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POSTMODERNIST ELEMENTS IN *ATONEMENT* BY IAN MCEWAN

SUMMARY

This paper examines the multiple techniques of postmodernism in Ian McEwan's 2001 novel. The paper presents a theoretical overview of postmodernist techniques and then analyzes their use in the novel itself. Among the most prominent postmodernist features of the text is its continued use of metafiction, through which McEwan questions the processes of storytelling. The novel also features historiographical metafiction, as historical events are constantly intertwined with fictional ones, that is, with narrative techniques that emphasize subjectivity and the impossibility of achieving a single, authoritative historical account of events. The intertextuality that McEwan also uses further reinforces these strategies. In addition, McEwan enriches the postmodernist aspect of the novel by introducing hybridity, juxtaposing different narrative forms, genres and perspectives. In this way, the reader's interpretive experience is made further complex, because the tension between realistic representation and experimental narrative practice is brought to the fore. Together, these techniques lead the reader to question the nature of truth, authorship, and the stories through which individuals and entire societies construct meanings.

Key words: postmodernism, Ian McEwan, Atonement, metafiction, historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, hybridity.

Metafiction

Metafiction is one of the most prominent elements in postmodern literature. The technique highlights the awareness of the relationship between reality and fiction, drawing attention to the connection between them. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as following:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such 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; 1988:2)

Writing on metafiction in her book *Postmodernism and Three Novels*, Džiho-Šator draws from Patricia Waugh's work stating:

> Waugh believes that metafiction is the way in which postmodern writers indirectly oppose the social structures of contemporary society, thus not opposing reality itself, but the language of a realistic novel that contains this reality, so she concludes that a metafictional novel, in this way, places its resistance within the very form of the novel. In this way, the main preoccupation of metafictional writers is the writing process itself. They abandon stream of consciousness and interior monologue because contemporary reflexivity implies an awareness of language, metalanguage, consciousness, and writing. (Džiho-Šator, 2012: 51)

P. B. Nielsen compares the writings of Bakhtin and Fowles and draws a parallel between the metafictional perspective in realist novels and that in postmodern novels. He notes that "the only difference is that the postmodern novel makes the metafictional aspect explicit, while this is only implied in the realist novel." The metafictional aspect is used in novels to draw attention to their own status as artefacts. Its purpose is to create a fictional universe that is eventually disrupted by a frame structure describing how the realistic universe itself is fictionalized (Nielsen, 2015).

In Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, metafiction represents a fundamental postmodernist element on which other postmodern features rely. Through this element, the author demonstrates how what we believe to be true can be fabricated. Metafiction in *Atonement* appears in various forms, but it is most clearly reflected in the novel-within-the-novel structure. There is *Atonement*, authored by Ian McEwan, and within it another novel authored by Briony Tallis. In addition, particularly in relation to Briony, metafiction is expressed through

the writing style and the impossibility of separating reality from fiction. Furthermore, the roles of the writer and the narrator become a significant focus of the novel, a revelation that unfolds at the end of *Atonement*.

Metafiction is a technique in which an author deliberately highlights the fact that the narrative is a crafted, artificial construct. Ian McEwan in *Atonement* uses metafiction to have the implied author give the impression that one of his fictional characters is the actual author of the work. Through this device, McEwan questions the relationship between fiction and reality. He withholds this revelation until nearly the end of the novel, where he informs the readers that much of the narrative is (supposedly) written by one of his invented characters. One of the primary purposes of metafiction is to make readers consciously aware that fiction is distinct from reality, inviting them to reflect on the nature of storytelling itself. Metafiction is used to demonstrate the difficulties in attempting to reconstruct reality through language. Up to the point of Briony's disclosure that she is the author of the first three parts of the novel, the story being told might feel real to readers. Because of this, readers become lost in the world that McEwan has created. Most novelists attempt to create fictional worlds that appear to be real. McEwan, however, wants the reader to be aware of how unreliable the fictional world is. When McEwan has Briony take over authorship of the novel and then also creates a scene in which she discusses various endings that she might have used, he emphasizes how uncertain language can be in representing the world. In other words, McEwan, through metafiction, demonstrates how easily words can change the world that is being described. (Yadav, 2012) So, language can be added as one of the metafictional techniques as well, because language actually plays one of the greatest roles.

Atonement offers several embedded narratives, most notably *Two Figures by a Fountain* and, earlier, Briony's childhood play *The Trials of Arabella*. These texts within the text demonstrate how central the act of writing is to Briony's identity, and how easily the boundaries between fiction and reality can blur. Briony repeatedly positions herself at the center of her own creations—first as the playwright of *Arabella*, later as the author of both *Two Figures by a Fountain* and *Atonement* itself. In doing so, she assumes a kind of authorial authority that allows her to reshape events, assign motives, and ultimately rewrite the past. This self-positioning underscores the novel's concern with the power of storytelling and the ethical implications that arise when a writer takes on the role of an almost god-like creator.

While reading *Atonement* we are convinced that a little "innocent" girl from the beginning of the book, who did not know to make a distinction between reality and fiction (she is a writer) has changed and wants to fix, or try to fix, the damage she caused. We are (as readers) convinced that Cecilia and Robbie reunited and remain together, we are convinced that Briony confesses her mistake, her sin. Throughout the novel, we are presented with events involving Cecilia, Robbie, Briony, and other members of the Tallis family. At a certain point, we begin to see the world through Briony's perspective. We come to believe that what we are reading is reality, or perhaps we wish for it to be real, or we desire to reshape "reality" within the confines of the narrative. However, at the novel's conclusion, we are confronted with a crucial revelation: what we have read is Briony's attempt atonement, her own fictionalized version of events. This moment serves as a clear representation of metafiction, leaving us uncertain about what is real and what is imaginary construct of the events. Therefore, O'Hara's argues that the metafictional perspective is evident for Briony to strengthen her act of atonement. The ethical structure of part one displays a young girl, who have not yet learned the difference between reality and fiction, while in part two she is portrayed as a young woman who is finally able to understand the ethical consequences of failing to make a distinction between reality and fiction. O'Hara argues that Briony comes to an understanding in part two of the novel. She realizes that nothing good comes from interpreting events according to her own fantasies: "Briony's aesthetic tastes have evolved in accordance with her lifestyle." (O'Hara, 2011, p. 82). Her need for control had been overshadowed by a guilty self-effacement instead: "All she wanted to do was work, then bathe and sleep until it was time to work again. But it was all useless, she knew. Whatever skivvying or humble nursing she did, and however well or hard she did it, whatever illumination in tutorial she had relinquished, or lifetime moment on a college lawn, she would never undo the damage. She was unforgivable." (McEwan, 2001, p. 285). Throughout the novel, Briony, as a writer, assumes the role of a creator, almost like a god figure. She constructs the narrative, shaping the lives and fates of the characters within it. This power allows her to remake reality to suit her desires, leading one to question how she can ever be seen as unforgivable. As the author of her own story, she is both the creator and the destroyer of her characters' lives. However, despite her god-like control over the narrative, her attempts to alter reality and seek redemption through writing remain an expression of her personal struggle with guilt. It is ultimately her way, as a writer, of attempting atonement, even though

the truth remains ambiguous. Briony expresses that her novel is an attempt to atone for the damage she caused as a child, which she has always known would be an impossible task. Nevertheless, she also expresses that that was exactly the point: the attempt will be enough to satisfy her. This suggests that there is a deeper motivation behind her decision to write the novel. The point was not just to give an account of what happened, but also to create a story: "There was a crime. But there were also the lovers. Lovers and their happy endings have been on my mind all night long. As into the sunset we sail. An unhappy inversion." (McEwan, 2001, p. 370). Here, Briony suggests that her goal was not just to narrate the events, but to use her writing as a means of atonement, crafting a love story as a way to reconcile the damage she had inflicted. Through this process, she attempts to reshape the past and find personal redemption. She cannot see the purpose in trying to persuade her readers into believing that "Robbie Turner had died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Belham Underground station. That I never saw them in that year." (p. 370). She wants to create a love story from the groundwork of something tragic; because she wants to give a final act of kindness towards the people she betrayed when she was young. (Nielsen, 2015) Furthermore, Finney gives the best explanation of Briony as a character as well as a writer. He says that he sees Briony as a prime example of "[…] the way art shapes her life as much as she shapes that life into her art." (p. 78). (Ibidem)

Consequently, metafiction is the most evident element of postmodernism in *Atonement*, and it appears as a shocking effect at the end of the novel, when the real author reveals that there is another author within his novel. Thus, by understanding metafiction as fiction about fiction, or fiction within fiction, we are presented with two novels. First, there is *Atonement*, and within it there is the novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*. The author of the first is Ian McEwan, while the author of the second is Briony Tallis.

We are introduced to Briony at the beginning of the novel, and the story concludes with her as well, creating a circular structure that emphasizes the idea that there is no definitive ending. This narrative technique suggests that Briony has not undergone significant change, highlighting the constant nature of her internal struggle and the unresolved nature of her atonement. In her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*, Briony portrays herself as someone who performs only virtuous actions. She works as a nurse, helps wounded soldiers, encounters Cecilia and Robbie, admits her wrongdoing, and imagines a scenario in which

Cecilia and Robbie are reunited. However, she continues in the role of creator: at the beginning, she is the one who "creates" Robbie's life, followed by the lives of all the other characters around him; later, she reshapes their lives by reuniting Cecilia and Robbie and allowing them to live happily.

What we find out at the end of the novel *Atonement* is that Cecilia and Robbie die, and it is only Briony's fiction that leaves them alive, her attempt to atone through writing, through making fiction out of reality. It is difficult to distinguish between the events in the novel that are grounded and those that are purely imagined. "Metafiction is a parodic, playful, excessive or deceptively native style of postmodern writing with implied spirit of celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with uncertainty about the validity of its representation." (Yadav, 2012, p. 21) Through the use of metafiction, McEwan illustrates the autonomy and creativity of writers, showing how they can shape and reshape narratives according to their intentions. This technique underscores the idea that fiction is not bound by reality and encourages readers to question the truthfulness of the stories they encounter. Both Briony and McEwan exemplify the power of creative imagination. Briony, as a writer, uses her work to seek atonement for the wrongs she committed in her youth, while McEwan, in turn, uses his narrative craft to explore themes of guilt, redemption, and the blurred boundaries between fiction and reality. Authors of metafiction often violate narrative levels by intruding to comment on writing, by involving his or herself with fictional characters, by directly addressing the reader and by openly questioning how narrative assumptions and conventions transform and filter reality trying to ultimately prove that no singular truths or meanings exist. (Ibidem)

Historiographic metafiction

After defining metafiction as "fiction about fiction" or "fiction within fiction" and acknowledging its deliberate distance from truth or reality, the introduction of history adds an additional layer of complexity. Although historical material is frequently woven into narrative works, its intersection with fiction inevitably unsettles the boundaries of what we regard as factual. This tension is central to the concept of historiographic metafiction. When a novelist incorporates historical events or figures, the resulting narrative—whether in part or in whole—tends to unfold within a recognizable historical moment, prompting readers to reconsider the relationship between documented history and

imaginative reconstruction. This element is particularly evident in McEwan's *Atonement*. Džiho-Šator writes on the relation of history and fiction in postmodernism and notes that.

> Postmodern writers view history as an integral part of human experience and, as such, seek to explore it. However, in their return to history, they do not approach it in a positivist or straightforward manner; instead, they engage with history from a distinctly critical standpoint. Postmodern historical novels are not merely novels about history—they adopt the form of the historical novel in order to critically reflect on the very process of creating a historical narrative. In doing so, these novels pay particular attention to the influence of the present moment on the ways in which we understand the past. In a sense, such works forge a new connection between the present and the past. (Džiho-Šator; 2021:80-81)

Steven Connor believes that the historical narrative that exists in the historical novels of the post-war period is not a matter of presenting the truth of history, but of constructing a way of talking about the structure of the address between the past and the present. (Connor; 1996:164) Postmodern writers emphasize the gap between the real past and its representation, and historiographical metafiction foregrounds this problem by questioning the very possibility of reliable historical narration. By revealing the fictionalization of historical material, it encourages readers to distrust official accounts and to reconsider the unstable relationship between reality, history, and fiction. Linda Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction:

> The term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. In order to distinguish this paradoxical beast from traditional historical fiction, I would like to label it "historiographic metafiction." The category of novel I am thinking of includes One Hundred Years of Solitude, Ragtime, The French Lieutenant's Woman, and The Name of the Rose. All of these are popular and familiar novels whose metafictional self-reflexivity (and intertextuality) renders their implicit claims to historical veracity somewhat problematic, to say the least. (Hutcheon, 1)

Hutcheon maintains that "In fiction, it is self-reflexivity that works to make the paradoxes of postmodernism overt and even defining" (*A Poetics* 43). Drawing on the work of Linda Hutcheon, Nielsen also explains the definition of historical novels as well as historiographic metafiction: According to Linda Hutcheon, a historical novel is defined by a storyline set in a past era, one that reconstructs the customs, social realities, and contextual details of that historical moment. Such novels fashion an imagined version of the past, offering a mimetic representation of a particular time period. Within a postmodern framework, however, both history and fiction function as discursive systems—structures through which meaning is produced—so meaning does not arise from past events themselves but from the frameworks that transform those events into what we recognize as historical "facts". (Hutcheon, 1996, p. 89). In other words, both fiction and history are accessible from a particular angle of the narration of the events, whether they are historical or fictional. Writing on *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes, one of the most famous novels of historiographic fiction, Džiho-Šator explains the concept of duality that permeates the said novels:

> The reader is kept in a constant tension of dual perception: they experience Flaubert both as a real historical figure and as Barnes's narrative construct. The pragmatic effect of this duality lies in the novel's ability to teach history while simultaneously prompting the reader to approach it critically and to question the official historical narrative, as well as the relationship between reality, history, and fiction. For although the reader may be aware of the factual basis of certain historical events depicted in the novel, the novel's exposure of the process by which historical material is fictionalized undermines their confidence in the truthfulness or nature of that representation, which, according to historiographic metafiction, is anything but objective. The compelling force of historiographic metafiction resides precisely in its ability to draw the reader into the text, fostering an awareness of the narrativization of history—its susceptibility to interpretation and reinterpretation—which ultimately demands a more active engagement in the reading process. (Džiho-Šator; 2018:214)

This demonstrates how historiographic metafiction destabilizes the reader's trust in historical representation, compelling a more critical and participatory engagement with the past which is what McEwan tries to achieve with his

novel. "The postmodern historical novel compels us to re-examine our notion of history, exploring the cultural assumptions underlying historical events. What is changing in postmodernism is the way we see or imagine history, all because of the awareness of the limitations that exist when trying to represent it." (Džiho-Šator; 2022:214-215)

A prominent feature evident in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* is the incorporation of historiographic metafiction, particularly in the second and third sections of the novel, where the narrative delves into the context of World War II and its associated horrors. The novel explicitly engages with a historical period, invoking real events from the past. In *Atonement*, McEwan integrates history to illustrate how historical narratives can be shaped by diverse perspectives, events, and personal experiences. He emphasizes that history can be written more subjectively than objectively, and through the act of writing, it can serve as a means of healing. This is conveyed not only through the experiences of the characters, Briony and Robbie, but also through McEwan's own role and his personal connection to the events depicted. The novel presents numerous vivid scenes and perspectives, seemingly drawn from the author's lived experience. However, upon examining McEwan's biography, it becomes evident that he has a personal connection to the historical period in question, as certain members of his family were involved in it—most notably, his father, who was wounded during the war, much like Robbie Turner, the character from *Atonement*.

> They called him that to settle the difficult matter of rank. He set off down the path in a hurry, almost at a half run. He wanted to get ahead, out of sight, so that he could throw up, or crap, he didn't know which. Behind a barn, by a pile of broken slates, his body chose the first option for him. He was so thirsty, he couldn't afford to lose the fluid. He drank from his canteen, and walked around the barn. He made use of this moment alone to look at his wound. It was on his right side, just below his rib cage, about the size of a half crown. It wasn't looking so bad after he washed away the dried blood yesterday. Though the skin around it was red, there wasn't much swelling. But there was something in there. He could feel it move when he walked. A piece of shrapnel perhaps. (McEwan, 2014, p. 196)

Furthermore, McEwan describes many scenes which Robbie, together with his friends Mace and Nettle, encounter in the war. During their journey to Dunkirk, they encounter numerous scenes that will haunt them for the rest

of their lives, and that is something that McEwan wants to attest; how traumas of people who have survived the war stay until the end of their lives. At the beginning of the second part of the novel the narrative immerses readers in the environment surrounding the soldiers, allowing them to construct a vivid and tangible image of the scenes. Through detailed descriptions, McEwan evokes a clear visual representation of the setting, enabling readers to perceive the harsh realities and emotional weight of the soldiers' experiences.

> The path he was interested in started down the side of bombed house. [...] Scattered around were shreds of striped cloth with blackened edges, remains of curtains or clothing, and a smashed-in window-frame draped across a bush, and everywhere, the smell of damp soot. [...] It was a leg in a tree. A mature plane tree, only just in leaf. The leg was twenty feet up, wedged in the first forking of the trunk, bare, severed cleanly above the knee. From where they stood there was no sign of blood or torn flesh. It was a perfect leg, pale, smooth, small enough to be a child's. (McEwan, 2014, p. 197)

The writer shows how long those scenes stay in people's minds, and how they affect their behavior and their life. "McEwan, especially, blurs the lines between fact and fiction in the scenes where he depicts Robbie's retreat to Dunkirk. Here, he combines the historical event with his storytelling." (Nielsen, 2015) Even though some days and years have passed, Robbie continues to think about that child's leg and other things he experienced and encountered in the war: "Being here, sheltering in a barn, with an army in rout, where a child's limb in a tree was something that ordinary men could ignore, where a whole country, a whole civilization was about to fall, was better than being there, on a narrow bed under a dim electric light, waiting for nothing." (McEwan, p. 206) As Sedaghat says is her work, McEwan writes about historical traumas to make them unforgettable and to help us deal with everyday situations which are vulnerable, violent and traumatological. Writing about history is a path to self-reflection and self-transformation. She further explains that postmodernism tries to prove that history is a human construct and verbal artifact. In postmodernism there are plural meanings and truths, and it is mostly shown through different points of view of a single event. "McEwan has shown how underlying systems of ideology and power relation shape the subject's consciousness and consequently the historians' taste and point of view." (Sedaghat, 2015)

In *Atonement*, McEwan incorporates actual historical events and real individuals, such as Cyril Connolly, thereby blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Through this technique, he plays with readers' expectations and deliberately creates a sense of uncertainty. By blending reality with fictional narrative, particularly within a historical context, McEwan keeps readers unsure of where the boundaries between truth and imagination lie.

The novel *Atonement* spans over several significant historical periods, beginning in 1935 and concluding in 1999. It opens with thirteen-year-old Briony and ends on her seventy-seventh birthday, reflecting both personal and historical transformations. As Raja and Sivaraja (2021) note, "the Second World War, which shocked the world with its agenda of massive ethnic cleansing, and the subsequent Cold War appear to have elicited aesthetic structures that reflect the complexity and horror of life in the second half of the twentieth century. As a result, contemporary fiction clearly reflects this dissatisfaction with, and breakdown of, traditional values. Previously, as in the case of nineteenth-century realism, the forms of fiction derived from a firm belief in a commonly experienced and objectively existing world of history." (Raja & Sivaraja, 2021) The disillusionment with the war is further explored in the third part of the novel, where Briony encounters and describes the severe injuries of wounded soldiers. A key element of the story is Briony's role as a nurse, tending to the injured. This aspect of the narrative functions not only as a form of atonement but also marks her personal growth, as she strives to make reparations for the harm she caused to Robbie's life by offering her care and support to others. According to Nielsen: "the concept of history in this novel involves two meanings: the idea of rewriting historical events into a narrative and the idea of writing someone's past or someone's life autobiographically into a narrative." (Nielsen, 2015)

Although everything started in 1935, and proceeds with the events of the war, it concludes in 1999, where it is revealed that Briony is the author of the previous part, of everything that we have read so far. She confesses that she visited the Imperial War Museum library because she needed some information for her novel. She also was in contact with one of the corporals who served with Robbie. Furthermore, her experience as a nurse enabled her to write about Robbie's journey to Dunkirk with a sense of authenticity. These revelations, however, are only disclosed at the novel's conclusion, when it is revealed that Briony is the author of the story we have been following.

In addition to Robbie's experiences during the war, the third part of the novel also delves into Briony's own role as a nurse. The conditions she faces in

the hospital are nearly as traumatic as those on the battlefield, as nurses are exposed to similar horrors and psychological burdens. Briony, who arrives at the hospital as an inexperienced beginner seeking practical training, is unprepared for the harsh realities that await her—much like Robbie was unprepared for the consequences of her actions. A pivotal moment occurs when, while walking with her friend Fiona, they turn onto Lambeth Palace Road and come across a disturbing scene unfolding outside the hospital.

> In less than a minute they were down among the men. The brisk air of spring did not dispel the stench of engine oil and festering wounds. The soldiers' faces and hand were black, and with their stubble and matted black hair, and their tied-on labels from the casualty-receiving stations, they looked identical, a wild race of men from a terrible world. (McEwan, 2014, p. 295)

After that they spend all their time helping wounded soldiers. Both McEwan, as the author, and Briony, as a character within the story, share a deep passion for crafting detailed descriptions that allow readers to vividly visualize the events unfolding in the novel. This passion for realism allows the readers to engage deeply with the emotional and physical realities faced by the characters as seen in some descriptions of Briony's experience working as a nurse, Nurse T. (it represents her identity now).

> Men coming round from amputations seemed compelled to make terrible jokes. What am I going to kick the missus with now? Every secret of the body was rendered up – bone risen through flesh, sacrilegious glimpses of an intestine or an optic nerve. From this new and intimate perspective, she learned a simple, obvious thing she had always known, and everyone knew: that a person is among all else, a material thing, easily thorn, not easily mended. She came closer she would ever be to the battlefield, for every case she helped with had some of its essential elements – blood, oil, sand, mud, sea mater, bullets, shrapnel, engine grease, or the smell of cordite, or damp sweaty battledress whose pockets contained rancid food along with the soldiers crumbs of Amo bars. (McEwan, 2014, p. 308)

It was her duty to take care of the soldiers, and she chose this profession in the hope that helping others would provide a sense of personal atonement for the mistakes she made as a child. She thinks about Robbie as a soldier and often

imagines him as one of the men arriving at the hospital, envisioning herself assisting him as a means of redeeming herself for the harm she caused him. This desire to make amends drives her actions, as she seeks a way to reconcile her past. "She thought too how one of these men might be Robbie, how she would dress his wounds without knowing who he was, and with cotton-wool tenderly rub his face until his familiar features emerged, and how he would turn to her with gratitude, realize who she was, and take her hand, and in silently squeezing it, forgive her. Then he would let her settle him down to sleep." (McEwan, 2014, p. 302) Being an inexperienced nurse during the war serves as a form of punishment for Briony, as she is unprepared for the emotional and physical demands of the role. Thrust into a situation for which she has no prior experience, she faces the harsh realities of war with little readiness, both professionally and psychologically. This unpreparedness mirrors the consequences of her earlier actions, which she now must confront in a different context. She was the one who dropped a bomb into Robbie's life, subsequently Robbie encounters the real bombs, and at the end Briony was the one in whose life bombs dropped every day, with each newly wounded soldier. There is also one vivid scene of Briony and soldier Luc:

> She was not intending to remove the gauze, but as she loosened it, the heavy sterile towel beneath it slid away, taking a part of the bloodied dressing with it. The side of Luc's head was missing. The hair was shaved well back from the missing portion of skull. Below the jagged line of bone was a spongy crimson mess of brain, several inches across, reaching from the crown almost to the tip of his ear. She caught the towel before it slipped to the floor, and she held it while she waited for her nausea to pass. Only now did it occur to her what a foolish and unprofessional thing she had done. (McEwan, 2014, p. 312)

There are many historical scenes within the second and the third part of the novel whose fictional author is Briony. Han and Wang, argue that the historical perspective is implemented in Atonement in order to give significance to the love story between Robbie and Cecilia (pp. 136-137). Ultimately, the novel then becomes, as Han and Wang argue a novel where "the fates of individuals are intermingled with the verisimilitude of history and society. And history, fact and fiction are knitted into the narrative framework."[1] (Han and Wang; 2014)

1 https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=51089, last accessed 11/27/2025

Furthermore, Nielsen describes *Atonement* as a historical novel because of its setting. It begins in 1935, moves on to the Second World War and ends in contemporary times. In conclusion, *Atonement* undeniably contains historiographic metafiction as one of the postmodernist elements. It is obvious because Briony as a writer implements the Second World War within her novel as she seeks to "wash away" her guilt, using the act of writing as a means of atonement for the wrongs she has committed. Firstly, Briony aims to reunite Robbie and Cecilia, allowing them to live happily together, as she feels responsible for having ruined their lives. Secondly, she strives to help others, beyond just Cecilia and Robbie, in an effort to be a better person and seek her own atonement. Although Briony makes every effort to authentically depict the violence and horror that follows the war, she ultimately transforms these real events into fiction, as this is the only way she can find satisfaction with her novel. "History can never be represented as it really was, because the author has fabricated the presentation from a particular angle. This underlines Nicol's definition of a postmodern novel. A realistic narrative can never be represented truthfully but will always be *a perspective* on the representation." (Nielsen, 2015, p. 9) So, both Briony and McEwan used information and experiences of war and past in general, to write this incredible work of fiction, but with different aims. For Briony, the aim is to atone for the wrongs she has committed, while for McEwan, the aim is to illustrate how history can be interpreted differently from various perspectives and how it can be shaped to achieve particular goals.

IV. 3. Intertextuality

Intertextuality is the term introduced to the study of literature by Julia Kristeva through the series of articles published between 1966-1974. The prefix "inter" suggests that there is something else "inside" the existing text, and because it proceeds with "text" we can suggest that there is/are another text/s. Džiho-Šator in her book says that one of the characteristic of postmodern novel is the dialog with the work itself, and another important characteristic of postmodern novel is the dialogue with other works, authors, their styles and literature epochs. (Džiho-Šator; 2021:49-50) According to Abrams:

> The term intertextuality [...] is used to signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text is made up of other texts, by means of its open or covert citations and allusions, its repetitions and transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier

> texts, or simply its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistic and literary conventions and procedures that are „always ready“ in place and constitute the discourses into which we are born. (Abrams, 1999:317)

Džiho-Šator notes that authors of postmodern novels allow the influences of other authors, works and styles, and they see it as a part of the overall flow of literary and human existence seen as text or sign. “Each literary epoch or trend arises as a kind of reaction to the previous epoch and to the social context or, as we see through intertextuality, as its continuation through the “open” nature of the postmodern novel.” (Džiho-Šator, 2021: 48-49)

> The very concept of intertextuality, as we can see, implies a very wide domain and is not reduced to the mere existence of other people’s words in a text, but it also implies an in-depth examination of the text, and an interpretive approach that means the search and recognition of clear quotations and allusions to other works and authors, as well as subtle and not so visible stylistic influences of some authors on others, but also the influence of the context, in general, on the text. Understanding everything as a text, from works of art, through historical texts to other human activities, also contributes to the complex nature of intertextuality and the intertextual approach to literature. (Ibidem; 2021:91)

Therefore, the ability to recognize intertextual references in a novel or any literary work, especially fiction, is influenced by one’s depth of knowledge and reading practices. Džiho-Šator furthermore writes about the connection of intertextuality and metafiction when it comes to postmodern novels. The connection is seen through using the same techniques such as quotation, allusion, parody, and even irony. All these techniques are used to create a novel that talks about itself and the novel that talks to other novels. However, a novel that implicates intertextuality as one of the elements of postmodernism, must imply metafiction as well. But, on the other hand, a novel that implicates metafiction does not have to implicate intertextuality. So, as Džiho-Šator asserts, we can conclude that intertextuality is subordinated to metafiction. “We conclude this, because by alluding one work to another, the writer sends the reader outside the fictitious world he creates, thereby breaking the illusion of its reality, pointing to its fictionality.” (Ibidem, 92)

When examining *Atonement*, certain intertextual references are readily visible, while others depend on the reader's prior literary experience and the range of texts they have previously encountered. The first intertextual reference appears at the very beginning of the novel, where an epigraph is presented in the form of a quote from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. In this way, McEwan begins his narrative with a text drawn from another author's work. Wang and Han suggest in their analysis that readers may question the choice of Jane Austen for the epigraph and its purpose within the context of *Atonement*. They further explain that the epigraph functions as a guiding element for readers, highlighting the parallels between McEwan's novel and Austen's works. Both novels, they argue, share notable similarities in themes and narrative structure. For example, McEwan is playing with his readers by using their spontaneous and naïve expectations, and at the end he leads them into a wrong judgement. Another aspect that can be linked to Austen's novels is the setting. The first part of *Atonement* is set in the country house, and it describes the traditional way of living in that time. Jane Austen, whose fiction focused on the provincial middle-class world shaped by her rural life, pioneered the country-house novel through works such as *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*, becoming a key figure in English literary tradition. In *Atonement*, the Tallis house draws on this realist heritage and the country-house motif, culminating in its transformation into the "Tilney" hotel, a clear intertextual reference to *Northanger Abbey* (Han & Wang, 2014). Han and Wang also note that McEwan sometimes describes his novel as "Jane Austen" novel. Furthermore, they say it is apparent that Briony is "Jane Austen Heroine" because she bears some resemblance to Morland. (Ibidem)

Next thing that serves as an intertextual reference is Briony's play *The Trials of Arabella*. Nielsen mentions the connection with Charlotte Lennox's novel *The Female Quixote: Or the Adventures of Arabella* (1752). He further explains that Briony and Arabella have many similarities as characters. Arabella is unable to distinguish between fiction and reality, neither is Briony. "She continually misinterprets events in her life as melodramatic moments lifted from one of the novels she has read. D'Angelo argues that McEwan makes small references to Lennox's novel to remind his readers that they should be critically engaged with the text as a single "correct" reading of a text does not exist, but a text can in fact be read "incorrectly". (D'Angelo, 2009, pp. 91-92). This is also a proposition that is reflected in Briony, who reads her reality through romantic impulses, which has life-changing consequences. McEwan, thus, warns his readers to be sensitive

towards the romantic impulses they implement in their readings of the novel: "For example, how much has the reader invested in Robbie's inevitable reunion with Cecilia? Is this an ending that, on some level, readers expect, or even require, Briony to write?" (p. 92). In other words, if readers are knowledgeable of the intertextual reference to Lennox's novel, they will be able to understand McEwan's warning not to expect a happy conclusion to the lives of Robbie and Cecilia." (Nielsen, 2015, p. 33) Nielsen agrees with D'Angelo's suggestion related to this connection and he adds that Jane Austen was also inspired by *The Female Quixote* to write her novel *Northanger Abbey*. He suggests it because "Briony's portrayal as a girl, who misinterprets events and sees reality through a lens of romantic impulses can be traced back through a series of already existent literature, such as *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey*, which both have heroines, who interpret reality through a lens of romantic impulses as seen in romantic novels." (Ibidem) Another connection of the name 'Arabella', how Han and Jang say, represents an allusion to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. "Arabella" is the name of Clarissa's sister. McEwan references *Clarissa* while depicting Cecilia's life after school. Upon returning home from Cambridge, she spends her time reading novels, and during a conversation with Robbie, he inquires about her thoughts on *Clarissa*. Cecilia uses the word "boring" to describe this novel and expresses her interest in Fielding who is psychologically crude in the eyes of Robbie. "To a certain extent, Cecilia's preference for Fielding over Richardson includes some sexually explicit message, for the works of Fielding may indicate a taste for the blood and sensual." (Ibidem) Cecilia also mentions *Clarissa* in her conversation with her brother Leon. When she answers on his question how she spends her time there she says: "As for *Clarissa* – all those day – light hours curled up on the bed with pins and needles in her arm – it surely proved the case of *Paradise Lost* in reverse – the heroine became more loathsome as her death-fixated virtue was revealed." (McEwan, 2014, p. 113) Furthermore, the rape scene in *Atonement* can be compared to the events in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. In Forster's novel, Dr. Aziz, a physician, is falsely accused of attempting rape, much like Robbie in *Atonement*. Both narratives explore the complexities surrounding a rape accusation, and there are significant parallels between the two works, particularly in the depiction of the incident and its subsequent consequences. In *A Passage to India*, Adela Quested, the white British schoolmistress, commits a wrongful act by falsely accusing Aziz of rape, which parallels Briony's actions in *Atonement*. In both cases, the men—Aziz and Robbie—are wrongfully accused and subjected to disbelief from those around

them, with their innocence gradually becoming increasingly questioned. Both men ultimately become victims of the false allegations, with their experiences marked by the loss of trust. The only difference is that Robbie is prejudiced because of the social class, and Aziz is an Indian, so he is prejudiced by racial discrimination. "In Paris Review, McEwan has admitted the influences of L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* on *Atonement* by saying that "L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* made a huge impression on me". In the interview with David Wiegand, McEwan said that: By the time I was at boarding school – a very unelated place – I was reading very intensely. In fact, one of the books I read at the age of 12 that formed the seed for "Atonement" was "The Go-Between". I was completely taken by that, partly because it was set in a country house and my boarding school was in a country house (Wiegand, 2002)." (Han & Wang, p. 138) What else they mention as an intertextual reference is Margaret Atwood's "The Blind Assassin". The novels are similar in terms of characterization, settings and plots, and narrative arts. Both novels use reader's innocence and tactical tricks in narration (unreliable narrator). Furthermore, when it comes to unreliable narrator, Han and Wang connect *Atonement* with Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*, the novel that turns out to be incredible in spite of its seeming objectivity. In addition, in their thesis, Han and Wang mention the connection with L. P. Hartley's *The Go Between*, which talks about children's misunderstanding of adult sexual relationship in a country house. (Ibidem)

Nuria Zinnurova connects Cecilia's choice of wearing green backless dress with a girl that appears one day before the sight of the amazed Stephen Dedalus in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* after which he experiences the final epiphany in the novel. "Cecilia chooses the green backless gown that makes her feel impregnable, slippery and secure. This time "It was a mermaid who rose to meet her in her full-length mirror". (McEwan, Atonement, p.99) A mermaid is a marginal creature who does not have to belong to any social niche; it is also a powerful sexual male construct that rouses men's imagination." (Zinnurova, 2006, p. 74)

Considering that Cecilia and Robbie graduated in English literature, it is expected that they have encountered and read different works from different literary periods. While walking around Tallis' library, wanting to see, to smell, to find something what will remind him of Cecilia, Robbie mentions some writers who would help him with the explanation of his state. It makes an intertextual reference as well: "How had it crept up on him, this advanced stage of fetishizing the love object? Surely Freud had something to say about that in *Three Essays on Sexuality*. And so did Keats, Shakespeare and Petrarch, and all the rest, and

it was in the *Romaunt of the Rose*." (McEwan, 2014, p. 88) While describing Robbie's room, some other works and writers are mentioned:

> Beyond the compass were his copies of Auden's *Poems* and Housman's *Shropshire Lad*. At the other end of the table were various histories, theoretical treatises and practical handbooks on landscape gardening. Ten typed-up poems lay beneath a printed rejection slip from *Criterion* magazine, initialed by Mr. Elliot himself. Closest to where Robbie sat were the books of his new interest. *Gray's Anatomy* was opened by a folio pad of his own drawings. (McEwan, 2014, p. 86)

So, it becomes evident that not only Briony has ambitions to become an artist (a writer). Robbie also makes attempts to become a poet, but he was rejected. Furthermore, other books that make the intertextual references are "his third-edition Jane Austen, his Eliot and Lawrence and Wilfred Owen, the complete set of Conrad, the priceless 1783 edition of Crabbe's *The Village*, his Houseman, the autographed copy of Auden's *The Dance of Death*". (Ibidem, 97) During the wartime, Robbie and Cecilia stayed in connection by writing letters to each other. In one of those letters Cecilia wrote him a poem from W. H. Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", and only some parts are mentioned in the novel *Atonement*: In the nightmare of the dark, All the dogs of Europe bark. (Ibidem, 207) and: In the desert of the heart / Let the healing fountain start. (Ibidem, 247)[2]

One of the most important intertextual references is the one which relates to Virginia Woolf. It is mostly connected with Briony and her writing style. "The influence of Virginia Woolf in particular is marked – McEwan even goes so far as to refer to her writing in *Atonement*, both in the process of narration through artistic strategies and techniques (Richard Robinson 473-75)." (Sedaghat, 2015, p. 44) While Briony was thinking about writing, about plots and characters, and about modern novelists, it is mentioned that "she had read Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* three times and thought that a great transformation was being worked in human nature itself, and that only fiction, a new kind of fiction, could capture the essence of the change.". (McEwan, 2014, p. 286) When it comes to Briony and her novel "Two Figures by a Fountain", she sent it to *Horizon*, and was waiting for their answer for a long time. When they answered, besides other advice, they wrote: "However, we wondered whether it owed a little too much to

2 https://poets.org/poem/memory-w-b-yeats - The whole poem.

the techniques of Mrs. Woolf." (Ibidem, 316) There is also another connection with Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, and it relates to the title of the novel and Mrs. Tallis, Briony's mom.

Proceeding with intertextuality within the novel "Atonement", some critics make connection with *Possession* by A. S. Byatt and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles. This connection is made because of history and mystery. (Han & Wang, 2014, p. 137) Furthermore, when discussing and writing about real historical events and facts, it is evident that intertextual references are present. However, one could only recognize these references by having prior knowledge of the relevant texts and historical context. Finney suggests that the intertextual references in the novel are, therefore, not only utilized to draw parallels to literary history but they are also used to establish a connection between the text and real historical events. Further, he argues that McEwan employs intertextuality in order to "[...] establish a connection between the microcosm of the lives that Briony has disrupted and the macrocosm of a world of war." (2004, p. 73). (Nielsen, p. 54)

We see that McEwan incorporates various intertextual references to enrich his novel and add complexity to its interpretation, thereby engaging his readers and challenging their perceptions. McEwan subtly invokes modernist writers, illustrating their influence on his own narrative style and approach to storytelling. Through the use of intertextual references, the author reminds readers that the story is fictional. Although some aspects may seem real or believable, the allusion to other fictional works makes it clear that the narrative is a work of imagination, not reality.

IV. 4. Hybridity and Juxtaposition

Hybridity is a literary device that relates to different works of art within a novel. "In literature, the process of hybridity means the mixing of different genres, styles, storytelling techniques and narrative discourses. In contrast to modernism, where coherence prevails, "i.e. consistent and consistent structuring of the text, postmodernist poetics prefers stylistic unevenness, incongruity of parts, narrative discontinuity and a mixture of narrative techniques" (Lešić, 2005:515), and in this respect, as Lešić points out: "the characteristic erasure of the boundaries between fiction and history, between simulation and reality, between dream and reality." (Ibid.) David Duff defines hybridization as a process in which two or more genres are combined to produce a new genre or subgenre,

or as a way in which elements of multiple genres are combined in a single work. (Duff, 2000:16)". Postmodern authors use and insert different genres and styles within their novels and in that way their novels lead dialogues with other texts, so they become hybrid. It represents the postmodern tendency to oppose order, big stories, ideologies and established categories. (Ibidem, 97) "Hybridity, as a characteristic of postmodern novels, contains a subversive power and a political message, because by mixing different heterogeneous elements into one whole that is traditionally homogeneous, the expectations and assumptions that make up and keep ideological constructs alive are broken. In this way, art acquires a liberating effect." (Ibidem) Further, Džiho-Šator emphasizes the role of hybridity in postmodernism regardless of seeing it as "a goal, as a means or as an effect of the postmodernist novel, whether we see it as a technique of postmodernist play or postmodernist resistance," (Ibidem, 98) it constitutes the central category within postmodernism. She also mentions that postmodernism uses and encourages the erasure of boundaries between different literary categories, primarily genres. Further, she mentions Stoddard's words of hybridity as something that is based on "flexibility, openness, adaptation, ambiguity, contradiction and irony.". So, these are central characteristics of postmodernism as well, what makes hybridity one of the most important postmodern techniques. (Ibidem, 95)

Taking into consideration that hybridity represents the structure of a novel which incorporates many different styles, including letters, poetry, and other narrative forms, to explore the authority of textual narratives, it is evident that hybridity is present within the novel *Atonement*. Besides the poetry of different authors (that is previously mentioned in the intertextuality part of the thesis), there are also some letters within the novel. There is the letter from the editorial, written by *Horizon* and signed by C.C. (Cyril Connolly), that responds to the draft of Briony's novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*, which she had submitted for review. In the letter, Briony is provided with feedback regarding her work, including suggestions for revisions, and is advised to send the revised draft for further consideration. There is some advice from the letter:

> The woman goes fully dressed into the fountain to retrieve the pieces. Wouldn't it help you if the watching girl did not actually realize that the vase had broken? It would be all the more of a mystery to her that the woman submerges herself. […] If this girl has so fully misunderstood or been so wholly baffled by the strange little scene that has unfolded before her, how might it

> affect the lives of the two adults? Might she come between them in some disastrous fashion? [...] Our wish is that you will take our remarks – which are given with sincere enthusiasm – as a basis for another draft. [...] We hope you will not be discouraged. It may help you to know that our letters of rejection are usually no more than three sentences long. (McEwan, 2015: 317-319)

Upon reading the rejection letter, it becomes clear to us as readers that Briony accepts the feedback and makes the suggested changes to her manuscript. The revised draft she submits is ultimately the novel we are engaging in, adding a layer of self-reflection to the narrative. There are also other letters within the novel *Atonement*. The first one is from Quincey twins, when they left the house and when all bad things started to happen: *We are going to run away because Lola and Betty are horrid to us and we want to go home. Sory, we took some fruit and there wasn't a play.* (McEwan, 2015: 147) Other letters in the novel focus on the correspondence between Cecilia and Robbie during his time in prison and the outbreak of war. During this period, Cecilia worked at a hospital and was distanced from her family. Robbie received a letter from her in April, with her reply arriving in May. In her response, she informs him about Briony, explaining that she did not go to Cambridge and is now training as a nurse at her former hospital. Briony wants to change her evidence about Robbie, but Cecilia does not want to hope because she knows "what a dreamer she is" (Ibidem, 216). At the end of the letter, she says she does not want to end on a sad note, so she looked back at his letter:

> I enjoyed your story about the sergeants' latrines. I read that bit to the girls and they laughed like lunatics. I'm so glad the liaison officer has discovered your French and given you a job that makes a use of it. [...] I'm enclosing a poem by Auden on the death of Yeats cut out from an old London Mercury from last year. I'm going down to see Grace at the weekend, and I'll look in the boxes for your Houseman. Must dash. You're in my thoughts every minute. I love you. I'll wait for you. Come back. Cee. (Ibidem, 218)

In addition to the letters and poems, the novel features an epilogue at the beginning, as well as a play written by Briony. We meet her melodrama "The Trials of Arabella" at the beginning of the novel as well as at the end of the novel, on Briony's 77th birthday. Briony is surprised on her birthday when her play is

finally shown. She says: "I knew the words were mine, but I barely remember them, and it was hard to concentrate, with so many questions, so much feeling, crowding in.". (Ibidem, 373)

McEwan weaves together multiple styles and genres throughout *Atonement*. He effectively dissolves the boundaries that traditionally separate distinct literary forms. Viewed through the lens of hybridity, this blending of modes becomes a key postmodern strategy that enriches the narrative, deepens its thematic complexity, and ultimately creates a more dynamic and engaging reading experience.

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is a literary device that places two contrasting elements side-by-side to highlight their differences or unexpected similarities.. This technique is a subtle way to encourage the reader to compare and contrast two or more elements in a story: characters, settings, events, moods, and more.[3] In terms of events, the juxtaposition, as a postmodernist element, is evident in Robbie's experience during the war. As he and his friends retreat to Dunkirk, they encounter a series of harrowing situations and images that will stay with them forever. Despite the chaos and horrors, they witness, they ultimately reach the resort, where salvation seems within reach, as Corporal Nettle assures Robbie:

> Guv'nor, can you hear me? Are you listening? About an hour ago I went out for a slash. Guess what I saw. There was the navy coming down the road, putting out the call for officers. They're getting organized on the beach. The boats are back. We're going home, mate. There's a lieutenant from the Buffs here who's marching us down at seven. So, get some sleep and no more of your bloody shouting. (McEwan, 2015:269)

This juxtaposition of despair and hope highlights the complexity of their journey. Although salvation is near, Robbie dies. His last words are his answer to Nettle's words: 'I won't say a word,' he said, though Nettle's head had long disappeared from his view. 'Wake me before seven. I promise, you won't hear another word from me.' (Ibidem, 270) Besides that, through the novel *Atonement* we can see a strong contrast between children's growing up,

3 https://prowritingaid.com/juxtaposition-definition accessed on the 24th of February.

or even teenage growth. Firstly, we see Briony as a thirteen-year-old girl who is imaginative, who wants to be a writer, and who wants to manage the lives of real and fictional characters in her life. Secondly, there is seventy-seven-year-old Briony with whom life has managed. Briony has never behaved like a child, nor teenager. At the age of thirteen she committed a crime, she ruined others' lives so she could never behave, and she never had a chance to behave like a child or teenager. She always wanted to behave and to understand adults, but she could not gain it like a thirteen-year-old child. She wants to grow up, but that is not her salvation. When she becomes an adult, she sees how difficult life is. That also juxtaposes the difference between the child world and adult world. When she comes into those years of adulthood, she sees and understands what kind of damage she has done to her nearest ones. Further, when it comes to Briony as an adult, it comes to her attempt to atone, and there we can find another thing which McEwan juxtaposes through Briony. It relates to fiction versus reality. Briony tries to give her characters in fiction what she has taken from them in real life: "But what *really* happened? The answer is simple: lovers survive and flourish. [...] then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love." (Ibidem. 377) In addition to this juxtaposition scene, there is another one which can be added. It represents the impossibility of a happy ending in Briony's novel, because her characters are dead. "But now I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, I tried to persuade my reader, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station." (Ibidem) "Though it is not possible to see the world in a subjective way through Briony's contemplation, Briony as an author is confused between what is true and what is not. Through the juxtaposition of Briony's false perceptions, McEwan can showcase the importance that perception has in the understanding of the truth. Ian McEwan also uses juxtaposition to address Briony's character development by showcasing the true qualities of her character under tough circumstances. McEwan uses war as a way of understanding how it affects the psychological as well as physiological pressures of Briony. It is seen that because of Briony's actions, Robbie is drafted to war." [4]

Juxtaposition can also be found when it comes to Briony and her sister Cecilia. At the beginning of the novel, we can see how different they are:

4 https://www.bartleby.com/essay/Comparing-The-Novel-Atonement-By-Ian-Mcewan-P32LG3MZSEFP

> She was one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so. Whereas her big sister's room was a stew of unclosed books, unfolded clothes, unmade bed, unemptied ashtrays, Briony's was a shrine to her controlling demon: the model farm spread across a deep window ledge consisted of the usual animals, but all facing one way – towards their owner – as if about to break into song, and even the farmyard hens were neatly corralled. (Ibidem, 8)

Furthermore, Briony believes that she must, and indeed does, save her sister from "the incarnation of evil" (Ibidem, 119), yet she is profoundly mistaken in her perception. She thinks: "With the letter, something elemental, brutal, perhaps even criminal had been introduced, some principle of darkness, and even in her excitement over the possibilities, she did not doubt that her sister was in some way threatened and would need her help." (Ibidem, 117) However, she did not save her sister's life, she ruined it. Another instance of juxtaposition, particularly in terms of good and bad, is found in Lola's rape scene. The contrast between the brutal act of violence and the subsequent reaction from various characters emphasizes the moral complexities and contradictions within the narrative, deepening the novel's exploration of innocence, guilt, and perception. "Lola's rape is the prelude to a long and socially successful marriage cemented by Lola's and Marshall's determination to keep the identity of the rapist a secret while either of them is alive." (Finney, 2002) Although Lola knows that Paul Marshall is her rapist, she chooses to spend her life with him, seeking happiness despite the trauma. Through this juxtaposition in Atonement, Ian McEwan highlights the differences between his characters, both mentally and physically. This serves to underscore the complexities of their psychological states and the ways in which their choices and circumstances shape their lives in contradictory ways. McEwan illustrates how each character perceives the world and what they have learned from the experiences they've endured. Their differing reactions to their respective situations reveal the complexities of human nature and the ways in which trauma, guilt, and desire shape their understanding of reality.

Conclusion

When discussing *Atonement* as a postmodernist novel, it is clear that it incorporates many key elements of postmodernism as a literary movement. As we analyze the postmodern elements within the novel, we can identify metafiction,

intertextuality, historiographic metafiction, hybridity, and juxtaposition. Each of these elements work together to blur the lines between fiction and reality, challenging traditional narrative structures and engaging readers in a deeper reading experience. Works of fiction often represent something unattainable, a world of possibilities, dreams, and desires that exist beyond our reach. Yet, they also offer a sense of delight, providing an escape from reality and a space where imagination can flourish.

Postmodernist novelists challenge conventional storytelling techniques and play with readers' expectations, demonstrating that fiction is not just a mirror of reality, but a space where rules can be bent or broken. Using different techniques and elements of postmodernism, postmodern novelists want to show us that there is no an absolute truth, everything that we believed is going to happen in novels will not probably happen, and that there can be many truths, as well as many ways to end a story. By using metafiction as a key postmodernist element, particularly through the device of fiction within fiction, Ian McEwan demonstrates how writers—both himself as the author and Briony as a character within the novel—can rewrite and reshape events in order to serve their own purposes. Furthermore, when it comes to the historiographic metafiction, we find out that history can never be written or told how it really happened. Even though Briony does her best to represent the scenes of violence and horror which follow the war, she makes fiction out of the real scenes, because that is the way she would be satisfied with her novel. Intertextuality as a postmodernist element is used to show the richness of postmodernist writing style, as well as to allude to other works of fiction with a reason. Juxtaposition and hybridity are in relation to narrative styles as well, especially when it comes to hybridity, because narration is hybrid as well.

Atonement stands as a true masterpiece by Ian McEwan, one that beckons readers to return to it time after time, driven by the desire to uncover something new or to interpret it in a different way. In a postmodernist novel like this, there are countless "endings" to be found, each shaped by individual thoughts and interpretations. Consequently, this reflects a key aspect of postmodernism: the rejection of a single, definitive end or an absolute, overarching truth.

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