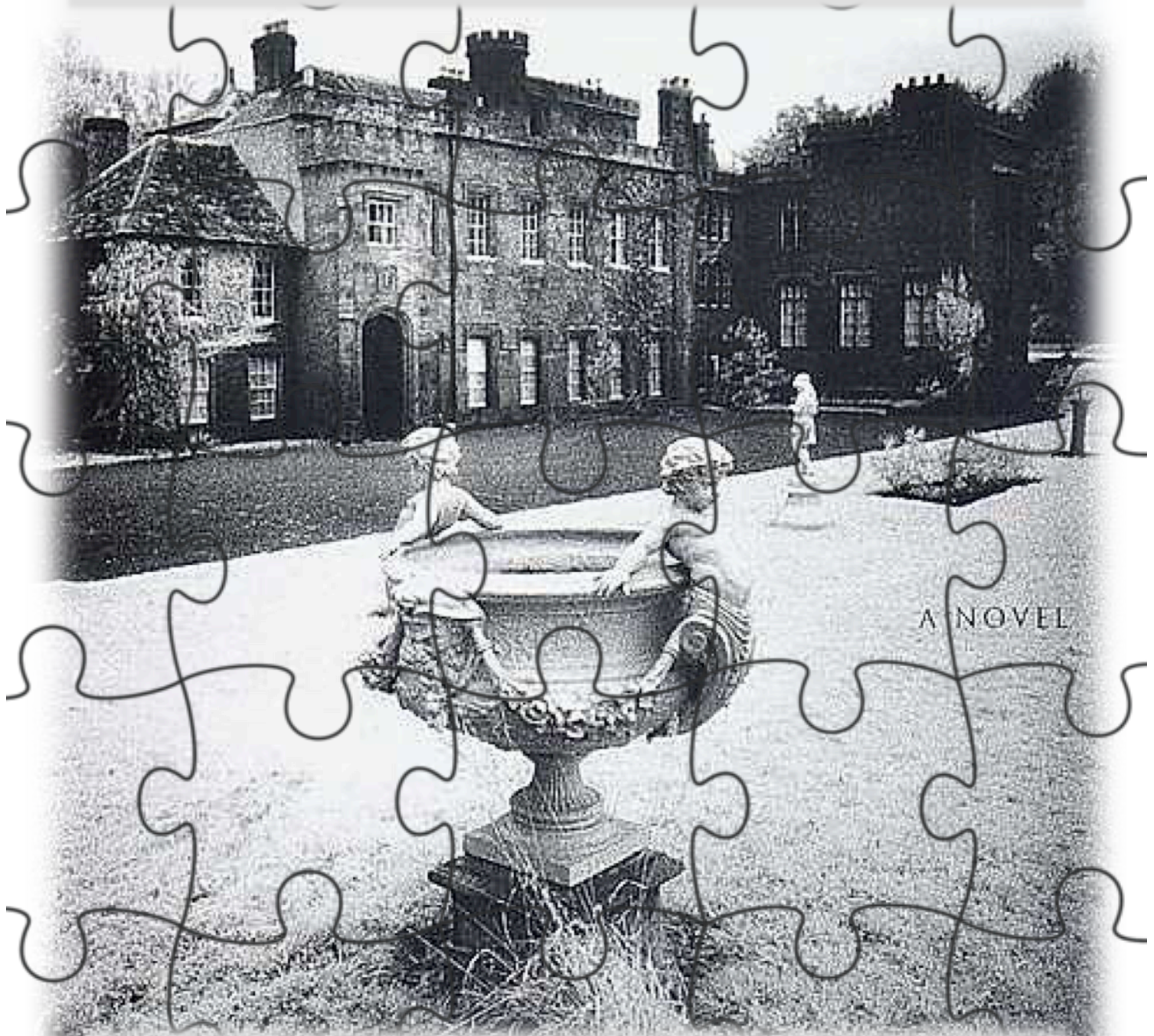


The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

An Analysis and Interpretation of the Novel with a Focus on
Postmodern Themes and Strategies



A NOVEL

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1 Abstract

This thesis consists of an analysis and interpretation of the novel *Atonement* (2001) by Ian McEwan, with a focus on the themes, narrative strategies, and literary devices used in the construction of the narrative. The novel is a self-reflexive narrative that uses many literary features, which are designed to draw attention to the construction of the novel's narrative. Therefore, the theme of the novel is writing. I take my point of departure in the British-American scholar of English Literature, Brian Finney's argument that the novel is about the making of fiction, which is both evident in McEwan's structure of the novel, but also in his portrayal of the protagonist Briony, who finds it difficult to distinguish between real life and fiction. A discussion is made on how McEwan has constructed his novel, which formalistic choices he has made, and how these relate to postmodern theory. The thesis consists of four sections that contain discussions of these questions from different perspectives.

The discussions specifically focus on the formalistic choices made in the construction, such as the narrative strategies applied in the novel and how these have resulted in different readings of the novel. Therefore, a discussion has been made on how critics have both read the novel as postmodern and anti-postmodern. Additionally, the discussions focus on literary devices used in the novel, such as intertextuality and metafiction. Intertextual references are made in the novel both explicitly and implicitly to influence the reader in a particular way, and to generate more meaning and depth to the text. The metafictional perspective is implemented in order to draw attention to the text as a literary artefact. In this way, McEwan underlines the constructed nature of the narrative. Additionally, the novel is read as a historiographic metafictional novel, because it is both self-reflexive, while portraying historical events. The last discussion of the thesis consists of the ontological levels of control and authority implemented in the novel, which underline the discussion of how the novel is a constructed narrative.

The discussions made in the thesis serve to understand how McEwan has constructed his narrative, and result in a conclusion, which states that McEwan has written a novel that is about the making of fiction, to which he draws on a postmodern discourse. The fusion of both postmodern techniques and classic realist techniques serve as the foundation for the novel's effect of drawing attention to its own construction of a narrative

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3 Introduction: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

[...] 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. [...] When she acts out her confusion between life and the life of fiction, the consequences are tragic and irreversible – except in the realm of fiction. She attempts to use fiction to correct the errors that fiction caused her to commit.

(Finney, 2004, p. 69).

The British-American scholar of English Literature, Brian Finney reads *Atonement* (2001) by British Author, Ian McEwan as a novel concerned with the making of fiction. The novel's protagonist Briony is a writer, who finds it difficult to distinguish between reality and fiction. This causes her to unfairly accuse her sister's boyfriend Robbie of a crime he did not commit. In an act to correct the error she made, she uses fiction to make amends for the damage she caused. I have chosen to take my point of departure for my thesis, in the quote above, for two different reasons. One is that my initial motivation for using *Atonement* as my primary literature was that I wanted to analyse the novel from a postmodern perspective. To read *Atonement* as a novel concerned with the making of fiction, I get to focus on the structure of the narrative and the choices McEwan made in the making of his novel. In other words, I get to explore what is at the very essence of postmodern literature: literature distinguished by dependence on narrative techniques. The second reason I have chosen to take my point of departure in Finney's argument is that his article, "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's 'Atonement'" (2004), seems to function as the focal point of the novel's receptive history. Critics of the novel all refer to Finney's article in the presentation of their own arguments, which makes his article central to the novel's receptive history. In this thesis, Finney's article is utilised as the key article in my own process of creating my argument, which is why I mention and reflect on Finney's arguments in all sections of my thesis.

Finney's argument that *Atonement* is about the making of fiction is interesting, because it opens up to questions about the constructed nature of a narrative. It opens up to both questions on

how McEwan has illustrated this notion in his novel, but also, which techniques he has used in the construction of his narrative. McEwan challenges the notion that a novel should be accessible, easy to read, and digestible. Instead, he challenges his readers and forces them to consider the process of creating a narrative by having Briony reflect on her own process in the epilogue of the novel. In other words, McEwan challenges the general notion that novels should be easy to read and argues for novels that engage the reader.

Postmodern fiction challenges the classic definition of a novel and requires novels that insist on readers, who are active co-creators of meaning and not just passive consumers. We accept that poetry does not communicate its point straightforwardly and we have to work to interpret it, therefore, why should novels not do the same? As readers of postmodern fiction, we get “[...] to interrogate the commonsense and commonplace assumptions about literature which prevail in our culture” (Nicol, 2009, p. xiv), and it invites us to extend our knowledge about literature on a wider scale:

To read postmodern fiction is to be invited to ask: what *is* fiction? What does reading it involve? Why do we read? Why, for that matter, do novelists write? Why do they create innovative, experimental forms rather than just stick to traditional ones?

(Nicol, 2009, p. xiv, emphasis in original).

Postmodern fiction is, thus, a particular mode of writing, which invites readers to reflect on their own reading process, and of the writing process. The postmodern novel makes the reader aware of the constructed nature of its narrative and invites the reader into the process of narration. Bran Nicol argues that identifying postmodern texts is a matter of establishing, which elements in the text are most dominant. In his opinion the most prominent features of postmodern texts are:

- (1) a self-reflexive acknowledgement of a text's own status as constructed, aesthetic artefact
- (2) an implicit (or sometimes explicit) critique of realist approaches both to narrative and to representing a fictional 'world'
- (3) a tendency to draw the reader's attention to his or her own process of interpretation as s/he reads the text

(Nicol, 2009, p. xvi).

Nicol's intent for pointing out these features and for emphasising that they should be dominant in the text is to argue that these features are not just exclusive to postmodern fiction, but can be found in all novels. "The question is really one of degree" (p. xvi), he insists. Additionally, it is important to consider the reason why these dominant features have become more dominant than in, for example, modernist texts, which he believes is due to the particular historical context that the texts appear in (Nicol, 2009, pp. xiii-xvi).

Nicol argues that postmodern literature is interested in a text's fictionality: the condition of being constructed, narrated, and mediated. In other words, the fictional world is always framed and presented to us from the perspective of another (pp. xvi-xvii). Telling a story is not just a recount of events, but also involves both selection and organisation. Texts will, therefore, always appear as manufactured units, because they are subject to some kind of manipulation. A work of fiction will always function as a *perspective* on a story rather than a mimetic representation (pp. 26-28).

Based on Nicol's definitions of postmodern literature, I will analyse *Atonement* from a postmodern perspective, because it acknowledges its own status as a constructed, aesthetic artefact by having Briony reflect on her process of writing her novel. *Atonement* contains all of Nicol's prominent features of a postmodern novel to some degree, which makes me able to analyse these features from a postmodern perspective. As a result of this, I will be able to understand the choices McEwan has made in the making of his novel and how he has manipulated events into creating a particular perspective for the reader.

The aspect that is brought to attention by many reviewers is the self-conscious use of narrative in *Atonement*. This aspect is criticised by a minority of reviewers (mostly British), because they read *Atonement* as a strictly realist novel "[...] that at the end inappropriately resorts to a modish self-referentiality." (Finney, 2004, p. 69). Finney argues that this entails a radical misreading of the novel, because the literary self-consciousness is present from the beginning and serves to undermine the classic realist mode of narration (p. 70). The minority of reviewers, who are "[...] lulled by the long Part One [...] into the security associated with the classic realist novel [...]" (p. 70), Finney argues, fails to recognise the textual codes embedded in the narrative, such as the epigraph from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), and McEwan's allusions or parodying of other traditional literary genres. The difference between a classic realist text and McEwan's is that *Atonement* draws attention to its own status as fiction as discourse (pp. 70-71). I find it interesting that many reviewers (mainly British) fail to acknowledge the use of the self-conscious narrative,

because they want to read the novel as strictly realist. It is possible then, to discuss why McEwan has chosen to wait, until the end of part three, to make the reader aware of the self-conscious voice, despite Finney's argument of this aspect being evident from the beginning of the novel. Additionally, a discussion arises of why McEwan has chosen to use a self-conscious narrative and why he utilises postmodern literary devices in a seemingly realistic narrative. Furthermore, why is it only British reviewers who criticise McEwan's use of a self-conscious narrative and not American reviewers, who give the book the highest praise possible, according to Finney? (2004, p. 69).

My aim with this thesis is to discuss how McEwan has constructed his novel centred on a self-conscious narrative, which I will identify as a postmodern feature. The self-conscious narrative serves to highlight the main theme of the novel: the making of fiction. The novel's part one, two, and three tells the story of Briony, who "[...] sets out to use fiction to attempt to make amends for the damage fiction has induced her to cause in the first place." (Finney, 2004, p. 70). McEwan's concern with the act of narration, illustrated in Briony, therefore, serves as a parallel to his own act of narration. The idea is to analyse the choices that McEwan has made in the making of his novel, which will be identified as postmodern features. To isolate the postmodern features of *Atonement* – those that concern the making of fiction – I have decided to focus on the themes, strategies, and literary devices, which McEwan implements in his novel, both explicitly and implicitly. By focusing on these, I get to analyse the choices McEwan made in the making of his novel, in order to understand why McEwan utilises a self-conscious narrative and why he waits until the end of part three to let the reader know.

In my discussion, I will focus on literary devices such as metafiction, intertextuality, narrative strategies, and author control. In order to discuss these, I will consider the novel's ontological levels of control and authority. Briony is portrayed as a naïve 13-year-old girl, but it is important to remember that the narrator has the experience of a lifetime, which underlines my premise that even realist narratives are constructed and will only serve as a particular *perspective* on the story. I will discuss both the intertextual references in the novel and the metafictional perspective on the narrative, because these serve as the backdrop to the choices McEwan has made in relation to a postmodern discourse, and in relation to how he portrays the constructed nature of a narrative. For instance, "[...] by referring within the text to an earlier literary genre or movement, McEwan draws attention to a continuous tension between the narrative and its narration." (Finney, 2004, p. 72). McEwan, therefore, draws attention to his text as a discourse rather than a story,

emphasising his construction of the narrative (p. 72). Additionally, he implements a historical aspect to the narrative, which again underlines the constructed nature of fiction. The novel will be read as a historiographic metafictional novel, because it reflects on its own mimetic implications with the past, by seeing history as an entity that only can be represented through a narrative construction from the point of view of the present. 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. A discussion will, therefore, be made on how the historical aspect is represented in Briony's novel.

While I read *Atonement* as a novel, which is concerned with the making of fiction, I also accept that the novel should not be read as strictly realist, but should be identified as discourse. In my discussion, I will, therefore, focus on the features of the novel that underlines the choices that McEwan has made in the construction of the novel and, therefore, read the novel from a postmodern perspective, because of the particular choices he has made in the act of his narration.

3.1 Topic of Research

In this thesis, I consider Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) a work of fiction concerned with the making of fiction. The structure of the novel is interesting, because McEwan has chosen to let the first three parts resemble a classic realist novel, and only lets the reader know, at the end of part three, that it is in fact the novel's protagonist Briony, who has written the previous three parts. My topic of research will, therefore, focus on the postmodern features of *Atonement* that underlines the theme of the novel: the making of fiction. I will analyse and interpret the novel focusing on the themes, narrative strategies, and literary devices that is implemented, in order to understand how McEwan utilises a metafictional aspect on the concept that novels are constructed artefacts.

3.2 Research Method

My method of research is to analyse the novel by focusing on the themes, strategies, and literary devices utilised in the novel. I intend to work my way through my focus points systematically as I, then, get to have a structured thesis that will take its point of departure in the simple questions of

research, and advance to the complex questions of research. In every discussion, I will use secondary literature to build up my argument and, additionally, I will contribute with my own opinions or arguments, which will enhance my level of abstraction for the subject in question. I may use the same arguments from the secondary literature in several sections of the thesis; however, this is a method for me to look at the arguments from several perspectives. My aim is to take my point of departure with a wide perspective and end up with a conclusions that not only ties it all together, but also opens up to more questions that instigates more research on the topic in question. For the most part, my thesis will focus on discussions rather than arguments, as I, then, get to examine the individual points from different perspectives.

3.3 Structure of the Thesis

My thesis will consist of four sections that each will provide a different perspective on the themes, narrative strategies, and literary devices, which McEwan has utilised in the construction of his novel. The concept of the structure of this thesis is to take a point of departure in the simple questions and move on to complex questions, which will present a higher level of abstraction.

In **section 3, The Form of the Novel: Narrative Strategies Applied in *Atonement***, I outline the formalistic structure of the novel by discussing the narrative strategies that have been utilised in the novel. Additionally, I discuss the novel's receptive history: how the novel has been read and the reasons for these readings.

In **section 4, Intertextuality: A Requirement of Literary Knowledge**, I analyse McEwan's fundament for his construction of the novel. This section provides an outline of the different intertextual references in the novel, both explicitly and implicitly, and the effect that they have on both the text, and on the reader of the novel.

In **section 5, The Historical Novel: A Metafictional Perspective**, I analyse Briony's fundament for the construction of her novel, by exploring the different choices she has made: how she has both implemented historical facts and recreated her own life history. In addition, this section provides a discussion on McEwan's use of a metafictional perspective in his narrative and how this underlines the historical aspect of the novel.

In **section 6, Authorial Control: An Ontological Discussion on the Power of the Author**, I analyse the three consecutive ontological levels of control and authority in the narrative and attempts to understand the power of the author. This section serves to merge all the previous arguments together, in order to understand the theme of the novel: the making of fiction.

In **section 7**, I conclude on the different findings in the consecutive four sections of the thesis, I give a literary perspective on the novel, and I suggest topics for further research related to the conclusions given in the thesis.

4 The Form of the Novel: Narrative Strategies Applied in *Atonement*

In Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), different narrative strategies are represented. Commentators on the novel have discussed the genre, in which the novel belongs to, because of its self-conscious references, the 'Englishness' of its setting, and its postmodern conclusion. The novel, therefore, seems to point in different directions. This section of the thesis will focus on the formalistic structure of the novel and will include discussions of the contradictory discourses that the novel draws on. These objectives are achieved by comparing the readings of different critics, and comparing these with my own take on the narrative style of the novel. The idea is to create an outline of the novel's structure and the narrative strategies that are used in the final draft of the novel. Additionally, I will discuss the different ways in which the novel has been read and the reasons behind these different readings.

This section of the thesis will give a formalistic analysis of the structure of the novel in order to understand how the novel has been read and to create an outline of the different contexts and criticisms that the novel has been associated with since its publication. This section of the thesis will, therefore, provide the preliminary work for discussions of the postmodern themes and strategies applied in the novel. The aim of this chapter is to understand how the novel has been received in terms of its formalistic structure, which will lead to discussions on the choices McEwan made when making the novel and the themes he included.

My premise is that the novel is about the making of fiction. In other words, how novels are constructed by a particular plot structure that serves to achieve a specific effect. This is a postmodern technique, which is why this section of the novel includes a discussion on how the novel has been read and a discussion on the different strategies used in the creation of the novel. My aim, with this section, is to understand how McEwan created his novel in addition to understanding how Briony created her novel, within McEwan's novel. Additionally, the goal is to come to an understanding of why both McEwan and Briony have chosen to construct their novels in these specific ways and which effect they achieve. This section of the thesis will serve as my foundation for understanding *Atonement* in a postmodern perspective and will act as a section in which the next three sections of the thesis originate their arguments from. Fundamentally, this section seeks to give an overall account on my perspective of the novel and will act as my point of departure for

understanding the constructed nature of the novel, and the choices McEwan have implemented in his construction of the novel.

4.1 Sections in the Novel: The Outer Structure

Atonement is divided into three main parts followed by an epilogue. Part one of the novel takes up almost half of the book, while part two, three, and the epilogue share the rest of the novel's space. Ahead of part one, an epigraph is included with a quote from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817). At the beginning of the book, McEwan has included a dedication: "To Annalena", which refers to his wife, and at the end of the book, he has included an acknowledgement section, where he thanks the people, who have helped him with inspiration and encouragement in writing the novel.

Part one of the novel takes place in 1935 in a country home in England. Here we are introduced to Briony, who at the age of thirteen already is committed to a life as a writer. The events of part one take place over the course of a single day and are narrated by an omniscient narrator. At the end of part one, Briony misinterprets a situation causing her to interpret her sister Cecilia's love interest, Robbie, as a "maniac". Eventually, this leads her to accuse him for the rape of her cousin Lola. In part two of the novel, several years have passed and the story is now set in the Dunkirk retreat and in London during World War II. Here we follow the points of view of Robbie and Cecilia. Robbie has just been released from prison under the condition that he enlists in the army. Cecilia is now a nurse and has cut off all contact with her family. In part three, we follow Briony as a trainee nurse in a hospital in London, several years after the events in part one. She is still writing, but is now a more responsible writer, than when she was younger. She has realised that to accuse Robbie as the rapist was a mistake and she now knows that it was in fact Marshall, her brother's friend, whom she saw raping her cousin several years ago. After attending the wedding of Marshall and Lola, Briony meets up with Cecilia and Robbie and learns that they have not yet forgiven her. Part three ends with the signature: "BT London 1999" (McEwan, 2001, p. 349), which reveals that Briony Tallis is the author of the novel. The epilogue titled "London, 1999" (p. 351) is written from Briony's perspective, as a 77 year-old woman. In the epilogue, we are told that Briony is the 'author' of the preceding three parts, in which she has changed particular events in order to acquire atonement for the damage she caused as a child. Briony explains why she has chosen to

give Cecilia and Robbie a happy conclusion, even though they died before they were reunited again. She wanted to give them their happiness by granting them a life together – at least in her novel, since they were robbed of that in real life. Briony, thus, uses fiction to correct the damage fiction caused her to generate in the first place.

The description of the outer structure of the novel serves to underline the different ontological levels of authority in the construction of the book. The following discussions will, therefore, be structured around the premise that there is a hierarchy of voices in the novel

4.2 Use of Different Narrative Strategies: Part One, Two, and Three

At first glance, the novel has a simple structure of three main parts and a shorter fourth part. Each of these sections represents different narrative styles that emphasise Briony's role as the author. I will discuss the style of each of the parts and comment on the effect the difference in style have on how the novel has been read. The narrative strategy used in each of the three parts will, therefore, automatically have a connection with whether to regard the novel a realistic, modern, or postmodern work of literature. I will, therefore, include a discussion on whether to regard the novel realistic, modern, postmodern, or a fusion of the three modes of writing. The idea is not to come to any conclusion as to which genre the novel should belong to, but to discuss the different narrative strategies McEwan uses in order to bring forward respectively realistic, modern, and postmodern modes of writing. Additionally, a discussion will be included on how the narrative style of each of the parts emphasise Briony's role as the narrator and creator of the plot in part one, two, and three.

In my discussion, I will focus on respectively realistic, modern, and postmodern modes of writing. The definitions of all three would be too extensive to explain here, which is why I will focus on particular understandings of the three. Realism will be regarded as the kind found in Jane Austen's novels. McEwan is quoted to have said that *Atonement* is his Jane Austen novel (Giles, 2002), which is why it must be presumed that the realistic mode of writing he uses is one similar to that of Jane Austen. Realism is defined as a mode of writing, which must be able to disguise its status as fiction and appear plausible to the reader, and the characters should seem to have lives independent of the text itself. This is achieved by having the author and reader share the same codes of the real, which will automatically make the text, draw the reader in (Eagleton, 2005, pp. 94-95).

Modernism will be regarded as the kind found in Virginia Woolf's novels. *Atonement* makes intertextual references to Woolf's works of fiction, in particular *The Waves* (1925), and Briony's editor explicitly tells her not to rely on modernist techniques (McEwan. 2001, p. 320). A modern mode of writing attempts to disrupt the linear flow of narrative and has a focus on what is going on inside the characters: "What is important is not just what is not said, but how it is not said." (Eagleton, 2005, p. 320). It is possible then, to imagine that McEwan thought of Woolf's characteristic form of writing when he sought to draw on a particular modernist discourse. What is distinctive is that both realism and modernism has a desire to represent something (with a slightly different degree in mimetic representation). Postmodernism, on the other hand, attacks the mimetic representation and deconstructs it. Postmodernism is regarded as a mode of writing that celebrates its status as fiction and self-consciously reflects on itself as a literary artefact. Unlike realist fiction, it invites the reader to actively participate in achieving meaning of the text and does not acquire the reader to share the same code of literary understanding. What the three modes of writing have in common is that they all draw from a set of discourses. The difference is, which discourses they draw from and which discourses the readers should decode when reading.

In his article "Briony's Stand against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" (2004), Brian Finney identifies the novel as being about the writing and making of fiction. What he means is that he not only notices the main character Briony's need for writing fiction and making every event around her into a narrative, he also observes a distinctive metafictional element in the novel (p. 69). By the time the reader reaches the end of part three, it is revealed that the preceding three parts have been written by Briony, made evident by her initials, location, and date: "BT London 1999" (McEwan, 2001, p. 349). With this revelation, it follows that the preceding three parts have to be re-assessed, because the narrative has been influenced by Briony's perspective and her imagination. The metafictional element is evident once the reader discovers that the narrative is highly subjective as it is presented from the mind of an unreliable narrator: "Through Briony, McEwan alerts the readers to not trust the author (be that him or Briony) as well as warning of the dangers of the literary imagination." (Ellam, 2009, p. 23). Therefore, Readers are made aware that what they have read is nothing more than a fictionalised reality, which is delivered by a fictional character: Briony (p. 23).

Finney does not comment on why readers have to wait until the end of part three to learn that Briony is the author of the preceding three parts; however, I consider this an important

discussion. I think that McEwan's choice to wait until the end of part three, to let his readers know that he deliberately has made Briony the author, is connected with the choice to use different modes of writing in the three parts. By waiting, he takes advantage of the effects that the different narrative strategies can have on readers and he builds up anticipation. As a result of this, McEwan constructs his narrative to go in one direction, however ultimately it goes in another direction, which has a more shocking effect than if the reader had known all along that it was Briony's novel they were reading. By implementing both a realist and a modern narrative in the story, McEwan creates a mimetic universe, in which the characters is presented as plausible, and by deploying both literary and ideological conventions, he achieves an effect of verisimilitude. The use of an omniscient narrator, who has access to the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motivations, is a formalised convention, which produces depth and therefore, has the effect of verisimilitude and plausibility. McEwan's choice to wait until the end of part three, to make the revelation, makes him construct a truthful narrative, which he then destroys by implementing a postmodern narrative that attacks the mimetic frame and deconstructs it.

In the article "Postmodernism and the Ethics of Fiction in *Atonement*" (2009), Alistair Cormack identifies *Atonement* as a novel that passes through both modernism and postmodernism and eventually arrives back to a more traditional realist form. He identifies part one of the novel to embody modernist poetics, because it lacks omniscient narration, which is identified with how each chapter is focalised through the consciousness of one character (except chapter five, which is shared by the two characters of Marshall and Lola). The narration of the novel is driven by senses and individual perception, which is one of the characteristics of a form of modernist writing.¹ This is especially seen in chapter six, where we follow Emily Tallis' thoughts. Cormack argues that her attentiveness to every creak of the house and her offering of a partial interpretation to every sense and smell she encounters is "[...] designed to flaunt a novelistic discourse settled on the cornerstones of modernism [...]" (Cormack, 2009, p. 73):

Emily [...] seemed to drift away then, not quite into sleep, but out of thought into invalid nullity, and many minutes passed until she heard in the hallway outside her bedroom footfalls on the stairs, and by the muffled sound of them thought they must be barefoot and therefore Briony's.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 66).

¹ The form of modernist writing that is thought of here is that of Virginia Woolf, for example in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).

Cormack especially identifies this scene, with Emily Tallis as the narrator, because it uses a modernist mode of writing that is reminiscent of the narrative style applied in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Emily Tallis has a hypersensitive consciousness, which makes her concerned about every social event that takes shape around her, and she seems to be attentive to everything going on around her, which are traits similar to those of Mrs Dalloway. By having Mrs Tallis directly imitate Mrs Dalloway, McEwan explicitly makes the reader aware of the modernist mode of writing used (Cormack, 2009, p. 73).

While Cormack highlights the specific chapter, where we follow Emily Tallis' thoughts, as particularly reminiscent of a modernist mode of writing, it is important to note that every other chapter in part one also embody modernist techniques. Briony's point of view also embodies a narrative mode, such as stream-of-consciousness, which is explicitly pointed out in the novel. This is evident, in part three, when Briony discusses the specific strategies she used when she wrote her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*: "Did she really think she could hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and drown her guilt in a stream – three streams! – of consciousness?" (McEwan, 2001, p. 320). With the knowledge that Briony is the author of the novel, it is evident that Briony, the writer, draws from a particular modernist discursive strategy, in this lengthy part one of the novel, to achieve a particular effect. She wants to be reminiscent of Virginia Woolf and have the opportunity to enter the minds of key figures – getting every perspective of the story on script. As the scenes shift between focal characters' points of view the pace is slowed down and it allows the story to slowly build towards Robbie's arrest at the end of part one. With the use of the fictional character Cyril Connolly, McEwan allows the metafictional element to become known by having the editor tell Briony not to lean so much on modernist techniques (McEwan, 2001, p. 312). McEwan implicitly tells the reader that this particular narrative style has been chosen in order to achieve a particular effect by having Briony display each of the focal character's perspectives in her act of atonement (Ellam, 2009, pp. 24-25).

Cormack's argument is potentially supported by the fact that it is explicitly told in the narrative that Briony relies on modernist techniques; however, I think it is important to note how Briony only uses a form of the stream-of-consciousness technique. It is written in the third person, which makes it impossible for her to use the exact technique of stream-of-consciousness. She does, however, use the stream-of-consciousness technique to an extent, as her narration focuses on the individual perception of the characters and the events around the characters. In other words, she uses a degree

of the technique that could be characterised as psycho-narration. Instead of having the consciousness of the character be narrated by him or her, it is instead narrated by a third person. The narration of the character's consciousness is, therefore, narrated in the language of the third person instead of the mental language of the character. Briony uses this technique to act in the place of other characters.

Brian Finney also notices a change in the narrative style from part one to part three. He argues that McEwan uses a modernist mode of writing in part one, because he wants to realistically portray the period, in which the story is set. However, he also argues that the narrative style of the novel is influenced by a modernist mode of writing in all of the three parts. This is evident in part three of the novel, where McEwan internally in the text makes the reader aware of its modernist influences by having Briony read Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* in-between her nursing shifts at the hospital (Finney, 2004, p. 72): "She had read Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* three times [...]" (McEwan, 2001, p. 282). In part two of the novel, McEwan has chosen to write in a style reminiscent of Hemingway, which Finney determines is because choppy and shorter, simple sentences portray the battlefield well; subordinate clauses do not illustrate life near the battlefield as well and that is why the sentences mainly consist of main clauses. In her book *Ian McEwan's Atonement: A Reader's Guide* (2009), Julie Ellam also identifies the style in part two as portraying the disorder of the situation. She notices that, unlike part one, part two does not have any chapter divisions, which she considers a way to enhance "[...] the eventual chaos of Robbie's thoughts." (p. 27). Thus, the particular style is applied to illustrate the current situation: the fragmentation of civilisation in the midst of war and the breakdown of Robbie as he attempts to survive a wound in his stomach (pp. 27-29). In part three of the novel, the narrative style is contemporary, which Finney identifies as a way to use a voice that is self-conscious and self-aware of its own act of narration (Finney, 2004, p. 74).

Cormack's reading of the novel does not concentrate on part two and focuses more on part one and three. He considers part three as postmodern. He claims that it is first at this stage in the reading of the novel that the reader realises they have been duped, because what they have just read is only a narration of Briony's. The epilogue, he believes, thus, functions as a deepening of what have already been realised in part three; at this point, Briony addresses the reader in the first person for the first time:

We are forced to return to the scene at the fountain – indeed to the whole first section – and regard it as pastiche: what we read in good faith in the first section as a Woolf-like modernism [...] we must now regard as an imitation [...] of one character's own modernist reconstruction of the event [...].

(Cormack, 2009, p. 75).

Though Cormack characterises the narrative style in both part three and the epilogue as postmodern, he also recognises that this form of postmodernism is not the playful and celebratory type, which often characterises works in this mode of writing. Rather he identifies the postmodern elements in the self-reflexiveness, which is evident in the epilogue where the notion of an independent reality is challenged (Cormack, 2009, p. 76). It is noteworthy that Cormack, in the quote above, mentions both 'pastiche' and 'imitation'. By concluding that readers are forced to regard part one as pastiche, at the end of part three, he indicates that Briony not only tries to imitate past events through her rewriting, she also has a particular attitude towards the written. Cormack's observation is potently supported by the fact that Briony wants more than just retell a story. She wants to make amends for her mistake and warn readers against the powers of fiction. The revelation at the end of part three, therefore, also functions as a way to make the reader rethink what they have read in the preceding parts and reevaluate their observations and evaluations. The discussion of why McEwan has chosen to wait until the end of part three to reveal Briony's role in the narration of the story is, therefore, also a way to make the reader reassess the mimetic structure in part one. Therefore, the reader is forced to consider the work's status as an artefact.

Additionally, Ellam also notices a devoid in chapter divisions in part three, which again is in sharp contrast with part one. The decision to avoid chapters can be seen as a method to enhance the contemporary voice and to illustrate the contemporary discursive narrative style being drawn on, in this chapter. As Cormack also notices, Ellam identifies part three of the novel to be where the reader is made aware "[...] that this is a fiction moulded by a writer for another writer." (Ellam, 2009, p. 30), which is made evident in the reply from *Horizon's* editor, Cyril Connolly² (McEwan, 2001, pp. 311-315). Cyril Connolly's commentaries on Briony's drafts function as a way to illustrate how Briony's narrative is constructed.

² Cyril Connolly was in real life the editor of the influential literary magazine *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art* from 1940 to 1949 and he made it into a platform for both distinguished and emergent writers at the time. He is, therefore, a fictionalised character in Briony's novel.

The comparisons of each of the readings in this discussion indicate how the novel can be read in several different ways and the narrative style used can be interpreted in different ways. Cormack identifies the traces of different narrative styles in each of the three parts as a way of reflecting the different stages of the three parts. He considers the choice to use different modes of writing as a method to reflect on the different settings portrayed in each of the three parts and is actually just a way for McEwan to write a novel that is realistic (Cormack, 2009, p. 70). Finney, on the other hand, identifies the different narrative styles in the novel as a way of alerting the reader of the status of the text as a literary artefact. He argues that McEwan uses the different narrative styles in the novel to make the reader aware that this novel is not just about the making of fiction, but the story itself also has a metafictional view on the making of fiction (Finney, 2004, p. 74). Ellam's focus is on Briony as an author and views her authorship as a method to make sense of the difference in narrative styles that is applied in each of the sections. For her, the story only makes sense once you are aware that a fictionalised character tells the story, because then you will be able to see why each narrative style has been used in each of the parts. The final section, set in 1999, gives Briony a direct voice to gain the sympathy of the readers and to assert her power for the last time: "[The final section] deconstructs all that has gone before and because of this it is also the most crucial of sections." (Ellam, 2009, p. 31). In other words, Ellam sees the final section of the novel as the one that makes all the other sections make sense in terms of the discursive strategies that have been drawn from (pp. 24-31).

This discussion has outlined how the novel has been received in terms of the difference in narrative style applied in each part of the novel. The idea has been to identify different modes of writing used in the different sections of the novel and discuss why these modes of writing have been chosen and the effect they have on the reading of the novel. Realistic, modern, and postmodern narrative styles have been identified in the novel, which points the novel in different directions in terms of which genre the novel should belong to. Most commentators and reviewers of the novel identify it as postmodern; however, some regard it as realist because it draws the reader in from the beginning.³

In the next two chapters, I will discuss how the novel can be perceived as respectively anti-postmodern and postmodern with the intention of discussing how the novel can be perceived in

³ This is a particular understanding of realism, as seen in specifically Jane Austen's novels, for example *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).

terms of genre. The idea is not to come to some definite conclusion as to which genre the novel belongs to but to give an outline of how the novel has been perceived and how you can read the choice to use different modes of writing in a novel.

4.2.1 An Anti-Postmodern Reading of the Novel

Several commentators and critics consider *Atonement* a realist novel, because they regard the novel's narrative to take place in a realistic framework where the reader becomes engaged in the immediacies of the depicted events and, therefore, view the narrative as plausible in the setting created. The commentators, who regard the novel as realist, have, in Finney's opinion, read the novel's ending to be an instance of "postmodern gimmickry" (Finney, 2004, p. 70). In this chapter, I will discuss an 'anti-postmodern' reading of the novel and discuss why critics have read the novel this way. The idea is to discuss how the novel can be read in different ways and the reasons for this.

Finney argues that the novel is concerned with the making of fiction and the implications that this has: "[...] the dangers of entering a fictional world and the compensations and limitations which that world can offer its readers and writers." (Finney, 2004, p. 69). While Finney evaluates the ending to be indispensable to the story, Kathleen D'Angelo argues that the ending can be read as "[...] an abrupt rendering of a straightforward realistic narrative [...]" (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 88). In her article "'To Make a Novel': The Construction of a Critical Readership in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" (2009), she comments on Finney's reading and criticises him for not taking into account that Briony is a fictionalised character in a fictionalised narrative. She argues that by making a fictionalised character (Briony) the author of the fictionalised narrative, the novel also has another narrative aspect that should be explored. In this sense, the novel is not only about the making of fiction, but also about the *reading* of fiction, which makes the author-reader experience in the novel a crucial theme (pp. 88-89). What D'Angelo argues is that in line with how the novel explores a theme such as the making of fiction, it also explores the theme of how fiction is read and the options that the author has of manipulating its readers into believing a fictionalised narrative. In this sense, the novel can also be read in a realistic framework where the author-reader experience is explored.

Cormack's reading of the novel alludes to the conclusion that the novel draws on both modern and postmodern discourses, however, he eventually reads the novel as anti-postmodern and

arguess instead that it overall belongs to the “[...] ‘Great Tradition’ of English novelists.” (Cormack, 2009, p. 79). Cormack, therefore, considers the novel (and also Ian McEwan) to belong with the group of English novelists, who F. R. Leavis considered in his book *The Great Tradition* (1948) to be the best authors in English literature. The list includes Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence and they were characterised as having a serious and responsible attitude towards moral complexity of life. D. H. Lawrence was not included in the original list but was added later, because F. R. Leavis believed that the list could evolve over time (Day, 2009). As Cormack considers *Atonement* to belong to the canonical “great tradition” of English novelists he regards it as a novel, which has been influenced by other great novelists but have eventually found its own voice, making it significant in the midst of all English literature. Additionally, as the original list reveals, the great tradition of English novelists wrote with respectively realist and modernist modes of writing, which underlines the statement that Cormack considers *Atonement* to belong with this tradition. He reads the novel as a traditional realist or modernist novel, which is most evident in the novel’s epilogue where, as Cormack argues, the novel’s self-consciousness is most explicit. Cormack argues, that for the novel to be postmodern readers have to be doubtful about what really happened. Cormack argues that the act of explaining explicitly in the text that the narrative is only a fictionalised reality of what really happened and that Cecilia and Robbie are in fact dead makes the novel anti-postmodern. Additionally, he argues that even though the novel is playful about the writing of fiction the fact that the connection between fiction and reality is explained in the end, also makes it anti-postmodern: “By referring to Austen, the novel implicitly attacks postmodern novelists and their celebration of the fictive. [...] Against the dangers of relativism and self-delusion implicit in postmodern poetics *Atonement* pits a tradition of English empiricism.” (p. 82). The novel’s epigraph, a quote from Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, therefore, functions as a way to alert the reader of the status of the novel – that it should be read as realistic, like Jane Austen’s other novels.

Cormack argues that by using characteristics from both postmodern, modern and realist modes of writing, McEwan overall has written a novel that belongs to the genre of traditional realist fiction. Readers are presented with a scenario in which they are overtly confident about ‘what really happened’ – just like in a Jane Austen novel, where everything is explained in detail and no one is in doubt of what is happening. Jane Austen was particularly great at having an omniscient narrator explain character traits first, and then afterwards having the characters carry out what had been explained, seen in for example *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). In that way, the reader is in no doubt of

the characters' personalities, because they see them act out what is explicitly told by the narrator. Cormack's argument is that even though modernist and postmodernist narrative styles are used in the construction of the novel it overall belongs to the category of traditional realist fiction. His reading of the novel argues that the novel is a story about what happens when fiction is presented as a lie – "[...] a lie that, if believed, comforts, distorts and finally produces unethical action." (Cormack, 2009, p. 81). He argues that while many will read the ending, where Briony explicitly explains that the novel is only a fictionalised reality, as a metafictional view on the story as a whole, it is in fact only part of the storyline of what happens when fiction is presented as a lie. To consider the epilogue as a metafictional perspective, will be a misreading of a novel that should only be considered a story of how lives change when events are misunderstood and presented as a lie (pp. 81-82).

Both Cormack and D'Angelo thus argue that the novel can be read as realistic if you consider the epilogue as part of the storyline and, therefore, only see it as a method for McEwan to illustrate what happens when fiction is presented as a lie and how authors have the ability to manipulate readers into obtaining a particular response. I believe it is possible to read the novel in this manner, because it depends on which codes the reader chooses to follow in the reading of the novel. If the reader chooses to read the novel's codes as realistic, then the novel will also automatically be read as realistic.

4.2.2 A Postmodern Reading of the Novel

Many commentators and critics place the novel in the category of postmodern literature, because they consider the novel's epilogue, where Briony explicitly explains that she is the author of the story, as a metafictional point of view on the story as a whole. The critics who consider the novel postmodern regard the novel's epilogue as an abrupt turn from a considerably straightforward realistic rendition of a narrative to a metafictional perspective on the narrative as a whole. I will in this chapter examine different postmodern readings of the novel and consider why and how they regard the novel as postmodern. The aim is to discuss how the novel can be read in different ways – both as anti-postmodern, which has been discussed in the previous chapter, and as postmodern, which will be discussed in this chapter.

Brian Finney considers the novel postmodern. He criticises reviewers of the novel, who acknowledges the novel's ending as "[...] an instance of postmodern gimmickry." (Finney, 2004, p. 70). The reviewers who read the novel's part one as a realistic narration and faults McEwan for not living up to the expectations that are given in the first half of the book, when the book's epilogue is reached, Finney considers to be people who have misread the novel. He argues that the novel, already at the beginning, warns the reader against reading the novel as strictly realistic by including the epigraph, a quote from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: "The novel's epigraph [...] serves as both a warning and a guide to how the reader should view this narrative." (p. 70). The protagonist in Austen's novel, Catherine Morland is reprimanded by Henry Tilney for being naïve about the events happening around her and is the victim of fiction by not distinguishing between the real and the fictive. Finney argues that McEwan begins with this exact quote to either warn or guide the reader into considering Briony the same way as Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. The intend is not to be drawn into the realistic narrative in the beginning but to be aware of moments in the text, where Briony could carry out actions, which could apply fittingly to the actions of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Finney suggests that readers are already at the beginning of the novel made aware that the events are fictionalised and they should, therefore, not be surprised when, at the end of part three, it is revealed that Briony is the author of the story (pp. 69-70).

I also think that the quote from *Northanger Abbey* serves another purpose. Austen wrote the novel as a parody of gothic novels, which also makes the choice to start with a quote from this particular novel a means to guide the reader into considering *Atonement* a parody as well. *Northanger Abbey* is a realistic novel in that it ridicules and dismantles another mode of writing (the gothic mode of writing). The epigraph not only serves to guide the reader to view the narrative as one that does not distinguish between fiction and reality, it also serves to guide the reader into considering the novel as one that dismantles conventions. While it presents itself as realistic, it actually dismantles the way that realistic fiction is written.

Finney argues that the point of the novel is that we from the beginning of the novel are confronted with a literary self-consciousness that undermines the classic realist mode of narration. The reviewers who read the novel as classic realist chose to disregard how Briony is actually represented in the novel – she is represented as an author instead of a 13-year-old girl. The novel opens with a description of a play and ironically not with a description of Briony as a person. This signifies that we are met with "[...] an instance of Briony's literary imagination before we get to

know her as a person. She is an author first and a girl on the verge of entering adolescence second.” (Finney, 2004, p. 70). In other words, we are presented with a scenario in which a young girl likes to imagine and make up stories. The narrative focuses on Briony as an author and we are told that this is to be her profession, later in her adult life:

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

(McEwan, 2001, p. 41).

Finney argues that to present Briony as an author rather than a 13-year-old girl, combined with how the story's epigraph indicates a misinterpretation between the real and the fictive, the story presents itself with a literary self-consciousness. Finney argues that the literary self-consciousness is present from the first page and should be seen as a way for McEwan to present what he expressed in an interview with *The Paris Review*'s Adam Begley: “I sometimes feel that every sentence contains a ghostly commentary on its own processes.” (Begley, 2002).

Julie Ellam also argues that from the epigraph and onwards, the novel warns the reader of the dangers of the literary imagination: “As well as being an encrypted warning against being drawn into the realistic narrative in Part One, it is also a playful and unsettling interpretation of how the fantasist, that is the writer, has the power to order lives.” (Ellam, 2009, p. 32). Ellam's reading of the novel, thus, focuses on how Briony has the power to do with her characters, which are in fact her family members, as she likes through the endless rules of literature. Ellam argues that by representing Briony as a writer – a fact that we are never able to forget as it is referred to many times throughout the novel – we are automatically made aware of the powers of writers. Ellam argues that the doubt that comes with Briony's authenticity throughout the novel is made more explicit in the novel's epilogue:

The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In

her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 371).

While Briony pleads for an understanding of her actions, she also flaunts the privilege, which the role of being a writer has given her. She not only attempts to atone for her sin, but she also establishes control over the people in her life by making them into literary characters. Ellam's reading of the text, thus, suggests that McEwan has drawn on a literary postmodern discourse because of how Briony is represented as a literary imager and fantasist. Both Finney and Ellam read the novel as postmodern because they consider the way that the protagonist Briony is represented. She is represented as an author first and a 13-year-old girl second, which means that every description of her evolves around her need for being in control and having the power to create particular narratives.

I consider the novel postmodern as well. By implementing different narrative strategies is exactly what makes it postmodern as it not only draws from the effects that the different modes of writing have but it also dismantles the conventions of the different modes of writing by including a self-conscious narrative. I agree with Finney that by presenting Briony as a writer instead of a 13 year-old-girl the story is at the beginning presented with a self-consciousness. Especially since the quote from *Northanger Abbey* has been included, which reveals a major theme in the novel: distinguishing between the fictive and the real. I also agree with Ellam's assertion of the novel, in that Briony flaunts her privilege in being an author – she has the power to order lives, which I think is a major theme in the novel: authorial control. The novel is therefore about the making of fiction and how fiction can control, since it is difficult to distinguish between the fictive and the real in a realistic narrative.

4.2.3 A Fusion of Different Narrative Strategies: Realist, Modern, and Postmodern

As concluded in the previous two chapters, *Atonement* can and have been read in several different ways. Some reviewers and critics credit the book as modern or realist, while others credit it as postmodern. The question is whether you can actually claim that the novel belongs to either one or the other mode of writing. As established in the discussions above, the novel moves through both

realist, modern and postmodern narrative strategies, which makes it difficult to give the novel a label as one of them. The novel's structure of being divided into different sections that each use a different mode of writing creates an ambiguity in whether to identify the novel as either the one or the other. Critics of the book, such as Cormack, D'Angelo, Finney and Ellam each give their arguments on how the book should be read and which indications that speaks for reading it one way or the other. Both Cormack and D'Angelo identify the novel as classic realist, with the use of techniques from both modern and postmodern modes of writing. They read the narrative of Briony revealing that she is in fact the author of the story, as part of the plot of what happens when fiction is presented as a lie. Finney and Ellam on the other hand read this as a sub-narrative that gives a metafictional perspective on the story as a whole and, thus, the narrative is presented as a method to illustrate the power that an author has in the making of fiction that may seem real but is in fact presented as a lie.

While the novel can be read in several different ways it is clear that several different modes of writing have been used in making the novel, which I think is a reflection on how the novel essentially becomes a textual practice in trying to convey a message. The idea of using several different narrative strategies is to demonstrate the ways in which you can convey a message through literature, which I think illustrates the main theme in the novel: how Briony through literature attempts to atone for the damage she causes as a child. She uses literature to create an alternative reality in order to make up for her mistake, which is something McEwan attempts to illustrate by using different modes of writing. Through literature he attempts to convey the effect that literature has – it may be presented as reality but it is important to remember how fiction will always have a certain angle that attempts to convey a message and will, therefore, always be presented as a form of lie.

4.3 Section Recapitulation: Analytical Framework of the Thesis

This section of the thesis has served as my analytical framework for understanding *Atonement* in a postmodern literary perspective. My point of departure has been postmodern theory and I have with this section established how the novel can be read. The novel can be read as either postmodern or anti-postmodern and I have concluded that it can be read as either one or the other depending on how you read the textual codes embedded in the text. I argue that the novel should be read as

postmodern because of McEwan's choice to include both realist, modern, and postmodern modes of writing. To apply several different narrative strategies in the construction of the book, McEwan underlines the constructed nature of the novel.

With this section, I have my analytical framework for the rest of the thesis. I have chosen to read the novel as postmodern, because I acknowledge that McEwan uses postmodern techniques in the construction of the novel. I have chosen not to elaborate further on the anti-postmodern reading of the novel, because this reading will not underline my premise of how novels are all constructed. The next three sections of the thesis will originate from this chapter and will explore the ontological levels embedded in the novel's framework. The focus will be on the techniques that McEwan uses in the construction of his novel and my argument will be that these originate from a postmodern discourse.

5 Intertextuality: A Requirement of Literary Knowledge

Intertextual references are made in a text when the text either explicitly refers to other works of fiction or if the structure, mode of writing, genre etc. implicitly refers to other works of fiction. *Atonement* contains both explicit and implicit intertextual references and this section of the thesis seeks to give an outline of the intertextual references in the novel. Additionally, I will discuss the effect that the references have on readings of the novel and the affect that they have on the reader of the novel. These objectives are sought achieved by uncovering important concepts in the study of intertextuality and clarifying on the effect that these have in a text, such as a novel. Additionally, I will discuss on which intertextual references McEwan made in the text and how these enable the reader to find meaning in the text. The third chapter provides a discussion on how the intertextual references create an implied and critical reader of the text.

My aim with this section of the thesis is to understand McEwan's point of departure in his creation of the novel. This argument is based upon an understanding in postmodern theory that works of fiction draw on discourses to give meaning to a text. Thus, works of fiction do not derive from nothing, but is established by already existent literary codes and systems, which derive from previous works of fiction. My presupposition is, therefore, that intertextual references are implemented in *Atonement*, to let McEwan construct his text in a way that conveys a particular meaning influenced by already existent works of literature.

5.1 Intertextual References: A Web of Literary Codes and Systems

Works of fiction are assembled from sets of literary codes and systems established by other works of fiction through time. These sets of codes and systems are crucial to finding meaning in literary works of fiction. In other words, literary texts lack in independent meaning as they depend on other texts in order to become meaningful. Theorists argue that in the act of reading you are guided into a web of intertextual references. To discover the meaning of the text you are reading, you must trace these references and figure out the relations between them and the text you are reading: "Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts." (Allen, 2000, p. 1). The French theorist of post-structuralism, Roland Barthes argues that literary meaning can never be fully established by a reader, because the intertextual relations of the literary work always lead the readers on to new textual relations. His argument is that authors cannot be responsible for how the readers will

interpret their texts, as many different meanings will proliferate from them. Barthes argues that the meaning of a text depends on the web of other texts that the initial text derives its meaning from: "Every text has its meaning, therefore, in relation to other texts." (p. 6). This could suggest why *Atonement* is read in different ways as it depends on which literary codes and systems woven into the text, the reader already knows.

Barthes' theory derives from Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the sign, in which a distinction is made between the signified (the work of fiction) and the signifier (the text; the writing in that work of fiction). Saussure's theory will appear rational in the theory of intertextuality because you consider the text to be a servant to the work. The text becomes the structure that will follow the orders of the already existent rules of the work (that have been established by previous works of fiction):

On the 'common' logic of the sign which Barthes invokes, the work is primary, the text secondary. The text exists to give stability to something which is presumed to come before it; writing merely helps the thought of the author to gain performance.

(Allen, 2000, p. 64).

In other words, the texts written ahead of others will function as the signified, in which all other texts/signifiers gain their knowledge from. The works written first will, therefore, automatically gain an authority and agency over the supervening works of fiction. Barthes' argument is that texts not only offer a plurality of meanings but also derives from a plurality of already existent meanings or discourses created by other texts. The meaning of a text is spun from a web of already existent meanings created by an already existent additional long thread of meanings and discourses (pp. 62-67).

Atonement is self-aware of its own status as fiction, which is evident, because of the many works of fiction it refers to and discusses both explicitly and implicitly. Commentators on the novel notice that intertextual references are made directly in the text when, for example, Briony is reading Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* in-between nursing shifts at the hospital in part three. Intertextual references are also made indirectly in the text when it is evident how a particular choice of narrative style is used, for example, when the narrative style in part one is considered reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's stream-of-consciousness. In the following chapters, I will give an account on the specific

intertextual references made in *Atonement* and discuss the effect they have in the novel. Additionally, a discussion will be made on which effect the intertextual references are meant to give and how they are meant to affect the reader.

5.1.1 Intertextual References in the Novel: Explicit and Implicit

In the article “Postmodern Strategies in Ian McEwan’s Major Novels” (2004), Jie Han and Zhenli Wang observe that McEwan has a tendency to draw attention to the work of fiction as an artefact by referring to other works of fiction. This is evident in many of his novels and serves to underline the self-conscious narrator: “By alluding to or parodying traditional literary genres, he makes the reader pay more attention to the presence of a self conscious narrator.” (Han & Wang, 2014, p. 137). Han and Zhenli argue that McEwan uses the intertextual references to give the novel a richer meaning and automatically enable the reader to read in a productive way (pp. 137-138). In this chapter, I elaborate on the intertextual references made in the novel both explicitly and implicitly. I seek to create an outline of the intertextual references in the novel, in order to use this information in a discussion on the specific effect the intertextual references are meant to give.

References to specific works of fiction from the eighteenth century appear from the novel’s earlier chapters. Cecilia and Robbie are presented as readers of eighteenth century novels, though with different reading aesthetics. Cecilia is reading Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa: The History of a Young lady* (1748) and when Robbie asks her what she thinks of it, she answers him with: “‘I’d rather read Fielding any day.’” (McEwan, 2001, p. 25). Afterwards, she considers how Robbie might feel about her proclamation, which D’Angelo argues is because Cecilia is aware that by marking herself as a specific kind of reader she carries with her both cultural, ideological, and sexual implications and, additionally, she proclaims Robbie as an interpreter of these codes:

She felt she had said something stupid. [...] He might be thinking she was talking to him in code, suggestively conveying her taste for the full-blooded and sensual. That was a mistake, of course, and she was discomfited and had no idea how to put him right.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 25).

D’Angelo argues that readers will automatically wonder why a novel, such as *Clarissa* fails to engage Cecilia – an explanation D’Angelo argues lays in the relationship that early eighteenth

century novels attempt to make with its readers. Cecilia prefers to read Henry Fielding over Samuel Richardson, because he engages his readers to help shape the meaning of novels. Richardson's novels contrarily serve to warn the readers of something specific. D'Angelo's point is that McEwan uses the same techniques in his novel to engage the reader into participating in the construction of the novel's meaning. The fact that Cecilia prefers Fielding to Richardson is, therefore, not a coincidence as it reflects McEwan's own viewpoint and the expectations that he wants the reader to have of his novel. Additionally, the different reading aesthetics that Robbie and Cecilia have are not coincidences:

In modelling Robbie and Cecilia as readers, and in particular readers with vastly different interpretative practices, McEwan explores the stance that any "good" reader must take toward a text. Readers are faced with a multiplicity of interpretations. They must be willing to commit to one and, more so, be expected to defend and define that interpretation from the attack of others.

(D'Angelo, 2009, p. 91).

D'Angelo's argument is potently supported by the fact that Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding are two novelists, who traditionally are considered opposites of each other: "Whenever a new literary form appears on the scene, there are two main ways in which it can try to legitimate itself." (Eagleton, 2005, p. 53). Fielding as the one, who can handle plot and Richardson with a focus on psychology: "If, like Fielding, it is concerned with formal design, it has to sacrifice psychological realism to do so; whereas the novel of psychological realism finds it hard to launch a shapely narrative." (p. 94). McEwan, therefore, presents an oppositional relationship to his readers. Robbie and Cecilia are binary opposites of each other in terms of their reading aesthetics and serve as an illustration on how texts can have a multiplicity of interpretations. When you are reading a realistic novel you are faced with options of interpretations: "Either it can point to its very newness as the source of its value, or it can appeal to tradition." (p. 53). McEwan, therefore, informs his readers to consider the interpretative options embedded in the realistic text. The readers can either read the novel as part of literary tradition or they can read it as an independent unity.

McEwan makes another reference to a different eighteenth century novel by having the title character in Briony's play *The Trials of Arabella* be named, 'Arabella'. Arabella is the name of the heroine in Charlotte Lennox's novel *The Female Quixote: Or the Adventures of Arabella* (1752). Like Briony, Arabella is portrayed as a character, who cannot distinguish between fiction and

reality. 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.

I think D'Angelo is correct in suggesting that McEwan was inspired by Lennox's novel when he wrote the character of Briony. Additionally, I also think it is interesting to note that *The Female Quixote* also inspired Jane Austen, when she wrote her novel *Northanger Abbey*. The intertextual references in *Atonement* then become more extensive and the meaning of the text is evidently derived from a long thread of meanings and discourses. Therefore, 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.

While McEwan uses intertextual references from the eighteenth century to provide a textual medium for exploring readership in novels, he uses modernist aesthetics to further investigate the responsibilities that come with reading. Modernist texts invite dedicated, attentive, and literary readers, and they demand their readers to be critical, because of literary techniques consisting of fragmentation, shifting perspectives, unstable beginnings and endings, and unusual patterns of temporality. D'Angelo argues that certain modernist writers seemed to cultivate particular expectations within their texts. They demanded readers who had enough knowledge of the literary canon to approach new texts through a lens of the old: "With the idea of a "professional" reader in place, the modernist author can rely on the reader's active participation in the construction of the text." (p. 93). The intertextual references in a text provides a recipe for reading and expect readers

to have knowledge of the intertextual references, in order for them to have an 'optimal' reading experience.

5.1.2 The Implied Reader: The Act of Reading and Finding Meaning

"[...] if *Atonement* is a novel concerned with the "making of fiction," it is also a novel concerned with the *reading* of fiction, as well as the reading of experience." (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 89). As D'Angelo argues, *Atonement* has been read as a novel concerned with the consequences of literary imagination, however it is also important to consider the role of the reader, and how a novel is comprehended. In other words, McEwan has written a novel that not only criticises the power of the author, but also criticises the reader's role, and the ethical responsibility they hold over a text: "Readers hold the final power of interpretation, judgement, and atonement; to meet these aims, they must maintain a stance toward the text that involves both critical assessment and empathetic identification." (p. 89). D'Angelo argues that it is important to consider whether signs imbedded in the text point towards a 'correct' reading or if readers determine their own authoritative meaning of the text. In other words, the question of who holds the final interpretative power of a text is significant, which is why it is important to explore the novel's intertextual references (p. 88-89).

D'Angelo observes that McEwan's intent to embed several textual references in his novel is to make his readers knowledgeable of a particular section of the literary past. His 'optimal reader' of the novel must, therefore, "[...] bring a certain literary background to his reading of *Atonement*." (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 94). The novel positions itself in direct conversation with a literary position – the text must find its meaning in the works that it refers to. In other words, to understand the meaning of the text, you must understand and be knowledgeable of the text's intertextual references.

In addition to direct references to Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and Charlotte Lennox, D'Angelo argues that McEwan also makes implied references to canonical British writers such as D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster, L. P. Hartley, and Evelyn Waugh: "The result is a work that seems to position itself in direct conversation with literary tradition." (p. 94). Brian Finney regards these intertextual references as a move towards textual 'productivity', which means that once a text establishes interdependence on other texts, its meaning and signification only proliferates (Finney, 2004, p. 73). Finney's argument is potently supported by the

fact that the intertextual references invite readers to read the text in two different ways. It can either be read in relation to a modern comparison or it can be read through its interaction with tradition (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 94). D'Angelo argues that there is not a single 'correct' reading of the text, because its meaning is found in the intertextual references, and if the reader is not knowledgeable of all the references, the reading of the text will be from a modern perspective. However, as all the intertextual references point towards, there is an 'optimal' reader embedded in the text. One that is knowledgeable of all the intertextual references.

Additionally, the many misinterpretations that the characters make of other characters' actions suggest that the text also invites a critical reader. Both Cecilia and Robbie misread each other's actions, and Briony misreads the couple's interaction beside the fountain. Finney argues that these successions of misinterpretations are aimed at McEwan's implied reader: "Is it not intended to prevent the reader from misinterpreting the long Part One as a classic realist text?" (Finney, 2004, p. 80). What Finney argues is that these "[...] misreadings, and the ease with which a casual reader might gloss over them, all suggest a larger point about the responsibility of critical reading." (D'Angelo, 2009, p. 95). The literary references in the text actually point the critical reader towards solving the crime before it is committed:

The presence of *Clarissa* directs readers to consider the lurking threat of sexual violation that surrounds these young women; [...] Briony's references to her eighteenth-century Arabella, as well as the novel's epigraph from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, indicate the very limitations of Briony's perceptions [...]

(D'Angelo, 2009, p. 95).

D'Angelo argues that a reader, who approaches the text through a lens of literary history, will find more layers of meaning than a general reader will. In her opinion, McEwan constructed the text in a way that a close and critical reading is necessary, because he stages the novel's dilemma so readers have to dig into the text and into literary tradition in order to solve the riddle of the crime (p. 95).

As both D'Angelo and Finney argue, McEwan has written his novel to an implied reader; one that is knowledgeable of all the intertextual references made in the novel, and can connect them with the characters' actions and the novel's plot. Additionally, the implied reader must also approach the text through a critical lens, because as Briony has written the text, the reader must be

aware of her inability to perceive situations. As a result of this, the reality of the text becomes unreliable. I agree with both D'Angelo and Finney that an implied and critical reader is embedded in the text, however, as the novel's part one, two, and three is written by Briony, the text also provides another perspective. While McEwan's targets his novel to an implied reader, Briony targets her novel to a 'real reader' – one that is of flesh and blood. This is already insinuated in part one of the novel when Briony implies that her play *The Trials of Arabella* is intended for her brother, Leon, who she believes must be guided in the right direction, when it comes to finding a proper wife:

Her play was not for her cousins, it was for her brother, to celebrate his return, provoke his admiration and guide him away from his careless succession of girlfriends, towards the right form of wife, the one who would persuade him to return to the countryside, the one who could sweetly request Briony's services as a bridesmaid.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 4).

Briony's intention to write a play, which will guide her brother in the right direction, serves as an illustration on how she also intends for her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain* to aim at a 'real' reader – namely herself. Her intention with writing the novel is for her to achieve atonement for the damage she caused as a child. She amends by giving her sister Cecilia and Robbie the life they never had, in the realm of fiction. Additionally, she also wants to avoid litigations by waiting to publish until her cousin passes away. However, she realises that this might not happen:

I always thought the high life, the cigarettes, would see her off. Even in our fifties I thought that. But at eighty she has a voracious, knowing look. She was always the superior older girl, one step ahead of me. But in that final important matter, I will be ahead of her, while she'll live on to be a hundred. I will not be able to publish in my lifetime.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 361).

Briony knows that she will not be able to publish her book until her cousin Lola and her husband Marshall are dead due to legal reasons. Additionally, she also writes the novel to her deceased sister Cecilia and her lover Robbie, because she wants to give them their happiness: "I like to think that it isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them at the end." (pp. 371-372). The difference between Briony's novel and

McEwan's novel is the point of Briony's novel is the process rather than the product, whereas the point of McEwan's is the product. Briony intends for her novel to appeal to a reader, who understands her process of atonement, whereas McEwan intends for his novel to appeal to a reader, who understands the product, which is a text made up from a web of codes and systems derived from literary history.

5.2 Section Recapitulation: McEwan's Authorial Fundament

This section of the thesis has served to understand McEwan's foundation for making his novel. My argument is that McEwan's point of departure derives from a set of already established literary codes and systems, because of his implementation of various intertextual references. The intertextual references serve as both McEwan's starting point, but also his control over the text, because the intertextual references help him guide his readers in the direction he wants. On that account, McEwan has both chosen to include intertextual references that he feels will enhance the message of his novel but, at the same time, he is also influenced by the intertextual relations, which helps him establish the meaning he wants to convey.

It has been established that *Atonement* contains both explicit and implicit intertextual references, which serve to both guide the reader into a particular direction but also to establish a place in literary history. What this means, is that McEwan draws on particular discourses by being inspired, and influenced by already established works of fiction. As a result of this, a particular place in literary history is established for *Atonement*. Additionally, the intertextual references establish an implied reader; one that understands all the intertextual references and can connect them with the meaning of the text. The optimal reader of the novel can, therefore, interpret the literary codes and systems embedded in the text and are able to understand McEwan's point of departure.

I have chosen to include this section in the thesis, because it provides an understanding of the point of departure McEwan had in the construction of his novel. McEwan's choice to let himself be influenced by other works of fiction and to include references to other works of fiction is a deliberate decision, because he in that way underlines the constructed nature of the novel.

6 The Historical Novel: A Metafictional Perspective

In McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), a historical aspect has been added to the story's narrative. The historical novel is defined as a novel, in which the plot takes place in a setting that is located in the past, and authors often choose to portray historical figures to allow readers to understand how prominent figures would have responded to their environments at the time. The most prominent historical aspects of *Atonement* are parts two and three, which take place in the midst of the World War II, during the Dunkirk retreat and in a hospital in London, where injured soldiers are brought to from the battlefield. Another historical aspect is found in Briony's autobiographical story, which is narrated from a point 50 years into the future. Therefore, 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.

As I mentioned in section 3, The Form of The Novel: Narrative Strategies Applied in *Atonement*, the novel is a frame story; a fact that readers learn late in the plot. Part one, two, and three describes a fictional realistic universe, which is shattered in the novel's epilogue where it is revealed that the novel's protagonist Briony is the author of the story. In the epilogue, she explains how she has manipulated events to fit into her narrative intended to make amends for the damage she caused as a child. The narrative, thus, entails a metafictional perspective, because it is self-consciously aware of its own status as fiction and automatically questions the relationship between fiction and reality. The novel questions what is considered the truth when fiction is presented as reality. Postmodern theory focuses on what history and literature share, rather than what separates them:

They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic construct, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality.

(Hutcheon, 1988, p. 105).

In postmodern theory, history is not considered obsolete, but is rethought as a human construct. In other words, history is a factual representation rather than a fact. It does not deny that the past existed, it only argues that history only will be accessible through text: "We cannot know the past

except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*.” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 16). Historical facts will only be accessible through a representation, made available in textual form.

Linda Hutcheon has coined novels that combine history with a metafictional perspective as ‘historiographic metafiction’, because they implement a self-reflective perspective while claiming to portray historical events and personages. Hutcheon considers these novels not just metafictional, nor historical because they are both metafictionally self-reflexive while speaking about real historical realities (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5). In this section of the thesis, I will argue that *Atonement* is a historiographic metafictional novel and discuss why.

As my point of departure for this chapter, I will unpack relevant concepts of the metafictional novel by explaining what the metafictional novel is, and how it affects the reader. Furthermore, I discuss how *Atonement* can be considered a metafictional novel and how this is expressed in the narrative. The point is to understand the metafictional perspective in the novel, before understanding how it connects with the historical perspective of the novel. This discussion will lead to a discussion of *Atonement* as a historiographic metafictional novel. In closing of this section, I discuss how the intertextual references in the novel establish a place for *Atonement* in literary history.

My aim with this section is to understand how the novel uses a historical perspective to draw attention to its own status as a literary artefact. The reader is made explicitly aware of the construction of an autobiographical story by implementing real historical events. This section, therefore, serves to understand Briony’s foundation for writing her novel, because she first, rewrites history from a particular point of view and second, self-consciously makes the reader aware of the techniques she has used. My premise is that Briony utilises both historical facts and her own life history to construct her novel and by having McEwan implement the metafictional perspective, he makes the reader aware of the constructed nature of a narrative.

6.1 Metafiction: A Self-Reflexive View on a Novel’s Fictionality

Metafiction is a form of self-conscious fiction. The purpose is to create a fictional universe that will reflect on itself as a work of fiction and make the reader aware of the text’s status as an artefact.

Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as a term that describes “[...] 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.” (Waugh, 1995, p. 40). Waugh sees language as an entity constructed by an independent and self-contained system, which has the ability to generate its own meanings. In order to explore the relationship between the linguistic system and the world, in which it refers to, a meta-perspective is required. Since the 1960s, Waugh argues that people have shown a cultural interest in how human beings reflect, construct, and mediate their experiences of the world. Metafiction pursues to understand this interest by exploring the relationship between fiction and reality. Individuals occupy ‘roles’ rather than ‘selves’ and fictional characters’ points of view make it possible to understand the construction of subjectivity outside the fictionalised universe: “If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself.” (Waugh, 1995, p. 41). Fiction is no longer isolated from the real world but is present in all layers of real life, which John Fowles points out in his novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969):

Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. [...] But this is preposterous? A character is either ‘real’ or ‘imaginary’? If you think that, *hypocrite lecteur*, I can only smile. You do not even think of your own past as quite real: you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it... fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf – your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of *Homo sapiens*.

(Fowles, 1969b, p. 97).

In Fowles’ metafictional novel, he explicitly points out how humans construct and mediate their experiences throughout life, which makes real life no more real than fictional life. Fowles’ argument is potently supported, because his point is that the metafictional novel only indicates what real life is and, therefore, portrays narratives that are no less similar to real life than realistic novels.

Although the term ‘metafiction’ is new, Waugh argues that the practice of novels that draw attention to their own fictionality is as old as the novel itself. She argues that metafiction is a function evident in all novels, because they are all assimilated by a variety of discourses identified as representations of speech and of forms of narratives. Waugh argues that these discourses always in some way question and relativize each other’s authority, to which she refers to Mikhail Bakhtin,

who believes that the different languages of fiction (memoirs, journals, diaries, histories, conversational registers, legal records, journalism, documentary) all compete with each other for the privilege of the overall 'language of fiction'. In other words they "[...] question and relativize each other to such an extent that the 'language of fiction' is always, if often covertly, self-conscious." (Waugh, 1995, p. 43). Bakhtin refers to this process as the 'dialogic' potential of the novel, which means that while metafiction functions as a way to make this potential explicit, realist fiction often functions by suppressing this dialogic function:

The conflict of languages and voices is apparently resolved in realistic fiction through their subordination to the dominant 'voice' of the omniscient, godlike author. Novels which Bakhtin refers to as 'dialogic' resist such resolution. Metafiction *displays* and *rejoices in* the impossibility of such resolution and thus clearly reveals the basic identity of the novel as genre.

(Waugh, 1995, p. 43).

The point is that metafictional novels are constructed as a fictional illusion (as in classical realism), which is laid bare in its narrative. To create a metafictional novel you have to create a fictional universe, while simultaneously making a statement about the creation of this universe (pp. 42-43). Bakhtin and Fowles' points are, therefore, similar. They both see the metafictional perspective in the realist novel as well as in the postmodern novel. 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 statuses as artefacts. The purpose is to create a fictional universe that at some point will be broken by a frame structure describing how the realistic universe is fictionalised. A metafictional novel is, therefore, a novel that adds a new perspective to the classic realistic novel. It resembles the classic realist novel in that it establishes a realistic universe; however, the difference is that at some point, a narrative frame pointing out what exactly makes it fictional will shatter this realistic illusion. As a result of this, the reader is offered information on the construction of the novel's narrative.

6.1.1 A Metafictional Perspective in *Atonement*: A Narration of Human Life or an Ethical Perspective?

The metafictional narrative perspective in *Atonement* is evident because of the novel's epilogue, where it is revealed that Briony is the author of the preceding three parts of the novel. The metafictional perspective in this story is, therefore, used as a way to tell a story of a girl, who attempts to atone for an error she made as a child. In this chapter, I will explain how *Atonement* is a metafictional novel, and I will discuss the effect it has to include a metafictional perspective.

The plot in *Atonement* is constructed from the beginning in a realistic setting, where every character and event seems plausible in the structure of the plot. The fictional realistic universe portrayed has another meaning once you get to the epilogue. The metafictional frame added to the plot structure in the epilogue has the effect that the narrative no longer functions as a fictional realistic universe but now also functions as a work of fiction that reflects on itself as fiction. The realistic illusion constructed in the novel is shattered and you realise that the realistic narrative have been manipulated by a narrator, who has changed events to make them fit into her own fantasies and imaginations. The effect that the metafictional frame has is that it poses questions between fiction and reality. In other words, as the realistic illusion is shattered, it is questioned whether what has been narrated has been real or not.

First, Brian Finney identifies the metafictional frame in the story as a method for the reader to be aware of the constructed nature of the characters, although secondly, he also argues that it simultaneously invites the readers "[...] to reflect on the way subjectivity is similarly constructed in the non-fictional world we inhabit." (Finney, 2004, p. 76). 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). From the beginning of the novel, it is evident how Briony's powerful imagination continuously confuses the real with the fictive. While she interprets events around her to fit into her own imaginative world, she simultaneously narrates the events through her storytelling: "Her observation of life around her is conditioned by the fictive world that holds her in its grip." (p. 78). Finney argues that Briony suffers from the inability to untangle life from the literature that shapes her life as she imposes the patterns of fiction on the facts of life. Finney argues that the metafictional perspective is there to make the reader understand how not only the fictional characters are narrated, but how "[...] we are all narrated, entering at birth into a preexisting narrative which provides the palimpsest on which we inscribe our own narratives/lives." (p. 79). Finney's argument is that the metafictional

perspective forces the reader to consider the extent to which narratives determine human life: we are all a part of a big narrative and we are all shaped around this narrative (pp. 78-79). Finney's point is then similar to Bakhtin and Fowles'. They all argue that narratives are no more constructed than real life, and that we all construct narratives, in everyday life, according to knowledge we already have.

The metafictional perspective is implemented to make the reader understand how human life works. Briony is portrayed as a girl, who understands the world through a series of narratives that are familiar to her, which is a reflection on how life is in general. Real life people will understand the world according to their pre-existent knowledge of the events and people around them, which does not make it much different from how Briony understands her world around her. Finney's argument, therefore, come from the notion of people constructing and mediating their experiences in real life similar to characters in a work of fiction, which Waugh points out in her article and Fowles declares in his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). Briony is seen as a character, who only illustrates the way real human life functions. Her world is her books and her fairy-tale fantasies, which is why she interprets events around her through a perspective that is familiar to her (the narratives she finds in her books). In real life, people do the same, because we only understand what is familiar to us, which is why in real life, people also interpret the world from a perspective they already know.

While I agree with Finney that the metafictional perspective is implemented in the novel to understand how we are all narrated and live our lives through small narratives, I think he fails to discuss the actual metafictional perspective in the book. With this, I mean the way Briony discusses the choices she has made, when writing her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*. 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 some other point behind choosing to write the novel as well. 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 ends have been on my mind all night long. As into the sunset we sail. An unhappy inversion." (McEwan, 2001, p. 370). Here, Briony implies that she not only wanted to give an account of what happened she also had an agenda to atone for the damage she caused by creating a love story. She cannot see the purpose in trying to persuade her readers into believing that Robbie Turner had died

"[...] of septicaemia 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. The metafictional perspective is brought up in the epilogue, because Briony reflects on the way she has written her story and the choices she has made. She has changed particular events, because she cannot imagine that any reader would get any satisfaction from the real sad ending. She believes that no one will care, whether the events or the individuals have been misrepresented, as long as they survive and are happy in the end: "As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love." (p. 371). Essentially, Briony creates a plot that has a particular effect: to make amends for the damage she caused as a child. In the end, Briony mentions that even though she has altered the story, in order for her sister Cecilia and Robbie to reunite once again, she never attempted to make them forgive her, because she knows that that would be impossible, as they are in fact dead. This final reflection on her book underlines the many choices Briony made when writing her novel and creates an ethical dimension to the narrative.

David K. O'Hara also defines the metafictional perspective in the novel as a method to utilise an ethical dimension to the story. He argues in his article "Briony's Being-For: Metafictional Narrative Ethics in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" (2011) that not only does the novel use the metafictional perspective to undermine the realist illusions in the plot, the metafictional perspective is also utilised "[...] in order to reassert an *ethical* complex that lies between author and reader, text and world." (p. 74). In other words, he argues that there is an uncertain relationship between *selves* and *others* in the novel, which means that all characters are bounded by otherness: by other people with their own plans and their own ways of perceiving the world. This *self-otherness* structure is first evident in the scene, where Briony is putting together a play for her family: "In a generally pleasant and well-protected life she had never really confronted anyone before. Now she saw: it was like diving into the swimming pool in early June; you simply had to make yourself do it." (McEwan, 2001, p. 15). Briony's need for putting together a play for her family is thus driven by a desire to assert power over others – she feels compelled to do it. O'Hara argues that the scene illustrates how Briony is susceptible to using life and art as a strategy for coping with otherness. She uses an aesthetic version of the world to employ her own fantasies upon reality (O'Hara, 2011, pp. 76-77).

The scene where young Briony is putting together a play for her family is utilised to illustrate her need to employ control over others. However, it only functions as a reflection of the entire story as a whole. The metafictional element, where Briony takes control of the text and aesthetises the reality, is where O'Hara detects the ethical element. Briony takes control of the text and narrates it from particular angle that makes her achieve atonement for the damage she caused as a child. O'Hara recognises that Briony portrays herself in part one as a young woman, who interprets events from her pre-conceived knowledge of narratives. In the scene where Cecilia and Robbie are at the fountain, Briony mistakenly interprets the scene as a proposal: "Otherness is forever sneaking into her constructed, orderly worldview, and she struggles to maintain her sense of authority." (O'Hara, 2011, p. 78). Briony's vision of the scene automatically becomes a tableau – a story that she knows well – because she wants to make the world fit into her vision of it and her fantasies:

There was something rather formal about the way he stood, feet apart, head held back. A proposal of marriage. Briony would not have been surprised. She herself had written a tale in which a humble woodcutter saved a princess from drowning and ended by marrying her. What was presented here fitted well. Robbie Turner, only son of a humble cleaning lady and of no known father, Robbie who had been subsidised by Briony's father through school and university, had wanted to be a landscape gardener, and now wanted to take up medicine, had the boldness of ambition to ask for Cecilia's hand. It made perfect sense. Such leaps across boundaries were the stuff for daily romance.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 38).

O'Hara argues that Briony "[...] refers to her own backlog of narrative schematics in order to interpret the ambiguous behaviour of the couple." (O'Hara, 2011, p. 78). However, shortly thereafter, she discovers that her imaginative ability to impose a familiar story onto an event falls short. She can no longer interpret but only watch as her sister takes her clothes off and jumps into the fountain. O'Hara argues that this is the moment where Briony realises that life is not a series of fairy-tales, but works in ways that transcend preconceived ideas of what the real world looks like:

Briony had her first, weak intimation that for her now it could no longer be fairy-tale castles and princesses, but the strangeness of here and now, of what passes between people, the ordinary people that she knew, and what power one could have over the other, and how easy it was to get everything wrong, completely wrong.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 39).

However, no longer thereafter she again falls back into her own ways and she feels free to perceive events from a perspective she knows, because in that way she gains authority of the events happening despite the consequences, which is illustrated when she mistakenly accuses Robbie for the rape of Lola at the end of part one.

Therefore, O'Hara's argues that the metafictional perspective is evident in order 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 realises 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 has 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).

Thus, Briony has come to an understanding in part two of the novel. She realises that it is no use to utilise control over others and she has put herself in the background instead: "The age of clear answers was over. So was the age of characters and plot." (McEwan, 2001, p. 281). In part two, she has evolved to a place where she has relinquished her authority and she no longer hijacks the narratives of others, in order to make them fit into her own vision of reality (O'Hara, 2011, p. 83). O'Hara's argument is that Briony portrays herself this way, in both part one and two, in order to illustrate her act of atonement. Her way of portraying herself as a young naïve girl, who only know the world through her fantasies, will then act as an excuse for the damage she caused for Robbie and Cecilia: "Her novel is ultimately revealed as an apologia." (p. 84).

"Throughout *Atonement*, the meta-mimetic frame of the novel allows us, as readers, to witness the authorial figure in Briony attending – imaginatively, poetically, ethically – to the "reality" of other people's lives." (O'Hara, 2011, p. 92). O'Hara argues that *Atonement* is a novel

about imagining other people's lives from the viewpoint of one person. Unarguably a question of ethics will automatically be brought up, because the metafictional perspective on the story will illustrate how another person is imagining an *Other's* experience. A fact that is also illustrated in the epilogue, when Briony writes: "I love these little things, this pointillist approach to verisimilitude, the correction of detail that cumulatively gives such satisfaction." (McEwan, 2001, p. 359). Briony is ultimately a character that orders other people's lives in the manner she wants them to behave. She takes on the minds of other people and portrays them herself.

I have in this chapter illustrated how the metafictional perspective is expressed in *Atonement* and have discussed the effect that it gives. The metafictional perspective is evident because the novel's epilogue reveals Briony as the author of the entire story, which means that the events leading up to her revelation have been narrated from a particular angle with the purpose of achieving a particular effect: for her to atone for the damage she caused as a child. Brian Finney argues that the metafictional perspective is implemented to understand how we are all narrated and how we all construct, and mediate our own lives, while David K. O'Hara argues that it is implemented in order to insert an ethical dimension to the story. I agree with the two and I would argue that the metafictional frame is added in order to illustrate how it is possible to order people's lives through a narrative structure, which gives an ethical dimension to the construction of a narrative. There will be no way of knowing 'what really happened', because an omniscient narrator has narrated everything. The metafictional perspective is, thus, implemented to understand the constructed nature of a narrative. In Briony, McEwan illustrates the power that fiction can have, but also how fiction is the foundation for her narrative, similar to McEwan's own point of departure in writing his novel.⁴

6.2 Historiographic Metafiction: A Reconstruction of the Past from the Point of View of the Present

Linda Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction as a particular form of the novel genre that is characterised as "[...] those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages [...]" (1996, p. 5). The combination of metafiction and historiography produces a new kind of experimental writing that

⁴ As discussed in section 4, Intertextuality: A Requirement of Literary Knowledge

Hutcheon believes to live up to the 'poetics of postmodernism'. The postmodern novels written in the form of historiographic metafiction are, therefore, novels aware of the limits of mimesis, while still managing to reconnect its readers to a world outside the novel. Readers of historiographic metafiction are able to respond to historical facts with the awareness of both the basis that it has in real events and its overall fictionality. These novels are a combination of a documentary historical actuality and a formalistic self-reflexive parody (Currie, 1995, p. 71).

In this chapter, I will uncover relevant concepts from Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction in order to illustrate the overall possibilities of the genre and to understand how it actively works. *Atonement* will, then, be analysed as an example of historiographic metafiction. The point is to discuss the genre and explain how the historiographic metafictional perspective is expressed in *Atonement* but also in other relevant works of fiction from the same genre. My point of reading *Atonement* as an example of historiographic metafiction is to understand how Briony constructs her novel. My premise is that she uses history, both real historical facts and her own life history, to assemble her narrative. In addition to fiction functioning as the foundation for her narrative, history also serves as the foundation for her construction of her narrative. History serves as the backdrop to Briony's storytelling and is utilised to again understand the constructed nature of a narrative, as she reconstructs historical facts from the point of view of the present (both real historical facts and her own life history).

6.2.1 The Historical Novel in a Postmodern Context

The definition of a historical novel is a plot structure, which takes place in a setting located in a temporal past. Additionally, a historical novel portrays the manners of the people, the social conditions of the time, and other details from the period, in which the story is set. The historical novel creates a fictionalised reality, in which details from a specific period in time are portrayed mimetically.

In a postmodern context, both history and fiction are considered discourses, which means that they both constitute of systems from which we make meaning. Meaning is not found in the actual events, but "[...] *in the systems* which make those past "events" into present historical "facts."" (Hutcheon, 1996, p. 89, emphasis in original). 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. Hutcheon also observes that this is not a “dishonest refuge from the truth” but just an acknowledgement of how humans make meaning of the past. The postmodern, then, affects the way, in which the historical novel has been seen previously, because “[...] it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge.” (p. 89). In that sense, there can be no concept of “genuine historicity”, because of how the author adds a particular angle of fictionality to it (p. 89).

Atonement is a historical novel because of its setting, which takes place in the past. It begins in 1935 in England, then moves on to World War II, and ends in contemporary time. Jie Han and Zhenli Wang argue that the novel is historical because of how “[...] the fates of individuals are intermingled with the verisimilitude of history and society. And history, fact and fiction are knitted into the narrative framework.” (2014, p. 136). What makes *Atonement* different from the classic understanding of a historical novel⁵ is that McEwan offers more information than the historian. McEwan combines historical facts with fiction, therefore, automatically blurring the lines between fact and fiction. The effect is that he creates a new version of the whole by narrating the past in a new manner. As a result of this, McEwan provides a number of possibilities that would have been ignored by the historian, as these are not part of the historical truth. However, Han and Wang argue that these possibilities are no less real than historical facts: “Those possibilities, whether they are real history of the past or not, are no less real in his fictionalized world.” (p. 137). 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. In their article, Han and Wang recount that many of McEwan’s depictions of war are influenced by his father’s experiences during the Second World War, which makes his methods similar to that of the historian. While the historical facts may not be depicted mimetically, they are still historical facts because “[...] in his fictional world, history becomes fictionalized. The writer’s design of plot and structure reflects his attitude towards history.” (p. 137). In that way, *Atonement* becomes a historical novel with a postmodern perspective, because the intention is not to depict real life events mimetically, but to depict a representation, or a revision, rather, of the past in a new context (pp. 136-137).

⁵ This is an understanding of historicity, where readers are offered a rendition of real historical facts described as mimetically as possible.

6.2.2 *Atonement*: A Historiographic Metafictional Novel

The historiographic metafictional novel questions the perspective that history can be represented as it 'really was'. In a postmodern context, history is considered a human construct, because it prompts reflection on its own mimetic engagement with the past by exploring the reality of the work of fiction as a narrative construction. Historiographic metafiction produces a desire to rewrite the past in a new context and to reconstruct the past in a new context. In this chapter, I will discuss how *Atonement* can be regarded a historiographic metafictional novel. In my discussion, I will include readings of commentators and critics and compare these with my own take on what makes the novel a work of historiographic metafiction. Additionally, I will compare the novel with another novel by Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs* (1992) in order to understand how McEwan applies the historiographic metafictional perspective in novels.

Natasha Alden considers *Atonement* a historiographic metafictional novel, which she writes in her article "Words of War, War of Words: *Atonement* and the Question of Plagiarism" (2009). She considers *Atonement* "[...] a novel-within-a-novel that reveals the (rewritten) stories behind stories; it brilliantly shifts between ontological levels and epistemological parameters, deliberately confusing the reader to the extent that we no longer know, whose text we are reading." (2009, p. 60). She claims that *Atonement* emphasise the constructed nature of narratives, both fiction and history, because of how Briony interprets and represents events from her own point of view (pp. 60-61).

As Han and Wang mention, McEwan has a personal investment in the story, because his father was a veteran who served at Dunkirk (2014, p. 136). It is possible, then, to imagine how McEwan would want his narration to be as close to reality as possible and 'set the record straight' in trying to re-imagine what it was like to be a soldier or a nurse to the wounded. However, he is also aware that both fiction and history are mediated discourses. In the epilogue, he explicitly reveals the mediated nature of the preceding three parts of the novel by having Briony explain how the "[...] narrative is corrected, purged of factual errors and mistakes." (Alden, 2009, p. 61). McEwan and Briony, therefore, do not narrate how things were, but what they *might* have been like, emphasising the constructed, mediated, and fallible nature of a historical narrative. McEwan, therefore, explores how it is like to go beyond the factual record and narrate events from a particular angle that offers readers the opportunity to imagine themselves in the past. Briony explores this aspect as well by enlightening readers on which details she wants to have

communicated by offering a look into the choices she has made in the making of the final draft of her novel, *Two Figures by a Fountain*. Especially the events at the Dunkirk retreat have been particularly hard for Briony to narrate since she was not there, which is why she had to mediate the events from knowledge she acquired elsewhere:

Briony atones by using fiction to portray thoughts and events she has no access to, and thus to 'reach' Robbie and Cecilia. She exploits, as McEwan does, the contradiction inherent in historical fiction, that of being simultaneously fictional *and* based in reality.

(Alden, 2009, p. 61).

Alden argues that Briony recreates the factual past in a fictionalised context. Nothing in Briony's narrative has really happened, but she creates an effect of verisimilitude by incorporating historical events in a seemingly realistic plot structure. The historical elements in her narrative may be inspired by real historical events, but as she was not present, Briony has to rely on other people's experiences in order to portray, for example, the events at Dunkirk as factually correct as possible. With this, Briony underlines Hutcheon's theory that fiction and history are both linguistic constructs and how both derive their force from verisimilitude:

[History and fiction] have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality.

(Hutcheon, 1988, p. 105).

The metafictional perspective in the epilogue serves as a backdrop to how Briony essentially creates a plot, in which she decides upon the particular angle from which her story is to be regarded. In relation to the historical aspect, Briony also decides how the historical events are to be presented, by deliberately including particular details, while omitting other details that she does not find important. World War II has many aspects, but Briony chooses to only focus on the retreat from Dunkirk and on the London hospital, thereby, only portraying parts of the events of World War II. Han and Wang also observe Briony's use of ellipsis in her plot structure: "[...] McEwan combines the fates of the individuals with the historical background of World War II, placing great

importance to the retreat at Dunkirk, which is the key element of part two and three.” (Han & Wang, 2014, p. 137). In other words, Briony constructs a plot by including and omitting particular details in order to present the story that she wants the reader to perceive.

Han and Wang, make the suitable comparison of *Atonement* to the novel *Black Dogs* (1992), because McEwan here also has chosen to depict historical issues. In *Black Dogs*, McEwan employs history and fiction in order to blur the line between them. In this novel, historical issues, such as the post-war British communism, World War II, and the fall of the Berlin Wall are depicted. What makes the novel different from *Atonement* is that it employs the historical events to make the main character ponder about them in a retrospective narrative. In *Atonement*, on the other hand, McEwan implements the historical issues in order to depict a novel that has broad historical significance: “The love story between Robbie and Cecilia interweaves with the history, especially of the Second World War, making it a modern romantic epic.” (Han & Wang, 2014, p. 136). Han and Wang, therefore, 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). Han & Wang’s argument is potently supported by the fact that Briony has chosen to let Robbie and Cecilia live, rather than tell the truth about them dying before they were reunited. The historical setting of World War II, therefore, serves as the backdrop to their love story: lovers being separated by war, but reunited again and living happily ever after. 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.” (2014, p. 136).

6.3 Intertextual References: An Attempt to Recreate the Historical

In section 4, Intertextuality: A Requirement of Literary Knowledge, I focused on the effect intertextual references have on the reader and the way, in which the novel has been received. Additionally, I discussed how the references create an optimal reader of the novel: one that is knowledgeable about all the references made and can link them together in order to produce meaning from the text. In this chapter, I will analyse the use of intertextual references in the novel from a different perspective. I will discuss the extent, to which McEwan uses intertextual references to underline a historical aspect. This objective is sought achieved by combining the historiographic

metafictional perspective of the novel with McEwan's choice to include intertextual references, in order to understand how he creates a text in the interest of achieving a particular representation.

Han and Wang observe that not only does McEwan include historical events in his novel; he also draws on historical literary references in order to underline the historical aspect. They claim that he has constructed *Atonement* to emphasise authors' ways of creating a text and the ways that texts are constructed by a plot structure:

It may be stated with some degree of safety that without some understanding of postmodernism and historicographic [*sic* historiographic] metafiction, there can be no real and full understanding of McEwan and even the contemporary British literature. In some way, the construction of *Atonement* itself is a reflection of the writer's understanding or mediation on contemporary fiction writing, an experimental novel on history and metafiction.

(Han & Wang, 2014, p. 136).

Han and Wang, therefore, argue that McEwan uses intertextual references in his novel to accentuate the constructed nature of the novel. The manner in which he constructs *Atonement* by referring to other works of fiction is essentially a way for him to reflect on the constructed nature of other works of fiction.

Han & Wang's argument are potent, yet the intertextual references may also serve another purpose altogether. I would argue that he uses the intertextual references to create a timeline of British literature. We know that the story has a time span of 64 years, from 1935 to 1999 and has included historical occurrences such as pre-war England and the Second World War. Additionally, the novel draws on literary discourses such as Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf. By including references such as these two, McEwan achieves an aspect of literary history in the novel as well. Finney comments on how "[...] McEwan draws attention to a continuous tension between the narrative and its narration [...]" (Finney, 2004, p. 72) by alluding to other traditional literary genres. Finney, therefore, distinguishes between the narration of the story and how this is narrated. The concern with the act of narration, Finney argues, emerges in McEwan's frequent use of intertextuality. For instance, when Robbie retreats to Dunkirk he quotes from W. H. Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (1939): "*In the nightmare of the dark, All the dogs of Europe bark.*" (McEwan, 2001, p. 203, emphasis in original). Finney argues that, in this instance, 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). As Finney suggests, the intertextual references in the novel are, therefore, not only utilised to draw parallels to literary history but they are also used to establish a connection between the text and real historical events.

To sum up, the intertextual references in the novel are implemented as an attempt to recreate the historical. *Atonement* is about the making of fiction, which is illustrated by Briony's conscious choices of inclusion and omission of particular details and her creation of a work of fiction that is meant to achieve a particular effect. McEwan, therefore, utilises intertextual references in his novel in order to create a timeline of literary history, but also to establish a connection between the text and historical events. In other words, McEwan applies the intertextual references in his novel in order to underline the historical. For instance, he draws from a modernist discourse by referring to Virginia Woolf, in order to establish a connection between the text (particularly part one), which is set in 1935 and the time in which Virginia Woolf lived (from 1882 to 1942).

6.4 Section Recapitulation: Briony's 'Authorial' Fundament

This section of the thesis has served to understand Briony's 'authorial' foundation for the construction of her novel. The metafictional aspect has served as an illustration on how fiction is the foundation for Briony's narrative, because she uses fiction to make amends for the damage she caused as a child, thereby, having it serve as the backdrop to understand the power of a narrative. Additionally, it has served to understand Briony's foundation in the construction of her novel. In the narrative, we learn that her books influence Briony and she only understands the world through her knowledge of narratives. This illustrates Briony's need for writing fiction and her influences from other authors, such as Virginia Woolf, and mode of writings, such as realism and modernism.

The historical aspect that is added to the narrative in *Atonement* creates a parallel between the storyline of Briony's novel and the construction of her novel. In the construction of her novel, Briony implements historical facts (particularly her aspect of World War II) in order to underline the love story between Robbie and Cecilia. Additionally, the historical aspect is added in the metafictional frame, because Briony here makes the reader aware of the choices she has made in the process of rewriting her own historical past. Briony's presentation of World War II will never be factual and will always be a reconstruction of a factual event from the perspective of the present. The constructed nature of the depiction of World War II, therefore, serves as a parallel to Briony's

plot construction. Briony can never factually represent her own historical past, but will again be a particular construction seeking to achieve a particular effect.

I have chosen to include this section in the thesis, because it illustrates the constructed nature of a narrative from the second ontological level of authority: Briony's. It illustrates the choices that McEwan has made when constructing his novel in order to demonstrate how novels are constructed narratives. He inserts Briony as an 'author' in the narrative, because he, then, can utilise her authorial control to demonstrate the choices that goes into constructing a novel.

7 Authorial Control: An Ontological Discussion of the Power of the Author

In the previous two sections of the thesis, I have explored how both McEwan and Briony have constructed their texts from a postmodern perspective. In this section, I will consider the novel from an ontological perspective and, therefore, discuss the author's role in *Atonement*. How authors take control of texts by constructing them in a certain way in order to accomplish particular effects. Due to McEwan creating a narrative about a writer (Briony), who in turn creates a plot structure within the novel, a discussion arises of the ontological levels of authority presented in the novel. The discussion will focus on the different levels of control, which is applied in the novel. Hence, this section serves to merge the previous discussions together, because of the consideration of the construction of the novel from different ontological levels. As a result of this, I attain a higher level of abstraction on the analysis and interpretation of the novel.

The novel is structured with three levels of authority, which all carry with them different levels of control. McEwan is the author of the novel and he functions as the final decision maker in the construction of the novel. Therefore, he has control of the entire novel. The next level of authority is that of Briony, who is an invention of McEwan. Briony is portrayed as a writer, which makes her have control as well, because she creates a plot structure within the novel. She has control over her invention, which is the third person omniscient narrator, who Briony creates in her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*. The third level of authority within the novel is, therefore, that of the third person omniscient narrator, because the narrator implements control over Briony as a character. Briony is the main character of the story *Two Figures by a Fountain* and is portrayed from the age of 13 to the age of 77. The novel contains different levels of control, because McEwan controls Briony, who in turn controls the third person omniscient narrator in the plot, who in turn has control over the character of Briony. To distinguish between the different levels of authority, I will refer to McEwan as the author and Briony as the 'author'.

The different levels of authority appear when we learn late in the narrative that Briony is the author of the three main parts of the novel. The epilogue functions as a break in the narrative, because the narration here advances from a simple structure to a complex structure with the appearance of Briony as the 'author'. What at first seems like a simple narrative becomes complex, because Briony as the 'author' is implemented in the novel's epilogue, and we realise that Briony has constructed the narrative rather than McEwan as first insinuated. As a result of this, a discussion

becomes apparent of the ethical dimension of a plot structure and of whom to consider the author of the novel.

My aim with this section of the thesis is to understand the author's role in the making of a novel. The idea is to comprehend the decisions made in the making of a novel and why these decisions have been implemented. I will explore the different choices, which both McEwan and Briony make when making their novels and why they have chosen to make these particular choices. Additionally, I will consider the ethical aspect of Briony's diagnosis of vascular dementia, which we learn in the novel's epilogue. The question then becomes apparent of whether you can consider the events of the novel's part one, two, and three to be narrated truthfully. Furthermore, it opens up to questions of what role Briony's diagnosis could play in the story and which purpose it serves that McEwan has chosen to let Briony end up with a diagnosis that will eventually have her forget all of her memories.

7.1 Ian McEwan: Author of the Narrative

In an ontological discussion of the novel, we have to consider the aspect that the novel's story exists before the plot. This means that McEwan has had a particular story in mind before writing the novel, and when he wrote it, he created a plot. This means that he has created a plot, which is assembled in a specific way to achieve a particular effect. It is possible, then, to discuss the different choices that McEwan has made when making the novel, in terms of how he has structured it, what events he has included, and what he has omitted in order to achieve the particular effects that he intends. This discussion, therefore, combines the discussions made in both section three, four, and five of the thesis, as I get to consider the different choices McEwan has made as an author. How he has applied both realist, modern, and postmodern modes of writing, been influenced by novelists such as Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf, and implemented a metafictional perspective with the purpose of underlining the constructed nature of a narrative by utilising a historical aspect.

In an interview with Ian McEwan, Adam Begley notices that McEwan has been inclined to write from a child's point of view, which has been evident in some of his previous novels, such as *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) and *The Daydreamer* (1995). McEwan responds that to write from a child's point of view, in *Atonement*, was not a way for him to shock or indulge the grotesque, but "[...] to portray a child's mind while drawing on all the resources of a complex adult language. [...]"

I didn't want the limitations of a childlike vocabulary." (Begley, 2002). Instead, he chose to make Briony the 'author' "[...] and let her describe her childhood self from the inside, but in the language of the mature novelist." (Begley, 2002). Thus, McEwan gave Briony the profession as an author because he wanted to avoid the problems that come with narrating a child, e.g. a restricted viewpoint. The result is that he could portray a young girl through the eyes of an adult, rather than that of a child, thereby, avoiding a limited perspective. McEwan also discloses that the scene at the fountain between Robbie and Cecilia was the scene that was written first. After writing the scene, he pondered over whom these people were and their backgrounds. He, thus, came up with the idea that Briony should narrate the events in the form of chapters that would function as a series of drafts, which would be her form of atonement to make amends for a terrible error she had caused (Begley, 2002).

As we are told in the interview, McEwan came up with the story before he came up with the plot. His choice to portray Briony as an author was for him to illustrate two of the novel's themes: writing and atonement. In other words, he wanted to illustrate how fiction is about the order of things – how a plot structure is constructed by an author. Finney argues that this is illustrated in the novel by having the *writer* in Briony identify Robbie as Lola's attacker, and not Briony herself: "Forcing life to conform to the aesthetic orderliness of art can have actual tragic consequences." (2004, p. 80). Finney's point is that Briony is essentially portrayed as a writer rather than a young girl and this aspect serves to underline how McEwan fundamentally wanted his novel to be about the making of fiction and the limitations and opportunities that come with this:

The fairy stories were behind her, and in the space of a few hours, she had witnessed mysteries, seen an unspeakable word, interrupted brutal behaviour, 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. All she had to do now was discover the stories, not just the subjects, but a way of unfolding them, that would do justice to her new knowledge.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 160).

The authorial control McEwan has over Briony is illustrated in his choice to portray Briony as a writer, because he, then, can illustrate the constructed nature of a narrative. He has chosen to let Briony be the author of part one, two, and three of the novel, because he, then, can implement a metafictional perspective on the story, where he chooses to have Briony explicitly explain the

constructed nature of a narrative. As a result of this, McEwan gets to control the choices that Briony makes as an 'author', thereby, underlining the power that authors have – even if it is over other authors.

7.2 Briony Tallis: 'Author' with a Need for Control and of Placing Herself in the Place of Others

The next ontological level in the story is Briony as the 'author', who tells her autobiographical story in the novel's part one, two, and three. We experience this in the novel's epilogue where the narrative goes from a simple construction to a complex one, due to the metafictional perspective. Up until the epilogue, the reader is confronted with a mimetic straightforward storyline, but at the end of part three the illusion is shattered and the reader is forced to reconsider what they have read. In this chapter, I will discuss the choices that Briony made in the making of her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain* with a focus on the ontological levels of authority that are implemented. The idea is to understand how Briony takes control of her text and makes particular choices that will give her the result she desires: to atone for the damage she caused as a child.

Briony's novel is autobiographical, so when Briony is characterised as a young girl, who cannot distinguish between the fictive world and real life, we must remember how that presentation of Briony derives from herself. In other words, she has chosen to represent herself this way because it will give a particular effect. Finney characterises Briony as a girl who lets art shape her life just as much as she shapes that life into her art: "Her observation of life around her is conditioned by the fictive world that holds her in its grip." (Finney, 2004, p. 78). Books shape Briony's life, and writing intrudes on her life in every moment. For instance, when Briony opens the shocking letter from Robbie, her interpretation involves exchanging one genre with another instead of interpreting it realistically:

No more princesses! [...] 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.

(McEwan, 2001, pp. 113-114).

Briony perceives both the letter and the scene later in the library, where she stumbles upon Robbie and Cecilia making love, as scenes from one of her books (probably of the macabre or gothic genre). As discussed in chapter 5.1, *Intertextual References: A Web of Literary Codes and Systems*, Briony's life is shaped around the books she reads and she only understands the world through familiar narratives. In the library, her first reaction is to understand the scene from a point of view she is already familiar with:

Though they were immobile, her immediate understanding was that she had interrupted an attack, a hand-to-hand fight. The scene was so entirely a realisation of her worst fears that she sensed that her over-anxious imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books. This illusion, or hope of one, was dispelled as her eyes adjusted to the gloom.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 123).

The misinterpretations of events that make her notice Robbie looking "so huge and wild" (p. 123) and her previous mention of him as "a maniac" (p. 119) are indications that "Briony is shaped by a melodramatic imagination that originates in the books she has read." (Finney, 2004, p. 79). Briony draws on literature in all shapes of her life, which makes her enable to disentangle her life from the things she reads in her books. Literature is intervened in every decision she makes and everything she perceives, causing her to misinterpret particular events (pp. 78-79). Like I discussed in chapter 5.1, we can only understand the world through what we already know and we recreate our own past, in Fowles' words, by dressing it up, censoring it and fictionalising it, in order to flee from our real reality. In other words, we romanticise our own past (Fowles, 1969b, p. 97). Briony's revision of her past, in the form of her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*, is just for her to romanticise a past she is embarrassed about, due to the damage she caused as a child. By means of fiction, she attempts to correct the error she made by letting Robbie and Cecilia live, thereby, producing a satisfactorily destiny out of a bad situation. Additionally, Fowles' perspective is apparent in Briony because she interprets every event from a viewpoint that she understands. Her world is filled with narratives, which is why it is difficult for her to understand the interaction between Robbie and Cecilia at the fountain and in the library as anything other than a marriage proposal and an attack. Not only does she attempt to romanticise her past, she also lets herself have the traits of a young girl, who cannot distinguish between reality and fiction, in order to justify her actions. In that way,

Briony, as an 'author', lets the narrator exert control over the character of Briony, shaping her into a girl, who acts this way.

Briony's choice to let the narrator of her story portray her as a girl who cannot distinguish between fiction and reality is a conscious choice, because it will function as justification for what she did. As stated in chapter 5.1.1, *Intertextual References in the Novel: Explicit and Implicit*, Briony uses her narrative as an apology for the damage she caused as a child, and by having the narrator of her narrative portray Briony in a particular way, she is able to construct her plot in a way that makes her achieve an effect of atonement. Additionally, Briony has her narrator portray the character of Briony as a naïve girl. As a result of this, she controls her own autobiographical story in order to portray it in a way that makes her look innocent. Ultimately, her autobiography becomes a fabrication originating from her own imagination. The decisions made in the making of her novel are, therefore, ultimately conscious choices rather than real life events transferred into fictional form.

Finney argues that the decisions Briony makes are conscious choices, which is why she portrays her narrative from different angles. He argues that Briony realises "[...] that what caused her to write Robbie into her story as a villain was both an excess of imagination and a failure of imaginative projection (into the other)." (2004, p. 80). Finney, thus, argues that Briony not only failed to perceive events around her realistically she also failed at putting herself into the place of others and imagining what it would be like. It is this form of imagination that Briony, for the rest of her life, attempts to acquire; an attempt that is projected into her novel, *Two Figures by a Fountain*:

The novel that we read and that took her adult lifetime to write is her attempt to project herself into the feelings of the two characters whose lives her failure of imagination destroyed. Having mistakenly cast them in a story that totally misrepresented them, Briony seeks to retell their story with the compassion and understanding that she lacked as a thirteen-year-old girl.

(Finney, 2004, pp. 80-81).

Briony, with her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*, abandons her authorial ego for an empathetic projection onto other's feelings instead (Finney, 2004, p. 81). Briony's novel functions as an apologia; an approach for Briony, to let her sister and Robbie have the happiness that they never attained when they lived. However, I also think the novel has another function. I would argue that

Briony's novel also functions as a method for Briony to carry out her passion for making fiction; creating a plot assembled of particular choices meant to achieve particular effects. Additionally, Briony's novel functions as a method for McEwan to demonstrate the choices an author takes in the making of fiction; a need for plotting and for putting oneself in the place of others in order to carry out particular actions. Additionally, I think it is noteworthy how Finney argues that Briony had a choice in making Robbie the villain.⁶ This argument only underlines the constructed nature of Briony's narrative and how we cannot really know if the events really happened in particularly the part one of the novel.

Briony creates a work of fiction, which is how she attempts to make up for the mistake she made as a child. The point of her novel is not to show 'what really happened' but to create a universe that will satisfy her, based on her autobiographical story. With her skills as a writer, Briony attempts to play God and alter her life story the way she wants, which is no more evident than in the final paragraph when Briony plays with the idea of writing a new draft. This draft would have Robbie and Cecilia forgive her, and be present at her 77th birthday party: "If I had the power to conjure them at my birthday celebration . . . Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at *The Trials of Arabella*? It's not impossible." (McEwan, 2001, p. 372). Briony, here, explicitly admits that writers have the power to do with their characters, as they want even if they are in fact her family members, whom she knows ended up with a contrastingly different destiny (Finney, 2004, p. 81). Briony's final act of atonement, by writing the novel, is therefore, carried out through her passion for writing. She uses what made her make the mistake in the first place, to make up for the damage in the end: her need for creating plots and for seeing the world around her from a narrative viewpoint.

Although it is in fact Briony's autobiographical story we read in part one, two, and three of the novel it has now been established that Briony, as the 'author' of the story, exerts control over the text by creating a plot structure. In other words, she has decided what events should be present and absent in her plot. In addition, she has also decided to portray different viewpoints in order to give a larger perspective on the story as a whole. While parts of Briony's story are autobiographical, it is also evident that some events are actually produced by the plot. This becomes evident in the novel's epilogue where Briony admits that she has altered certain events in order to

⁶ See quote from Finney's article above: "[...] that what caused her to write Robbie into her story as a villain was both an excess of imagination and a failure of imaginative projection (into the other)." (2004, p. 80).

make up for her error in judgement, such as letting Robbie and Cecilia live even though they in fact died in real life. Her attempt to recreate her past from a fictional viewpoint fails in some way, because she lets the plot produce events that never happened in real life. Her seemingly realistic universe is, therefore, no more than now, characterised as a plot construction.

7.2.1 Briony's Diagnosis: An Ethical Aspect on the Construction of a Narrative

In a discussion on the ontological levels of authority and control in the novel, a problematic perspective becomes apparent, due to the fact that Briony is inserted in the narrative as an 'author', who is dealing with a diagnosis of vascular dementia. A fact the reader learn in the epilogue of the novel:

The process will be slow, but my brain, my mind, is closing down. The little failures of memory that dog us all beyond a certain point will become more noticeable, more debilitating, until the time will come when I won't notice them because I will have lost the ability to comprehend anything at all. The days of the week, the events of the morning, or even ten minutes ago, will be beyond my reach. My phone number, my address, my name, and what I did with my life will be gone.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 354).

Briony's diagnosis, therefore, must have an effect on how she tells her narrative. There may be moments she does not remember, which has the consequence that she can never give a complete account of what happened. Her incipient loss of memory, therefore, must affect how she communicates her story. It then follows, that you cannot really trust that what is told has really happened the way it did. The consequence is that she is portrayed as an unreliable narrator.

Although, Briony's diagnosis poses the ethical question of whether her mimetic storyline can be trusted, I would also argue that Briony's point of the story was not to show 'what really happened'. Her point was to atone for her wrongdoings as a child and the only way she knew how to do that was to use her skills as a writer:

No one will care what events and which individuals were misrepresented to make a novel. I know there's always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what *really* happened? The

answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 371, emphasis in original).

In Briony's attempt to make up for the damage she caused as a child, it is more important for her to create a plot that will do just that, than to recreate events as they really were. Her status as an 'author', therefore, makes her exert control over the text.

To continue with the discussion of whether Briony's diagnosis has affected her mimetic storyline I would argue that it has. This is especially evident in how she communicates her story. For example, with her frequent use of anticipation, especially in part one of the novel: chapter thirteen opens with: "Within the half hour Briony would commit her crime." (McEwan, 2001, p. 156). Finney argues that the use of anticipation is for Briony to, not only narrate these events satisfactorily, but also to unfold them adequately. Briony's immediate reaction following the incident at the fountain also illustrates the narrator's use of temporal prolepsis:

This was not a fairy tale, this was the real, the adult world in which frogs did not address princesses, and the only messages were the ones that people sent. It was also a temptation to run to Cecilia's room and demand an explanation. Briony resisted because she wanted to chase in solitude the faint thrill of possibility she had felt before, the elusive excitement at a prospect she was coming close to defining, at least emotionally. The definition would refine itself over the years. She was to concede that she may have attributed more deliberation than was feasible to her thirteen-year-old self. At the time there may have been no precise form of words; in fact, she may have experienced nothing more than impatience to begin writing again.

(McEwan, 2001, p. 40).

Finney argues that in "[...] this passage lies the anticipation of the numerous stages or drafts through which this narrative is destined to pass before it reaches its final form as we read it." (Finney, 2004, p. 76). Finney recognises the act of narration in the passage; the choices Briony made in her act of narration, which she explicitly tells the reader. To draw attention to the act of narration serves not only the purpose of the part of the metafictional novelist, but Finney also argues that it is central to the book's concerns: the making of fiction. In the passage, it is evident how Briony is in conflict with her emotions. In other words, she is not sure how she felt

immediately afterwards, when she was thirteen, and she is not sure whether she gives her thirteen-year-old self more complexity than she was capable of having (pp. 75-76).

Finney's argument is potently supported by the fact that Briony has a need for controlling situations. With her skills as a writer, she has the power to control the situation, which she does with the use of anticipation so she can unfold her story adequately. However, I also think that the use of anticipation serves another purpose, which is connected with her diagnosis. I think her instances of flash-forward function as a form of memory-aid. I would argue that the sentence, at the beginning of chapter thirteen, serves as an aid for not forgetting how her plot should unfold. It is possible then to imagine, Briony as a 77-year-old woman writing her final draft and inserting this sentence⁷ as a method to not forget the point of her novel. McEwan has, therefore, chosen to let Briony use anticipation in her plot construction, because he wanted to emphasise the affect that the diagnosis has on her.

I would argue that there are several reasons why McEwan has consciously chosen to give Briony vascular dementia. First, the idea of losing snippets of one's memories is applied in the story as a parallel to how McEwan narrates Briony telling her story through flashbacks. McEwan, therefore, draws attention to his own method in creating the plot, because he makes particular choices in his plot construction of what to include and in which way. Secondly, I would argue that Briony's diagnosis serves another purpose. By giving her dementia, McEwan allows Briony to live on, because she then feels compelled to write her story down, in order to be remembered. Finney argues that the epilogue serves as her act against oblivion. She knows that her time is running out fast. Not only will she forget her memories, but also people around her will soon forget her when she passes away. Her novel, therefore, serves as a way to be remembered as a writer (Finney, 2004, p. 82).

Finney also considers another perspective: "Briony's revelation of the two lovers' deaths stands in stark contrast to the orderliness of the story she concocted as a child." (Finney, 2004, p. 81). At 77, Briony has come to a point in her life where she finally attempts to be honest, rather than make her tales fit into an already familiar narrative, similar to what she did as a child. Finney's point is that she will never get to write an honest rendition of her story, – what really happened – because she is limited by her diagnosis. She is on the verge of losing all of her memories and,

⁷ See quote from *Atonement* above: "Within the half hour Briony would commit her crime." (McEwan, 2001, p. 156).

therefore, might not get to finish the draft; a draft she considers writing where Robbie and Cecilia are alive and present at her 77th birthday party (Finney, 2004, pp. 81-82).

7.3 Section Recapitulation: Understanding Authorial Control on a Macro Level in Relation to a Discursive Context

This section of the thesis has provided a discussion on the power of the author in *Atonement*. I have distinguished between the ontological levels of authority and control established in the novel and discussed the different choices made in the making of the novel. McEwan has constructed his novel in a manner that allows his fictionalised character Briony to take control of parts of the text, in order to illustrate the constructed nature of a narrative and of characters. By having an 'author' narrate parts of the story, he explicitly explains to his readers the power that authors have; for instance, to put oneself in the place of others in order to carry out a particular meaning.

The second level of control is that of Briony, as she exerts control over her invented third person omniscient narrator, which in turn exerts control over the character of Briony. Briony's autobiographical story serves as a way to illustrate the constructed nature of a narrative. When constructing her novel *Two Figures by a Fountain*, Briony lets her narrator portray the story from a specific angle that serves to give a particular effect. She shows that narratives are not only a way to unfold a series of events that have happened, but a plot structure can actually produce events. This is evident in how Briony allows her plot to take a direction that goes beyond her own autobiographical history by letting Robbie and Cecilia live in her narrative even though they in fact died. Additionally, McEwan has chosen to give Briony the diagnosis of vascular dementia to give an ethical perspective on the construction of the plot, and to have Briony unfold her plot adequately with the use of anticipation. The diagnosis, therefore, complicates the ontological levels of control, because we cannot know the background for why the control is exerted as it is.

This section of the thesis has served to understand the power of the author and the ontological levels of control exerted in the novel. I think it is noteworthy, here, to discuss how McEwan ultimately uses postmodern techniques to self-consciously draw attention to his own act of narration in the novel. This statement does not conclude that the novel is postmodern, but that McEwan uses techniques that draw on a particular postmodern knowledge. By reading *Atonement* as a novel that uses postmodern techniques, readers will automatically be made aware of the

constructed nature of a narrative, which is what McEwan wants to convey. The question is then, why McEwan feels a need to write a novel where readers learn late in the narrative that everything they have just read, as a mimetic realistic narrative, is only a construction from the imagination of the main character in the novel. Is his novel essentially just an example of contemporary fiction?

To answer this question it would be useful to place the novel in a discursive context. Michael Foucault considers language to be a system of representation deriving from a particular discourse, which defines and produces the knowledge presented in the text. For Foucault, texts produce its knowledge from a particular discourse rather than from language (Hall, 1997, p. 44). A postmodern text, for example, uses conventions such as self-reflection on its own status as artefact, because it draws on a particular postmodern discourse. When reading *Atonement* in this context, it is evident, that McEwan has drawn on a particular contemporary discourse when writing his novel. The novel is, therefore, not necessarily postmodern, but uses postmodern conventions because of the time in which it was written. In that way, the construction of the novel is just a reflection on a particular knowledge gained from a discursive context. He would never be able to write a realistic novel, without in some way making the reader aware of the constructed nature of the narrative, because of the time in which it was written. The only question would be to which degree he would make the reader aware of it.

8 Conclusion: The Constructed Nature of a Narrative

In this thesis, my intend was to discuss how Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* is about the making of fiction and how McEwan illustrates this by using postmodern techniques. I wanted to read *Atonement* as a postmodern novel, because I, then, could explore the different techniques McEwan uses in the making of his novel. My aim was not to necessarily identify the novel as postmodern, but as I recognised postmodern techniques in the novel, I found it interesting to focus on the postmodern features, which made me able to discuss how McEwan has assembled his narrative.

I have divided the thesis into four sections that each analyses and interprets a particular area in McEwan's construction of the book. The first section titled "The Form of the Novel: Narrative Strategies Applied in *Atonement*" has served as my foundation for analysing the novel, and my analytical framework. The idea with this section was to understand how the novel has been structured and how critics have received it, since its publication in 2001. In exploring the outer structure of the novel, I have concluded that McEwan has structured his novel as a frame story, by implementing a secondary narrative inside his novel. Both his inclusion of the frame narrative, the epigraph at the beginning, and his 'acknowledgement' section at the end serve to emphasise the different levels of authority established in the plot structure. In exploring the inner structure of the novel, I inferred that McEwan has utilised different narrative strategies in the construction of his novel. Both realist, modern, and postmodern modes of writing are in play and serve to underline the constructed nature of the narrative. Once the reader discovers that the seemingly realistic universe, they have just read, is a figment of the main character Briony's imagination they have to reassess their previous assumptions of the narrative. By implementing realistic, modern, and postmodern modes of writing, McEwan creates an effect of verisimilitude in his narrative, which serves to give a more shocking effect, when it is revealed that everything has been constructed. The discussion of the different narrative strategies utilised in the novel led me to discuss whether to regard the novel postmodern or not. Critics have read it as both postmodern and anti-postmodern, which is a result of McEwan's way of constructing the novel. To read it as anti-postmodern is to respond to the textual codes in the novel as realistic. If you consider the novel's epilogue as part of the narrative in presenting a story about the instance, when fiction is presented as a lie, then you can read it as anti-postmodern. However, as most critics do, you can read the novel's epilogue as a metafictional frame, which will produce a postmodern reading of the novel. The two different readings of the novel gave me a perspective on how the novel can be read, which led me to argue that the use of

different narrative strategies was not for McEwan to write either an anti-postmodern novel or a postmodern novel, but for him to illustrate the constructed nature of a narrative. The different narrative strategies that are utilised, essentially, become a textual practice in trying to convey a message, which is that literature may be presented as reality, however, all fiction is subject to some kind of manipulation, because it has been arranged that way by the author.

The second section of the thesis titled: "Intertextuality: A Requirement of Literary Knowledge" has served to understand McEwan's foundation for writing his novel. Intertextuality is a postmodern literary device applied to create interrelationships between texts. Therefore, I have used this section to understand McEwan's point of departure in writing his novel, and in addition, to understand how McEwan uses these intertextual references to influence the reader. McEwan includes many intertextual references in the novel, both implicitly and explicitly, to give the novel a richer meaning and to allow the reader to read in a productive way. McEwan's choice to include an epigraph at the beginning of the novel, with a quote from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, serves to guide the reader into being sensible towards the romantic impulses in the book, and not read it as straightforwardly realistic. Therefore, he uses other works of fiction to underline his own message in the novel, and they serve as the backdrop to understanding how his novel is a constructed narrative. In other words, he did not start from nothing when writing his novel, but was influenced by other authors' work of fictions that helped shape his novel's narrative. The intertextual references provide a correct means of perceiving the book, creating an optimal reader. The optimal reader of the novel is one that understands all the intertextual references and can connect them in a manner that provides the meaning McEwan wanted the reader to gain from reading his book.

In the third section of the thesis titled: "The Historical Novel: A Metafictional Perspective", I attempt to understand Briony's foundation for writing her novel, because of how she uses real historical facts and her own life history to create her narrative. Ultimately, the historical perspective is implemented to draw attention to the novel's own status as a literary artefact. The beginning of the section served to understand the metafictional perspective in the novel, and to understand why McEwan has chosen to use this literary device. The metafictional aspect is implemented to draw attention to how Briony has constructed her text and it poses questions between fiction and reality. Briony is portrayed as a young girl, who is unable to distinguish between real life and the reality of the books she reads. Her personality reflects her behaviour in the epilogue, where it is revealed that the previous three parts of the novel is her attempt at writing her own autobiography. However, she

has manipulated events to fit into an already established known narrative: a love story. McEwan implements the metafictional aspect to draw attention to the constructed nature of the narrative. Later in the section, I read the novel as an example of historiographic metafiction, because I argue that McEwan has implemented a historical perspective in the novel, to draw attention to the constructed nature of a narrative. Historiographic metafiction is a postmodern understanding of the historical novel, which argues that history can never be represented factually, but will always be portrayed from a particular angle. History is used similar in *Atonement* to underline the choices that Briony has made in the construction of her novel. She gives a particular representation of, for example, the Second World War, in order to underline the love story between Robbie and Cecilia. Lastly, I discussed how McEwan implements the intertextual references in order to underline the historical aspect of his novel.

The fourth section of the thesis titled: "Authorial Control: An Ontological Discussion of the Power of the Author" served to merge the previous sections together and to discuss the ontological levels of authority and control implemented in the novel. In other words, I have analysed how McEwan and Briony construct their texts and, thus, how they utilise their power as authors. There are different levels of control in the novel's narrative. McEwan at the first level, then Briony as the 'author', then the third person omniscient narrator and in the end Briony as a character in the narrative. McEwan essentially creates a plot with the purpose of presenting how narratives are constructed by plot structures. He does this by creating a character like Briony, who is an 'author' herself. Briony's story is autobiographical, however, with her manipulations of events we learn that she has essentially created a plot structure, which has the purpose of achieving particular effects. Additionally, it is evident that she lets the plot actually produce events that never happened, again, emphasising the constructed nature of her narrative. The different ontological levels of control in the story serve to understand how all narratives are plot structures, which has the purpose of creating particular effects. McEwan has, for example, chosen to let Briony end up with vascular dementia, which lets him have an ethical dimension to his narrative. As readers, we are again confronted with the notion that what seemed like a realistic storyline is not at all realistic, because we never know whether Briony have forgotten certain events.

The four sections of this thesis have served to understand the construction of *Atonement* in terms of how McEwan has assembled his novel together, in order to create a plot structure about the making of fiction. The outcome is that his novel becomes a textual practice in trying to convey a

message, which is that all narratives are subject to some kind of manipulation and have been assembled together in a specific way, in order to achieve a particular effect. McEwan's enduring concern with the act of narration makes the novel subject to understand it from a postmodern perspective. The novel can be read as postmodern, because McEwan uses literary techniques such as intertextuality, metafiction, historiographic metafiction, and a self-conscious perspective. The novel is, therefore, not necessarily postmodern, but the use of postmodern techniques makes it a contemporary novel that attempts to recreate the past from the point of view of the present. Stefanie Albers and Torsten Caeners conclude in their article "The Poetics and Aesthetics of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" (2009):

By means of constantly alluding to the stereotypical principles of eighteenth-century literary aesthetics, the reader's construction of the fictional world is supported and guided. Only by "sealing off" the main plot in this manner, can the destructive potential of the last chapter come to its full effect. Finally, the careful implementation and manipulation of diegetic and, especially, metadiegetic elements and techniques as well as the fusion of postmodern and classic realist storytelling are the foundation of the novel's effectiveness.

(Albers & Caeners, 2009, p. 719).

As Albers and Caeners allude to, *Atonement* is about the making of fiction, because it utilises a metafictional aspect on the concept that novels are constructed artefacts. McEwan underlines this notion, because he features many narrative literary devices in his construction of the novel, which are designed to draw the reader's attention to the construction of the novel's discourse with the understanding that the underlying theme of the novel is the making of fiction. Therefore, the novel becomes a textual practice in trying to demonstrate the constructed nature of a narrative.

8.1 A Historic Literary Perspective: Suggestions for Further Research

To place *Atonement* into a literary perspective, the tendency to draw attention to its own status as a literary artefact is seen in other British novels as well. As I have mentioned previously in this thesis, John Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is another example on a novel that uses this technique. In this novel, Fowles draws the reader into a seemingly realistic universe until chapter 13, where he addresses the reader and tells them explicitly that he is actually constructing a

narrative. The way the reader expects the novel to go, therefore, may not happen, because the plot constructs the story, as he explains in chapter 13:

This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and 'voice' of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word.

(Fowles, 1969b, p. 95).

Fowles explicitly explains how he is aware of literary conventions and, as he writes a story set in Victorian time, he tries to imitate the literary conventions accepted at that time. However, the truth is he is writing his novel in a time, where we have the knowledge from postmodern theorists such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes, which is why he uses conventions from a postmodern perspective. As a result of this, he explains that his story is not real, but a fabrication from his own mind: "[...] *we wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is.*" (Fowles, 1969b, p. 96, emphasis in original). Fowles, then, continues on to a discussion on the freedom of his characters. He argues that in order to create a fictionalised world that appears plausible to the reader it must be independent of its creator: "It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live." (p. 96). He argues that you must accept that some plans in the narrative will come directly from the plot and, therefore, disrespect your own pre-planned ideas. This is the only way the narrative will appear real to the reader. His argument originates from the notion that all novelists are gods. However, he argues that the god-like author has changed from being the omniscient and decreeing kind towards the kind that has freedom as their first principle instead of authority. Although, the author is the overall creator of the text, Fowles argues that he must allow his characters to assume responsibility for some of the actions in the text in order for them to appear real to the reader.

McEwan uses this method as well, because he allows Briony to assume control over parts of the text, therefore, giving her some degree of freedom in his narrative. Although, the two novels have been published 32 years apart, it is evident that a tendency towards creating a historic realistic universe, which is shattered by a self-conscious voice in the narrative, has appeared in British literature. In addition, it is not just a tendency seen in British literature, because the Canadian author

Margaret Atwood uses somewhat the same technique in her novel *The Blind Assassin* (2000). In *The Blind Assassin*, we are only told that the protagonist is the author at the end of the novel, similar to *Atonement*. In Atwood's novel, we are aware of the frame story from the beginning; however, we are led to believe that it is the character Laura, who writes the story-within-the-story, but towards the end, we are told that it is in fact the novel's protagonist and Laura's sister, who is the author. This is the main difference between *The Blind Assassin* and *Atonement*.

The question is then, why a tendency towards misleading the reader and being self-consciously aware of the narrative has arisen in the last fifty years. Furthermore, what does this mean in relation to literary history? I do not want to get into a full discussion here; however, I think it is noteworthy to comment on Terry Eagleton's book *The English Novel: An Introduction* from 2005. In the preface of the book, he comments that the book "[...] is intended as an introduction to the English novel for students, but also for general readers who might find the subject interesting." (p. ix). Furthermore, he comments that it is an introduction of the British literary canon. It is, therefore, noteworthy to observe how he wants to discuss British literary canon, but only finds a need to distribute seven pages to British literature subsequent to Virginia Woolf. Authors such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf are given between 20 or 30 pages each. Evidently, Eagleton does not find British literature following Virginia Woolf particularly significant in relation to literary canon. A discussion could, therefore, be made on whether Ian McEwan's novels, notably *Atonement*, are exceptionally significant in relation to the timeline of British literature. Additionally, how does this discussion compare to Cormack's statement of McEwan belonging to the Great Tradition of British Novelists?⁸

⁸ Discussed in chapter 4.2.1, An Anti-Postmodern Reading of the Novel.

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