is always to be celebrated and honored, no matter how long it lasts.

## **1.2. Postmodernist Theory**

Postmodern theory is a complex set of ideas and theoretical approaches rooted in philosophy and social sciences. Broadly speaking, postmodern theory seeks to challenge and critique traditional conceptions of identity, knowledge, and power to provide an alternative view of reality and subjectivity. “Postmodern literature is a form of literature which is marked both stylistically and ideologically, [...] as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, games, parody, paranoia, dark humour, and authorial selfreference” (Sheeba, 2017, p. 181). Through its emphasis on subjectivity and the rejection of traditional, essentialized categories of thought, many fields have embraced postmodern theory, such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, literature, and critical theory.

Postmodern theory is the term used to define the context of philosophical, artistic, and social developments that occurred during the second half of the twentieth century. It is a concept that acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and perspectives, such as those shaped by class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Postmodern theory is first developed in the 1960s and 1970s as an attempt to understand the complexity of a fragmented, rapidly changing world. Postmodernism refers broadly to a range of academic disciplines, principles, movements, trends, and social circumstances. At its simplest, postmodern theory gives up the idea that objective truth is possible or desirable. It also

challenges established structures and ideologies by viewing them as subject to change. Further, postmodernism acknowledges that certainty and stability are not possibilities in this rapidly transforming world. Postmodern theory is often described as a tool for understanding how the institutions, norms, and identities of the modern world interact with one another. It seeks to analyse a range of elements such as culture, power, language, and technology and considers their individual and collective impact on society.

Postmodern theorists focus especially on how power is embedded in cultural practices and how life experiences are shaped by race, gender, sexuality, and class. Postmodernism argues that the conditions of human existence inevitably shape humanity's view of the world and that these realities signify different kinds of knowledge and experience. Postmodernism is a theory of modernity that develops out of a critical re-evaluation of the established assumptions of traditional modern thought. Postmodernism is often associated with an attitude of skepticism toward conventionally accepted notions of truth and objectivity. Postmodernism questions the validity of objective reality and traditional conceptions of the real world by accepting that reality is constructed by the individual, "Anti-positivist and anti-verificationist" stance highlighted that post-modern thinkers attack the idea of objectivity in social research, an autonomous rational mind and grand narratives" (Sheeba, 2017, p. 184).

Postmodernism also denies the existence of any all-encompassing, absolute truth, instead recognizing that reality is defined through one's subjective experience and individual interpretation of reality. This is a departure from previous theories of modernity, which typically assume that an objective reality is knowable and can be presented authoritatively. Instead, postmodernism holds that the experience of reality is highly subjective and variable since everyone views it differently. Postmodernism believes that there is no certain truth, that humans have created what they have come to accept as reality, and that they have done so through their interpretation. Postmodernism further argues that society is structured by a set of conventions, norms, and discourses that shape our understanding of history, identity, and how we

interact. Postmodernists believe that these conventions, norms, and discourses can be altered or abandoned at any time.

Postmodern theory, emerging in the end twentieth century, offers a hopeful response to the increasing complexities of our society. It has become a cornerstone of contemporary socio-cultural and philosophical thought, aiming to address the changing nature of our world by rejecting the traditional systems of categorization and management. Postmodernism is centred on interrogating the prevailing concepts of truth and certainty, fostering a broader scope for intellectual exploration and creative expression. It posits that diverse interpretations can exist to construct meaning within various frameworks. The foundation of postmodernism largely lies in different forms of deconstruction, which involves dismantling established cultural and societal norms to reveal new perspectives. Deconstructionism is notably adept at challenging our capacity to make cohesive judgments, as it underscores the inherent diversity in our encounters. Additionally, postmodernism sheds light on how the predominant cultural milieu influences our identities, offering a hopeful vision for a more inclusive and diverse future.

Postmodernism, with its focus on subjectivity, acknowledges that there are always multiple ways of interpreting the same information or experiencing the same event. Our perceptions, understandings, and experiences are unique to each individual, and all these perspectives are equally valid. A key concept in postmodern theory is the rejection of universal truths. Postmodernism recognizes that various perspectives can create different meanings and experiences, thus rejecting the notion of a single, absolute reality. As a result, postmodernism does not accept any single point of view as correct or perfect. Instead, postmodern thinkers strive to understand and accept the multiple ways in which people interpret and experience their world, fostering a sense of inclusivity and respect for diverse viewpoints. Postmodern theory seeks to embrace diversity, allowing for greater appreciation and understanding of the various backgrounds, values, and identities that define who we are. Moreover, it encourages the expansion of existing knowledge and advancements in

understanding our world, making us feel valued and accepted for our unique contributions to knowledge.

Postmodern theory has emerged as a popular form of theoretical analysis that seeks to challenge traditional paradigms of knowledge and understanding by introducing new ideas and concepts. The postmodern approach questions and critiques the fundamental assumptions of the traditional modernist approaches and views science, history, and other disciplines through a fresh yet skeptical lens. Gladstone & Worden, in their article *Introduction: Postmodernism, Then. Twentieth Century Literature*, state:

One of the effects of these approaches to post-1945 literature has been to displace postmodernism as an explanatory category in the name of more pragmatic institutional histories, circulation studies, sociological inquiries, and reception models. For Sean McCann and Michael Szalay, this shift marks a rejection of New Left politics and, by extension, postmodernism, for it entails a recognition that many of the concepts and theories central to postmodernism—the poststructuralist theory of language, Foucauldian understandings of discipline and the subject, Althusserian accounts of compromised agency, and gender/queer theory's emphasis on the power of the "unspeakable"—are, in fact, not radical ideas but rather “cherished and ultimately comforting folklore of the late capitalist economy” (Gladstone & Worden, 2011, pp. 294-295).

Postmodern theory has made a strong impact on areas such as architecture, literature, philosophy, and art. At its core, postmodern theory is a reaction to the excesses and shortcomings of the modernist paradigm. Put simply, postmodernism seeks to reject linear, traditional views of knowledge and understanding. Instead, it encourages a more open-minded, pluralistic approach to thinking. Another key feature of postmodern theory is its focus on the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge. Postmodern theorists reject the notion that one discipline or field has all the answers, instead believing that knowledge should be derived from multiple sources and interpretations. Postmodern theorists thus advocate for incorporating multiple, sometimes contradictory,

perspectives in formulating a knowledge base. The postmodern movement also emphasizes the multiplicity and plurality of interpretation, which should be considered when evaluating any single interpretation or point of view. No single interpretation or view should be given absolute truth status, as the postmodern theorist Jacques Derrida argued in his book *Of Grammatology*.

Postmodern theorists challenge traditional notions of power and identity. Rather than promoting rigid, traditional concepts of power and identity, postmodern theorists recognize that power and identity can be fluid and ever-changing. Postmodern theorists reject the idea of a unitary identity, suggesting that identity is multiple, complex, and in constant flux. Postmodern theory has become an important concept in the intellectual discourse of recent decades. It has challenged traditional paradigms of knowledge and understanding and opened up new avenues for exploration. By encouraging open-mindedness, interdisciplinary approaches, multiplicity, and multi-faceted identities, postmodern theory has provided a valuable challenge to the stagnation of ideas that can come with traditional thinking.

Postmodern theory has become an important part of modern thought in the twenty-first century. Postmodern theorists seek to challenge accepted ways of thinking and approach topics that are commonly considered taboo or radical. “Postmodernism” is an overarching term encompassing many theoretical perspectives. It includes everything from deconstructionist approaches to psychoanalytic understandings of gender dynamics. It is a multi-faceted ideology that is complex and often misunderstood. At its essence, postmodern theory strives to question traditional interpretations of reality. In particular, postmodern theorists refute the idea of a single, homogenizing reality. Instead, they argue that reality is inherently constructed and dynamic.

Additionally, postmodernists often see the concept of truth as unreliable and subjective. They approach understanding and knowledge of the world around us with a suspicion of absolutism. This can often be observed in postmodern treatments of ethnicity, race, and gender. For example, notions of gender as either binary or inalterable are often challenged, and diversity is

embraced. Postmodern theory questions traditional understandings of reality and truth, moving away from the traditional approaches it sees as outdated and limited. Postmodernists instead embrace a vision of social context that is far more complex and diverse. Postmodernists reject the idea of one way of thinking, instead privileging multiple perspectives and interpretations. Postmodern theory is a reaction to the universalism implicit in modernity and its grand narrative, providing a way of looking at the world that is more reflective of the diversity and polyphony of the modern age.

Postmodern theory is often characterized by its self-reflexivity, looking critically at its own assumptions and arguments. Critics of postmodern theory often paint it as overly self-reflexive and flirting with relativism. On the other hand, postmodernists argue that self-reflexivity is an essential tool for contemporary critical thought, as it allows us to more effectively understand and analyse the social, cultural, and political realities of the contemporary world.

Postmodern theory is also characterized by its concern with power and the relationship between those with power and those who lack it. It emphasizes marginalized and oppressed groups, highlighting how power and privilege work to sustain existing systems of domination. Postmodern theorists also explore how media and culture are used to both reject and reinforce dominant power structures:

Rachel Adams does this sequentially in her essay “The Ends of America, The Ends of Postmodernism,” insofar as the “American literary globalism” she describes as following postmodernism is, essentially, an expanded version of ethnic American literature. Ursula Heise does this synchronically in her essay “Postmodern Novels” insofar as she argues that postmodernism needs to be understood as a response to mass media that consists of an effort to capture or preserve “oral culture”—which is, itself, a long-standing description of the central project of ethnic American literature. We are indebted to Maria A. Windell for this insight (Gladstone & Worden, 2011, pp. 294-295).

Overall, postmodern theory focuses on multiple perspectives and fluid authority, as well as its interrogations of power and privilege. Postmodern theorists strive to create more inclusive ways of thinking through their critical engagements with the foundations of modernity.

Postmodern literature has come to play an incredibly important role in contemporary literature. With its focus on the bizarre, the ridiculous, and the surreal, postmodern literature has been instrumental in helping develop a more open-minded approach to literature and art in general. One of the main forefathers of postmodern literature is French author and philosopher Jean Ricardou. In his book *The Narrative Forms*, Ricardou argued that literature should embrace the “postmodernism of the everyday,” allowing writers to express various realities and not limit their works to one genre. Another pioneer of postmodern literature is the American author William Gass. Gass is best known for his works *Fiction* and *The House of Fiction*, both of which focus on how fiction does not necessarily have to be realistic and how it can also depict a much more absurd reality. He believed that fiction should be used to “liberate” the human imagination from the constraints of place and time. The Canadian poet and novelist Margaret Atwood is also considered a primary figure in postmodern literature. She is well-known for her works, such as *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Robber Bride*. Atwood argued that in postmodern literature, the focus should be on the aesthetic value of the work and not on the genre or form. She also firmly believed in using multiple voices in fiction to create a more engaging narrative. Kurt Vonnegut is another major figure in postmodern literature. His works, such as *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Sirens of Titan*, are extremely influential and often quoted as prime examples of postmodern literature. This is mainly due to his blending of science fiction, fantasy, and surrealism. He is also renowned for his challenges to traditional conventions of literature and art in that he was not afraid to tackle unconventional or controversial topics.

Jacques Derrida is widely recognized as one of the most significant theorists of the postmodern era. He is renowned for his contributions to deconstruction, a theory that underscores the diverse interpretations of meaning

within any given text or statement. Deconstruction challenges conventional structuralism by asserting that a text's meaning is provisional and subject to varying interpretations. This theory has profoundly influenced the evolution of postmodern literature. Another key figure in the advancement of postmodern theory is Jean Baudrillard. "Most of the post-modern thoughts have mainly been originated from the Nonsociologist like Derrida, Lyotard, Jameson and others. Apart from them, some other prominent writers were Foucault and Baudrillard" (Sheeba, 2017, p. 185). Baudrillard is celebrated for his concepts surrounding simulacra, which pertain to tangible objects such as consumer goods that no longer represent an authentic original but their own replicas. Baudrillard's theory posits that contemporary culture is centre around artificial, inauthentic objects and images, prompting inquiries into the essence of truth, genuineness, and reality. Richard Rorty is another important postmodernist theorist, contributing ideas about Ironist Liberalism. Rorty's main idea is that our culture and beliefs are all contingent, relative, and constantly changing. Therefore, any individual's truth is based on what society accepts, leaving the truth itself to be seen as up for debate. According to Rorty, this creates an environment of constant interaction and re-evaluation of beliefs.

Roland Barthes is a significant figure in the development of postmodern theory in literature. Barthes is best known for his ideas relating to semiotics, which is the study of signs or symbols and how they contribute to the meaning of a text. His most famous book, *Mythologies*, is composed of short essays examining mythology and its implications in modern culture and literature. He also developed several theories related to how texts and images work together. His most famous works, *Mythologies* and *Elements of Semiology*, explored how symbols in literature, advertising, and mass culture can carry emotional and intellectual implications. Barthes believed that signifiers are open to interpretation, even if their creator has a distinct idea in mind, and he argued that the only true meaning of any text is the reader's own understanding.

Frederic Jameson is an American literary theorist and critic who is largely credited with introducing the postmodern concept of metafiction: "[e]xamples of stylistic techniques that are often used in post-modern literature

[...] metafiction is the act of writing about writing or making readers aware of the fictional nature of the very fiction they are reading” (Sheeba, 2017, p. 183). His 1981 essay, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, put forth a new way of thinking about both narrative fiction and the concept of the self. In essence, he argued that postmodern fiction should be seen less as an authoritative narrative and more as the result of the individual consciousness interacting with the culture of the times. Further, he posited that certain aspects of fiction inherently push the boundaries of the traditional narrative conventions, such as character experimentation, fragmented plot, and intertextuality in the language of multiple texts.

In addition, the American critic Harold Bloom is often credited as one of the first major figures of postmodern literary theory. He is best known for exploring the anxieties of influence and the relevance of intertextual readings. In his influential book *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom proposed that literary works are inextricably linked with the surrounding texts and that this relationship holds particular relevance for a reader's understanding of a text. Julia Kristeva is another name that is often associated with postmodern theory. Her work on intertextuality, language, and semiotics brings important ideas about postmodernism to the forefront. Kristeva is credited with introducing the concept of “intertextuality.” This concept has since become important in postmodern theory and criticism. The Cuban author and philosopher Julio Cortazar’s breakthrough novel *Hopscotch*, published in 1966, is also credited with introducing postmodern elements into literature. The novel tells the story of a man suffering from futility and boredom. Like Coover and Barth, Cortazar use humor and absurdity to challenge traditional narrative structures. He used a stream-of-consciousness style to explore the chaotic nature of reality.

These individuals represent a fraction of the pioneering figures in postmodern literary theory. Despite their works' variations in tone, content, and style, they collectively champion the notion of departing from conventional literary norms, allowing for fresh interpretations and writing styles. Whether delving into Jean Ricardou’s exploration of the postmodern elements in everyday life or Kurt Vonnegut's critique of traditional literature, each author

has played a crucial role in molding postmodern literature into its present form. The works of these theorists and many more have had a significant impact on the development of postmodern theory in literature. With their ideas and theories, these pioneers of postmodern theory have steered our culture and literature in a new, ever-evolving and expanding direction. The pioneering figures of postmodern theory in literature provided the groundwork for a modern era of literary analysis and theory. As such, the contributions of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, and Deleuze are still highly influential in academic discourse today. In a world increasingly marked by questions of social justice, their works remain particularly pertinent as they have helped to examine issues such as the construction of identity, the possibilities and limits of communication, and the role of language and power in knowledge production. The work of these pioneering postmodern theorists set the tone for postmodern literature and helped to develop its philosophical and stylistic elements further. Today, postmodern literature is studied in classrooms around the world, and its experimental intertwining of reality and fiction provides an ever-evolving range of narrators that readers never tire of exploring.

In literature, postmodernist theory has presented itself in a variety of ways. Some of the most notable examples of postmodernist theory in literature include the works of authors such as Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, and Toni Morrison. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* employs metafictional elements, where the story is not only told but also played out within the narrative. In the narrative, postmodernism confronts and challenges traditional structures, forms, and concepts. Eco employs a range of parodic, ironic, and pastiche elements in his work to create a scathing but ultimately thought-provoking critique of Western philosophy and religious thought. Eco also layers Eastern European, Islamic, and Jewish motifs across the work, something that is meant to be deliberately subversive and unpredictable. Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* blends, offering different perspectives on a unified set of events. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* extends the postmodern tradition of incorporating multiple narratives. *Beloved* not only uses flashback sequences to deepen the understanding of its characters but also employs fragmented stories

to explore the legacy of slavery in the United States. These examples of postmodernism in literature exemplify its characteristic of challenging traditional structures and helping expand our understanding of the world around us. Postmodernism in literature is certainly not limited to these authors and books. In fact, virtually any novel or work of literature can be seen as connected to the postmodern tradition, as it encourages readers to challenge established ideas and ideals, be creative, explore diverse perspectives, and question the dominant norms of our culture.

Even works of popular literature will often invoke aspects of postmodernism theory, such as Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006). Here, McCarthy employs a range of contrasting imagery, symbols, and language to explore ideas of loss, end of days, and shattered realities. Moreover, McCarthy's use of overlapping imagery and varying linear flashbacks to create a fractured narrative directly references postmodernism. Vladimir Nabokov's work *Lolita* (1955) can also be seen as a prime example of postmodernism in literature. Nabokov uses the narrator's unreliable accounts and unreliable perceptions of the story to make a statement about the subjectivity of culture and reality. Ultimately, Nabokov's work reflects how postmodernist thought could be used to critique conventional social truths through art. Another example of postmodernism in literature is the work of British author and playwright Samuel Beckett. Beckett's work often challenges the traditional narrative structure and deliberately subverts the typical expectations of the audience. His plays use irony and absurdity to portray the absurdity of life itself and the unreality of existence. Examples of this can be found in his play *Waiting for Godot*, which tells the story of two tramps enduring an apparently endless wait for someone or something called "Godot".

The aforementioned examples are just a few of the most notable works of literature that embody the postmodern ethos, but they serve as powerful examples of the postmodern form in literature. By familiarizing ourselves with these examples and postmodernism in general, we can gain a better understanding of literature, culture, and identity and broaden our perspectives.

Postmodernist authors often tend to write with irony and humor, as well as experiment with magical realism. Therefore, readers can expect to be taken outside reality when reading postmodern literature. Writers who have embraced postmodernism are often labeled with terms such as “magical realists” and “metafictionists”. In a sense, postmodernism has allowed literature to incorporate self-referential themes and ideas, often denoting personal experiences such as love, marriage, religion, race, and gender. Postmodern literature has allowed us to learn more about the world through these elements. This has led to an increased understanding and appreciation of the complexities of contemporary society, which can be seen in how books are now being read, analyzed, and understood.

The postmodernist perspective has caused a shift in how we view literature, with the traditional boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, author and reader, and between truth and fiction being challenged. Postmodernism has sought to create artworks and literature that are both distinct and subversive, allowing writers to express their experiences and beliefs in ways that weren't accessible in earlier eras. It is argued that postmodernism has helped create a greater diversity in literature and encouraged writers to explore new narrative techniques and novel ideas. Writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, and Salman Rushdie have all helped expand the parameters of what is considered traditional literature and have drawn attention to topics and concepts that were formerly suppressed. In addition to providing a platform for writers to explore new themes, postmodernism has had a huge influence on literature's structure and form. We can see this in the fragmentation of texts, the lack of conventional linearity and structure, and the linguistic freedom that allows for more direct and honest writing. These elements, which are typical of postmodernist works, have opened up greater possibilities for authors and helped to challenge existing narrative conventions. Postmodernism has also had a lasting effect on how readers approach literature. Rather than seeing a text as a unified and coherent whole, readers now think of different elements within a text as connected, as if they are “intertextual” links between different works and points of view. This way of reading allows readers to understand texts in a

deeper, more complex way and to challenge their own preconceived notions of what literature is and can be.

In conclusion, postmodernism has profoundly impacted literature in a manner that has not been seen before. Its influence can be seen in a large variety of works, shifting the dimensions and boundaries of how literature is read, understood, and experienced. Postmodernism has had a huge impact on literature, not only in terms of the structure of texts but also in terms of the reader's engagement with them. By encouraging a more open and critical approach to literature, postmodernism has opened up new creative pathways for authors and allowed readers to explore new ideas in more radical ways.



## 2. IAN MCEWAN AS A POSTMODERN WRITER

### 2.1. Modernist Elements in McEwan's Works

In this section, we will explore McEwan's works, assessing the elements of modernism he incorporates and providing examples of these modernist features. According to the School of Literature, Drama, and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, the basic concept behind modernism is to challenge the accepted rules of literature. This means producing unique works that break from traditional structures, characterizations, and plot structures. McEwan himself described modernism as an impulse for revolution for radical innovation. McEwan's works often include fragmented narrative structures that break with traditional preconceptions of linear chapter-driven stories. His novel *Enduring Love* (1997) is an example of this. The book's chapters are written from the alternating perspectives of the two central characters, Joe and Clarissa. This allows McEwan to emphasize distinct narrations, perspectives, and levels of reality that traditional linear narratives could not explore as effectively. Further, McEwan's works often feature voices of discord characters that offer alternatives to the dominant view. With this, McEwan can express different points of view and establish a sense of self-reflexive thought in his reader. For instance, in *The Child in Time* (1987), McEwan presents differing perspectives on childhood and parenthood, allowing readers to contemplate their methodological approaches to parenting. McEwan includes an intertextuality in many of his works, referencing movies, books, or even real-life figures. Such references hint at a larger cultural fabric, connecting his works to the broader canvas of modern life. For example, in *Atonement* (2001), McEwan references Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), opening up a deeper exploration into the idea of voyeurism.

McEwan often deploys themes of uncertainty, instability, and the ephemeral nature of life. By writing stories with such themes, he points to a larger truth of modern life: we never know if stability is sustainable or if life is truly controllable. A prime example of this is his novel *Amsterdam* (1998). In the book, McEwan presents a situation in which a group of characters must

come to terms with life's exciting but brief nature, as evidenced by the fact that one of them, Molly, dies from a terminal illness. McEwan's use of modernist techniques helps capture intricate issues in society today. McEwan employs variations in time and perspective to elucidate contemporary life's chaotic and unpredictable nature. By switching between the protagonist's viewpoints, McEwan showcases the challenges of living in a perpetual state of flux. This novel serves as a poignant example of modernist literature, capturing the tribulations of daily life and the societal transformations of our time. McEwan also utilizes irony and other modernist elements throughout his work to capture the complexities of everyday life. In *Atonement*, he conveys an intense irony when the protagonist falsely accuses the housekeeper's son of the rape of her cousin. This irony further illustrates the reality of human error and serves as a reminder of the limited power humans have in the modern world. In particular, McEwan utilizes many themes and techniques common to modernist writing, such as fragmentation and stream of consciousness, as well as the interesting relationships between a reader and a text. Through a close examination of his works, this section will discuss some of the modernist elements found in McEwan's works and provide examples to illustrate the point. Wilson describes a scene from the film adaptation:

Briony runs away we hear a repeated piano motif (part of the foreboding theme associated with her at the start). Robbie, seen from behind, glances to one side, says Briony, and then commences a mental flashback of sealing the letter. A thudding pizzicato cello heartbeat-like motif intermingles with the tapping of a typewriter's keys and distorted fragments of *'O soave fanciulla* (Wilson, 2015, p. 164).

Fragmentation has been a hallmark of modernist literature for many decades. Throughout his work, McEwan peppers the narrative with shorter sections or paragraphs that often move the story in dramatically different directions. This technique fragments the story, giving the reader a different perspective each time. A great example of this can be found in McEwan's novel

*Saturday*, where the narrator is constantly interrupting his own story to provide brief, often humorous asides. McEwan's work is an excellent example of this, with characters that often seem ambivalent and are rarely driven by a linear set of motivations. In his novel *The Child in Time*, this fragmentation of narrative is used to explore the impact of the disappearance of a four-year-old on her parents, who are forced to confront their individual and collective fears and learn how to cope with the loss. Fragmentation is a common characteristic of modernism in which the author breaks down narrative elements into disconnected parts. In *Saturday*, McEwan uses fragmentation to create an atmosphere of tension and alienation. He presents the narrative in an undisciplined style, jumping from one point of view to another and frequently leaving the reader confused and uncertain about the events unfolding. This fragmentation style allows the reader to focus on the interior lives of the characters and explore the complex relationships between them. The use of stream of consciousness is another common element of modernism that can be seen in McEwan's works. This technique presents the thoughts of a character as if they were being spoken directly by that character rather than written by the author. In this way, the reader can gain deeper insight into the character's mind and his motivations. One of the best examples of this can be found in the novel *The Child in Time*, where the protagonist often pauses to ruminate on the events of his past.

Stream-of-consciousness writing is a technique by which the writer attempts to present the thoughts and feelings of the characters in a nonlinear fashion. McEwan often combines this technique with fragmentation to create a nonlinear narrative that allows the reader to focus on the emotions of the characters. An example of this can be seen in *Atonement*, when the main character, Briony, writes a letter to her older sister, Cecilia, in which she expresses her guilt and regret. In the following quote, we will see the use of stream of consciousness from *The Child in Time*, McEwan writes:

It was not always the case that a large minority comprising the weakest members of society wore special clothes, were freed from the routines of work and of many constraints on their behaviour, and were able to devote much of their time to play. It should be remembered that childhood is not a natural occurrence. There was a time when children were treated like small adults. Childhood is an invention, a social construct, made possible by society as it increased in sophistication and resource (McEwan, 1987, p. 45).

McEwan's particular quote is an excellent example of the use of stream of consciousness in modern literature, particularly as it applies to one of its major themes, childhood. The passage above draws attention to the fact that modern childhood has evolved and progressed into what it is today. In the past, children were often treated like small adults and it was not until society began to acquire more resources that we saw a shift in attitudes toward childhood. This change resulted in our current conceptions of childhood, in which young people are given special clothes, more freedom, and less responsibility. In using the stream of consciousness, McEwan effectively gives us a great insight into the development of our current ideas of childhood. By highlighting the fact that society had very different attitudes to childhood in the past, he is able to emphasize the importance of allowing children to have a carefree, playful attitude to life. He also shines a light on the fact that childhood is not something that should be taken for granted or taken away from any child, as it is integral to their development and overall well-being. He conveys this idea without explicitly stating it, allowing the reader to infer it from the character's words. The passage speaks to the notion that childhood was only made possible by a complex network of social structures and conventions. For example, by devoting resources to creating special clothes for children and freeing them from work, society was able to create a separate experience for children that allowed them to explore their world in a safe environment. This quote is an important reminder that childhood is not a universal experience but something that society has to invent. It is a reminder that we are responsible for creating a

world where children can experience the world in a safe and secure environment. By understanding the invention of childhood and all of the complex structures and conventions that have been created to make it possible, we can strive to create an environment where all children have the chance to thrive. It is worth noting that McEwan often challenges the reader, creating interesting dynamics between the text and the reader. This can be seen in many of McEwan's works, where he challenges the traditional structures of storytelling or even challenges the reader's preconceptions. Another example of this can be found in his novel *Enduring Love*, where the structure of the story is a puzzle that only the reader can piece together.

Modernism is a complex literary movement that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was characterized by a rejection of traditional narrative structure and the emergence of innovative literary styles. In *Atonement*, he proves the power of storytelling as a modern element.

She raised one hand and flexed its fingers and wondered, as she had sometimes before, how this thing, this machine for gripping, this fleshy spider on the end of her arm, came to be hers, entirely at her command. Or did it have some little life of its own? (McEwan, 2001, p. 33).

McEwan explores the powerfulness of storytelling as a modern element. Through the lens of protagonist Briony Tallis, McEwan showcases the transformation of her inner conflict and how her storytelling enables her to achieve the absolution she pursues for most of her life. The quotation further demonstrates the impact of storytelling. It highlights Briony's passing musing in which she contemplates the purpose of her hands and the intangible personality she has slowly built up for them. The quote is illustrative of the power of storytelling. It showcases how storytelling can imbue an everyday object with form and meaning, giving life to something seemingly mundane. In this instance, Briony gives her hands life and personality by creating a story around them. It implies that her hands grip things whenever she experiences something powerful from Briony's stories. The power of storytelling can be used to create

new worlds and bring existing ones to life. It has the ability to transform an emotion into something tangible and connect us to our innermost selves. It can even allow us to heal and grow from our experiences. In Briony's case, the power of storytelling enabled her to atone for her past transgressions and to create the life she dreamed of as a child. Through her stories, she was able to tell her own story and make an impact on the world around her. The quotation perfectly illustrates McEwan's exploration of the modern element of storytelling. It captures a moment that reveals the potential of what storytelling can do and its potential to transform and show us things we would have otherwise never seen. It suggests that with enough imagination, anything can be given life and become something more than what it is. Storytelling is regarded as one of the most potent tools in modern literature, demonstrated in the works of numerous acclaimed authors. *Atonement* stands as a prominent example of this phenomenon, recognized as a classic of contemporary literature. Through this excerpt, McEwan has managed to create a compelling story from a single descriptive phrase. The quotation speaks to much more than the character's physical body. McEwan's words suggest the idea that, although her body belongs to her and is under her command, it still feels as though it has a life of its own. This notion speaks to a bigger theme of the power of storytelling, which plays an important role in the novel.

The dangers of imagination and catharsis and the healing of storytelling with the various forms of emotions of the reader into the story will be analysed in this paper. And also focuses on the drastic shift of the story in the last part of the novel. The 'transformative power of the art' of writing which allows her to atone for what is done by her in a realistic way (Praneetha, 2019, p. 49).

McEwan's narration of Briony's contemplation of her hand paints a vivid image of an individual trying to understand the control she has over her own body while simultaneously hinting at a deeper sense of the power of storytelling. The evocative description of her hand, "this machine for gripping, this fleshy spider on the end of her arm," signifies not only her physical strength

but, more importantly, her mental and emotional strength, encapsulated in the phrase “entirely at her command”. The idea of her physical body having a little life of its own taps into the idea of a source of internal power, representing the triumph of the imagination. By illustrating the power of storytelling within the quotation, McEwan has crafted a powerful and evocative metaphor to demonstrate its importance. Through the simple act of visualization, he uses the language of storytelling to convey an idea that has much broader application. The notion that we possess a powerful inner self that can be used to create meaningful stories is a lesson of modern literature, and this excerpt speaks to its power. This passage is a powerful reminder of the power of storytelling and its role as a modern element in literature. The evocative imagery and suggestion of a deeper inner power make this quote from Ian McEwan a memorable and thought-provoking example of the power of storytelling.

Another key element of modernism is a focus on the psychological and emotional states of the narrator. Rather than relying on the traditional introduction of characters and their development throughout a linear story, McEwan instead uses internal monologues and dream sequences to illustrate the psychological complexity of his characters. Symbols are used consistently as a means to convey a mood or feeling, and, as in *The Cement Garden*, they can also serve as a way to represent different levels of understanding and emotions. Symbols are also used to provide insight into the characters’ inner thoughts and states of mind, as well as to hint at the greater truths the characters are grappling with an example of this is *Atonement*, in which the narrator’s reflections on her guilt provide insight into her emotional state, which is never fully explained but is nevertheless presented as something to be understood.

From a vulture to a globe, McEwan crafts vivid symbols that act as a narrative metaphor to help convey his points. In *Saturday*, McEwan uses a vulture to represent the metaphysical footprint of lived intensity. In *The Children Act*, McEwan introduces the symbol of a globe to represent the burden of forced decision-making in the story. These symbols lace his narrative with deeper meaning and purpose. Finally, McEwan’s works often contain a sense of alienation and a rejection of traditional notions of morality. This can be seen in

*Enduring Love*, in which the protagonist is put in a situation that forces him to decide whether to follow his own moral code or to conform to prescribed societal norms. This internal battle is presented in a way that conveys a sense of alienation and suggests that society's conventions are not always right.

Modernism emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was characterized by a rejection of traditional values and aestheticism in favor of the exploration of interior landscapes and interpersonal relationships. This movement was primarily fueled by the growing sense of disillusionment with the World War II and its aftermath, as well as a desire to experiment with form and language. McEwan often uses intertextuality, or the idea that one text contains references or allusions to another text, to explore these themes. In *Atonement*, he explores the complex relationship between childhood and adulthood as a modernist technique. *Atonement* follows Briony Tallis, a young girl whose childhood is cut short when she comes to understand the grown-up world more thoroughly than she had imagined. In one of the most remarkable passages of the novel, Briony begrudgingly leaves behind her childhood poster of a knight saving a princess from a dragon, symbolizing that she is finally beginning to understand the messiness and subtlety of the world that has grown up around her.

Her childhood had ended, she decided now as she came away from the swimming pool, the moment she tore down her poster. The fairy stories were behind her, and in the space of a few hours she had witnessed mysteries, seen an unspeakable word, interrupted brutal behavior, and by incurring the hatred of an adult whom everyone had trusted, she had become a participant in the drama of life beyond the nursery (McEwan, 2001, p. 92).

This analysis is further explored by McEwan in the novel, as Briony's manipulation of the events around her causes severe consequences for those involved, a reminder that the line between childhood innocence and adulthood accountability is thin. Through this, he conveys a complex sense of the human condition, evoking a range of emotions in readers as they experience the journey

between childhood and maturity with the characters. In this manner, McEwan's narrative centers on the intricate interplay between childhood innocence and adult knowledge. This interplay is accentuated by the life-altering events that the characters in Briony's world must face throughout the novel. Specifically, McEwan vividly portrays the necessity for Briony to witness the accompanying elements of violence, confusion, and betrayal in order to grasp the complexities of the adult realm. Furthermore, Briony's newfound understanding of adulthood puts her in a difficult position. On the one hand, she has an appreciation for the beauty of the world beyond her nursery. On the other hand, she has incurred the wrath of the adults around her and come to terms with the fact that the world she is growing up in is a much more complicated one than her childhood dreams of living happily ever after had led her to believe.

As a modernist element, the significance of McEwan's narrative lies in the exploration of the liminality between childhood and adulthood, the gap that challenges individuals to negotiate dual narratives. McEwan presents Briony as a character whose childhood is ending as she develops her own understanding of the world and her place within it. Briony's plunge into the unpredictable landscape of adulthood is poignant and provocative as she starts to become aware of the tragedy and injustice of the world. It is the moment when Briony replaces the "fairy stories" with the harsh reality that she discovers the darker and more nuanced aspects of adulthood; mysteries, cruelty, and power all combine to form a formidable landscape of multi-faceted relationships. This transitory period also ages Briony; in a few hours, she becomes wise enough to understand the need to incur the hatred of someone she thought to be beloved to protect those she loves. In the novel, family relationships are complex and represent a microcosm of the wider social system that many individuals must confront in modern society. Briony's intimate family relationships are challenged by the unexpected violence and brutality that she has witnessed. Not only does Briony experience familial tension, but she is also faced with her own lack of power in the adult world; her beliefs, decisions, and actions are subverted by others to the detriment of the truth. In many ways, Briony's tale reflects the difficulties of overcoming the circumstances that adulthood presents

and the powerlessness that young adults often experience. As modernist literature, *Atonement* presents an immersive narrative that provides insight into the complexities of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. McEwan highlights the liminal space in which Briony must realign her perspectives and relationships; her lack of power in the adult world reminds us of our generation's ultimate vulnerability.

To understand the modernist elements of McEwan's work, it is important to examine his works on a textual and conceptual level. To that end, McEwan's story in *Atonement* presents a nuanced and captivating portrait of the complicated relationship between childhood innocence and adult knowledge. While Briony ultimately finds her own sense of closure in the novel's conclusion, the nuances of this relationship have become a powerful literary device of modernism, deepening our appreciation for the moment when the veil between innocence and knowledge is lifted. McEwan's use of modernist elements in *Atonement* can be seen as his representation of the complex relationship between childhood and adulthood. Through his characters and narrative, readers are given an insight into the deep and continuous changes that occur between the two with a layered subtext that has the power to spark emotions in those who experience it. In his works, McEwan often emphasizes how humans retain a sense of individuality and autonomy in an ever-changing and fragmented world. Characters in his works often find themselves in situations where an established and cohesive social system challenges and questions their uniqueness, passions, and ideas. This element of the struggle for individual autonomy is common to many modernist works. In terms of structure, McEwan often works with non-linear chronologies and multiple points of view. This abstraction from traditional narrative techniques is common to modernism, allowing authors to express a greater range of themes and ideas. Through this structure, McEwan attempts to create a worldview that is based upon complexity and fragmentation, which can be seen as a core aesthetic of many works of modernism.

McEwan's works are replete with themes of alienation, identity, and morality. His characters often grapple with their sense of self-identity and navigate the complexities and struggles of their own moral choices. These themes, deeply intertwined with modernist works, reflect authors' attempts to explore questions of morality and identity in a chaotic and unpredictable world. The significance of these themes and the structures that embody modernism within McEwan's works cannot be overstated. Whether it is the struggle for individual autonomy, non-linear chronologies, or the exploration of moral dilemmas, McEwan's works are firmly rooted in the aesthetics and values associated with modernism. Through his works, he subtly and deftly explores how modernism expresses itself in the contemporary world.

## **2.2. McEwan's Influence on English Literature**

Literature is known to be the mending force, where the mind of Robbie is being liberated with the help of literature and which enables him to gain the 'ability of making his own decisions' about his aspiration of his life. Literature also serves him to be a better human and more skilful in his medicinal studies (Praneetha, 2019, p. 49).

McEwan's novels often push the boundaries of literary conventions. His writing is often compared to that of literary heavyweights such as Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot, as it possesses a certain complexity not often found in other works of literature. He often explores questions of human nature and often poses difficult moral dilemmas. In addition to his creative writing, McEwan creates compelling essays and short stories, "McEwan epitomizes an emotional novel that alters reality as he amplifies the creative acts of literature" (Praneetha, 2019, p. 51).

Works such as *The Comfort of Strangers* and *In Between the Sheets* continue to challenge notions of morality, society, and science. From the candid depiction of wartime London in his early novels to the masterful plot lines of his recent works, the breadth and depth of McEwan's prose have captivated and

informed several generations of writers and readers. McEwan's writing has explored a variety of themes and topics from the personal to the global and his work often invites comparisons with the likes of greats such as George Eliot, Henry James, and even Shakespeare himself. With works like *Atonement*, McEwan has crafted an accessible yet powerful narrative, proving his mastery of both dialogue and description. His works have been translated into over 40 languages and have garnered the respect of the literary establishment, winning major awards such as the Booker Prize, the Whitbread Novel of the Year Award, and the Premio Gregor von Rezzori.

McEwan has also been praised for his ability to move readers in ways that few other authors can. The characters in McEwan's work are complex individuals who find themselves in difficult situations, yet are able to make decisions that shape the course of their lives and create moments of insight and empathy. Moreover, his writing often ends with subtle messages about life's tragedies and triumphs in which readers can find inspiration and a place of refuge.

From his early works, such as *The Cement Garden*, to his more recent writings, McEwan has left an indelible mark on the English language. Through his influential literary style and lucid, elegant prose, McEwan's novels explore emotions, relationships, and the anxieties of modern life. He has a profound ability to communicate his characters' inner struggles and often uses his works to comment on current topics and debates. McEwan is a master of clever foreshadowing and satire, another trait that has earned him a place in the literary canon. His stories often contain elements of suspense, humor, and dark irony. In his most famous novel, *Atonement*, McEwan highlights the devastating effects of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, while his 2007 novel, *On Chesil Beach*, provides a vivid and nuanced insight into love and sexuality. Odimba states:

According to Briony's education, sexuality, whatever it might be, is something that should not happen before or outside of marriage or, for Briony herself, that should better not happen at all: In Part One, Chapter One,

she thinks “A good wedding was an unacknowledged representation of the as yet unthinkable— sexual bliss” (McEwan 9) (Odimba, 2009, p. 42).

One of the most striking aspects of McEwan’s work is his willingness to redefine traditional genres. His novel *Saturday*, for example, is both a love story and a commentary on modern life, while *Amsterdam* is framed as a mystery even though the crime occurred in the past. Each of his works is profoundly original, pushing readers to look at the world differently and changing how they think about literature.

McEwan is a true master of the English language. His language is often poetic and expressive, making reading his books an experience of beauty and insight. He is a master of prose and a magnificent storyteller, but his works also have a timeless edge, bringing readers into the world of his characters and making them think deeply about their own beliefs and actions. In short, McEwan’s work is both innovative and traditional, making it one of the most important contributions to English literature. His writing has been incredibly influential, inspiring writers and readers alike to take a closer look at the world and to think more deeply about morality and what it means to be human. McEwan has been subject to both admiration and criticism for his controversial works and unique vision. Regardless, his influence on English literature is undeniable, “McEwan has always been taken seriously by critics and scholars, although they have not always liked his books” (Malcolm, 2002, p. 4). From his comedic wit to his psychological insight, McEwan’s writing has inspired many aspiring authors to explore their own creative boundaries and challenged readers to think critically about the world around them. His work has inspired generations of readers to think more deeply about moral issues and the human condition and to explore difficult topics with compassion and understanding.

### **2.3. McEwan’s Use of Literary Devices**

McEwan’s literary prowess is undeniable. With masterful strokes and deftly crafted stories, Ian McEwan has made himself one of the most revered contemporary authors of our time. From his novels to his short stories, McEwan

takes full advantage of the various literary devices he employs to write his works. His works demonstrate a mastery of literary device usage, making his stories both entertaining and thought-provoking. Throughout his works, McEwan effectively utilizes numerous literary devices, such as irony, metaphor, and alliteration. Here, we explore some of his most notable works to see how exactly he employs these devices to create tension and depth in his stories.

Winterhalter, in his article *Plastic Fork in Hand: Reading as a Tool of Ethical Repair in Ian McEwan's Saturday*, states:

As he rises, he finds himself “already in motion”, “almost summoned” by an unaccountable call. Moving as if “in a dream”, he feels compelled to look out through the window’s large frame - a structure that literally and metaphorically places margins around as much of the world as is visible to him in the pre-dawn light - where he pauses. From this vantage point, we are drawn into Henry’s thoughts as McEwan blends traditional third-person narration with long passages of free indirect discourse that focalize the scene before us through Henry's consciousness (Winterhalter, 2010, p. 338).

He has a knack for creating vivid imagery, making the reader feel as if they are right there in the action. His use of metaphor, symbolism, and allusion have been studied by many readers and scholars alike, and his works are often used as examples in literature classes. Point of view is another useful device McEwan employs to deliver his stories. He features a variety of points of view that allow a deeper understanding of the characters’ motivations and the story’s overall events. In “The Daydreamer”, McEwan switches adeptly between the third-person and the first-person point of view of Peter, the protagonist. This shift allows readers to understand his frustration, imagination and struggles far better than only one point of view would.

Another device McEwan draws frequently on is imagery. The descriptions of his setting and characters are lush and detailed, allowing readers to sink into the world of his stories. McEwan creates vivid images that capture the themes of his stories and characters. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, McEwan describes Mary as “furtive and fire-lit, like a pet ferret suddenly in desperate pursuit of something beyond the kitchen floor”. This vivid image gives readers a powerful insight into her character and emotions. Moreover, imagery also stands out as a prominent literary tool for McEwan. He creates scenes in a manner that immerses the reader in the world of his characters, making them real and tangible. In *Enduring Love*, McEwan details a climatic balloon crash, depicting the startling contrast between the chaos below and the blue summer sky above. Another example of McEwan’s usage of imagery is his detailed descriptions of the WWII beachfront in *The Comfort of Strangers*. He paints an eerie yet beautiful picture of the couple’s eerie and lonesome walks along the beach with the waves welcoming calm, which sets the perfect atmosphere for the unfolding of events in the novel.

Symbolism and imagery are key aspects of McEwan’s writing. He often emphasizes the themes of isolation and alienation through the use of symbolic objects and landscapes. For example, in *Atonement*, McEwan uses a tree as a recurring motif to emphasize the loneliness and frustration of his characters. The characters are unable to reach the top of the tree, representing the difficulty they face in attaining safety and security in their lives. McEwan also frequently uses imagery in his works to evoke powerful feelings in his readers. He often paints vivid word pictures to create intense emotions. In *Saturday*, for example, he uses detailed imagery of a hospital room to portray the emotions of anguish and sorrow that the protagonist feels due to the stark reality of his circumstances. The dark, dismal, and claustrophobic room, combined with the negative imagery, is used to emphasize the hopelessness and dread the main character feels. In *The Child in Time*, McEwan makes use of a fiery metaphor to express the protagonist’s strong feelings: “Our marriage had a kind of fire to it that day. A fire of sorrow and anger”. Here, McEwan creates a powerful image of the state of their marriage through metaphor. He also uses metaphor in

*Atonement* to evoke a sense of tragedy: “When I [Briony] saw him [Robbie] out of uniform for the first time, his shoulders were like wings of defeat”. This metaphor serves to illustrate the detrimental effects of incarceration and the war on Robbie. After Briony realizes her mistake in falsely accusing Robbie Turner, the novel takes a dramatic shift with the powerful line, “Whatever happened, he [Robbie] could never entirely forgive her for not believing his explanation,” an ironic illustration of the consequences of her actions. The irony is also present in the novel *Amsterdam* when the protagonist Maurice’s marriage to his former mistress Anne-Marie crumbles after his time away in prison. Here, the irony is used to show the consequence of neglect in a relationship; Winterhalter explains:

To counter his argument about wasting time, we are challenged, it seems, to gain purchase on a crucial distinction McEwan implies between merely being a spectator of and attentively reading the lives of others. For as we look through the image of himself, Henry sees in the glass (away from the interior spaces that make him most comfortable[...]) (Winterhalter, 2010, p. 338).

He often uses metaphors to add depth to characters or events. In *Atonement*, Briony Tallis is portrayed by McEwan as a “blindfolded priestess”, conveying her guilt and isolation at the events of the novel. McEwan also uses metaphors to create suspense, as in *The Children Act* when Fiona is described as “prowling a cage”, showing her hesitance to make a decision.

McEwan’s stories are also full of allusions to classic literature, from Shakespeare to Freud. He also utilizes alliteration in his works to add emphasis to his words. In *Enduring Love*, the alliterated phrase ‘agony of understanding’ highlights the complex emotions that Joe (the protagonist) feels in the face of tragedy. Alliteration is also used in McEwan’s novel *Nutshell*, which is narrated from the perspective of an unborn baby. Here, we hear several uses of alliteration to add emphasis and to give a unique voice to the protagonist: “Every day a dolls’ dance of movements, and every night a cacophony of thrumming” and “Boulders and bells that banged out my birth”.

Through symbolism and imagery, McEwan has created a world of realism and lucidity, giving readers insight into life, humanity, and the various emotional worlds that each of his novels possess. His use of literary devices effortlessly draws the reader in and makes them feel like they are part of the action. His metaphors and symbols provide interesting insight into his characters and narratives, while his allusions to classic literature allow the reader to connect the dots and appreciate his writing even more. McEwan is one of the best examples of an author who can use literary devices to create powerful and thought-provoking stories. McEwan's works offer a fascinating example of how to effectively use literary devices to convey a powerful message through one's writing. His usage of irony, metaphor, and alliteration demonstrates his impressive skill in employing these devices to craft captivating stories that provoke thought and emotion.

### 3. IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT* AS A LITERARY WORK AND ITS FILM ADAPTATIONS

#### 3.1. Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and Its Film Adaptations

This analysis attends to the adaptation of the metafictional aspects of the novel, which thematize its enunciation process and are echoed in the author-reflexive and self-conscious film discourse. Special attention will be paid to two transformations that the film adaptation carries out on the novelistic hypertext and which respond to the complex temporality of the story and its use of multiperspectivism.

After directing a series of short films and television productions, Joe Wright (London, 1972) burst onto the European film scene with his adaptation of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (*Pride and Prejudice*, 1813) in 2005. Starring Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfayden using an adapted script by Deborah Moggach, the film was nominated for five awards at the 2006 BAFTA Awards ceremony, including the Alexander Korda Award for Best British Film, and Wright won the Carl Foreman Award for the Most Promising Newcomer. It also garnered four Oscars from the American Academy of Motion Pictures in the same year. However, it is his second feature film, *Atonement* (2007), that established Wright as a director of prestige: the film received numerous awards, such as the 2008 Oscar for "Best Original Score" (signed by Dario Marianelli). The 2008 BAFTA Awards for Best Film and Best Artistic Direction went to *Atonement*. The cast is made up of Keira Knightley (in the role of Cecilia Tallis), James McAvoy (Robbie Turner), Saoirse Ronan (Briony Tallis with 13 years), Romola Garai (18-year-old Briony Tallis), Vanessa Redgrave (old Briony Tallis), Juno Temple (Lola Quincey) and Anthony Minghella (interviewer), among others.

*Atonement* (2001), a highly intertextual work aims to explore life as literature through its metanarrative. This study examines the film version of McEwan's book. It examines how screenwriter Christopher Hampton and director Joe Wright addressed the complex inner life and nuanced metanarrative

of this work of fiction. Joe Wright and Christopher Hampton recognized the significance of this literary device and the message it aims to convey in the novel. They went beyond the plot's eventfulness and discovered the cinematic equivalents to translate the novel's symbolic meaning into the audiovisual language of the film.

The novel and film are divided into four discrete blocks. The first part of the story takes place in the British countryside on a hot summer day in 1935. Briony Tallis is a 13-year-old girl who aspires to be a writer. Her upper-class upbringing has been sheltered, as was generally the case for her time and social status. Cecilia, Briony's older sister, and Robbie Turner, the housekeeper's son, spend the afternoon flirting with one another in a series of encounters that Briony witnesses but misinterprets due to her naivete and class prejudice, and she begins to believe that Robbie is a "sex maniac" trying to attack her sister. When Briony and Cecilia's cousin Lola is raped later that evening, Briony definitively identifies the rapist as Robbie. However, it is clear to the reader that it is Paul Marshall, a friend of Briony's brother, who committed the crime. On the strength of Briony's testimony, however, Robbie is arrested, tried, and convicted, and his relationship with Cecilia is irremediably cut short.

The second part of the novel takes place during World War II. Briony and Cecilia are both nurses but have contact because Cecilia is still angry at Briony for Robbie's misfortune. Cecilia and Robbie, who have joined the army in exchange for a commuted sentence, enjoy one brief meeting before he is sent to Dunkirk, where he is injured. She was known as Nurse Tallis in the hospital dorm where Briony worked. She always uses recess night to write about the things she is most passionate about. Her steadfast writing after work relates to her portrayal of selfishness. Thus, it may be shown that *Atonement* began when she gave her life in order to provide medical assistance during World War II. Her greatest love and writing skill may be used to atone for her previous transgressions if she works as a social worker and humanitarian.

In the third part, Briony realizes her mistake when she hears that Lola is about to marry her rapist (thus rendering him immune from her testimony) and

attempts to rectify it by seeking out Cecelia at her lodgings. To her surprise, Robbie is there too, and the three plan to have the conviction overturned. The fourth and final section of the novel takes place in 1999. Briony has indeed become a famous and successful writer, but she has just been diagnosed with terminal dementia. She is interviewed as part of the promotions for her last novel, *Atonement*, which is the story of her, Cecilia, and Robbie. In a tragic twist, however, she reveals that Robbie and Cecilia were both killed shortly after their brief meeting and never saw each other again. Therefore, everything after that point, including Briony's meeting with Robbie and Cecilia to fix her mistake, is fictionalized. Briony says that a happy ending was the only way she could atone for having irrevocably destroyed Robbie's life (and, to a lesser extent, Cecilia's).

In this way, *Atonement* presents its character as literary fiction and thematizes novel writing as a matter of fiction. A metafictional, self-reflexive, and specular discourse is superimposed on the narrated story, which gives rise to a meditation on writing. Thus, in the first place, there is a metafictional structure of a framed novel in McEwan's novel, by which the first three blocks of the novel correspond to the fictional text of the same name that Briony Tallis wrote throughout her life and was concluded in London in 1999. Briony's overflowing imagination and creativity need not end there but instead give rise to the inclusion in the story of a whole series of texts in which she rewrites the most recent facts and perceptions significant of its existence. Thus, the novel opens with Briony's writing of *The Tribulations of Arabella*, a short play she wrote in honor of her brother Leon's birthday, which is the day the first part of the novel takes place.

The novel therefore, formed as a modern story, according to the distinction between classical story and modern story established by Francis Vanoye (1996, p. 137-144), which is particularly interesting for the characterization of the film adaptation of *Atonement*. Features that are defined by the "modern story" form Vanoye are linguistic awareness, reflection on one's language, and the presence of the author's work. Psychological realism and subjectivity are ruptures of the mimetic value of representation and self-

awareness. A narrative open ending that breaks the ties between the spatial, temporal orders, ambiguity, and relativization of the truth, among others, is directed. The supposed cancellation of some of these characteristics—that is, thinning of the metafictional load of the hypertext in the film adaptation directed by Joe Wright—would cause the transformation of a “modern story” into a “classic story” (Wright’s film). There would therefore be a “stylistic divergence” between hypertext and hypertext, which would give rise, in terms of the aesthetic-cultural proposal of the adaptation, to a “looting”, with the implication of the novel source and the transformation of its meaning.

In this line, the problem posed by the transfer of the framed story from one medium - the literary one to a different one the cinematographic one is pointed out and is well explained. In the novel, both the story and the novelistic discourse of the first three narrative blocks are perfectly framed, and its authorship and the circumstances of its writing are well established. In Joe Wright’s film, there is no correlation complete and symmetrical of the metafictional game of the hypertext. Thus, the entire story narrated in the first three blocks of the film corresponds to the story in which Briony is involved and the author narrated in the novel. However, the same cannot be said of the film discourse, and the distinction remains undetermined.

Secondly, the thematization of writing is omnipresent throughout the entire film. Briony’s typewriter and the characterization of her as a fiction writer will reappear throughout the story. Again, it is enough to point out the first film sequence, which presents Briony in the room as she strives to finish the text of *The Tribulations of Arabella*. The fourth and fifth shots of the work show, respectively, through the detail shot, the keyboard of Briony’s typewriter, and the cover of her first play. Furthermore, the sound of Briony’s typewriter echoes repeatedly on the soundtrack, accompanying the appearances of this character or reminding the viewer, through sound association, of the framed story nature of the narrated story.

The director’s affectation of his own style is continuous throughout the film. A good example of this is the long and descriptive sequence shot of

Dunkirk Beach (in the second narrative block), which represents, in terms of its duration, an internal detour within the grammar of the work. This sequence shot, which lasts five minutes, opposes, due to its artificiality, the understanding that the theorist André Bazin has of the sequence shot as a privileged medium for cinematographic realism (Sánchez Noriega, 2000, p 105). An intertextual and metafictional game of cinema within cinema outside the novel hypertext is also produced in the film. Robbie, wandering through the chaos and destruction of Dunkirk, attends a film screening in a basement next to the beach: the film that is cited and honored is the war melodrama. However, the most striking characteristic in terms of the inter-textual and self-reflexive character of the film is the pastiche of advertising aesthetics that takes place in the narration of the sequence: features that point towards intertextual allusion and stylistic imitation of a certain type.

Postmodernism, a complex literary style that thrives on fragmentation, finds a unique expression in the award-winning novel *Atonement* by renowned British author Ian McEwan. From its use of fractured time to its subversive plot, *Atonement*'s postmodernism offers a wealth of insight into the contemporary world, making it a compelling subject for literary analysis.

The postmodern ideals of *Atonement* are represented through the novel's fragmented timeline. The action of the novel begins in 1935, yet the plot is told using flashbacks to earlier periods and other characters' perspectives in both the past and the present. This technique allows the storyteller to explore the themes of unexpected consequences and how the past affects future outcomes. There is no unified timeline that allows for a linear understanding of the plot; instead, by employing chronological jumps, the reader gains the opportunity to observe how an individual's decisions and actions can drastically change the course of their life. Postmodernism is characterized by themes of indeterminacy and intertextuality; these elements can be found in the novel *Atonement*.

To demonstrate how this challenge renders his call for attentive reading more audible, I want to examine McEwan's obvious and not-so-obvious intertextual choices more closely. It is now commonplace to talk about

Saturday in terms of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, trading as McEwan does upon its quotidian London framing device. It is less common, although I argue perhaps more fruitful, to see also the parallels this novel holds to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which like *Mrs. Dalloway* also transpires in a single day (Winterhalter, 2010, p. 352).

The idea of indeterminacy, which is a major part of postmodernism, is also featured in *Atonement*. The novel's plot follows the events that take place in a single day, but the ending does not give a definite answer about the resolution of the day's events. These instances of uncertainty are a major example of the postmodern concept of indeterminacy, as the reader is continually left with a lingering uncertainty as to what will happen next. McEwan also incorporates the concept of intertextuality into his narrative. As the novel focuses on a single event, the reader is able to draw connections to themes and events in other works of literature, providing an additional layer to the novel's meaning. Through these instances of intertextuality, McEwan is able to add depth and meaning to his narrative, creating a truly postmodern work.

The other characteristic of the postmodern is metafiction, which deals with telling stories about the act of telling stories itself. In *Atonement*, McEwan delves into metafiction through the predominant theme of guilt and *Atonement* for a mistake. Briony Tallis herself undertakes a journey to rectify her past errors in order to make amends. Subjectivity is another postmodern element utilized in the novel to develop its themes and techniques, deliberately rejecting objectivity. Further, the novel portrays a rejection of universal truths in its events to underscore its postmodernist essence.

The fundamental tenet of postmodernism is that reality is unstable and subservient to narrative devices. To reinforce this, McEwan employs fragmentation, dividing the action into three parts; this technique not only establishes a distinct contrast between the past and the present but also

amplifies the book's recurring theme of re-evaluating one's identity. The most profound example of this occurs in the first part of the novel, which centers on 13-year-old Briony Tallis. This section exemplifies postmodern fragmentation by not merely exploring Briony's memory of events, but also utilizes waveforms to depict her shifting subjectivity. This notable waveform of the storyline is an example of the uncertain epistemology of postmodernism, which is a core concept explored by McEwan throughout the novel. In the second part of the novel, McEwan dives deeper into the implications of postmodernism, notably the idea that there can be multiple versions of reality. The fragmented narrative portrays a version of history penned by Robbie Turner, one of the characters targeted by Briony, according to D'Angelo:

[...] Character in Fiction (published in the *Criterion* in 1925), in which she expands on the idea of character in the modern narrative and offers implications for plot two narrative techniques that Briony speaks about directly in *Atonement*. High modernist narrative is most often associated with fragmentation and multiple perspectives; however, for Woolf, these aspects alone do not define the modern aesthetic (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 96).

In addition to Robbie's narrative, the book explores the lack of definitive truths in the novel, adopting a more postmodern outlook and allowing for multiple interpretations of history. This outlook is exemplified through the major events in the novel, such as Robbie's part in the French campaign, in which readers are forced to form their own conclusions from the shifting images presented by the fragmented narrative.

The conclusion of *Atonement* is a direct example of McEwan's postmodern-inspired narrative techniques. In this section of the book, he creates multiple iterations of the same events, alternating between past and present while focusing on the details of memory that were omitted in previous versions. By doing this, McEwan reflects the multifaceted nature of postmodernism,

conveying the idea that there can be no absolute truths and that all stories may be constructed differently depending on the lens through which they are viewed. Additionally, McEwan utilizes a fragmented style of narration to represent the postmodernist theme of deconstruction. This can be seen during the first chapter of the novel when the protagonist exhibits numerous split personas. These personas contradict one another and serve to create a chillingly realistic character that is representative of the postmodern notion of fragmentation.

As the novel progresses, McEwan continues to employ postmodern techniques with manipulation of language and intricate wordplay. These techniques often allude to the postmodern idea of epistemology or the study of how one comes to acquire knowledge. This concept is easily seen when McEwan's protagonist challenges the boundaries between past, present, and future; overall, McEwan crafts the novel *Atonement* to reflect postmodernism.

Intertextuality is a form of literary analysis used to describe and identify the relationships between different texts, including those by the same author. The term has its roots in postmodernism but is used in several forms of writing, not just contemporary literature. *Atonement* puts in evidence this concept, providing readers with a unique understanding of postmodernism within its narrative:

McEwan is a representative of postmodernism and the postmodern strategies and tendencies are easily recognizable in his writing. The use of intertextuality in *Atonement* is not a novelty in McEwan's work, as his previous novels exhibit different degrees of the phenomenon (Výborná, 2017, p. 20).

The narrative of *Atonement* follows the story of Briony and Cecilia Tallis through the displacement of time, revealing not only the human side of the characters' lives but provoking a reflection regarding modern society. This reflection involves themes such as the effects of war, cultural identity, and the meaning of justice. To portray these topics, McEwan employs intertextuality as

a device to provide further knowledge, allowing readers to reach a clearer understanding of the novel. One example of intertextuality in *Atonement* is the usage of the bildungsroman approach as a way to explore the psychological and human growth of the characters. This technique allows McEwan to narrate a coming-of-age story, focusing on reflections such as the dualistic language of constraints, which is seen in the dichotomies between young and adult as well as feminine and masculine. McEwan highlights the societal norms and their applicability to individuals by narrating the experiences of Cecilia and Briony.

Additionally, McEwan's utilization of the gothic element serves as an example of intertextuality. Gothic literature encompasses elements of the mysterious and supernatural and frequently employs a dramatic horror tone, which is seen in the form of family secrets and financial struggles. This is a clear reflection of the uncertainty of the upper class regarding the future world, a world of postmodernism where the old definitions of class and society do not apply. McEwan employs intertextuality as a way to explore the characteristics of postmodernism, not only in narrative but also in the literary structure of *Atonement* itself. By dividing the narrative into three different parts, McEwan allows the reader to understand how facts and truths of life can be heard through the multiple perspectives of the characters. This symbolizes how, in a postmodern society, it is of utmost importance to consider not only the voices of the dominant classes but also those of the marginalized, as D'Angelo (2009) stated:

*Atonement* offers particularly clear instances of what Kristeva claims are some of the different ways in which a text, in relating to other texts, becomes productive of further meanings (73). Echoing T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Finney articulates a process wherein the intertextuality invites both a new reading of the original text through the modern comparison and a deeper reading of the new work through its interaction with

tradition. (See Eliot 71-72.) In comparing the two works, readers can acquire a richer understanding of both novels' meanings (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 96).

This use of intertextuality as a reflection of postmodernism is evident in the novel *Atonement* and is perfectly illustrated in the character's quotation of classic texts. For example, the protagonist Briony employs irony extensively when referring to ancient Greek texts, particularly those by Homer and Aeschylus. Through her quotation of Greek mythology, she reveals her longing for personal redemption and her growing recognition of her culpability in past choices and decisions.

Through the novel's echoes of Shakespearean poetry, McEwan is able to explore moral themes further, such as the power of guilt and the ultimate quest for redemption. The prevalence of these motifs in the work mirrors the core themes of postmodernism, which frequently explore concepts of history, contemporaneity, self-consciousness, and ethics. Furthermore, McEwan employs intertextuality to draw attention to the larger context of the Great War; for example, "In Part II, McEwan abandons the multiple-perspective narration and focuses solely on Robbie and his war experience" (Výborná, 2017, p. 39). The novel's references to war imagery, such as the flashing lights of the moonlight sweeping across the land, allude to the Great War's violence and its heartbreaking aftermath. Through this approach, McEwan effectively offers both historical context and his own critique of what had become commonplace.

McEwan's purposeful use of intertextuality in his novel effectively demonstrates postmodernism. The act of referencing other works of literary artistry and their influence in the formation of one's own is an important aspect of postmodern literature. By presenting the reader with these constant connections to authors of the past and present, McEwan encourages them to consider the implications of intertextuality on postmodern writing and culture. In addition to exploring postmodernism and its components like intertextuality, McEwan's novel also reflects the concept of reality's unreliability, a fundamental principle of postmodern literature. McEwan utilizes intertextuality to emphasize life's lack of trustworthiness, wherein her interaction with

literature influences Briony's understanding of the world and past events. This offers readers an alternative perspective of reality, one that both mirrors actuality and diverges from it. Overall, the intertextuality of *Atonement* by Ian McEwan serves as a powerful reflection of postmodernism, "What is more, the intertextual nature of *Atonement* enables the reader to read it several times and still discover new dimensions of it" (Výborná, 2017, p. 39). "Intertextual references are deployed almost as consistently in *Atonement* as imagery is in Shakespeare's plays", as Anna Grmelová notes (Grmelová, 2007, p. 154). McEwan uses intertextuality from the first to the very last page. McEwan suggests Briony's crime at the outset of the book by quoting Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, which, like *Atonement*, explores the significance of the distinction between the actual and fictional worlds. Despite being four years older than Briony, thirteen-year-old Catherine Morland is just as naive as the thirteen-year-old, having only the wisdom of Gothic literature to guide her. As a result, she spends most of her time making up absurd stories and making snap judgments about the individuals she meets when she first leaves her house and travels to Bath and then Northanger Abby. She feels that her life is uninteresting and unremarkable compared to the exciting lives of her favorite fictional characters. Her desire is to live out the romances and dangers that heroines typically face; therefore, she interprets her surroundings to support her wild theories. For Briony, books and her "strange mind" (McEwan, 2001, p. 6) are constant companions during her mostly solitary existence in this remote realm. Her strict and disciplined personality conflicts with actions that could reveal secrets; thus, although she yearns for mystery and secrets, she is unable to have any, "Nothing in her life was sufficiently interesting or shameful to merit hiding" (McEwan, 2001, p. 5). Although Briony is not unaware of "the life beyond the nursery" (McEwan 2001, p. 160), she remains blind to childhood innocence and "lacks the vital knowingness about the ways of the world" (McEwan, 2001, p. 6). Moreover, because her fantasy is limited to the concepts of good and evil, she transfers the inadequate information she learned from fairytales to the far-off and unfathomable world of grownups, drawing incorrect conclusions.

Through the use of literary references, McEwan showcases the malleability of reality and encourages the reader to analyze their view of the world and how it can be informed by those around them. The novel effectively examines the consequences of postmodernism and emphasizes the significance of past cultural influences on our present. By using intertextuality as a reflection of postmodernism within the novel *Atonement*, McEwan has succeeded in creating an intricate and multi-layered narrative. Through his use of allusions, irony, and war imagery, he effectively examines moral, historical, and sociocultural themes, ultimately creating a commentary on how past and present relate both to each other and to our own choices and decisions. This analysis demonstrates the profound influence of literature and its ability to narrate stories that are both poignant and timeless.

*Atonement* and its postmodern use of subjectivity is a powerful tool to explore the limitations of understanding, the role of narratives in constructing reality, and the power of perspective. In this novel, McEwan uses subjectivity as a reflection of postmodernism in order to portray the instability of beliefs, perceptions, and truths. Subjectivity is used to demonstrate the power of human consciousness and how perceptions and memories can be unreliable accounts of reality. McEwan utilizes the character of Briony Tallis to explore subjectivity and her meanings and interpretations of events in the novel. Briony's misperception of the interaction between Cecilia and Robbie leads her to falsely believe that Robbie has assaulted her sister, even though he has not committed any wrongdoing. This is an example of how subjectivity can lead to miscomprehending of events and reality. McEwan also uses Briony to illustrate the detrimental effects of subjectivity and the power of perspective. By having Briony witness and misinterpret the events, McEwan shows how powerful and destructive subjectivity can be. Furthermore, by using subjectivity to misguide Briony in her judgment, McEwan is also subtly suggesting that, in postmodernism, the truth is an elusive concept and is based on the experience, opinion, and perspective of those involved, as Parlej demonstrated:

A consciousness anterior to human subjectivity (“aware textuality”) inaugurates “the primacy of text as the basis for all logical and systematic organizations” (15). *Afterimages of Modernity* develops “aware textuality” into a rumination model of writing and reading in structuralist terms, as “indifference”, and in psychoanalytic terms, as “obsessional neurosis” (1990, 176). The postmodern subject (Joyce, Kafka, Beckett, Borges, Adorno, Bernhard) neither simply thinks nor feels. It digests (its thoughts?), joining metabolism with speculation in an activity inaccessible to any conceivable organic assimilation or speculative processing (Parlej, 1996, p. 73).

Thus, through the use of subjectivity, McEwan is able to explore the limitations of understanding and the power of perspective in postmodernism. McEwan also uses characters such as Robbie and Cecilia to demonstrate his views on postmodernism. An example of McEwan’s perspective on the challenges individuals encounter in a postmodern world is seen in Robbie and Cecilia; their depiction illustrates their efforts to free themselves from the limitations of subjectivity. In addition, through the two characters attempting to defy societal norms, McEwan is suggesting that the power of subjectivity over the individual is crucial to personal freedom and liberation.

When analysing the narrative in *Atonement*, readers should observe the way in which McEwan’s use of subjectivity allows for multiple interpretations of the same story. The idea of different interpretations of the same story is enhanced even further when we examine McEwan’s use of the device of an omniscient narrator. The narrator provides an objective account that allows each reader to develop their evaluation of the novel, thus demonstrating postmodernism’s call for the breaking of hierarchies between reader and text. The employment of subjective narrative is further evidenced through how characters are depicted in the novel. Each character’s inner thoughts, motivations, and desires are filtered through McEwan’s subjectivity. Patricia Waugh, in her book, claimed that metafictional writings “not only examine the

fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (Waugh, 1984, p. 2), and through this, they provide a critique of their own methods of construction. She also stated that metafiction can be a useful tool “for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside novel” (Waugh, 2001, p. 3). As a result, readers gain a better understanding of the characters and their relationships with each other, as well as their relationship with the world around them. Put simply, it allows readers to gain access to a unique and valued understanding of the characters which is not possible in traditional literature.

McEwan’s use of subjectivity within *Atonement* demonstrates how the novel ultimately reflects the postmodern era; McEwan demonstrates that meaning is ultimately constructed through the reader’s interpretation of the text through subjectivity. The meaning of *Atonement* is ultimately shaped and determined by readers’ perspectives and interpretations, thus emphasizing the idea that postmodern literature seeks to allow readers to explore their own subjective interpretations. The power of subjective truth is seen most effectively in Briony’s misinterpretation of Robbie and Cecilia’s interactions in the fountain scene. After she reads a letter the two exchanged, she assumes Robbie is kidnapping Cecilia, which gives her a certain meaning of the moment that is entirely subjective. Her perspective causes her to misconceive the events of the story and subsequently leads to her blaming Robbie for the rape of her cousin Lola. This is a particularly powerful example demonstrating the power of subjective reality and how objective truth can be disrupted and altered through a single individual’s interpretation. In addition to the misinterpretation of events, Briony’s subjectivity is also seen in her views on the world, as her reality is only ever seen from her own subjective viewpoint. At the beach, she reads poetry to the wounded soldiers, and Robbie is deeply moved by her simplistic and innocent interpretation of reality. However, whenever another protagonist expresses a different perspective, Briony is typically scornful. An example of this is during a conversation on World War II between Briony’s father and her brother when Briony expresses contempt by claiming that her brother's facts are

excessively optimistic. This shows the power subjectivity can have in the construction of reality.

Overall, *Atonement* exemplifies the power of postmodernism and the use of subjectivity to shape reality. McEwan employs Briony's perspective to illustrate the concept of 'subjective truth' and show how truths can be changed with a single view or interpretation. The power of Briony's subjective truth is formidable and reflects the power of postmodernism in McEwan's novel.

In *Atonement*, Ian McEwan uses metafiction to explore themes of identity and its relationship to postmodernism. Metafiction is a type of literature that deals with self-reflection and self-awareness, often questioning the narrative's structure and presuppositions. McEwan uses his novel to reflect on postmodernism's effect on identity, particularly the blurring of traditional boundaries between truth and fiction, reality and unreality. One example of this can be seen in the novel's climactic scene, where protagonist Briony Tallis must confront the reality of the consequences of a lie she had earlier told:

Much of the critical response to Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* has focused on the metafictional elements of the work's narrative structure, as well as Briony Tallis's revelation in the final pages that she, in fact, authored the text. Critics have asked whether the novel earns this epilogue or whether it is an abrupt rendering of a straightforward realist narrative into what David Lodge has called a postmodernist metafiction (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 88).

Briony, feeling ashamed of her misdeeds at the novel's opening, decides to conclude it with a false confession, which she admits to in a court of law. The reader thus becomes wary of the reliability of the narrator, mirroring the doubts that one experiences in a postmodern world, where the notion of absolute truth is constantly being questioned. The novel also challenges the traditional concepts of genre and viewpoint. The novel employs third-person omniscient narration with a twist; the narrative voice is Briony's, which the reader discovers when Briony introduces herself in the book. This distinctly

postmodern approach to storytelling supports the novel's exploration of the interplay between reality and unreality as the narrator utilizes her own highly subjective perspective to construct and shape the narrative.

McEwan's handling of time and narrative structure further evidences the themes of identity and postmodernism. Moreover, the narrative consistently draws attention to its fictional nature through techniques such as direct references to the narrator, brief asides to the reader, and occasional entries at the conclusion of chapters presented as excerpts from a diary. McEwan used the method of unreliable narration to emphasize the awareness that we are engaging with a fictional narrative. Linda Hutcheon coined the term *historiographic metafiction* and uses it for such novels "which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Výborná, 2017, p. 18). The protagonist, Briony, constantly re-evaluates her subjective interpretations of events as her reality does not necessarily align with events as they unfold. Briony's role as the primary narrator of the narrative introduces a psychological dynamic between her, the narrator, and the reader. The reader must discern which events are believable and which should be dismissed. This technique effectively draws us into the fictive world of the story while simultaneously serving as a reminder of its fictional nature.

### **3.2. *Atonement* as a Postmodernist Novel**

The novel *Atonement* is a masterpiece of postmodern literature, with an intricate and powerful exploration of human nature. Through its main characters, the novel examines a variety of themes, and raises many questions and presents thoughtful cultural commentary through its vivid and intricate storytelling. In this section, the main themes of the novel are explored to gain a better understanding of the novel's underlying meaning and purpose. Arguably, the most powerful of these themes is the power of perspective and how an individual's perception of events colours the truth of the bigger picture.

The truth was, whatever its great value, and beyond its association, Emily Tallis did not much like the vase. Its little painted Chinese figures gathered

formally in a garden around a table, with ornate plants and implausible birds, seemed fussy and oppressive. Chinoiserie in general bored her. Cecilia herself had no particular view, though she sometimes wondered just how much it might fetch at Sotheby's. The vase was respected not for Höroldt's mastery of polychrome enamels or the blue and gold interlacing strapwork and foliage but for Uncle Clem, and the lives he had saved, the river he had crossed at midnight, and his death just a week before the Armistice (McEwan, 2001, p. 18).

The novel centres around two central characters, Cecilia and Robbie, who come from two separate social classes and hold two entirely different worldviews. Throughout the novel, we see how their limited perspectives cause them to make decisions with irreversible consequences. This serves to demonstrate the idea that an individual's view of the world is often too one-dimensional and limited to fully comprehend what is happening. It forces readers to consider that their own perspectives may not always give them an accurate representation of the truth. McEwan explores the concept of how perception and personal judgment can be unreliable and ultimately biased. As the novel follows the tumultuous and unpredictable relationship between Robbie and Cecilia, which is conveyed through the points of view of several characters, it allows readers to examine and compare the various interpretations of events. McEwan employs this technique to convey his idea that life and experience can be filtered and shaped through personal biases.

Another theme explored in the novel is that of social class. McEwan examines the way that class systems can have a profound impact on relationships, as well as on individuals within those classes. The portrayal of how the differences in values and beliefs between the traditional upper and lower classes significantly impact Cecilia and Robbie's relationship, leading to an eventual breakdown of trust. This demonstrates the power of social class to either foster unity between individuals or to create division between them.

McEwan examined the divisions and power imbalances between the various classes of characters, with Eddie and Leon representing the working class and Cecilia and Briony representing the upper class:

When analysing the intertextual layer of *Atonement*, one simply cannot omit the two most important intertexts (or hypotexts, in Genette's terms) that keep reverberating throughout the story and that belong to the web of texts *Atonement* is weaved into - D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* – which both share one of the main themes of *Atonement*, the theme of social class (Výborná, 2017, p. 18).

Through his exploration of these dynamics, McEwan illustrates the idea that one's financial status might hinder whether one reaches their goals, feels content, and seeks redemption. The novel also examines the power of storytelling, which is demonstrated in the way Ian McEwan uses narrative to construct his story. McEwan manipulates the readers' perspective and paints a vivid picture of the events throughout the novel, all while making sure they are engaged with the storyline. McEwan's style of storytelling serves as a reminder of the power of this medium and how powerful false narratives can be. McEwan examines the idea of how stories, even when exaggerated or fabricated, can have grave ramifications on real-life situations. This is exemplified by Briony's accusation of Robbie and the effects it has on his life. McEwan not only raises issues about the damaging potential of storytelling but also its capacity to provide clarity and understanding in a world filled with misconceptions. Finally, McEwan explores the themes of guilt and regret, two of the darkest elements in the novel. Both of these characters are haunted by their past, as they are forced to come to terms with the mistakes they have made. The novel forces readers to consider the effects of their own mistakes, and the possible consequences of their actions. McEwan illustrates the idea that mysterious forces can be responsible for transforming events and choices into consequences, and he further explores the idea that regret can bring this guilt and cause people to suffer, even if they are not responsible for the actions that have transpired. This

theme is especially prominent in Briony's story, and it is a poignant reminder that even seemingly insignificant decisions can have major outcomes.

Overall, *Atonement* is an exceptionally powerful and poignant novel. Its exploration of themes such as the nature of perspective, social class, and the power of storytelling make it an essential read for lovers of literature. The novel's exploration of remorse and regret evokes a profound impact on readers, prompting introspection about their own lives. By examining the themes of The Nature of Perspective, Social Class, The Power of Storytelling, and Guilt and Regret, readers can better understand the novel and its powerful messages.

The power of perspective is a consistent theme throughout the novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. McEwan uses a combination of point of view, plot development, and character arcs to explore the power of perspective and how it can shape our understanding of truth and reality. This novel offers an in-depth look into the power of perspective and how its influence can shape both the lives of individuals as well as entire societies. Through its intricate plot, McEwan proposes that an individual's understanding of the world is shaped by their particular perspectives,

It was near enough to the water's edge, raised upon a projecting bank, to cast an interesting reflection in the lake. From most perspectives, the row of pillars and the pediment above them were charmingly half obscured by the elms and oaks that had grown up around them. Closer to this, the temple had a sorer look: moisture rising through a damaged damp course had caused chunks of stucco to fall away (McEwan, 2001, p. 51).

McEwan illustrates this in the novel by featuring three distinct points of view. The novel begins from the point of view of protagonist Briony Tallis, a thirteen-year-old aspiring novelist. Briony's perspective is initially limited,

colored by her naïve and childlike outlook on the world. Her limited understanding of the true complexities of adult life and relationships leads to catastrophic consequences in the plot. She misinterprets an incident when she interrupts her sister, Cecilia, and her long-time family friend, Robbie, as an attempted rape. This inaccurate and misguided view of the events proves to be the catalyst that sets off a chain of unfortunate events in the plot.

Throughout the novel, the power of perspective is shown through the many turning points the protagonist and other characters experience. This is most strikingly shown in the case of the character Robbie Turner. After being falsely accused, he is then forcefully arrested, sent to prison, and ultimately deployed to the battlefield. His journey is dictated by the perspective of certain characters who pass judgment upon him. However, the reader is able to gain insight into the true complexity of his situation as the story progresses, thus challenging preconceived notions. The power of perspective is also implied in the themes explored through different characters in the novel. From Lola Quincey's determinism of invalidating her experience of the supposed 'rape' to the sympathy one may feel for Paul Marshall, the victim of Briony's misguided accusation, the reader can see the characters through various angles. Through this, McEwan provides readers with a greater understanding of the complexities of power and how it can change their perception of truth. McEwan states:

It would have suited [Cecilia] better had Briony wept and allowed herself to be comforted on the silk chaise longue in the drawing room. Such stroking and soothing murmurs would have been a release for Cecilia [...] addressing Briony's problems with kind words and caresses would have restored a sense of control. However, there was an element of the younger girl's unhappiness (McEwan, 2001, p. 15).

This quote from the novel *Atonement* speaks to an insight of perspective as it relates to the theme of the novel as a whole. The quote addresses the idea of the importance of thoughtfulness, kindness, and understanding when

addressing a problem or issue, which can help lead to a resolution. This sentiment brings to the forefront the importance of approaching situations with empathy and compassion, no matter what the issue or challenge may be. From the perspective of the quote, it is evident that Cecilia would have been better served had Briony allowed herself to be comforted on the chaise longue in the drawing room, with gentle stroking and soothing murmurs. In this scenario, Cecilia would have been taking a more thoughtful and compassionate approach to Briony's problems and difficulties, rather than trying to control or fix them. This moment provides a microcosm for the underlying theme of perspective in the novel as a whole. The idea that understanding and kindness can be more effective than controlling and fixing is an important part of *Atonement*, and this quote exemplifies this idea in a meaningful way. In today's world, it is more important than ever to be mindful of how perspective affects the way individuals approach issues and problems. It is important to be aware of how understanding and compassion can be more effective than taking a controlling or domineering approach. Too often, individuals frequently become excessively engrossed in their personal thoughts and solutions to a problem, neglecting to contemplate the viewpoints of others.

Apart from the fragmentation of the storyline, multiple-perspective narration, and metafiction, one of the most apparent techniques used in the novel is intertextuality" (Výborná, 2017, p. 24). The quote speaks to Cecilia's recognition that, despite the intensity of the emotion expressed through Briony's tears, a simple stroke and comforting words could be enough to restore her sense of control. This speaks to the idea that even in the darkest moments, there can be moments of comfort and reassurance, and that perspective is vital when navigating difficult emotional situations. It is also a reminder that our relationships with those in our lives, particularly in moments of distress, can be our sources of solace and understanding. Perspective plays an important role in how individuals interpret their lives and how they interpret the lives of others. It is the ability to step away from our own experiences and emotions to look beyond ourselves and instead recognize the feelings of the people around us. Perspective can create a more inclusive understanding of our lives and lead to a

greater understanding of different people and life experiences. The quote from *Atonement* regarding comforting Briony raises the importance of being mindful of our perspectives and the perspectives of others, particularly during moments of great emotional distress. It is also a reminder that sometimes, the most straightforward act of compassion and understanding can be enough to restore someone's emotional well-being.

Finally, the quote about Briony needing comfort is a reminder that perspective is of utmost importance when navigating relationships and life's conflicts. The novel centres around the experiences of thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis, who actively shapes her own worldview. Briony's perspective is formed through her own observations, which in turn influence the lives of the people around her. As a child, Briony tries to comprehend the seemingly chaotic world she sees, distorting the facts and creating her own version of reality by incorporating her own experiences, beliefs, and values. This power of perspective is reinforced by the fact that *Atonement* is told from multiple points of view, which allows the reader to notice different aspects of Briony's story and how each character sees it differently. The viewpoints presented provide readers with a powerful example of the power of perspective and how it shapes one's perception of life. Furthermore, McEwan's writing style plays a key role in how the power of perspective is conveyed throughout the novel. Through mastery of symbol, metaphor, and imagery, McEwan paints an unforgettable picture of the immense power that perspective plays in forming an understanding of reality. The novel's exploration of the power of perspective culminates when Briony, now grown, is presented with an opportunity to atone for her past shortcomings through an act of honesty. In this analysis, McEwan explores the concept that the influence of perspective remains significant, even when considering events retrospectively. Individuals' comprehension of these events will always be molded by the power of perspective, regardless of the actual truth.

The novel opens with an omniscient narrator whose point of view provides an insight into the thoughts and feelings of all its characters. This perspective enables us to view the events of the novel over a broad period of

time and understand their importance within the bigger picture. The narrator also allows a deeper understanding of the characters' struggles in a more meaningful way and appreciates both the motivations of their actions and the consequences of the decisions they make. The second point of view is that of Briony Tallis, the central character of the novel. As a thirteen-year-old girl, she is naïve and inexperienced and does not understand the complexities of adult life; thus, her perspective is somewhat limited. The events of the novel, such as the family squabble, the sexual tension between Robbie and Cecilia, and the eventual return to the Tallis estate, are seen entirely from Briony's perspective. Yet, a deeper understanding of the events is gained through her eyes. Through her childlike impression of the world, the power of perspective in action is observed. The significance of Robbie and Cecilia's relationship is evident in the far-reaching consequences that can result from seemingly minor decisions or statements. The third perspective is offered by Robbie Turner, a humble working-class lad who is in love with Cecilia Tallis. His point of view provides a glimpse into the life of someone whose status is vastly different to that of a privileged family such as the Tallises.

Ultimately, McEwan successfully explores the idea of the power of perspective in his novel *Atonement*. Through various plot points, characters, and themes, he reveals that our perception of the world is dictated by the stories we tell ourselves and others.

McEwan brilliantly explores the theme of social class throughout the novel, shedding light on its impact on the narrator, Briony, and her perception of her world and the characters within it. Through the stories of Cecilia, Robbie, and Briony, McEwan reveals how societal boundaries and labels can shape an individual's outlook and relationships. Throughout the novel, McEwan presents a thoughtful examination of how the issue of social class creates divisions and impacts individuals' lives.

Class in *Atonement* is shown through the three main characters. Cecilia comes from a wealthy family, while Robbie is lower class. This stark contrast becomes most apparent when the couple is preparing to attend a party. Robbie

makes the shocking comment, “I’m just noticing that I look impecunious [poor] when I’m with you”. This realization shows Robbie’s awareness of his social ranking compared to Cecilia and its influence on their inter-class relationship. The theme of social class is also explored through Briony’s guilt and obsession with becoming a writer. As she matures, she utilizes her elite position to express her newfound ideas and sense of justice. She vigilantly attempts to exonerate Robbie by using her class privilege to gain access to courtrooms, lawyers, and records. However, her use of social class falls absurdly short of justice as he is ultimately sent to prison. Despite the obvious disparity of the three characters’ social status, McEwan showcases how class can still bring them together. Cecilia and Robbie’s romantic contract is evidence of how love can transcend the boundaries of class. Ultimately, their story represents how understanding and empathy can breach the class divide. The author writes:

Briony’s immediate feeling was one of relief that the boys were safe. But as she looked at Robbie waiting calmly, she experienced a flash of outrage. Did he believe he could conceal his crime behind an apparent kindness, behind this show of being the good shepherd? This was surely a cynical attempt to win forgiveness for what could never be forgiven. She was confirmed again in her view that evil was complicated and misleading (McEwan, 2001, p. 27).

This observation serves as a poignant reminder of the generational divide between Briony, who was raised in a different world, and Cecilia, whose background is far more traditionally upper-class. This quote is a prime example of how McEwan engages with the differences between the two protagonists while illustrating the impact that disparity can have on communication. Therefore, when Briony’s feelings of isolation and sadness manifest, Cecilia, whether consciously or not, tends to retreat to the silk chaise longue in the drawing room—a comfortable and familiar setting where she can convey her empathy and affection for her distressed friend through compassionate words and physical gestures of solace. This meticulously conducted research on the influence of diverse social backgrounds underscores the challenges posed by

societal norms and their impact on interpersonal communication. McEwan's meticulously chosen words convey a strong message about the significance of acknowledging varied backgrounds for relationships to be profound and prosperous. Throughout the novel, McEwan offers incisive discussions about the complexities of relationships, portrayed through multiple characters and their diverse backgrounds. This quote regarding Briony and Cecilia's shortcomings highlights the fragility of relationships based on differences of social class and offers an insight into how understanding can bridge the divide.

In *Atonement*, Cecilia is a typical wealthy and privileged upper-class character. She is accustomed to having a certain degree of control in her life, so she finds it difficult to deal with Briony's emotions. At this moment, to address her sister's problems and comfort her, Cecilia's instinct is to sit her down on the silk chaise longue in the drawing room and offer her loving caresses and gentle words. McEwan's quote is a poignant reminder of the power of privilege and how it has the potential to shape and alter the lives of ordinary people. In *Atonement*, Cecilia and Briony cannot overcome the restraints of their social class, leaving them feeling helpless and isolated. No amount of comforting words or caresses can change the reality of their situation, but the message of hope still lingers in the author's words. Ultimately, McEwan's quote from *Atonement* encapsulates the theme of social class through the example of Cecilia and Briony, two characters who may have been able to lead different lives had their circumstances been different. It is a powerful reminder of the importance of class in society and of the consequences for those who are unable to overcome their social disadvantages.

The protagonist, Briony Tallis, comes from an upper-class English family. She has been taught by society to think of those who are not within her class as 'the help'. This attitude causes her to have a limited view of the world around her and to make assumptions without understanding or considering the lives of others. When she accuses Robbie, a worker on her family's estate, of a horrific crime which she knows he did not commit, her lack of understanding and class prejudices are largely responsible for her actions. This leads not only to Robbie's imprisonment and suffering but also to a life of personal guilt and

regret for Briony. The novel is set in the 1930s, a time when the class system was still very much alive and well in England. It is clear that social rank greatly affects the character's actions and decisions. Cecilia, Briony's well-to-do member older sister, must hide her relationship with Robbie from her family and society because of their different class standing. Her social circles would have considered her relationship with him scandalous and unacceptable. Similarly, Briony chooses to keep her distance from Robbie even when she realizes the danger he is in because their class difference makes it socially unacceptable for her to associate with him.

Overall, *Atonement* is a brilliant exploration of the theme of social class and the effects it has on the characters within the novel. McEwan's evaluation of the theme is thorough, with each character providing a different perspective on class and its associated issues. McEwan manages to convey the message that love has the power to break class barriers and the novel serves as a reminder of the importance of class and equality in society.

The novel *Atonement* is an exceptional example of the power of storytelling to shape an individual's perception of the world and events. Through the structure of interlocking stories and the use of narrators, the novel offers a reflective insight into how individuals internalize their experience of the world and its events. Through the narrative of its protagonist, Briony Tallis, the novel explores how storytellers can create both accurate and inaccurate versions of reality which shape a person's understanding of their own experiences:

In a spirit of mutinous resistance, she climbed the steep grassy slope to the bridge, and when she stood on the driveway, she decided she would stay there and wait until something significant happened to her. This was the challenge she was putting to existence—she would not stir, not for dinner, not even for her mother calling her in. She would simply wait on the bridge,

calm and obstinate, until events, real events, not her own fantasies, rose to her challenge, and dispelled her insignificance (McEwan, 2001, p. 53).

Storytelling is a powerful tool that has been used for centuries to convey meaning and evoke emotion. Storytelling not only entertains but can also shape perspectives and tell stories of valid experience, whether true or fiction. In the novel, the power of storytelling is explored in detail, which sheds light on how powerful stories can be.

At the novel's start, Briony is a young, naïve girl living in a world of her own creation. John Best state, "At issue are the ambiguities at the heart of Briony's path to *Atonement* because, in the novel, McEwan establishes these largely through the narration, that is, through the elderly novelist Briony's own storytelling choices" (Best, 2021, p. 16). As the novel progresses, she uses stories to make sense of the events that unfold before her, particularly to cope with the tragedy surrounding her cousin, her older sister Cecilia, her older brother Leon, and Robbie's estrangement. She creatively writes her dramatic retelling of events, which leads to disastrous consequences for all those involved in the story. The novel further explores how storytelling can be utilized to rewrite history both in a collective sense and in an individual one. It examines how stories can be used to erase certain versions of reality or seamlessly integrate different accounts of the same events. For instance, Briony's cousin Lola offers her a different version of events which Briony allows herself to believe, rewriting her own narrative of the series of events that falsely blame Robbie for raping Lola. The novel centers around the characters Briony and Cecilia and their failed attempts at reconciliation. The story is seen from Briony's perspective and she is full of regret for her childhood actions:

The first few minutes of the film follow Briony's perspective, leading up to her witnessing, from a distance and through a window, an altercation between her sister Cecilia and Robbie, the son of the family's female servant. From Briony's view, it appears as if Robbie commands Cecilia to remove her

clothes and dive into a fountain. Briony turns away, shocked by Robbie's ostensibly lewd behavior. The camera then cuts to Cecilia and breaks chronology, now following her actions leading up to her confrontation with Robbie at the fountain, where a tense conversation leads to their breaking a vase (Best, 2021, p. 15).

Briony's feelings of guilt and responsibility for ruining the lives of the two people she loves the most are explored through storytelling. Her narration tells the story of how her childhood actions led to her own undoing and how these actions still haunt her as an adult. The power of storytelling is further explored when Briony presents a story she had written when she was a young girl.

*Atonement* is a remarkable novel that explores the influence of storytelling and how it can shape our lives and the lives of others and serves as an inspiring reminder of how narratives can evoke emotions and instill optimism. Through this storytelling, McEwan has created a captivating novel full of love and sorrow, redemption and regret, and the significance of storytelling. By weaving together the stories of different narrators, he shows how the narrative of the storyteller is powerful in the creation of understanding and our interpretation of one's own past. In this novel, the readers come to understand that ultimate truth may remain elusive, but there is nevertheless power in the stories we tell.

*Atonement* appeals to the reader from its opening pages, exploring profound themes of guilt and regret. *Atonement* follows the story of Briony Tallis, a young girl whose life is forever changed by a single mistake that she made as a child. At its heart is the story of a young girl who makes a hasty and fateful choice that has catastrophic consequences for herself, her family, and those close to her. The novel also explores how the repercussions of that fateful action are felt and experienced by all of the characters. Briony's feelings of guilt and regret are explored in depth as McEwan writes a compelling story of both her present life and her past. It becomes evident that her actions as a 13-

year-old resulted in tremendous tragedy, yet she continues to struggle with the weight of responsibility and the feelings of remorse. Through the reflections and musings of Briony throughout the novel, McEwan paints a vivid picture of her inner struggles and the effect they have on her. As events that take place in the novel add to the notion of guilt and regret, Briony is faced with the challenge of helping Cecilia and Robbie mend their relationship after her initial misunderstanding. Later, when Robbie is sent off to war, readers are guided through the emotional experiences of Briony as she reflects upon her mistakes and how her one action changed her entire life. McEwan is also able to showcase the effects of Briony's guilt in the novel, tracing the psychological effects it had on her since childhood as she uncontrollably worries about the lives of the people she once held dear. McEwan write:

[Briony] would never be able to console herself that she was pressured or bullied. She never was. She trapped herself, she marched into the labyrinth of her own construction, and was too young, too awestruck, too keen to please, to insist on making her own way back [...] by clinging tightly to what she believed she knew, narrowing her thoughts, reiterating her testimony, she was able to keep from mind the damage she only dimly sensed she was doing (McEwan, 2001, p. 48).

The impact of guilt is a central theme in the novel of *Atonement*, both on a personal and collective level. This quote takes an in-depth look at the weight of guilt and how it can lead to disastrous consequences. Throughout the story, it becomes clear that Briony's guilt is immense and, tragically, a complete self-imposed burden. The quote begins by emphasizing the fact that Briony is never pressured or bullied. This is an important point because it underlines the idea that Briony is the sole culprit in perpetuating her own guilt. The quote then moves on to describe how Briony 'trapped herself' and entered a 'labyrinth of her own construction.' This paints a vivid and powerful picture of how trapped and confused Briony feels.

The metaphor of the labyrinth suggests that Briony's timeline for redemption is unclear and often seems inexistent, as she is completely alone in resolving her own inner turmoil. The author then proceeds to emphasize Briony's young age, suggesting that it may have affected her decision-making. Being young and impressionable can blind a person to the consequences of their own decisions, which could be a factor in Briony's guilt. As a young girl, she yearned to please and would have felt great pressure to allow events to unfold as they did. Finally, the quote culminates in a somber reflection on the 'damage' that Briony never fully comprehends. Even the most seemingly innocuous decisions can have a devastating impact, and this is something that Briony—and all of us—must be aware of. It is essential that individuals consistently assess their choices to ensure accountability for actions that result in guilt and regret. Frequently, guilt has the ability to obscure one's vision, much like it did to Briony in *Atonement*. Examining actions can lead to recognition of potential harm from decisions, enabling steps towards redemption. It is important to bear in mind that guilt is an emotion that contains insight and can assist in personal growth.

Overall, the novel *Atonement* is a powerful account of the consequences of guilt and regret and their psychological impact on one's life. Through his writing, McEwan is able to provide a complex look at the emotions associated with such feelings and how they can haunt a person for a lifetime. He carefully crafts a story that dives deep into a girl's inner struggle and her search for *Atonement*. *Atonement* explores the consequences of causing harm to others, even unintentionally. It is a story of *Atonement* for wrongs that can never be fully forgiven and a reminder of the depths of despair and guilt that can be brought about by a single action. McEwan's powerful and moving novel, which delves into questions of guilt, regret, and *Atonement*, is a timeless classic that will remain relevant for many readers.

### **3.3. A Comparison of the Printed and Screened Versions**

*Atonement* became a phenomenally successful movie released in 2007. The film, directed by Joe Wright and starring Keira Knightley, James McAvoy,

and Saoirse Ronan, is widely regarded as a masterpiece. However, despite its success, certain distinctions exist between the film and novel versions of *Atonement*. Firstly, when it comes to the story itself, there are notable differences. In the novel, Briony Tallis' story is told in three parts, while it is condensed into two parts in the film. Furthermore, the novel focuses on the intricate relationships between characters and their various points of blame. The film concentrates more on the impact of their actions and the consequences of their guilt. The length of the novel allows for greater detail in each character's backstories, particularly Briony Tallis' journey from innocence to culpability. In comparison, the film allows for a faster narrative that only pauses near the climax to do justice to the moral lessons it seeks to impart. The second difference between the film and the novel is in its treatment of key scenes; Fuller (2007), in "Review of *Atonement*, by J. Wright", write:

*Atonement*, which examines the moral responsibility of separating fact from fancy as it unfolds the story of a murdered romance, is a putative mainstream classic. Much has already been made of the movie's pictorial glories, Keira Knightley stripping to her underwear and diving into a fountain, the five-minute Steadicam shot that careers across the Breughelian chaos on the beach at Dunkirk (Fuller, 2007, p. 71).

The book and film of *Atonement* both share the same plot and characters but differ greatly in their approach to the story. While both works are powerful and emotionally stirring, one prominent difference between them is their respective styles. Conversely, the film version is minimalistic and focuses more on the external aspects of the story, such as the character's actions, physical expressions, and body language. The film focuses less on the minutiae of its characters' inner lives and more on the consequences of their choices within the context of broader historical and political events. For example, in the novel, readers are privy to detailed insights into the mind of protagonist Briony Tallis in her struggle to deal with the guilt of her actions. Then, in the film, the audience is exposed to the external effects of her actions on the people around

her, including her sister and the man she falsely accused of a crime. This difference in style drives home the immense emotional difficulty of the characters' struggles. The book and film of *Atonement* both present a powerful and emotionally moving story. However, the differences in their approach, the heavy literary style of the novel and the sparse, external-focused style of the film help to elucidate the complexity and gravity of the story in different ways. When comparing the book and the film adaptation of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, one particular difference stands out: the novel has a certain wry sense of humor that is almost completely absent in the film.

While the film can be somber and immersive, it is lacking in humorous moments that make the book more appealing and relatable. An instance that showcases the wit of the novel is when Briony energetically attacks a clump of nettles, believing them to be her cousins. It is an amusing moment rarely seen in the film, which avoids levity and instead focuses on the serious and even depressing elements of the novel. While the film adaptation is strong, the book embodies a unique and cumulative sense of joy that is absent in the film. For example, McEwan's writing is full of characters who are made flawed by their misplaced trust and moral struggles, but despite the ceaseless doom and gloom of their plight, they exude a degree of joy, hope, and resilience:

As the film's first act draws to its grim conclusion, Cecelia Tallis (Knightley) hovers in the drawing room of the vast country house where she lives with her sister Briony (Saoirse Ronan) and their migrainous mother. In love with the housekeeper's son, Robbie Turner (James McAvoy), and frustrated because he has yet to make a move, Cecelia distractedly plucks a piano string, silencing the piano music on the soundtrack. Breaking the spell of realism, her action suggests that the story is being presided over by an unseen deity, as does the repeated crash of a typewriter carriage that accompanies the wiping of one image from the screen by another (Fuller, 2007, p. 72).

This wry mixture of enjoyment and despair sets the novel apart, a sentiment that is not fully captured in the film, resulting in a highly acclaimed adaptation that falls short in some way. The book and the film possess their unique appeal, but it is important to note that while it may follow all the same plot lines, it diminishes a portion of the humor and, ultimately, some of the insight that the novel conveys. Although both are efforts are laudable, the book is undoubtedly the better version of the tale.

Moreover, the novel is filled with richness, detail, and emotion that can captivate readers and keep them engrossed for hours. Its passages can be lengthy and even dense, requiring a significant amount of reader concentration. The narrative style of the novel is evocative of Charles Dickens in its depth, beauty, and complexity. However, while the film follows the same basic story as the novel, it offers a more accessible and easier viewing experience. Cinematic scenes are enhanced with visual, auditory, and other sensory elements that can convey several pages of plot, themes, and character development without the need for too much exposition. Pauses and sparse but meaningful dialogue are adequate to provide a sense of calm and closure to the story. While the novel may require greater immersion and attention, the film's more visual elements make it easier to experience and enjoy with less effort. While the film version of the story focuses on the tension of individual moments, the book version goes much deeper by exploring the different expectations and meanings between characters every time they meet. To demonstrate this, the book version of *Atonement* has a scene at the fountain playing out from each of the characters' perspectives in turn. This allows readers to gain insight into what was going through their heads and why each of them misreads the situation. For instance, in the film version of *Atonement*, the scene in the fountain is played out twice, first from Briony's perspective and once from Robbie and Cecelia's perspective, so that viewers may hear their dialogue. In the book, this is done in a more meaningful way as readers can gain insight into each character's feelings, motivations, and expectations. This demonstrates how miscommunication can build tension between two people and how this misunderstanding can lead to disastrous results. Moreover, in the book,

the tension between the characters is further emphasized through the description of the atmosphere and the environment of the scene:

There's no denying the power of the sequence or its metaphoric significance in *Atonement*'s visual schema. As Robbie reaches the end of this dystopia, he eventually stumbles into a movie theater where *Le Quai des brumes* is playing and, in his delirium, superimposes his and Cecelia's faces over Jean Gabin and Michèle Morgan's as they kiss-offering him a final epiphany, this is Robbie's very own meta-movie. At the least, it defies the moment early in the film when Briony tells Lola, "I'm going to be the director". (Fuller, 2007, p. 72)

The book explores all of the situations that each character is experiencing, making it easier to sympathize with them and understand the consequences of their missteps. The book also takes the time to explore the psychological aspects of the characters and their motivations in a way that is not possible with film. *Atonement* is a story about loss and misunderstanding, and the differences between the book and the film version of this story capture this theme in a remarkably effective way. While the film is able to explore the tension of individual moments effectively, the book dives into the psychology of the characters and their expectations to gain a greater understanding of the situation. In the end, this emotional depth makes *Atonement* an engaging and timeless classic.

In the book, Cecelia and Briony's mother, Emily's points of view are presented in a number of chapters, offering insight into the thoughts of an adult in the family. These chapters convey a better understanding of the dynamics at play between Briony and Cecelia, which is more unclear in the film. There is also a sense of the very real strain within the marriage of Emily and her husband, Jack Tallis, which is not shown in the movie. By providing this previously unseen perspective, Emily's chapters offer much more dimension to the story. This is perhaps most important as it relates to the reader's impression

of Briony and Cecelia as young adults and their attempts to understand each other and their parents. Emily's chapters help to highlight the lack of communication and understanding, providing further insight into the tragedy of all the characters in the novel. When it comes to the film version of *Atonement*, however, Emily's involvement and impact are drastically reduced. Her absence serves to streamline the film and make it easier to monitor the fates of the two young protagonists. This can be seen as a shrewd cinematic move, yet it does not quite convey the same depth of feeling that the book does.

Overall, it is undeniable that the book version of *Atonement* offers an enriched level of detail regarding Emily, who remains an elusive but significant presence throughout the narrative. Additionally, by portraying her character in such an complex yet forthright way, the book succeeds in prompting readers to consider the complexity of human relationships and the deep-seated emotions that support individuals' interactions. In the film, all of the sumptuous details and backstories of the vase are largely ignored. There is no mention of the vase being a hereditary keepsake, nor any insight into the sentimental facts of its restoration. While storytellers must necessarily make cuts and adjustments when going from novel to film "The truthfulness of their storytelling is also tainted by their vested interest in certifying [their] innocence" (Výborná, 2017, p. 32). it is unfortunate that the film adaptation of *Atonement* fails to capture the connection between the vase, Cecelia, and their respective stories. It is a missed opportunity to draw out the heartwarming and heartbreaking complexities between the characters, and it is a reminder to book lovers and filmgoers alike that sometimes no telling device can quite match the emotion and scope of a well-written novel.

One remarkable moment in the novel is the extended and tense description of Cecelia trying on a series of dresses, apprehensive that her appearance may inadvertently reveal her genuine emotions toward Robbie. She hopes to convey an impression of being 'sleekly impregnable' at the dinner party but becomes progressively aware of imperfections, signs of aging, and a sense of maturity. This episode provides an understanding of her fragility, her lack of life experience, and her susceptibility to making a fashion misstep.

Conversely, in the film adaptation, Cecelia's entrance lacks such theatricality. Instead, she simply emerges at the doorway, exquisitely attired and projecting a composed and confident demeanor. Although the scene is presented in a much shorter length in the movie, it still demonstrates Cecelia's inner struggle with her conflicting desires and repression, desperately trying to make sense of it all. Both versions depict a compelling story of growth, identity, and eventual *Atonement*, with different yet meaningful aspects to the main characters' personalities and qualities. Therefore, the novel and the film adaptation present different perspectives and details of the same story, providing a multi-dimensional understanding of the events in *Atonement*.

However, one aspect that stands out when comparing the two versions is the portrayal of Lola, a supporting character of the story. In the book, Lola is mainly a passive observer with little input into the events taking place, whereas in the film, she is a much more active participant in the story. The movie captures the changes and agency that Lola gains throughout the story. In the book, she is largely powerless and a mere bystander in the events that unfold. Though she ultimately takes a stance for herself and against the unjust events, she does so without having any significant influence on the outcome. In contrast, the movie emphasizes Lola's growing self-confidence and her growth as a character. She is active, making decisions and intervening in the events of the story. She is outspoken in her beliefs and actively opposes those things that she sees as unjust.

The key difference between the two versions of the story is in how Lola is portrayed. In the book, she is a docile bystander, while in the film, she is an active contributor to her own life and the lives of others. Her active role not only gives her character development but also gives her an agency and voice that was unfortunately absent from the book version. One thing immediately apparent is the change in age of Lola's character. In the novel, Lola is around 7 or 8 years old; in the film, she is aged up to 11 or 12. This age protagonist gives the viewer a more sympathetic portrayal of the scene in which Lola protects her sister by succumbing to the advances of her cousin, Paul. Another difference that stands out is how Lola is portrayed in the film. In the novel, Lola is a

typical 8-year-old: curious and mischievous, yet clever and naïve. In the film, Lola is more overtly sexualized and more sexually aware than her age would assume. This has, unfortunately, been the subject of criticism and debate among viewers.

Though the film does justice to the nuances of the original narrative, some of the elements of Briony's story are altered in order to accommodate the film's runtime. Chief among these differences is the role Briony plays within the story. In the novel, Briony is the protagonist and drives the story forward. Though she is the one responsible for the tragic misunderstanding, as the novel continues, she develops a deep sense of remorse. She is ultimately forced to confront the repercussions of her simple mistake, which brings about much of the tragedy of the story. In the film, the story shifts to focus more on the two lovers, Cecilia and Robbie, who were separated by Briony's mistake:

The film expands on the destitution of happiness in Briony's family, work, and life. It dwells on the fabrication of happiness in terms of Briony's obsession with self-perfection, social recognition and manipulative power. It elaborates on the extinction of happiness issued from the incessant torment of a guilty conscience and further approaches the possibility of achieving innermost salvation and spiritual happiness via resignation (Chakraborty, 2018, p. 59).

Here, Briony's role is not as a driving protagonist but as a third person whose memory haunts and strategically propels the narrative. Higher emphasis is placed on the romance of the two lovers, with Cecilia and Robbie's pain being emphasized over Briony's misguided intentions. The effect of this is that viewers see the gravity and tragedy of the misunderstanding rather than focus on the character of Briony. Though the film conceptually captures the essence of the novel, the role of Briony is drastically different in each version. In the novel, Briony is the human face of the tragedy, and readers are left with a deep sadness for her character. In the film, Briony is relegated to the background,

with the focus instead resting on the grief and agony of the two lovers a change which ultimately serves to make the story more accessible and affecting for a wider audience.

In the novel, Briony harbours guilt and disappointment over her perceived weaknesses and mistakes, which leads her to make decisions and attempt to write her own version of the events of that day. As the story progresses and Briony grows older, she gradually seeks truth and redemption and offers a degree of reparation for the injustice she has caused. However, Briony is portrayed in a far different light in the film. While she still harbors guilt and confusion about her role in the events of the day, her ambition to be a writer provides the framework for her efforts to reconcile the past. She uses her narrative skills to become the author of their family's story, and in doing so, she exercises a degree of control over her own life and the lives of those around her. The novel and the film have distinct approaches to Briony's role. In the novel, Briony's imposition of her own narrative on the events she witnesses leads her to shape the lives of all those around her. The author, in contrast, uses her ambition and skill as a writer to form a unique relationship with the reader as her narrative attempts to reconcile and redeem.

In the Joe Wright film adaptation, the story is told from an adult Briony's point of view. Now an elderly woman, Briony has come to terms with the psychological and emotional trauma that her lies have caused. Unlike her younger self in the book, adult Briony has developed an understanding of past wrongs, and although she has accepted the true consequences of her actions, she is still haunted by the memories and regrets them. The film gives the audience a different version of Briony and her roles concerning the Tallis family dynamic. Throughout the film, Briony's role as a storyteller is reinforced and echoed throughout the narrative as she becomes an all-knowing, omniscient character who is both remembered and revered. As an older woman, Briony is able to redeem herself and make a proper, purposeful *Atonement*. The dynamic between book-Briony and film-Briony is vastly different. In the book, Briony is an immature and naïve child who makes a mistake without understanding the consequences of her actions. However, in the film, Briony is an elder woman,

who takes ownership of her actions, and her *Atonement* has a deeper and lasting impact on the Tallis family. Both versions of *Atonement* provide a unique perspective on the character of Briony and how her role as a family member differs between the book and the film. The story of *Atonement* shows us that life is full of both joy and tragedy and that we should take accountability for our words and our actions.

The film and book of *Atonement* depict the same famous scene between Robbie and Briony at the pond in a near-identical manner. In the film, however, the scene is allowed to stand without critical comment, hinting at a possible reason for Briony's subsequent false sentencing of Robbie. In the book, however, Robbie dourly speculates about this incident being a potential root cause for Briony's action. The book also presents a factual viewpoint from Briony's perspective that her infatuation for Robbie was merely a fleeting schoolgirl admiration and that Robbie's thoughts about the matter were yet another attempt to derive a motive behind someone else's behavior. Regardless of the medium, the scene between Robbie and Briony has been portrayed as a crucial point in the story, one that its characters are unable to fully explain. The audience is left to discover the truth of its motivations on their own. However, the discrepancies between the two adapted versions of the story suggest that Briony's decision to pursue a false accusation against Robbie is beyond what can be reasonably explained as a sole result of the pond scene. No matter how it is interpreted, the pond scene between Robbie and Briony is an evocative moment between two spectators of tragedy. It is a powerful reminder that feelings can be misinterpreted, reasons misunderstood, and that the consequences of such missteps can be grave. Both the film and the book of *Atonement* are a reminder of the importance of examining and understanding the motivations behind decisions in order to prevent unintentional and avoidable tragedies.

In the book, Briony watches a nurse reveal their real name to a patient and is reprimanded in the process, teaching Briony never to make the same mistake. The severity of the situation is presented clearly, allowing Briony to recognize the importance of keeping one's identity a secret from those being

cared for. However, in the film, it is Briony herself who makes this mistake and is reprimanded as a result. The viewer is able to see her mistake firsthand and witness the consequences of her actions; Briony realizes the importance of remaining professional and respecting the privacy of those in her care. Though it may seem like a small change, these small moments offer a different view of the characters and transition of Briony into her new nursing profession. It allows the viewer to get a deeper insight into the story of Briony, which, although similar between both forms of the book and film, can provide different viewers with different outlooks. Both the book and film are incredibly captivating, offering enough of their own unique twists while telling the same story. Regardless of personal preference, both the book and film adaptation of *Atonement* have effectively conveyed a captivating narrative.

The film adaptation of *Atonement* was generally well-received, but there is a major discrepancy between the ending of the book and the film, which must be noted. The book ends with an aged Briony looking back on her life and the one decision which ruined it, accusing Robbie, the family's housekeeper's son and her sister's love interest, of rape. As an older woman, she recognizes the futility of her words and realizes that her accusations have resulted in ultimate heartbreak for herself and her family. The film, however, takes a more optimistic stance on the story. While the older Briony still recognizes the pain caused by her errors in judgment, the film's narrative brings a more uplifting conclusion. In a surprise move at the end, it is revealed that Briony was able to reunite her sister and Robbie after the war. She has been gathering evidence and trying to make amends for her mistake for decades, and she is able to successfully reunite the lovers and gain Robbie's pardon from the military. The film's ending mirrors a traditional narrative of hope in the face of hardship. This type of ending is certainly more emotionally satisfying for viewers, but it does not respect the source material or reflect the gravity of the situation explored in the novel. Briony's struggle to understand and accept the repercussions of her mistake is not resolved in the film, and this loss is to the detriment of the story. While the film adaptation of *Atonement* is definitely worthwhile, it is important to consider that there is a stark difference between the ending of the book and

the ending of the film. It is this difficulty that must be considered when discussing the themes of the work, and this nuance is something that the film fails to capture.

Nowadays, the majority of critics in adaptation studies would rather discuss films in terms of intertextuality and the dialogic link between them, as the “way we respond to any film will be in part the result of those other texts and influences we inescapably bring to bear on our viewing” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 26). Given how heavily intertextual the original book is, this approach to Joe Wright’s *Atonement* is undoubtedly appropriate. However, Matthew Bolton expands on the point by arguing that we shouldn’t ignore the most significant intertext of all, “the special relationship between an adaptation and its source material”, which is, after all, “the one thing that distinguishes adaptation studies from a textual study in general” (Bolton, 2013, p. 24).

However, Matthew Bolton expands on the point by arguing that we shouldn't ignore the most significant intertext of all. We contend that as a result, the impacts of the movie can be evaluated in terms of specificity as well as faithfulness, taking into account its distinct cinematic approaches to highlighting and even engaging in dialogue about a number of the themes included in Ian McEwan’s original novel.

## CONCLUSION

In its many forms, the concept of *Atonement* has fascinated human beings for thousands of years. As a result, it has become a recurring theme in literature, with countless authors using it to explore crucial topics such as forgiveness, redemption, and salvation. One such author is Ian McEwan, whose novel *Atonement* has been the subject of numerous critical and academic analyses since its publication in 2001. In *Atonement*, the intertextual references serve a significant purpose. They are not mere decorative elements but rather enhance the story, add depth to the narrative, and spark new interpretations when the novel is examined in conversation with other literary works. As well in the *Face Value: The Traps of Visual Storytelling in Joe Wright's Atonement* John Best (2021) stated that both McEwan's novel and Wright's film delve into the themes of narrator reliability, credulity, and scapegoating while also raising doubts about the very nature of truth. However, the novel expertly challenges the reader with these questions, whereas the film predominantly focuses on Briony's character and her responsibility in both the pivotal event and her fictionalized account of it.

This study presents a comparative analysis of *Atonement*, focusing on the portrayal of crucial narrative elements in both the novel and the film. A central aspect of this investigation is the examination of Briony's perspective and the power dynamics inherent in her storytelling. The analysis also considers the challenges of adapting a story while highlighting the unique contributions that each format brings. By exploring how the film employs cinematic techniques to convey the novel's postmodern critique of storytelling, this thesis aims to offer a fresh perspective on *Atonement*. This comparative approach does not only enhance our understanding of the themes in the story but also shed light on how the film expands upon the ideas explored in the text. *Atonement* tells the story of a young girl named Briony who mistakenly accuses her sister's lover of rape. The lie ultimately ruins the lives of all those involved, and the novel follows the characters as they attempt to come to terms with the consequences of Briony's actions. The novel has been praised for its complex characters, vivid descriptions, and poignant exploration of guilt, *Atonement*, and the limitations

of memory. The most recent adaptation was released in 2007 and starred Keira Knightley and James McAvoy. While the film was also a critical and commercial success, it differs in several ways from the novel, leading to the question of whether it captures the original story's essence.

When considering both the novel and its adaptations, it is clear that *Atonement* is a work of both literary and cinematic brilliance. Both the novel and its adaptations explore complex themes such as guilt, forgiveness, and the idea of *Atonement*, albeit in different ways. The novel uses lyrical prose and vivid imagery to capture the emotional turmoil of its characters, while the adaptations use powerful performances and arresting visuals to convey the same ideas. The success of *Atonement* as a literary work and as a film adaptation lies in its ability to capture the complexities of human emotion and experience. Through its exploration of guilt, redemption, and the limitations of memory, *Atonement* speaks to a universal human experience and reminds individuals of their capability of both making mistakes and seeking redemption. Whether we choose to atone for our mistakes or not is up to us, but *Atonement* shows us that the possibility for redemption is always there.

In conclusion, the novel is a commentary on the cost of seeking redemption and the painful process of coming to terms with past mistakes. The characters of Robbie and Cecilia serve as a microcosm of the larger societal forces at play, where individual choices can have far-reaching consequences. The novel illustrates how a single lie or a misinterpretation can cause irreparable damage. While the novel *Atonement* is complex and multifaceted, Chapter One of this thesis has provided readers with a comprehensive review of the literature. The literature review has highlighted the importance of understanding the different layers of meaning embedded within the work. Through an analysis of the various themes, it has become clear that the novel *Atonement* is a timeless piece of literature that speaks to the human condition in a profound and deeply moving way.

The novel's artful use of unreliable narration draws readers in and keeps them engaged throughout. The chapter's examination of similar strategies used

in other novels provided readers with a broader context and understanding of McEwan's choices. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this thesis is the insights that were gained by exploring the various ways in which the novel addresses themes of *Atonement*, love, justice, and the complexities of human relationships. By examining the characters' motivations, experiences, and growth throughout the narrative, a deeper understanding is gained of the challenges that they face and the choices that they make.

After thoroughly examining the first chapter of *Atonement* and delving into the world of postmodernist theory, one can confidently conclude that the novel is a true synthesis of past and present, form and content. *Atonement* is a masterpiece of literature that transcends the boundaries of time and challenges traditional narrative structures. Postmodernist theory, as explored in the first chapter of *Atonement*, allows us to question the nature of truth, reality, and the role of the author. McEwan adeptly and intentionally plays with the reader's perception of reality, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Through his use of narrative techniques such as metafiction and intertextuality, McEwan forces the reader to question the reliability of the narrator and the events of the novel. In addition to its exploration of postmodernist theory, *Atonement* also serves as a commentary on the societal and cultural norms of the time period in which it is set. Set in pre-World War II England, the novel depicts the rigid social hierarchies and gender roles that were prevalent during that time. Through the character of Briony, McEwan illustrates the damaging effects of these societal expectations and how they limit individual agency and freedom. Furthermore, the use of intertextuality in *Atonement* highlights the importance of literature and storytelling as a means of understanding and processing the world around us.

The theory of postmodernism is indeed prevalent and relevant in this novel, as it is in many other modern literary works. Postmodernism is a complex theoretical framework that questions the very foundations of modernism, including various elements such as the idea of progress, the concept of objective truth, and the power relationships that define the world we live in. Postmodernist literature seeks to challenge the traditional notions of narrative,

representation, and meaning, and it frequently employs various strategies such as fragmentation, intertextuality, and metafiction. In the novel *Atonement*, Ian McEwan, uses many of these postmodernist techniques to great effect. For example, the novel's structure is non-linear and jumps back and forth in time, which is a classic postmodernist trait. The multiple perspectives of the different characters that are explored in the novel also mirror the postmodernist preoccupation with the plurality of perspectives and the rejection of the idea of a single, objective truth.

One of the key themes of this novel is the power of storytelling and how truth is constructed through narrative. The way the story is told and the way the characters interpret the events that have happened demonstrate the influence of postmodernist thinking. The unreliability of the narrator, Briony Tallis, is a testament to the idea that truth is a subjective and unstable construct rather than an objective reality. Briony's own subjective interpretation of events and her desire for *Atonement* also highlight the postmodern critique of the concept of originality and authenticity. Overall, exploring the postmodernism theory in *Atonement* reveals the deep influence of this theoretical framework on contemporary literature. It highlights the importance of understanding the complex relationship between literature, narrative, and reality. The novel's use of postmodernist techniques and ideas shows that we must question how we tell stories and construct meaning, as stories themselves are powerful and subjective constructions that shape our understanding of the world.

In Chapter Two of the thesis, I explore McEwan's life and literary style and how they reflect his postmodernist approach to writing. A strong influence of postmodernism marked McEwan's early life. Born in 1948, he grew up in a period of great social, political, and cultural change in Britain. In the 1960s and 70s, the country was undergoing radical transformations, and McEwan, along with many other artists and writers of his generation, was deeply influenced by the changing times. McEwan's work is marked by a unique blend of modernist and postmodernist elements as a writer. His novels are known for their experimental narrative techniques, unconventional plot structures, and somewhat detached, ironic tone. At the same time, however, his writing is also

deeply rooted in the modernist tradition, with clear echoes of writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. One of the most striking things about McEwan's writing is his ability to capture the complexities and ambiguities of modern life. His novels often deal with themes related to identity, memory, and the nature of reality itself. Interestingly, McEwan's postmodernist style allows him to explore these themes in ways that might not be possible or as effective with a more traditional narrative structure. As shown in Chapter Two of this thesis, McEwan's postmodernist style has had a significant influence on contemporary literature. His works have been praised for their innovative approach to storytelling and their ability to capture the complexities of modern life. At the same time, McEwan's unique blend of modernist and postmodernist elements has made him a difficult author to categorize. Still, it has also ensured that his work remains relevant to readers and critics alike.

Furthermore, McEwan's writing often reflects the fragmented nature of the postmodern world. He portrays a sense of uncertainty and confusion in his characters' lives, emphasizing the destabilization of social and cultural norms that have become a hallmark of postmodernism. Another important characteristic of McEwan's writing that aligns with the postmodern tradition is his use of metafictional devices. In *Sweet Tooth*, for example, McEwan creates a protagonist who is a writer at MI5, blurring the lines between fiction and reality and challenging the reader to question the nature of storytelling itself. Overall, it is evident that Ian McEwan's life and literary style demonstrate a strong connection to postmodernism. By subverting conventional narrative structures, questioning traditional beliefs and values, and utilizing metafictional devices, McEwan is able to explore the complexities and uncertainties of the postmodern world in a powerful and thought-provoking way.

Ian McEwan is an exemplary modernist and postmodernist writer whose works are marked by a unique blend of modernist and postmodernist elements. His ability to capture the complexities of modern life through his experimental narrative techniques and unconventional storytelling has had a significant influence on contemporary literature. McEwan's work remains as relevant today

as it was when it was first published, and he continues to inspire and challenge writers to experiment with narrative form and style. The thesis presents a compelling case for McEwan's status as a postmodern writer. The author's analysis is thorough and well-researched, providing a comprehensive understanding of McEwan's life and work. Anyone interested in the genre of postmodernism or McEwan's writing specifically will find this thesis to be a valuable and insightful read. After thoroughly exploring the reflections of postmodernism in Ian McEwan's acclaimed novel *Atonement*, several conclusions can be drawn about both the novel and the broader implications of postmodernism itself.

Chapter Three of this thesis explores *Atonement*'s themes of history, memory, and subjective truth, which are all hallmarks of postmodernism. McEwan questions the reliability of memory and highlights how storytelling can twist the truth to fit one's narrative. This fluidity of truth is a defining characteristic of postmodernism, as it suggests that objective reality is impossible to discern and that everything is subjective. This rejection of objective truth is a direct challenge to the modernist worldview, which held that there was such a thing as a definitive reality that could be known and understood. One of the key ways in which postmodernism manifests itself in *Atonement* is through the novel's metafictional structure. By introducing a self-aware narrator who acknowledges the artifice of storytelling and calls attention to how they construct the narrative, McEwan draws attention to the malleability of truth in fiction. Another important aspect of *Atonement*'s postmodernist themes is its focus on historical memory. The novel is set against the backdrop of World War II and explores how individual experiences can be shaped and reshaped by historical events. McEwan suggests that the past is not something that can be easily understood or even fully known, as it is constantly being reinterpreted and rewritten by those who come after it. Overall, the reflections of postmodernism in *Atonement* point to the broader philosophical and artistic shifts of the Postmodernist era. By rejecting the optimistic faith in progress and objective truth that characterized the modernist era, postmodernism opens up new possibilities for exploration and experimentation in literature and other art

forms. The reflections of postmodernism in *Atonement* serve as a powerful reminder of the ongoing dialogue between art and philosophy and the ever-changing nature of human knowledge and understanding. Ian McEwan's novel stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of Postmodernist thought and its continued impact on contemporary literature.

After exploring the main themes of the novel in Chapter Three, the power of storytelling, social class, and the power of perspectives are evident. These themes are not only prevalent in the novel but also in society, and understanding their impact can provide us with a deeper understanding of our world. Firstly, the power of storytelling is evident in the novel, and it is a theme that has universal relevance. Stories have the power to transport us to different worlds, to empathize with characters, to inspire us, and to challenge us. This is evident in the novel, where storytelling is used as a tool to bring different characters together and to shape their experiences. From the perspective of the protagonist, storytelling becomes a way of framing the world and coping with the challenges he faces. Secondly, social class is an important theme explored in the novel. The novel exposes the differences and inequalities that exist between people of different social classes. The characters from different social classes are portrayed differently, and we can see how their experiences shape their perspectives. By exploring this theme, we can understand how social class affects how we view society and how our status can profoundly affect our lives.

Finally, the theme of the power of perspectives is omnipresent throughout the novel. The book explores how our perspectives influence how we experience the world and how our experiences shape our perspectives. It also shows that different perspectives can lead to conflict and misunderstanding, but it also demonstrates the importance of empathy and understanding. By exploring the power of perspectives, we can understand that our experiences and beliefs are not objective truths but subjective perceptions shaped by our histories. This chapter of the thesis explores the differences between the novel and the film of *Atonement*, making it clear that the two mediums present their own unique perspectives on the story. Through a comparison and contrast of the

two, the chapter sheds light on the various techniques and approaches that the novel and the film utilized to convey their message.

Throughout the novel, Ian McEwan's writing is characterized by a deep focus on the internal thoughts and emotions of the characters. He uses precise language and evocative imagery to create a vivid mental picture of the story's setting, mood, and themes. This is particularly evident in the novel's opening, where McEwan describes the lush and beautiful setting of the Tallis estate, creating a sense of tension and foreboding that permeates the rest of the story. In contrast to this emphasis on internal thoughts and emotions, director Joe Wright's film adaptation relies heavily on visual imagery and sound design to convey the story's themes and emotions. Wright's use of color and framing techniques creates a beautiful and haunting visual tapestry that brings the story to life in a starkly different way than the novel. One of the most significant differences between the two is how they portray the protagonist, Briony. In the novel, Briony is presented as a complex and layered character, struggling with her own guilt and desires as she tries to make sense of the world around her. In the film, however, Briony is portrayed as a much more sympathetic and relatable character, allowing audiences to connect with her on a deeper emotional level. The differences between the novel and the film of *Atonement* highlight the unique strengths of each medium. While the novel excels at delving into the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters, the film's use of visual and audio techniques can create a more visceral emotional experience for viewers.

It is evident that both the novel and film share a common storyline, but the approach taken by the respective authors is vastly different. In the novel, the author, Ian McEwan, takes a more introspective approach to the characters, allowing readers to get a deeper understanding of their motivations and inner turmoil. However, in the film adaptation, director Joe Wright takes a more visual approach, using the power of cinema to showcase the stunning visuals of the war-torn landscape and the beauty of the English countryside. Another major difference between the novel and the film is the portrayal of the characters. In the novel, the characters are allowed to develop at a more

leisurely pace, with the author taking his time to delve into their personalities and motivations. However, in the film, the characters are portrayed more stereotypically, emphasizing their actions rather than their personalities.

However, the primary difference between the novel and the film is the approach taken by the authors. While author Ian McEwan is more character-focused and introspective, director Joe Wright is more visual-minded and cinematic. This difference in approach makes both the novel and film of *Atonement* unique in their own right. In conclusion, *Atonement* is a perfect example of how adaptation can succeed if done well. Both the novel and film are highly acclaimed and beloved by audiences across the world. While there are differences between the two, those differences actually underscore each medium's strengths and prove that there is no "better" option when it comes to adapting a story.

The novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan and its subsequent film adaptations have been subject to intense scrutiny and analysis by literary critics, scholars, and curious readers alike. The novel and films have been examined from a variety of perspectives, ranging from psychological, historical, and literary. One perspective that has received much attention recently is the postmodern perspective. Studying *Atonement* as a postmodern work reveals that the novel and films are not only complex but also highly metafictional. Postmodernism primarily emphasizes self-reflexive narratives, which explore the nature of storytelling and how narrative shapes our understanding of the world. *Atonement* is a quintessential postmodern novel and film, as it constantly calls attention to its status as a work of fiction, even while representing events that are rooted in history.

Throughout focusing on how the novel and films question the notion of truth and representation, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of history and the limits of the human imagination. We can also appreciate the ways in which McEwan and the filmmakers use the tools of storytelling to explore the human psyche and the challenges of empathy. Moreover, studying *Atonement* enables us to compare the novel and film adaptations, examining

how each version interprets and represents the story. By comparing the two versions, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the unique qualities of each medium, as well as how different modes of storytelling can affect our interpretation of a story.



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