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Postmodern Vision of Absolute Truth in "Atonement" by Ian McEwan

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Ian McEwan's "Atonement" and its postmodern interpretation of the concept of ultimate truth. The novel, which takes place in the early 20th century, examines the difficulties associated with memory, narrative, and the search for the truth. This essay examines how the novel reflects the postmodern rejection the idea of ultimate truth through a study of the text. It is possible to see the novel "Atonement" as a postmodern attack on the idea of ultimate truth. It is proposed that the novel's postmodern is a conception of reality highlights the importance of memory and narrative in the construction of truth. This paper is important because it applies postmodernism theory to

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the novel "Atonement" by Ian McEwan, giving it a fresh viewpoint. The study underlines the significance of subjective experiences and viewpoints in our perception of reality and underscores the function of memory and narrative in truth construction. Postmodernism theory is used as a literary movement that rejects the conventional belief in objective truth and emphasizes the importance of subjectivity and fragmentation in understanding of reality. This paper attempts to analyze the notion of absolute truth in Ian McEwan's novel. The primary aim of this paper is to examine the postmodern vision of absolute truth in "Atonement" and its implications for our understanding of truth and reality. This paper aims to demonstrate how the novel challenges traditional notions of truth and offers a vision of truth that is subjective and fragmented.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Reality, Fiction, Ontology, subjective experience, "Atonement", Fragmentation, Deconstruction. Absolute Truth

نظرة ما بعد حداثة للحقيقة المطلقة في رواية "الكفارة" لميكيوان

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المستخلص

تناقش هذه الورقة البحثية رؤية ما بعد الحداثة للحقيقة المطلقة في رواية لان ماك إيوان "الكفارة". تدور أحداث الرواية في أوائل القرن العشرين وتكشف مدى تعقيد الذاكرة وسرد القصص والبحث عن الحقيقة. من خلال تحليل الرواية ، تستكشف هذه الورقة الرفض ما بعد الحداثي لمفهوم الحقيقة المطلقة وكيف تنعكس في الرواية . يمكن قراءة رواية "الكفارة" كنقد ما بعد الحداثة لمفهوم الحقيقة المطلقة. يُفترض أن الرؤية ما بعد الحداثة للحقيقة في الرواية تؤكد على دور الذاكرة ورواية القصص في بناء الحقيقة. هذه الورقة مهمة لأنها تقدم منظورًا جديدًا لرواية ماك إيوان ، "الكفارة" وفحصها من خلال عدسة ما بعد الحداثة. تسلط الورقة الضوء على دور الذاكرة ورواية القصص في بناء الحقيقة وتؤكد على أهمية التجارب الذاتية ووجهات النظر في فهمنا للواقع. تسلط الورقة البحثية الضوء على دور الذاكرة ورواية القصص في بناء الحقيقة وتؤكد على أهمية التجارب الذاتية ووجهات النظر في

فهنا للواقع. المفاهيم النظرية المستخدمة في المناقشة والتحليل ، تُستخدم نظرية ما بعد الحداثة كحركة أدبية ترفض الاعتقاد التقليدي في الحقيقة الموضوعية وتؤكد على أهمية الذاتية والتشردم في فهنا للواقع ، وتحليل رؤية الحقيقة المطلقة في رواية لان ماك إيوان " الكفارة." الهدف الأساسي من هذه الورقة هو فحص الرؤية ما بعد الحداثة للحقيقة المطلقة في "الكفارة" وآثارها على فهنا للحقيقة والواقع. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى توضيح كيف تتحدى الرواية المفاهيم التقليدية للحقيقة وتقدم رؤية الحقيقة غير موضوعية ومجزأة.

الكلمات الدالة: ما بعد الحداثة، الواقع، الخيال، علم الوجود، الخبرة الذاتية، "الكفارة"، التفكير، التجزئة، الحقيقة المطلقة

1. INTRODUCTION

A literary and creative movement known as postmodernism emerged in the middle of the 20th century as a reaction to modernism, which placed epistemology at the center of analysis .The interpretation of reality piqued the curiosity of critics. However, for Postmodernism, ontology—the study of what a reality is, how it came to be, and whether it interacts with other realities—remains central. In this perspective, language is acknowledged as a reality-shaper. Traditional narratives are rejected, and individual experiences and interpretations of reality are emphasized in postmodernism. Atonement by Ian McEwan has postmodern elements like relativism and subjectivity all throughout the book. The manipulation of time and memory is another aspect of postmodernism in the novel. The book is set in World War II-era England, but it also has flashbacks and alternate histories. The novel's metafictional twist, for instance, that the earlier portions were actually pieces of another novel written by Briony, underlines the importance of memory and narrative in forming our perceptions of the past. The rejection of conventional narratives and the emphasis on individual experiences and perceptions of reality, on the other hand, are characteristics of postmodernism. The novel aims to address the ontological issues that are distinctive to the postmodernist movement and places a particular emphasis on language. The novel investigates the complexities of narrative, memory, and the search for the truth. The main character, Briony Tallis, is a little child who erroneously interprets a series of happenings and accuses the incorrect guy of a crime, having disastrous results. Through the analysis of the novel, this paper explores the postmodern vision of absolute truth and its implications for our understanding of reality.

Since "postmodernism" first appeared in the critical discourse in the 1960s, it has been a contentious notion. Since there is no unambiguous agreement on the meaning among researchers, postmodernism suffers from semantic instability, according to Ihab Hassan, author of *Toward a definition of Post-Modernism* (276).

Some writers see it as a complete rupture, even a crisis, from modernism, the previous major intellectual trend; others think the only difference is in the issues its authors are posing. The postmodernist movement is more concerned with ontological issues, or the

essence of being itself, than it is with experience and knowledge. In his work *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale explores this change in what he refers to as "dominant". According to him, postmodernism's issues center on the idea of reality and whether it can be divided into a single or a collection of realities. This suggests the existence of a heterocosm with an almost unlimited number of unique planets. He claims that postmodernism doubts the possibility of a connection between those realms. What happens when various types of worlds are put in conflict or when the borders between worlds are crossed, to use his own words? (McHale, 1987).

Through the protagonist, Briony Tallis, McEwan examines the concept of subjective truth in his book. The narrative of Briony, a little girl from an affluent family, who accuses Robbie Turner, the son of the Tallis family's cleaning woman, of a crime he did not commit, is told in the book, which is set in England during World War II. The accusation results in Robbie's detention and the couple's breakup. But as the story goes on, it becomes evident that Briony's understanding of what happened was incorrect and that the reality is much more nuanced than she first believed.

The concept that reality is subjective and relative is one of the core themes of the novel and one of postmodernism's key characteristics. McEwan disproves the idea of absolute reality by depicting the same events from many angles. The book is broken up into three sections, each of which is recounted by a different character and contains fresh information that alters the reader's interpretation of the plot. Briony tells the story in the first section of the book, and because of her limited knowledge of what happened, she accuses Robbie in error. Robbie, who offers an alternative viewpoint on the circumstances leading up to the crime, narrates the second half of the book. Briony again provides the narration during the book's third section, but this time as a senior citizen who has acquired a more complex perspective of what is transpired. McEwan emphasizes the theme that truth is not absolute via the shifting viewpoints and the altering accounts of events. Each character has his own subjective and skewed account of what happened. The fact that the novel is a work of fiction and the events it depicts aren't necessarily based on truth emphasizes this subjectivity even more. According to McEwan, reality is a construct that is molded by our views and experiences rather than an immutable fact. (McEwan, 2001).

Through its examination of memory and narrative, *Atonement* also casts doubt on the concept of pure truth. The novel poses concerns regarding the accuracy of memory and the function of narrative in forming our perceptions of the past. Because of her poor recall and propensity to make up stories in order to make sense of the world, Briony made a false charge. According to McEwan, our sense of reality can be distorted by stories and memory is not a dependable source of information. The reader's prior interpretation of the events is called into question in the second half of the book when Robbie's point of view discloses the reality of what actually occurred. Thus, the story highlights the notion that truth is arbitrary and relies on one's perspective. Postmodern elements of the book also explore identity and how it is created. Due to her limited knowledge of the circumstances and propensity to make up stories in order to make sense of the world, Briony made a false charge. The book implies that identity is fluid and subject to change depending on one's experiences and viewpoints. Another aspect of postmodernism included in the book is a self-reflexive critique on literature and narrative. As an aspiring author, Briony is often reflecting on how fiction may influence reality. Her

erroneous charge against Robbie might be seen as a parable about the risks associated with fabricating facts while narrating a tale. Further stressing the notion that all writing is a construct and not necessarily representative of reality, the story concludes with Briony's admission that she had deceived the reader through her writing. (McEwan, 2001).

The novel can be read as a postmodern critique of the concept of absolute truth. The novel challenges the traditional belief in the objective truth and offers a vision of truth that is subjective and fragmented. Through the analysis of the novel, it is hypothesized that the postmodern vision of truth in the novel emphasizes the role of memory and storytelling in constructing truth. The research attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1 How does the novel challenge the traditional concept of absolute truth?
- 2 How does the novel reflect the postmodern rejection of objective truth?
- 3 How does the novel emphasize the role of memory and storytelling in constructing truth?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In "Atonement," the postmodern vision of absolute truth is explored through the lens of storytelling and the nature of truth itself. McEwan's work delves into the idea that there is no absolute reality or truth, aligning with postmodern theories of truth (GRIN, 2022). The novel employs unreliable narration to present layered truths and a constant deferral of meaning, highlighting the complexities of truth in a postmodern context (Postmodernism and Unreliable Narration, 2022). McEwan's focus on writing, imagination, history, and the nature of truth in the novel reflects postmodern strategies in storytelling (Postmodern Strategies, 2014). The novel is seen as a demonstration of McEwan's negotiation of metafictional aspects within a postmodern narrative, emphasizing the suspension of disbelief and the reader's engagement with truth (Negotiating Metafictional Aspects, 2001). The interplay of authorial control and readerly judgments in McEwan's work further emphasizes the construction of truth within the narrative, blurring the lines between reality and fiction (The Interplay of Authorial Control, 2013). "Atonement" contributes to the postmodern canon by challenging traditional notions of truth and reality, inviting readers to reconsider their understanding of absolute truth in storytelling (What would you consider to be the Postmodern canon?, 2013). Through its exploration of absent mothers and post-imperial melancholia, the novel prompts a reevaluation of truth and fiction within the context of postmodernism (Reconsidering Absent Mothers, 2013). In the rise of post-postmodernism, "Atonement" remains a significant work that continues to challenge and redefine notions of truth and storytelling in literature (I Write, Therefore I Am, 2017). Almaarroof and Rostam (2023) delve into the concept of fragmented landscapes in Pinter's play *The Room*, illustrating how the physical and psychological spaces within the narrative contribute to a postmodern understanding of identity and existence. Their analysis highlights the disconnection between characters and the environments they inhabit, emphasizing the existential crises that arise from this fragmentation. This study underscores the intricate ways in which Pinter's work reflects the disjointedness inherent in postmodern thought.

Similarly, Abdulla and Faraj (2024) examine the theme of irrationalism in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, arguing that the characters' motivations and actions are often rooted in profound irrationality, a hallmark of postmodern narratives. Their research indicates that

the absurd elements within the play challenge traditional notions of rationality and coherence, ultimately leading to a deeper exploration of the human condition. This study is significant in highlighting how Pinter's rejection of logical structures invites audiences to confront the complexities of postmodern life. In another exploration of Pinter's oeuvre, Almaarroof and Mehasin (2024) analyze *The Homecoming*, focusing on the celebrated fragmentation present within the text. They argue that the disjointed nature of the dialogue and the interactions among characters serve as a microcosm for the postmodern world. This exploration of fragmentation extends beyond the narrative to include themes of memory and identity, which are crucial in understanding the disarray of familial and societal relationships in a postmodern context. Finally, Almaarroof and Abdullah (2024) address the notion of "breaking the grand narrative" in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*. While positioned slightly outside of Pinter's direct works, their analysis remains relevant as it contextualizes the broader postmodern critiques regarding narrative structures. The authors argue that *Buried Child*, like Pinter's works, subverts traditional narratives, showcasing the instability of meaning and the dismantling of established truths within the postmodern landscape. Collectively, these studies provide a comprehensive perspective on the complexities and thematic richness of Pinter's plays as embodiments of postmodern thought. They underscore the significance of fragmentation, irrationality, and the challenge to grand narratives, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse surrounding postmodern literature and its manifestations in contemporary theater.

Previous researches on "Atonement" and postmodernism have focused on the exploration of guilt, love, and betrayal. However, there has been little research on the postmodern vision of absolute truth in the novel. Postmodernism is a literary movement that rejects the traditional belief in objective truth and emphasizes the role of subjectivity and fragmentation in our understanding of reality.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a close reading approach to analyze the novel through the lens of postmodernism. The analysis focuses on the novel's rejection of the traditional concept of absolute truth and its emphasis on the role of memory and storytelling in constructing truth.

4. THEORY CONCEPTS USED IN DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Postmodernism theory is used to analyze the vision of absolute truth in McEwan's "Atonement." The theory emphasizes the rejection of objective truth and the importance of subjectivity and fragmentation in our understanding of reality. The paper also draws on narrative theory to explore the role of memory and storytelling in constructing truth.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. The Subjective Truths that Shaped "Atonement"

The protagonist, Briony Tallis, is a young woman with a passion for storytelling. She is able to imagine a world that is more interesting than her own with the aid of fairy tales, pretend play, and a strong imagination. The truth, according to the book, is "strange and deceptive; it had to be fought for, against the current of the ordinary." Briony battles a discrepancy between her self-ideal and self-perception, which causes a fracture in the self and appears to be the root of both her subjectivity and her dependability. As Briony ages, McEwan challenges the reader to pursue a truth that is elusive and ever-evolving. She observes her sister and Robbie Turner interacting while she is a little kid and how she responds to it alters the course of many people's life. She is unable to understand the

meaning of the action being played out in front of her, and as a result, her interpretation embellishes the facts with untrue ideas. However, the mind is prone to fill in the blanks that are left, and as a result, Briony starts to create her own memories. (McEwan, 2001)

Postmodern writing frequently exhibits a high level of self-consciousness regarding the narrative and representational processes. Her life experiences and the environment she has grown up in have influenced Briony's individuality. She occasionally allows herself to become completely engrossed in her imagination, but this liberation from reality is frequently fleeting since she quickly realizes that "of course, it had all been her - by her and about her, and now she was back in the world, not one she could make, but one that had made her." (McEwan, 2001, 27)

The ability to distinguish between her own mental projections and the views of the other characters rests on the reader. By acknowledging that a narrator is influenced by their surroundings and highlighting the fragmentation that precludes the idea of a universal knowledge of the universe, Ian McEwan exemplifies postmodernist philosophy. In this book, Olson's difference between a fallible and an unreliable narrator, as well as the impact of the narrator's identity and social function, stand out as being particularly significant. Unreliable narration is portrayed in the novel as a psychological defense mechanism that reevaluates what constitutes reality and truth in fictitious contexts: "He knew how easily an idea or impression could become fixed, how a person could fall into a category." (McEwan, 2016) this highlights the fragility of ideas and perceptions, suggesting that thoughts and identities can easily be cemented into fixed categories. This notion aligns closely with postmodern critiques of absolute truth and the ways in which society constructs meaning. In a postmodern context, the belief in absolute truths is often challenged. Postmodernism posits that truths are not universal or objective, but rather subjective and shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts. Individuals' identities and ideas, therefore, are seen as fluid, influenced by their experiences and the discourses surrounding them. The quote captures the essence of this perspective, illustrating how easily one can be pigeonholed into a particular category based on prevailing notions or societal constructs. The idea that "a person could fall into a category" reflects the postmodern understanding that identity is not a fixed essence but a complex interplay of various influences. When people are categorized, it can lead to simplifications, stereotypes, and a singular narrative that often overlooks the multiplicity of human experience. This highlights the danger of adhering to absolute truths, as it can lead to an oversimplified understanding of both self and others.

Furthermore, McEwan's statement emphasizes the importance of awareness regarding how quickly conclusions can be drawn, which resonates with the postmodern call for skepticism and critical thinking. By recognizing the contingent and constructed nature of ideas and identities, individuals can resist being confined to rigid categories and engage more fully with the complexity of their own and others' lived experiences. This quote serves as a reminder of the postmodern critique of absolute truth, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of identity and a recognition of the social processes that shape our perceptions and categorizations. This perspective promotes the idea that truth is not something to be discovered but rather something that is continuously negotiated and redefined. In this sense, Jennifer Egan, the *New York Times*, once said that "Truth is never singular; it is a tapestry woven from many threads. No one knows the truth of an event, except for those who were there, and they each see it through their own eyes." -

5.2. Play with Time and Memory:

"The future lay in modulating the past." (McEwan, *The Children Act*, 2014). In this context, the phrase reflects the writer's understanding of past, memory, and identity. The complex relationship between memory, identity, and the unfolding of future possibilities, suggesting that how we interpret and integrate our past experiences significantly shapes our future actions and decisions. The act of "modulating" the past implies not only revisiting memories but also reinterpreting them in a way that influences one's present and future. Critics have observed that in contemporary literature, especially in postmodern works, there is often a focus on the fluidity of time and the subjective nature of memory. As noted by literary critic David Edgar, "Memory is inherently selective and subjective, shaping our identities and experiences in profound ways" (Edgar, 1999). This highlights the power of modulation mentioned in McEwan's quote—the capacity to reshape one's understanding of the past can lead to new possibilities and pathways for the future. By reconsidering past events, individuals may find new meanings and directions, thereby transforming their future outlook. Similarly, the critic Julia Kristeva, in her exploration of intertextuality, suggests that texts and experiences are in constant dialogue with one another: "The past is not dead; it is not even past" (Kristeva, 1980). This notion underscores the idea that our past experiences persist in our present consciousness and can be reinterpreted, allowing for a continuous modulation between past and future experiences. Linda Hutcheon, in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* claims that "McEwan's novel moves seamlessly between the present, the past, and the future, reflecting the postmodern belief that time is not linear but rather a fluid concept." -

5.3. Self-Reflexive Commentary on Literature and Storytelling:

Katarzyna Poloczek, in *Text Matters* said that the novel "is a self-conscious novel that examines the power of storytelling to shape our understanding of the world." (Poloczek, 2016, 205-220) Poloczek's assertion highlights the metafictional aspects of "Atonement", where the act of storytelling itself becomes a central theme. In this novel, McEwan intricately weaves together multiple perspectives and temporal shifts, encouraging readers to reflect on how narratives are constructed and the implications of those constructions. The character of Briony Tallis, as both a young girl and later a writer, embodies the struggle between truth and fiction, as her initial misinterpretation of events leads to life-altering consequences for those around her. This introduces a critical exploration of guilt, responsibility, and the unreliability of memory. The novel raises fundamental questions about the role of the narrator and the ethics of storytelling. By positioning Briony as a self-aware author within the text, McEwan compels the reader to consider how stories can be manipulated to serve individual motives, while simultaneously revealing the transformative potential of storytelling to bring about atonement and understanding. The layered narrative structure invites readers to engage critically with the text, reflecting on their own interpretations and the narratives they accept as truth. Furthermore, the notion that storytelling shapes our understanding aligns with literary criticism that emphasizes the importance of context and perspective in shaping meaning. By illustrating the consequences of a single narrative, McEwan underscores how stories create and affect perceptions of reality, shaping relationships, identities, and historical memory. Poloczek's analysis underscores the self-reflexive nature of the novel, illuminating the ways in which McEwan grapples with the

complexities of storytelling and its capacity to influence our understanding of human experience.

5.4. Exploration of Identity and its Construction:

In the Guardian, Margaret Atwood claims that "The novel explores the idea that identity is not fixed but is constructed through a combination of individual experience and cultural influence." (Atwood, 2013, September 7), thus, the exploration of identity and its construction is a central theme that permeates the narrative, particularly through the characters of Briony Tallis, Cecilia Tallis, and Robbie Turner. The novel intricately examines how identities are formed, perceived, and altered by personal experiences and the subjective narratives that individuals create.

On one hand, Briony's character illustrates the complexities of identity formation, especially in her early years as a writer and a child. Her misunderstanding of adult interactions leads her to craft a narrative that significantly impacts the lives of those around her. The pivotal moment occurs when she misinterprets a series of events between Robbie and Cecilia, which culminates in her false accusation. Briony's identity is shaped not only by her family and social environment but also by her aspirations as a writer. As she matures, she grapples with the consequences of her actions and seeks atonement for her earlier misinterpretations. This self-awareness transforms her identity, prompting her to reconcile her past with her current understanding of truth and fiction. On the other hand, Cecilia's identity is constructed through her defiance of societal norms and her passionate love for Robbie. Her development from a sheltered young woman to someone who asserts her independence highlights the interplay between personal desires and societal expectations. Cecilia's relationship with Robbie challenges her family's perceptions and contributes to her sense of self, marking a departure from her prescribed role within her upper-middle-class family.

Moreover, Robbie's identity is marked by class distinctions and the aspirations of a working-class young man educated at a prestigious institution. His experiences as the son of the family's cook put him in a precarious position, straddling both the upper class and his origins. The label of "the accused" following Briony's false testimony drastically alters his identity; he becomes a victim of circumstance, and his journey throughout the war further complicates his self-conception.

The novel's structure, which includes different perspectives and shifts in time, also plays a critical role in the exploration of identity. Each character's story is intimately connected to how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. The multiplicity of narratives allows McEwan to examine the subjective nature of identity, suggesting that it is not a fixed entity but rather something that evolves over time through experiences and interpretations. The final section reveals that Briony has become a published author, and her retrospective narration serves as both a way to come to terms with her past actions and reshape her identity as a storyteller. This metafictional approach forces the reader to confront the constructed nature of identity and narrative itself, emphasizing that identities can be rewritten and understood anew through storytelling.

In this regard, McEwan vividly examines the construction of identity through complex character dynamics and the ramifications of narrative misinterpretation. The characters' struggles with their identities—shaped by personal failings, societal pressures, and the desire for reconciliation—reflect the intricate and often tumultuous process of self-discovery and redemption. The novel ultimately suggests that identity is an ever-evolving

narrative shaped by both personal experiences and the stories we tell about ourselves and others.

5.5. Inter Subjectivity And Alterity

Unreliable narrator's sub-truths are predicated on a misinterpretation of the conscious perception of occurrences. A self-deceiving or subjective mind could see the world in conflicting ways, producing an inaccurate narrative as a result. According to Husserl, Each person has, at the same place in space, 'the same' appearance of the same things -- if, as we might suppose, all have the same sensibility. (Husserl, 1982). The intersection of people's cognitive skills leads to the presumption that the world seems the same to everyone. Husserl's proposed interpersonal knowledge may not hold up to the sensibility of unreliable narrators since it is potentially too sophisticated. Briony's youth is characterized by a lack of inter subjectivity since she is still in the developing stages of learning about the adult world. She lives in a wistful alterity where her identity is determined by a quality of otherness that is opposite to, distinct from, or inassimilable by the self. She creates stories to make her life more fascinating since she feels alien to a world of information that she can't access because she's young. The inability of the self to comprehend the other's phenomenological experience leads to "a fundamental asymmetry and, ultimately, disconnectedness between the self and other," according to the theory.

This disconnection is transformed by Briony into an active imagination that manifests in her stories as a kind of empathy. She considers the notion that "confusion and misunderstanding" are the root causes of sadness, but "above all it was the failure to recognize that other people are as real as you. And the only way to access these many brains and demonstrate their equality was through a tale. Thus, the novel illustrates intersubjectivity as a crucial element of storytelling and narrative comprehension. (Husserl, 1982).

Briony acknowledges that she struggles to understand the complexity of others. She utilized her own stories as a means of escape when she was younger. She knows now that her stories led to Robbie's accusation as an adult, but she retreats into yet another state of denial. When Briony enrolls in nursing school, she leaves her former self behind. Nurse Tallis relies on following a predetermined script that ensures "the continued coordination of conduct." Behind the façade of Nurse Tallis, who plays the part of a "no-nonsense nurse" despite her quivering hands, Briony's actual identity is momentarily concealed. The ward sister will not put up with any indications of uniqueness "as she filled their vacated minds" and clothes them in uniforms that "like all uniforms, eroded identity, and [had] no place in the ward." Daily tasks like pressing seams, smoothing pleats, and polishing shoes—especially the heels—started a process through which other concerns were gradually disregarded.

As their lives are now moulded by instructions and routine, their past lives no longer matter, and their particular wants can only exist in their heads. The group's efforts have rigorously circumscribed Nurse Tallis's personality, but the true self that lies underneath this façade of maternal tranquility will eventually come to light. Briony sees a growing gap "between her and another self" and refers to the 'other' Briony as "the imagined or ghostly persona." Her identity as a storyteller was not altered by Nurse Tallis' badge and outfit, and she later rediscovers "her true self, secretly hoarded, quietly accumulating." Without any respect for the facts, she then returns to the imagined views of others. She

alters her life's circumstances and creates fresh stories for "the people of the ward," whose fictitious "rambling thoughts" serve as the basis for Briony's tales. Her fictional creations distance her from reality and call into question our ability to fully comprehend the fundamental existence of others. The complicated inter subjective that results from the complex interaction between the reader, writer, and narrator then alludes to the significance of narrative comprehension and the deviance of imaginative alignment.

Multi-perspectival structure of the events in the plot emphasizes the subjectivity of interpretation. Each character who narrates the story has a distinct existence in the book's imaginary universe and tells the story from a third-person perspective. As a result of their overt involvement in the story, they are established as a homodiegetic narrator who is "subject to the epistemological uncertainty of lived experience." (28) Due to her young age and sheltered upbringing in an upper-class family, Briony has little understanding of the outside world. Her version of events differs from that of the other characters, and because of this, it serves as a point of comparison for the reader to look for any early indications that she might not be trustworthy. Briony watches from the sidelines as people communicate with one another. She interprets before she understands and knows before she sees. Cecelia and Robbie's talk by the fountain turns into a lovers' argument that, in Briony's opinion, ought to culminate in a shocking drowning scenario and a proposal of marriage. Briony temporarily reverts to fairytale tropes and considers that the setting "could easily have accommodated, in the distance at least, a medieval castle." She quickly understands, though, that she didn't comprehend and that she must only observe. She makes an attempt to present herself as an unbiased observer in this fashion, but she quickly realizes that what she perceives as her access to adult behavior is actually a system of rites and conventions she knew nothing about, up to this point. As these "rites and conventions" of "adult behavior" are confirmed by the reader's own experience as well as the third-person perspectives of Cecelia and Robbie that fill in the blanks of Briony's tale, the reader engages with a different frame of reference. Briony has a negative interpretation of the desire that underpins Robbie and Cecelia's relationship in the book; this interpretation reaches a boiling point as she enters a realization of her worst fears. (McEwain, 2001)

Robbie and Cecelia find themselves in the darkened sphere of the library and give in to the sexual tension that exists between them. Whereas the reader has access to the sensual scene that exists in the reality of Cecelia and Robbie, Briony thinks she is witness to assault and her immediate understanding was that she had interrupted an attack, a hand-to-hand fight. These three characters' disparate knowledge bases serve as evidence that homodiegetic narrators' knowledge is constrained by the particularity of their lived experiences. Olson's claim that homodiegetic narrators cannot have metatextual or omniscient knowledge because they are constrained by their own presence in a fictitious context does not appear to be contradicted by *Atonement* at first look. Since her personal experience is what determines Briony's reality, she is struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive. A mysterious, seemingly omniscient narrator does, however, occasionally shine through. The phrase "within the half hour Briony would commit her crime" marks the beginning of a new chapter told from Briony's perspective and suggests the existence of a separate narrator from both of the other characters. (McEwain, 2001)

It appears that the novel's narrative structure avoids the basic restrictions that are brought about by the employment of homodiegetic narrators. The inferred author who is hidden

behind the other characters' statements and the origin of the unreliable narration are both called into doubt. The author or a figure who narrates, according to Walsh, is always the narrator. There is not a middle ground. McEwan did not, however, view Briony as a "wicked person" who engaged in "intentional mendacity." His perspective is distinct from the introductory statement, which passes judgment on Briony's choices by labeling her actions as "crimes." The reader is thus prompted to question the intermediary position of an anonymous narrator who ostensibly has access to omniscient knowledge by the contrast between the standards of the author, narrator, and suggested author.

Third-person narration is used throughout much of the novel to tell the story, but the last chapter switches to Briony's first-person viewpoint. This change makes Briony a clearly unreliable narrator rather than a faulty one. Olson distinguishes between various unreliable narrators because they affect the reader in different ways. As a flawed narrator's views are changed by external variables rather than fundamental or essential features, their errors are frequently seen as being "situationally motivated." (McEwan, 2001)

Narrator might not be able to accurately recount their events. The reader understands that the scene should be interpreted as a sexual encounter, yet thirteen-year-old Briony believes she sees Robbie assault her sister. Due to her young age, she is not instantly accused of being an unreliable narrator, but the experience does alter how she views the subsequent events. She comes to the conclusion that it is better for her not to "be afraid now of Robbie; better by far to let him become the object of her detestation and disgust." It is revealed in a later scene that Lola, Briony's cousin, was sexually assaulted by an unidentified offender. Briony instantly makes the connection between this incident and the one she witnessed in the library and in that way, "the truth instructed her eyes. "Seeing and knowing are linked, but they are not the same thing since seeing needs observation and knowing relies on assumptions. However, despite the fact that the darkness prevented Briony from accurately recognizing the person who fled the scene, she still concludes that Robbie must be Lola's rapist. Despite a certain understanding that her story cannot be referred to as "the objective truth," Briony's commentary frequently suggests that she chooses to recall things in ways that suit her. Her account of the incident is evasive, and she "would have preferred to qualify, or complicate, her use of the word 'saw'." Briony walks a fine line between being a reliable narrator and one who can be trusted since her choices and vivid imagination now have a significant impact on the lives of others characters. The only character that could correctly identify her rapist is Lola herself, but Briony's words invite her "to remain silent about the truth, banish it and forget it entirely, and persuade herself not of some contrary tale, but simply of her own uncertainty." (McEwan, 2001)

In order to keep her own ideas from being challenged, Briony enters a condition of self-deception when she chooses to lead people astray by committing the "sin of omission." She erases from her memory any information that does not support her own interpretation of the events in order to support the lie she created. She therefore plays on the reader's need for a happy conclusion and eases her own mind by creating a make-believe world that excuses her previous transgressions.

According to Booth, unreliable narrators are "dependable in the sense of being consistent," which means that once a narrator has proven to be unreliable, they are unable to simply restore the shattered confidence and become infallible once more. The dramatic

irony that is inaccessible to the unreliable narrator and obvious to the insightful reader creates a rationale from which readers will determine cases of irony and unreliability in the novel. These conclusions are noted and cannot be easily forgotten since they have influenced the reader's comprehension and it has been established that unreliable narration is a "textual constant." Due to her young age, thirteen-year-old Briony may be pardoned for being an unreliable narrator; nevertheless, as the novel goes on, so does her experience, making it harder to distinguish between her mental projections and the observations that define the reality of the other characters. As a storyteller, Briony frequently makes references to her boredom with her life's routine reality. She may see what life would be like if things were different in her work, but she also acknowledges that "she was under no responsibility to the truth She made no one a chronicle promise. She could only be unrestrained here. Her independence is a means of escape an unfulfilling existence, not a result of the truth. The reader is left wondering about the blurred border between truth and fiction as a result of Briony's ongoing interactions with fictitious worlds. (Booth, 1983)

the last chapter switches to the first-person perspective, revealing that the entire story was concocted in Briony's head, rendering her wholly unreliable. Everything about the other characters' internal struggles and secret aspirations was only accurate in the sense that Briony believed it to be true. Her assessment implies the text's standards and beliefs, therefore the indicated author should be "imagined as a personality supporting the work." (Booth, 1983) Her presence in the story is given the same abstract personality as the supposed author, making her become a version of the author that the reader conjures based only on the text. The comprehension of this make-believe universe is significantly altered when it is discovered that Briony is actually the (fictitious) creator of the tales of the other characters in the book. She assumes responsibility for the overall narrative's structure and meaning as the personification of the suggested author, and as such, the criticism she leveled at young Briony's behavior was a result of her own introspection. In this story, Booth's notion of the implied author is subsequently taken quite literally, with the result being a narrative twist that undermines the reliability of the entire narrative.

Finally through a fight for interpretation and an unwavering skepticism of the truth, the novel presents Briony as an unreliable narrator. When Booth's interpretation of the indicated author is accepted literally, it adds a fictional element to the story by explaining why a homodiegetic narrator would have omniscient knowledge. Due to her restricted worldview at the beginning of the book, Briony is introduced as a naive fallible narrator, but as time goes on, she gradually deviates into an unreliable narrator who reconstructs reality to lessen the discomfort of her previous mistakes. Therefore, Briony's unreliable account also makes references to intersubjectivity and alterity issues. A fragmented reality without an objective truth is produced by individual experience, the deceitful mind of the unreliable narrator, and other factors. Briony has difficulty with the notion that her experience is different from that of those nearby, and she finds it challenging to understand the intricacy that distinguishes their perspective. She uses her own imagination to try to piece together this fragmentation, and it appears that her unreliability is a result of her ego's protective mechanisms.

6. Conclusion

In "Atonement", the author intricately weaves a narrative that challenges the notion of absolute truth through a postmodern lens. The novel reveals how subjective experiences,

personal motivations, and the act of storytelling itself complicate the quest for a singular, definitive truth. Through the character of Briony Tallis, McEwan explores the fluidity of memory and the fallibility of perception, illustrating how one's understanding of events is often colored by individual biases and societal influences. The interplay of unreliable narration and the fragmented structure of the text exemplifies postmodernism's skepticism toward grand narratives and universal truths. McEwan crafts a narrative that encourages readers to engage critically with multiple perspectives, recognizing that truth is not a fixed entity but rather a construct shaped by context and interpretation. As Briony grapples with the consequences of her actions and seeks atonement, the novel ultimately emphasizes the complexities of human experience and the ethical implications of storytelling. By deconstructing the concept of absolute truth, McEwan invites readers to reflect on the nature of reality itself and the stories we tell to navigate the world. In this way, the novel stands as a poignant exploration of the postmodern vision of truth, serving as a reminder that understanding often lies in the grey areas rather than in absolutes. The novel leaves the readers questioning not only the reliability of narratives but also the very essence of truth in life, echoing the uncertainty that defines the human condition.

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