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The Interplay of Authorial Control and Readerly Judgments in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

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THE INTERPLAY OF AUTHORIAL CONTROL AND READERLY JUDGMENTS IN IAN
MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT*

A thesis submitted to
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Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

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English

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One	6
Chapter Two	29
Chapter Three	52
Chapter Four	65
Conclusion	75
References	78
Appendix/ IRB Letter	82

Abstract

Mainly focusing on postmodern literary theory, I will analyze Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and suggest how it becomes a simulacrum due to the protagonist, Briony Tallis taking control of authorship from McEwan and expressing how she is the author of the text. Because Briony negates an important aspect of the novel, hyperreality occurs. This thesis will look at the role McEwan plays as author of *Atonement*, how main characters Robbie and Cecilia take part within this fictional world and how they become aware of an authorial presence within their lives, how Briony takes ultimate control of the pen and appoints herself into the authorial role, and finally how her text is a simulacrum due to her acts as author.

Introduction

In the following text, I view Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* through many different theoretical lenses in order to indicate how it operates as a metafictional work, how the world within McEwan's novel exists as a storyworld, and how hyperreality is present within that storyworld that McEwan ultimately creates. In this introductory chapter, I define each theory and explain how it is used in the context of each of my chapters as applied to McEwan's novel.

The basis of *Atonement* is that Briony, the thirteen year-old protagonist, mistakenly accuses Robbie, her cleaning woman's son and sister's lover, of raping her visiting cousin, Lola. Before this occurs, Robbie and Cecelia, Briony's sister, have finally found and consummated their love for each other. Briony decides to identify Robbie as Lola's rapist because she has read the vulgar apology note that he writes to Cecelia for acting strangely around her lately; then she walks in on her sister and Robbie making love in the library, but she thinks Robbie is forcing himself on Cecelia. Robbie is sent to jail and then placed into service during World War Two. He and Cecelia attempt to get back to one another after the war, and, when Briony sees them in Part Three, the two live happily together as Briony apologizes to them for her action. On the last page of Part Three, the initials "BT" and date "1999" are at the bottom, indicating that Briony is the author of all of the text just read. The final section of the novel, "London, 1999," is a diary entry written by Briony in which she reveals that she made up the ending of her book. The movie version of *Atonement* indicates that Briony is jealous of her sister and Robbie's love because she has feelings for Robbie (*Atonement* dir. Wright). The hint of jealousy stems from a scene in Part Two when the narrator mentions that Robbie remembers walking with Briony, then age ten, by the river when she jumps in and pretends to drown so he will save her. As he dives in and pulls her body to the grass, she admits her love for him, but it is never mentioned again throughout the

book. Although her action might indicate that Briony did have an obsession with Robbie, one would expect that a thirteen-year-old girl would easily forget a preteen crush and move on with her life. Briony decides to choose Robbie out of fear because she needs a scapegoat for her naïve world having been ruined by his letter and because she must have control. She gains this control because she takes it away from McEwan, as I explain in Chapter One.

In the first chapter I explain how *Atonement* functions as metafiction and examine the metafictional elements within it, such as its characters (especially Robbie and Cecelia, whom I look further into as characters in Chapter 3). My understanding and knowledge of this theory comes from Patricia Waugh's work *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Her definition is as follows: "*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2, italics original). She expands on this definition by suggesting that these works often explore structures within narrative but also examine the possibility of reality being fictional or constructed. The term metafiction applies perfectly to McEwan's work because *Atonement* points to itself as fiction and characters often wonder whether life can be fictionalized, as seen with Cecelia and Robbie, who often feel as if their world is constructed or whether what they are doing has been done long in the past. Metafiction also comes about when McEwan reveals in "London, 1999" that Briony is the author. The metafictionality of the text not only allows the reader to question the reality that could be in and could be lost in this text, but also allows the novel to question its own relation with the notion of constructed reality.

In Chapter One and Chapter Two, I examine Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality and simulacra in relation to McEwan and Briony. Before I begin defining and explaining

Baudrillard's work, I wish to say that I focus on hyperreality specifically within the storyworld of *Atonement*. In *Basic Elements of Narrative*, David Herman defines storyworlds as follows: "Storyworlds can be defined as the worlds evoked by narratives; reciprocally, narratives can be defined as blueprints for a specific mode of world-creation. Mapping words (or other kinds of semiotic cues) onto worlds is a fundamental – perhaps *the* fundamental – requirement for narrative sense-making..." (105, italics original). Herman indicates that storyworlds are the realistic world within the text; he further clarifies this concept by stating that "storyworlds are mental models of the situations and events being recounted – of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what manner" (107). Basically any act that occurs within the text represents the storyworld. Another term that I use and define in my first chapter is mimetic, which is clarified by James Phelan in *Living to Tell About It* as follows: "Responses to the mimetic component involve an audience's interest in the characters as possible people and in the narrative world as like our own" (20). So, with this background, I explain in Chapters One and Two how hyperreality occurs within the storyworld of McEwan's text; in other words, hyperreality occurs in Briony's reality or the world she inhabits in McEwan's novel.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard first examines the notion of Borges' fabled map, in which the map makers of the Empire match the territory exactly. With his theory, Baudrillard suggests that the map then replaces the reality of the territory – the map becomes the reality. He further explains that simulation is a "generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" because simulation is no longer related to substance (1). Simulation does not agree with representation because representation relates to the principle of the sign and "the real," but simulation is the "*radical negation of the sign as value*" (6, italics original). The most important quotation relating to my research is about the formation of a simulacrum: "Whereas

representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (6). Therefore, simulation accepts the structure of representation and replaces it by enveloping representation with itself, making it a simulacrum.t Hyperreality not only is present due to the masking of an absence but because a simulation or non-reality covers the absence and represents itself as the form of reality a simulacra is present. There is a “fake” reality, to put it into simpler terms. As I will further explain in Chapters One and Two as well as in my Conclusion, hyperreality is present in the storyworld that McEwan creates within his novel. In other words, hyperreality is present within Briony’s world/ reality because she decides to cover the absence of Robbie and Cecelia by representing a reality where they live after the war and are together in the end of her book. This ending of her novel indicates to the reader that her book may be some form of non-reality because, ultimately, it is supposed to represent the truth of what happened in her life at her home and what happened between Robbie and Cecelia.

In Chapter Four, I apply Saussure’s and Lacan’s ideas on the signified and the signifier to *Atonement*. In his book *Course in General Linguistics* Ferdinand de Saussure indicates that there is a formula for the concept of the linguistic sign in which the “concept” or “signified” is over the “sound-image” or “signifier” (126). Signifier and signified are united and people attempt to find meaning in the word tree and the concept of that “tree,” but “only the associations sanctioned by that language appear to us to conform to reality, and we disregard whatever others might be imagined” (125). The meaning must come from the reality of the language that the reader of the sign knows or speaks. He further explains that the bond between these two is arbitrary because, as he explains and uses for an example, “the idea of ‘sister’ is not linked by any inner relationship to the succession sounds s-ö-r which serves as its signifier in French; that

it could be represented equally by just any other sequence is proved by differences among languages”(126-127). Saussure is saying that the idea of a concept does not necessarily link it to the word or sound-image that represents it because of the multiple languages that exist.

In “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud,” Jacques Lacan analyzes Saussure’s model and uses the example of twin doors as the signified with “Ladies” and “Gentlemen” as the signifiers to indicate restrooms. He uses this example to point out the absurdity of the signifier in relation to the signified. He also explains that the signifier “tree” can relate to any number of trees including the tree of life, tree of Diana, a tree struck by lightning, etc. in order to convey that different forms of the signified make understanding of language or a concept impossible due to this algorithm of signifier over signified. In other words, it is impossible to have a fixed formula because the signified may become different concepts for each signifier.

With these many theorists providing the essential background, I wish to examine *Atonement* and explain how hyperreality is present within the storyworld of the novel, how Briony’s text becomes a simulacrum, and how control reigns over the book as a major theme. Although a battle for control seems to take place mostly between McEwan and Briony, the reader is the true winner, because he or she passes judgment and therefore holds authority over Briony, McEwan, and *Atonement* as a whole.

Chapter One

McEwan as Author of *Atonement*

Although the final chapter or epilogue of *Atonement* states that Briony has written the previous three chapters as her own, Ian McEwan is still the biographical author and controls both Briony and her text. He creates the storyworld within the novel and creates Briony herself, but because Briony has such control issues, she attempts to take the authorial role away from McEwan. Ultimately, Briony is still just a character that is bridled by McEwan. Through the storyworld that he creates and his metafictional writing style, as I define and layout in my Introduction with the help of Patricia Waugh's theory on metafiction, McEwan makes his characters meta-aware of their situations as fictional and their world as a constructed reality.

The characters of Briony, Cecelia, and Robbie all seem to be aware of the fact that they are fictional characters in the ways they react to life. Briony thinks that she is able to control other lives around her because she has the power of writing and thus creating narrative. Robbie and Cecelia both feel as if their world is fictional, at times, and they are able to see the construction of the life and world that surround them. By McEwan writing his characters this way, it seems that he not only comments on the act of writing through Briony but has the text convey the postmodern notion of life/reality as constructed through Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. Hyperreality occurs when an absence is masked by a constructed truth, then that constructed truth replaces the original reality. For instance, in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard uses Borges' fabled map of the Empire as an example. The map resembles the land so much so that it precedes the territory. In other words, a new miniaturized or constructed reality has taken place of the reality of land. The hyperreality of *Atonement* functions as a

simulacrum in the same way that Baudrillard argues Borges' map does. A constructed reality has superseded reality for the reader of *Atonement*. The instances of characters being aware of their constructed surroundings are also clues that point to the fact that Briony is the author of Parts One, Two, and Three. Another instance of awareness is the image of triangles or threes within *Atonement*; these themes convey triangular relationships and are prevalent throughout the novel.

This image can be seen in the two triangular porcelain pieces of the vase that Cecelia retrieves from the fountain, one of the twin cousins with a triangular piece out of his ear, etc. In Chapter Four, I will discuss how this relates to the triangular relationship among the reader, McEwan, and Briony, but now it is important to explain how this triangle represents Briony, Robbie, and Cecelia. These characters relate to and differentiate from each other due to their multiple minds each being represented within the novel. This multiplicity is conveyed first by the three different perspectives on the fountain scene, then the different points of view when it comes to their separate lives, and finally their relationship with each other in the end of "Part Three." Richard Robinson explains, in "The Modernism of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*," that "Although *Atonement* moves between its characters' perspectives, it does not attempt to bring together a multiply-served, common consciousness" (478). The lack of a common consciousness would convey to the reader how controlling Briony is, and how she cannot assimilate the other characters' minds and ideas with her own – she must be separated from as well as be above Cecelia and Robbie. In order for McEwan to indicate how Briony takes over the book, he must write like she Briony and create a postmodern text in its own right.

The Author Himself

Because McEwan guides his readers with clues he also manipulates them with the text because he knows that readers want a happy ending between Robbie and Cecelia or at least anticipates that those readers want to see Robbie and Cecelia successfully back together. In “James Wood writes about the Manipulations of Ian McEwan,” James Wood states that *Atonement* sheds light on McEwan as a manipulator because of “the delicate way it makes readers aware of their own desire to be gratified by serious narrative manipulation” (7). He continues to note that although the reader acknowledges Briony as author, he or she never comprehends the possibility of Briony inventing what happens in the book – especially with her seeing Robbie and Cecelia together. With this scene, “McEwan plays on the complacency of the readerly expectation, whereby, with the help of detailed verisimilitude, readers tend to turn fiction into fact” (8). A reader believes what he or she is reading must be true, even if it is fiction, because he or she cannot comprehend otherwise.

Through the process of reading fiction, especially that which is close to real life occurrences (such as the relationship of a middle class family before and during the Second World War), the reader becomes so engulfed in the novel that he or she believes that what is told in the novel is fact. This type of narrative is “mimetic” as defined in my Introductory Chapter by James Phelan as basically any story that mirrors or mimics the reality or world that the reader is used to in his or her everyday life. Because the characters and storyworld of the novel seem so close to life that a reader experiences and knows, he or she treats the novel as a form of reality. The practice of the novel also allows the reader to recognize that *Atonement* is like other texts which follow narrative patterns, so he or she expects that Robbie and Cecelia must be together in the end and Briony has to recant her statement about Robbie being Lola’s rapist. Not only does

McEwan comment on changing and making new forms of narrative, but he also makes reality fictional.

Briony writes about and alters experiences in her life that she does not fully understand. In “The Poetics and Aesthetics of Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” Stefanie Albers and Torsten Caeners state that, because Briony writes her story down, “she fictionalises reality, inventing a tale from what she experienced in life by fashioning it in terms of the literary models she uses to conceptualise her world” (717). McEwan does the same thing as flesh-and-blood author because, although he never experienced WWII, he heard about his father’s experiences and researched people who did take part in the fighting and healing the wounded. Many people within the literary world have even suggested that he plagiarized when using information from the autobiography of WWII nurse Lucilla Andrews’ *No Time for Romance*. He denies copying Andrews’ work and even says that he gives credit to Andrews in *Atonement* and brings her up any time he talks about constructing his work. He takes these true stories from people who experienced the war first hand and he fictionalizes them into his book.

McEwan responded to the accusation that he plagiarized in his essay “An Inspiration, Yes. Did I Copy from Another Author? No” published in *The Guardian*. In this open letter, he explains that remembering his father’s stories about WWII inspired him to write *Atonement*. He even placed his father’s story about his legs being shot up, so he and another man with no arms both controlled a motor bike in Dunkirk. McEwan, with the power of authorship, adapted his father’s story into his novel in order to convey the reality of the war. As he says in the essay, he wanted to get every detail correct; “It is an eerie, intrusive matter, inserting imaginary characters into actual historical events. A certain freedom is suddenly compromised; as one crosses and re-crosses the lines between fantasy and the historical record, one feels a

weighty obligation to strict accuracy” (2). He is explaining that he needed to provide the truth of what happened in WWII, but with his own characters.

Because McEwan did not hear stories from nurses working at the time of the Second World War, he began to research for letters from the girls, but most of them only contained questions about home more than tales about their work. McEwan did find some instances of working conditions that he needed in order to write about Briony’s experience within the regimented ward, but there was no lengthy first-hand account from any nurse. He was losing hope until he found Andrews’ autobiography, which discusses daily schedules and stories of caring for wounded soldiers. When writing *Atonement*, McEwan wanted to bring to life the true events that happened in battle and in hospitals. As he explains, Andrews’ narrative “was not a fiction. It was the world of a shared reality . . . she rendered in the form of superb reportage, an experience of the war that has been almost entirely neglected, and which I too wanted to bring to life through the eyes of my heroine” (3). McEwan wanted to convey how strict the nursing ward was along with incorporating true detail in the life of soldiers who were travelling through Dunkirk. He needed detail for his narrative and, with the help of Andrews, whom he thanks and acknowledges in a letter at the end of *Atonement*, he was able to portray what the war was like for the people involved.

McEwan included these real stories and writings in his novel in order to convey what people involved in the war went through every day. He explains in his open letter that he wanted to stay true to what happened while also incorporating these stories into his work in order to fit into his characters’ narratives. It seems in some instances that he is writing historical fiction because the scenes are so real; McEwan takes reality and enters it into his own novel reworking it to fit his needs. This replaces the truth of those stories and instances with his new form of truth

– what really happened in his father’s tales, soldier’s letters, Lucilla Andrews’ book are all a part of his fictional work now. McEwan’s work pays homage to these pieces of history, but also shows how McEwan, like Briony, is capable of fictionalizing history to serve his ends.

Writing Double

The first three sections of *Atonement* are all thematically and aesthetically modernist, but the final chapter of “London, 1999” is postmodernist because it is revealed that Briony has written the whole novel. The sections which Briony “wrote” are inherently modernist because of her style and her beliefs as an author. It is important to realize the duplicity with which McEwan writes his novel; not only must he write as Briony, but he must also create *Atonement* as his own work. He must be conscientious of how he writes, because he enters into his own character’s mind, when he makes Briony an author as well.

It seems that McEwan is not just commenting on the act of narrative as a whole with his novel, but, as Robinson states, “*Atonement* self-consciously undoes and rewrites the modernist novel” (474). McEwan must write within this modernist mindset in order to make it believable that Briony did have a hand in writing *Atonement*. With her big reveal in “London, 1999,” Briony takes responsibility for writing a modernist novel, but because McEwan is the author of her work and this final chapter, the text then becomes quite metafictional. He does this to point out that, “postmodernist provisionality, or a threat of textual erasure, is designed to modify modernist claims for the autonomy, monumentalism, and transcendence of literature” (Robinson 475). This would go along with Briony’s state of mind when writing her piece, because she thinks that “the attempt was all” in order to atone for her mistake (351). She believes that her *Atonement* will live on and transcend the past; the attempt of atonement, of writing her novel, is

all that she needs to gain forgiveness. With McEwan being the historical author, he takes this away from her because he points out, just with the act of creating her, that she and her story are not real. He undermines the notion of monumental modernist literature by suggesting that it can and will be changed or erased. He does this because, as Robinson states, “*Atonement* seems to ventriloquize modernism and then to silence it... [it] pretends to be a modernist palimpsest that has undergone continual erasure” (474-475). The text not only portrays modernism, but comments on its tropes and expectations that it sets for the reader. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the reader expects a happy ending due to his or her own expectations of narrative technique, and McEwan writes the happy ending but ultimately takes it away with the final section of Briony’s diary.

McEwan must write in a modernist mode in order to maintain the idea of Briony writing the novel because, in the third part, Briony explains that she has read Woolf’s *The Waves* and was attempting to write with the same geometry, beauty, and mixed consciousness as that work (265). Briony also is a modernist author because of her first work “Two Figures by a Fountain,” and mainly because she submits her work to Cyril Connolly at *Horizon*, from whom she takes advice in order to write her current work. McEwan writes with the same beauty and stream of consciousness of his characters because he gives each mind its own space to express thoughts and judgments, but it is essential that he not have the different minds meet because he has to convey how Briony is unable to do so. McEwan still has to write as his character of Briony and even as she grows into an aged author, McEwan must convey how Briony is unable to let her mind become equal with Robbie and Cecelia’s. She must remain separate because it allows her to feel as if she is in control and holds the utmost power as author, which enables her to take

authorship for the novel. She believes that she is more powerful than Robbie and Cecelia, and even thinks that she has more control over the text than McEwan, her creator

McEwan as Postmodernist

When the final section reveals Briony as the author of the novel, she describes how the attempt to atone was all that she needed in order to make amends; Briony indicates that she is not able, as an author, to resolve her mistake to anyone because she controls and holds “absolute power” (350). It can be said that McEwan is commenting on his own position as author within this same section and he is appealing to his audience as James Phelan suggests in “Delayed Disclosure and the Problem of Other Minds: Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*.” Phelan explains that this final section is a “delayed disclosure” from McEwan, which “is analogous to Briony’s misidentification of Robbie: since we have no prior definitive signal that Parts One, Two, and Three are Briony’s novel, he has implicitly misidentified the nature of his narrative up until this point” (127). Through the first reading of *Atonement* this quote applies, but upon a second reading it is easier to see that McEwan adds Briony’s practice and compulsion to fictionalize the world around her and “meta-level communications about its modernist techniques” (128). This need for control seems especially true for the scene in which “[Briony] left the café, and as she walked along the Common she felt the distance widen between her and another self, no less real, who was walking back toward the hospital. Perhaps the Briony who was walking in the direction of Balham was the imagined or ghostly persona” (McEwan 311). Because, as the reader finds out in the final section, Briony never goes to meet her sister, that the “ghostly” Briony is true. The same goes for the last words uttered by Robbie in Part Two, “I promise, you won’t hear another word from me” (250). These last words ring true when it is understood that Robbie died from

infection to his wound, but upon the first reading, it just seems as though Robbie will no longer complain.

McEwan is not just writing with modernist technique, he is also placing meta-level commentary throughout the novel in order to clue the reader into the final section. These clues often go unnoticed on the first read, but after the reader understand “London, 1999” and even rereads the novel, these hints will start to come together. By utilizing meta-narrative, McEwan transforms the narrative and even folds the narrative back on itself, in which the text comments on the fact that it is fiction. Phelan states that “the accomplished novelist has been writing not a straight modernist novel in Briony’s (or Woolf’s) mode but a more self-conscious, self-reflexive novel. In its self-reflexiveness, McEwan’s surprise ending acknowledges *Atonement’s* postmodern moment” (129). By doing so, McEwan embraces postmodernism. In his essay, “Literature of Replenishment,” John Barth explains that modernist or any “artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work” (206). McEwan transcends modernist technique and not only comments on the role of authorship with Briony’s character, but also allows his character to have her own freedom and choice as author. So, although McEwan manipulates the reader into seeing the narrative a certain way with Parts One, Two, and Three, he includes metanarrative hints that a self-aware reader might catch. This helps the reader see hints that he or she might realize are such after he or she has read the epilogue, and encourages him or her to reread the novel.

The fictional readers that exist in Briony’s world, the storyworld which McEwan has constructed within *Atonement*, will only see and read Briony’s novel, hypothetically speaking, and view her work as modernist. This same reader does not see her diary entry because it is only included within McEwan’s text and offered up to his particular reader. The only reason that the

text becomes postmodernist for McEwan's reader is because he or she notices that a fictional character reveals that she has not only written Parts One through Three, but has fabricated the ending of her work. Until "London, 1999" is read, the novel seems to be a modernist piece, but after the final section is read, it becomes postmodernist because only then does the reader notice and comprehend the metafictional elements of the piece.

Without the final section of "London, 1999," the reader of Parts One, Two, and Three of Briony's admitted novel would assume that Robbie and Cecelia lived happily and that Briony was able to see them together. Because of the epilogue, the reader finds out that Briony fictionalizes the Robbie and Cecelia ended up together in Part Three; the two have died and they of course do not end up happily together and Briony never sees them after the war. Because of Briony's made up ending, and because of McEwan's "delayed disclosure," a hyperreality occurs within the text. There is no evidence to support the claim of Robbie and Cecelia being alive and together and, thus, Briony's scene does not signify any reality of her ending. Moreover, If Robbie and Cecelia are dead, then this moment when they are together is false. A loss of truth or a reality representing an actual absence occurs and a fabricated reality replaces the original truth, so hyperreality is present within the storyworld surrounding Briony's work. Briony's book fictionalizes the fact that Robbie and Cecelia never lived to see each other after the war, her ending explains that they lived happily together, and this new ending replaces the truth that they died, because the reader of her text now believes that this truly happened. Although Baudrillard mainly focuses on simulations of the postmodern as forms of hyperreality such as television, Disneyland, and Los Angeles rather than novels, I wish to argue that his theories can still be applied to *Atonement*. Although the fictional novel is often viewed as a non-issue because it is fictional, if it is mimetic it still mirrors the real world. Also, there are plenty of arguments about

authors who falsify information in their autobiographies for creative purposes, why not discuss fiction the same way? Although it is true that fiction is often created and can be based on real information, readers still know it as fiction. If literature replaces the truth that the reader knows from his or her own real world, this could cause hyperreality because this fictionalized truth takes over the reality of the reader's known/original truth. In *Atonement*, Briony bases her novel off of the storyworld around her, so readers in that world would believe that she is writing about/in reality. Not only that, but she is writing about her real sister and her sister's real lover, so when she replaces the actual fact that they both died in WWII with the ending of her novel that she witnessed them together, it becomes like her accusation of Robbie; it was "less like seeing, more like knowing"(McEwan 159). Briony does not actually see them, but hopes that they do live happily ever after in afterlife, so she writes it as such, having her ending take over as reality – allowing for hyperreality to be present in McEwan's storyworld.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard explains that hyperreality is a "generation of models of a real without origin or reality" (1). Essentially, hyperreality is masking an actual absence of truth. He further explains it as so: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1). Therefore, the hyperreal represents not a sign or simulation, but an actual absence; it attempts to represent the real, but there is no reality that the sign can link back to in order for it to be represented. Baudrillard looks even further and suggests, "[the real] no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (Baudrillard 2). Here, Baudrillard is

explaining that the hyperreal has replaced the real because it has no truth or surrounding which keeps it together, and it is not able to be signified or has nothing to represent, then it creates an absence. The hyperreal represents a reality attempting to hide this absence and then replace original truth. So, because Briony's novel is also mimetic of the storyworld in which she lives, it represents reality as well, but when she reveals in "London, 1999" that she made up the fact that Cecelia and Robbie ended up together, that reality is lost. The ending to her novel hides the absence of the truth and of Robbie and Cecelia's bodies, which I discuss further in Chapter Two, but it also becomes reality and replaces the truth of their deaths. It has no evidence to support this ending and thus has no true atmosphere which surrounds it; because this is true, Briony's novel circulates a non-reality as truth back on itself and becomes a simulacrum.

Baudrillard continues to say that hyperreality is a stage a text takes in order to form a simulacrum, which never connects to the real, but only to itself – a simulacrum is “an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference,” meaning that it is the ultimate representation of not only a non-reality, but represents only itself; a simulacrum is the representation of itself, which signifies an absence, through a constant continuation of masking (6). He then analyzes the difference between simulation and representation and how representation is connected to the equal value of the sign and the real, while simulation comes from the negation of the value of that sign. Representation interprets simulation as false, but “simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (6). The phases that an image or language take in order to reach this final stage are as follows: the sign “is the reflection of profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (6). So, hyperreality is the second to final stage of forming a simulacrum, because it hides that there

is an absence. Because of the absence of Robbie and Cecelia's bodies and because of the loss of a true ending to Part Three, a hyperreality is present within *Atonement*.

In the end of Part Three, Briony writes a happy ending to her novel, masking the reality that her sister and her sister's lover died during the war. This ending hides the truth of their deaths, and because there are no physical bodies in existence, a hyperreality is formed because there is no evidence or as Baudrillard says, "atmosphere" which surrounds this ending. The atmosphere would be proof or evidence to back up a statement, so there is no evidence/ real physical bodies of Cecelia and Robbie to provide back up for what Briony is stating with her ending. By writing through Briony, McEwan is masking this absence as well. He takes it to another level because he is masking the truth that he is the biographical author of *Atonement* with the tool of Briony. He creates a fictional character who he then uses to tell the reader that there is no good end for Robbie and Cecelia. Because Briony is fictional and only lives in the storyworld of the novel, she also has no reality that contains her, so McEwan also masks reality with his practice of adding Briony's diary entry as the last section.

McEwan makes Briony's storyworld seem real because of his writing style, but he also employs different stories from his own reality in order to portray how the war really was in his book. In a letter to *The Guardian*, McEwan explains that his father told him true tales about being in WWII, he researched about the soldiers in France at the time, he read letters from soldiers and nurses, and he even read an autobiography from a nurse herself. All of these bits of writing make it into *Atonement* because McEwan suggests that he wants to remain true to what really happened in the war; he especially wants to show what the nurses did day in and day out in order to perfect Briony's experience. He feels the need to convey to the reader what the war was like in reality, but he also wants his work to be aesthetically pleasing, so he includes the stories,

but tweaks them a little in order to fit them into his characters' lives and into his constructed storyworld. It seems that although McEwan is bringing real elements of WWII into his work, he is also fictionalizing specific occurrences and specific words from real people involved in it. His view and written form of World War II becomes a reality within *Atonement*; when the reader reads these passages, McEwan's truth will replace what he or she knows about the war.

Hyperreality is present within the storyworld of McEwan's piece because he reshapes reality into his own form of truth. Partly because of the portrayal of the war, McEwan also conveys how fascism was present within the communities subliminally through the use of militarization within the nursing wards and life in general during WWII.

Subliminal Fascism in the Text

Although WWII takes place within the novel and links to the family drama of "Part One," in "The Impression of a Deeper Darkness: Ian McEwan's *Atonement*," Peter Mathews points out that there is little direct representation of Nazis or fascism within the book, but they are present subliminally in the outside world and in everyday life of the storyworld (154). He suggests that the nursing wards represent a fascist mindset because they have strict rules and regulations that they follow – much like militarization. Briony subjects herself to this military and fascist mindset in order to punish herself for ruining Robbie and Cecelia's lives, but she would also be used to the strict regulation because she herself embodies fascist ideals due to her controlling behavior. In the beginning of the novel, Briony is not only obsessed with order, but also the beauty of the literary – the ideal. This idealized mindset even further relates to fascism and the Nazis because they, too, attempted to form an ideal world. Briony strives to create a perfect world by cleansing it of everything that does not fit into her ideal. She is terrified of any blemishes of her perfected state and her world shatters when her cousins do not act out "The Trials of Arabella" exactly the

way she wants them to. The ultimate breaking point, however, is when she reads Robbie's letter. Briony has pictured the world as pure and symmetrical, but because she sees Robbie's letter to Cecelia, which says, "In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long," knowledge seeps into her mind that it is not so (McEwan 80). Mathews explains that due to this rupture, Briony must blame someone for the impure change to her idealistic mindset – she must create a scapegoat, much like the Nazi mindset of scapegoating groups of people to take the downfall for their idea of social ills. The Nazis wanted to build a society with only people of the so-called Aryan Race and needed to be rid of the people who did not fit this description. Briony scapegoats Robbie because he is the cause for tearing down her walls of innocence. As Mathews suggests, this act of scapegoating would restore purity and cleanse Briony's already messy world:

If that figure can be eliminated, purity will be restored to the world. For the Nazis, the ideal was encapsulated by racial and cultural purity, requiring the elimination of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled, and so on.

The focus of Briony's search for purity is Robbie: the obscene letter, coupled with her ontological rupture, becomes the ammunition she needs to take aim at this destroyer of the aesthetically perfect worlds of her childhood. He is to be the sacrifice, the scapegoat that restores her world to its pre-lapsarian state.

(Mathews 155)

Briony's need for control gives her the urge to make situations around her perfect, they must be just the way that she has planned or foreseen. She sulks in her room and thinks about cancelling the play after it is not performed exactly the way she wants. Robbie's letter creates the ultimate

loss of control for Briony because she is naïve and sees the world as pure. Her childhood completely crashes down when she reads Robbie's note; if he destroys the way she sees her surroundings, then she must destroy him. Briony must regain control of her pure surroundings in order for it to become hers again. So she accuses Robbie and casts him out for performing the final act of going against everything she plans with his letter to Cecelia.

Not only does Briony's act convey her need for ultimate control, it also creates another absence of direct acknowledgement of fascism. Briony represents elements of fascism through restoring purity to her mindset because the Nazi regime believed that having their form of purity would allow for a utopian world as well. Through making the Aryan race the dominant class, Nazi ideology argued that the world would become pure and pristine. Although Briony embodies fascist ideals when she seeks to cleanse her world, these ideals are only seen subconsciously; there is no visible representation of the Nazis in the novel. Robbie is in France during the war, but there is not even mention of the Nazis, Adolf Hitler, or the Holocaust in Part Two or Three. As the historical author of the text, McEwan is ultimately responsible for this absence. Although there is no representation of direct fascism or Nazi acts, which may seem negative it may also prevent hyperreality being present due to McEwan not directly representing Nazism or fascism. In his chapter "Holocaust," Baudrillard looks at how television attempts to represent the Holocaust. Although he analyzes television and the screen, he is still discussing the idea of reproduction, which is the re-representation, or newly created view of an already established idea or occurrence. Baudrillard begins by stating, "Forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history, of the social, etc." (49). It would seem that not representing the Holocaust would be dangerous because there is the loss of memory, but he goes on to say that "artificial memory" is more dangerous "especially [if it is] through a

medium that is itself cold, radiating forgetfulness, deterrence, and extermination” (49). He suggests that television cannot represent extermination because it is a cold medium, which is because it only represents the reality of what truly happens through audio and visual “tracks” and “microprocessors” (49). Although novels are often known as a warmer medium, the representation of the Holocaust, or even the idea of genocide with fascism, would be dangerous for an author.

The written word, without bearing witness to it, is unable to convey extermination. It can be said that the acts of the Nazis during WWII cannot be reproduced in the written form at all. Briony was a nurse during the war, but she writes that she witnessed either French or English men coming into the ward. McEwan did not see the horrors of genocide at the hand of fascist leaders, and if he would have attempted to represent direct acts of fascism, such as genocide, then hyperreality would have been present because McEwan would have been masking the truth of extermination. Thus, whereas McEwan masks direct actions and aspects of fascism, he does not want to represent their actions. If he does not present fascism in the text directly, then there is no re-representation of those horrible acts by the Nazis. Instead of representing direct fascism or not at all, including how fascism affected the people living in Europe at the time of WWII, McEwan conveys how it entered into the practices of the nursing ward. This subliminal entrance of the fascism prevents hyperreality in at least that aspect of the novel.

McEwan’s Relationship with his Readers

By including an epigraph from Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, as well as the multiple literary allusions to other works in *Atonement*, McEwan urges his readers to notice the hints and be prepared for the diary entry from Briony. Because the epigraph warns the reader that a terrible

misunderstanding will take place and other allusions hint at the same idea; these hints help the reader notice what to expect when Briony commits her crime. The epigraph is a quote from Henry Tilney questioning the judgment of Catherine Morland when she mistakenly thinks that his father has murdered or hidden his dead wife. Her misjudgment in this epigraph leads the reader to see that a misjudgment of the same if not worse proportions will occur in *Atonement*. In “‘To Make a Novel’: The Construction of a Critical Readership in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” Kathleen D’Angelo points to the allusions in the fountain scene where Robbie and Cecelia discuss *Clarissa* by Richardson and Cecelia indicates that she would rather read Fielding. D’Angelo suggests that Cecelia might like Fielding better is because he allowed his readers to explore and partake in the process of narrative due to his comic writing style. This allusion to him would convey that McEwan wants the reader of *Atonement* to create his or her own meaning or answer at the end of the novel because he is playing around with literary allusions that indicate reader participation, irony, and the narrative function of making the reader more aware of their role with the novel. Furthermore, D’Angelo states that, because of these allusions, “Readers must participate in ‘solving’ the crime at the heart of the novel, with McEwan directing them toward particular practices that will produce ‘good’ readers, and readers must feel the impact of Briony’s transgressions” (90). McEwan first does this with the epigraph suggesting that a mistake will be made and it could change the lives of many.

McEwan not only has literary allusions, but also conveys the dire consequence of misreading – Briony makes the terrible mistake of misjudging the fountain situation, the letter from Robbie to Cecelia, and the rape of her cousin, Lola. With his protagonist, McEwan is warning his reader about reading and judging carefully, especially with him writing that Briony admits (in “London, 1999”) that the end of Part Three is fictionalized. The ending of Part Three

where Robbie and Cecelia live together, “forces the reader to examine his or her own narrative expectations and preferences” because he or she will question their own yearning for the cliché happy ending (D’Angelo 101). D’Angelo suggests that McEwan places Briony in the author position in favor of truth rather than the yearning for a typical ending; he wants the reader to acknowledge his or her expectations and subverts them by having Briony admit to falsifying this happy ending (101). His action is interesting because although McEwan wants the truth to be revealed, he does not want to take the fall for revealing it. He scapegoats Briony into the position of explaining to the reader that Robbie and Cecelia have died.

As the historical and implied author, McEwan wants his reader to critically analyze his novel as well as every text that he or she reads. By including allusions, metanarrative clues, and the final epistolary chapter, McEwan is expressing to his reader that he or she needs “to observe, question, investigate, and, finally, to feel” (D’Angelo 103). He wants to allow the reader to control his or her own feelings and thoughts rather than having the reader follow the normal sequence of the novel they expect. McEwan does not allow the happy ending to remain and he employs Briony to reveal herself as author because McEwan wants the reader to question his or her own expectations. This specific action indicates that he is not in ultimate control over what he writes; he allows his character to have control over the text (mainly because she must have some control in order to be satisfied) and he allows readers to ultimately decide how they should treat Briony and himself as author. Because the last chapter can be seen as McEwan speaking through Briony about writing, McEwan is atoning to his reader for the disclosure of Briony as author being revealed at the very end of the novel. Phelan suggests that because Briony asks, “[H]ow can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God?” that McEwan is playing God as well with his ending of “London, 1999”

(McEwan 350). Phelan explains that McEwan's "delayed disclosure is an instance of McEwan playing God, his using his novelist's absolute power not only to decide the outcome but to reveal the decision suddenly and, from the perspective of our emotional engagement in Briony's novel" (128). The ending in "London, 1999" indicates that McEwan could be apologizing to his readers that he has misled them throughout his work. Although he atones to his reader he does not know whether or not he will actually be forgiven, and expects the same for Briony. He only writes what has been done and does not make the decision to condemn or free Briony from her mistake, but leaves it to the reader to forgive her and to forgive him. This act of relinquishing his power as author conveys McEwan's connection to postmodernism because he transcends the final decision or ending of his novel and allows his reader to create their own endings. By having Briony question whether or not she can really atone and explaining that her attempt was all that is needed, McEwan allows the reader to see this attempt and take that away from the novel; he or she may decide to forgive or not to forgive Briony. The question could arise, as seen from Phelan, whether or not to forgive McEwan as well, which is why he seems to write his novel with aesthetic beauty in mind and to fit both genres of modernism and postmodernism.

Further in their essay, Albers and Caeners state that *Atonement* "holds an intermediate position between the classic, closed narrative and the open and experimental narratives of (post)modernism" (708). They discuss Murray Krieger's theory about the language and reality of closed and open texts, from "An Apology for Poetics," which he defines as being between post-Structuralism and New Criticism. Albers and Torsten explain that Krieger's theory may be applied to *Atonement* because of the poetic language within the text as well as the technique that it utilizes of being between a closed and open narrative. Although they claim that it is in between

the two, I believe that the text is both open and closed because it contains practices that Krieger suggests form a double nature of open and closed texts.

Krieger states that his theory pushes for a “paradoxical simultaneity of utter closure and utter openness” based on “notions like self-reference, illusion, and metaphorical duplicity” (535). *Atonement* utilizes all of these notions with its meta-narrative practice of referring to itself as a written form, its illusion of reality, and finally its metaphorical duplicity with its metaphors both referring to the act of authorship both by McEwan and by Briony. The main aspect of the novel is its metafictional ability to comment on its own fictionality while questioning its story reality, which is also Krieger’s main argument, stating that “those moments during which the fictional world betrays a self-consciousness about itself as fiction remind us of the illusionary nature of that ‘reality’ which seeks to enclose us” (535). Thus, not only does the text reveal the question of reality to its reader, but the reader must also take part in the act of recognition.

The reader must question the reality in which he or she is situated in order to understand the context of McEwan’s novel. And instead of the book masking reality and revealing it to the reader, it undoes its own inner reality by pointing out its own questioning as well as defining cultural moments with its language (Krieger 536). Another major point about the novel is the meeting between Briony, Cecelia, and Robbie as a “happy ending” to Briony’s book. As I have mentioned before, the reader expects this type of ending because of what he or she is used to with other books – it is a conventionalized narrative construct. As Krieger explains, “The imagination’s need to find closure may largely account for the role of the story – like that of the picture frame or the proscenium arch – in the history of culture” (540). The reader’s mind must have an ending that is closed because the role of narrative in general has historically been closed and contained. Although he focuses on the role of the ending being closed, Krieger also notes

how literature inherently opens itself to the reader and the world due to its use of language (540). Although narrative has a seemingly closed nature due to its ability to be self-justified, it also relies on the reader to make meaning of the language. Therefore, the language can be self-conscious; it also is made up of words, “empty signifiers,” which need meaning. The meaning comes from the reader; so it is important for authors to invite the reader to partake in the meaning-making of the language in their novel as well as in the narrative (Krieger 540). *Atonement* does allow the reader to make meaning with its language as well as the postmodernist movement of the final section.

McEwan utilizes both the idea of closed and open narrative to create Krieger’s “paradoxical simultaneity” of both forms. He first writes the happy ending that the reader yearns for at the end of Part Three but then proceeds to subvert the notion of closure by adding “London, 1999” to the end of his book. As D’Angelo explains, McEwan wants the reader to explore his or her own role in demanding these endings. He includes the readers in the process of fiction and reality making because he allows them to decide what exactly constitutes the ending of his work. He also leaves the judgment up to the reader to decide Briony’s fate because, ultimately, it is the reader who must forgive Briony or deny her what she wants – forgiveness (a result of her atonement). McEwan is in control of *Atonement* because he is the biographical author, but he gives some control to Briony because of her obsession with that power. Although he allows her the role of author in the text, McEwan relinquishes the last portion of control to the reader.

Although McEwan is the flesh-and-blood author, Briony reveals herself to be author as well in the final section of *Atonement*. McEwan gives control to Briony because she has the personality of a person who must have that power. She must also atone for her mistake of

misidentifying Robbie in Part One. The only way that she can even attempt to do so is to write her novel and have the two lovers live together happily. Briony must right(or even write) what she had wronged in the past and be forgiven for her “crime,” as she calls it throughout the novel. She not only needs the thought of a reader to forgive her, but she also needs to forgive herself. Briony says that an author, who holds the ultimate power of creation, cannot atone to or be forgiven by any form of a god because an author is god-like as well. McEwan allows his character to write her book because he understands the pain that the author must go through when attempting to find forgiveness as he seems to ask for from his readers in the final section as well. What is interesting, though, is how controlling Briony truly is; she is so controlling that she takes the pen from McEwan and places herself in the authorial role. Briony believes that she holds the utmost power in the relationship between herself, the reader, and her creator – McEwan. But it could also be said that Briony is forced by McEwan to tell the reader about the “reality” of Robbie and Cecelia’s fate.

Chapter Two

Stealing the Pen: Briony as Author of *Atonement*

In the final section of *Atonement*, Briony is revealed as the author of the text as a whole. In this chapter, I will explain how hyperreality is further formed due to Briony negating a major fact from her story in her journal entry of “London, 1999.” I will also examine Briony’s role as author and point to the notion that her character contains a duality of major roles – Briony can be seen as the controlling character who takes over the writing and takes it away from McEwan, or she can be viewed as a victim or tragic figure because McEwan places the blame in her hands. These views of Briony seem to come straight from the text rather than as a part of McEwan’s role as author, mainly because the text is so metafictional that it lends itself/ appeals to the reader. The text is open, as defined by Murray Krieger in my previous chapter, and allows the reader to form his or her own judgments on the novel. Although McEwan creates Briony and the storyworld surrounding her, the text ultimately contains her and this is where the reader judges her.

The final section of *Atonement*, “London, 1999,” is a journal entry by the now seventy-seven-year-old Briony. In her own writing, she states that she is the author of the preceding text, but she also reveals the truth about a major point in the narrative. In Part Three, the narrator explains that the character of Briony sees her sister, Cecelia, and Robbie together, but in “London 1999,” Briony states that the lovers died in World War II. Because Briony reveals herself as author of *Atonement* and her novel would replace the reality that Robbie and Cecelia have actually died within her storyworld, hyperreality is present within that world. A major issue

is the fact that Robbie and Cecelia are not physically in existence when Briony writes that she saw them together.

The Absence of Robbie and Cecelia

In her journal entry, Briony explains that due to authorship, a novelist becomes god-like and, therefore, cannot appeal to any entity:

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. (350-351)

Through her fictionalization of the happy ending between Robbie and Cecelia, Briony has at least attempted to see them and apologize to them. She believes that this act is all that is needed in order for her atonement to reach fruition; because she is the novelist and god-like, she must forgive herself. Because the lovers cannot physically forgive her, Briony makes them forgive her in her novel. Although her act of forcing the characters of Robbie and Cecelia to forgive her at the end of her novel when she really never saw them may seem selfish, Briony realizes that self-forgiveness is the only way that she will reach forgiveness at all; as the novelist, Briony decides what happens in the world that she creates. Although this is true for the idea of forgiveness, it seems that there is no actual atonement because that act normally involves more than one person. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “atonement” as a form of reconciliation, a settlement of

unity after strife, or settling a difference (OED). All of these definitions deal with unifying multiple people especially due to a misunderstanding. Briony seems to misinterpret the whole point of atonement because, even though she forgives herself, she cannot atone to herself. In her novel, the character Briony apologizes to Robbie and Cecelia and brings unity between the three of them. But, because this situation is fictional, the author Briony is never able to create a unity with her sister and Robbie and is only able to reconcile the guilt within herself. Writing that she met with the two lovers hides this misinterpretation and allows for an atonement in the novel that does not actually take place in Briony's reality.

In the final section "London, 1999," Briony states that Robbie and Cecelia did not live through the war, "But now I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, I tried to persuade my readers, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecelia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station. That I never saw them in that year" (350). Briony as author, and possible narrator, has just negated a major point in the narrative. This practice is named "denarration" by Brian Richardson in *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. If the reader sees Briony as author and narrator of Parts One, Two, and Three then it is true that she has taken back/ changed what was stated in Part Three (87). In the end of Part Three, Briony must write that Robbie and Cecelia are alive in order to reach forgiveness, but this fictionalization masks an absence of Robbie and Cecelia's bodies as well as replaces the reality of their deaths with Briony's invented scene. Because Briony writes, and thus represents what did not happen, hyperreality forms within the text. If Cecelia and Robbie actually died, then they are no longer seeable by Briony – their deaths create an absence. This absence is further illuminated through the idea that Robbie's and Cecelia's bodies are not

physically in existence – they are both destroyed into oblivion. If Robbie dies in Bray Dunes of septicemia, which is a “life threatening infection that gets worse very quickly [and can] arise from infections throughout the body,” then his body probably would have been either left or buried on the beach (U.S. National Library of Medicine). Also, if Cecelia dies from the bombing in the Balham Underground, then her body would certainly have been obliterated. With the physical bodies of Robbie and Cecelia gone, Briony further hides the absence of their physical bodies as well as the idea of them being together in the end by writing that they are alive and she meets with them in Part Three.

Briony’s Need for Control

Briony conceals the absence of Robbie and Cecelia in Part Three, but she conceals other secrets throughout the novel as well. These acts of hiding and the fact that Briony is the author of the novel convey Briony’s need for order and control. Her need for manipulation comes from her judgment of situations, which is seen on the first page. The narrator is describing the moral of Briony’s play, “The Trials of Arabella,” and states, “At some moments chilling, at others desperately sad, the play told a tale of the heart whose message, conveyed in a rhyming prologue, was that love which did not build a foundation on good sense was doomed” (1). This judgment is not only applied to the character of Arabella but also to Cecelia. Briony first witnesses the scene at the fountain between Robbie and Cecelia and thinks that Robbie has some sort of power over Cecelia, but even further into the novel, Briony opens Robbie’s letter and thinks that she should be afraid of him. Then Briony sees Robbie over Cecelia in the library. Although the two are taking part in consensual sex, Briony believes that Robbie is overpowering her sister. Briony now sees Robbie as a threat and does not understand why Cecelia loves him; this leads her to believe that their romance is dangerous for Cecelia, so she is the one to bring

upon the destruction of their relationship. Due to her judgment that Robbie's and Cecelia's love for each other is not set on solid foundations, Briony creates their separation and imminent doom. Even though in the end of her novel Briony writes that they are together, they have faced the ultimate ruin – their deaths. Because Briony suggests that Robbie and Cecelia died during WWII, then their end has taken place. These deaths are revealed to the reader only through the journal entry, so if the reader just focuses on Briony's book and not the epilogue of "London, 1999," disaster never occurs to the lovers. Briony writes that they are alive because of her need to atone and because of her need to control.

Briony also conveys a manipulative personality through the sheer act of authorship; she writes her novel in order to make amends because she could not do so in real life. Authorship creates a form of ultimate control because Briony is able to make characters act according to her needs – even herself. The way that Briony is described in Part One conveys author-like qualities as well as her acts of manipulation. Her orderly room and her miniature figurines represent cleanliness and regulation. When Briony is flexing her fingers and wondering how she commands the movement, she also searches for "the part of her that was really in charge" (33). She wants to know how to command the actions of her hand, which is almost like controlling/commanding the actions of her characters. Within novels in general, characters are governed by their creators, but the authors at times realize that these characters have free will and allow this to occur, as in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, when John Fowles enters into the novel as another character watching his protagonist's every move on the train and deciding what to do with him. Further on in *Atonement*, Briony contemplates the hardship of constructing a play and notes that storytelling is easier for her, "A story was direct and simple. . . . In a story you only had to wish, you only had to write it down and you could have the world"

(35). Briony is claiming that a story is more easily manipulated; as long as words are written down, they become true. This need for control stems from Briony's practices of watching others while hidden out of view in Part One.

When Briony sees Robbie and Cecelia at the fountain in Chapter Three of Part One, she watches their interaction with each other while she is invisible to her sister and Robbie: "Unseen, from two stories up, with the benefit of unambiguous sunlight, she had privileged access across the years to adult behavior, to rites and conventions she knew nothing about, as yet" (37).

Briony witnesses Robbie and Cecelia having a very strange, but very intimate moment; she sees Cecelia disrobe and plunge into the water while Robbie looks on. This scene allows Briony to realize the power of writing different minds, but it also leads her to one more act of observing her sister and Robbie. When Robbie and Cecelia make love in the library, Briony walks in on them and watches. In Chapter Ten, about Briony's point of view, the narrator explains that Briony thinks her sister is being attacked by Robbie. In Chapter Eleven, Cecelia and Robbie are disappointed that Briony interrupts their climax. Either way the scene is analyzed, Briony watches the two have sex; she may not understand it, but she still sees the act. In both of these occasions, Briony watches Cecelia and Robbie in very private moments. Briony attempts to control these situations by replacing reality with her own view; she thinks that Robbie is forcing her sister to enter in the water in the fountain scene and when the two are in the library, Briony thinks that Robbie is forcing himself on Cecelia. Because she does not understand the truth, she replaces it with what she believes as truth from her own mind with her previous knowledge about sexual violence derived from the gothic novels that she often reads. In the first scene, Cecelia is taking her clothes off before going into the water, and being subjected to not only Robbie's gaze, but Briony's gaze as well. Briony's watching of this scene becomes an obsession because she

watches it until the water on the ground evaporates (McEwan 39). She literally watches her sister undress and stares at the place where it occurs until all evidence is gone. Briony then becomes obsessed with the idea of writing a story conveying Robbie's and Cecelia's separate points of view about what happens at the fountain, but she replaces what really happens with what she dreams up in her mind.

Briony also makes up reality in her head when she sees Lola being raped (McEwan 154-155). Briony does not comprehend the truth of what is really happening (rape or a sexual encounter between two people), or even who is doing this to her cousin, so she immediately questions Lola and frames Robbie for the act. Because she makes up the culprit, Briony destroys Robbie's and Cecelia's lives and knows that she must change and atone for what she has done. Briony does not understand the truth, so she replaces it with her own idea of truth in these instances, and is even able to do so further when she writes her novel; Briony is able to control what goes on in her novel, especially with Robbie and Cecelia.

Briony utilizes narrative in order to create and render her world however she likes. She does this first at the end of the fourth chapter in Part One when she witnesses the fountain scene between Cecelia and Robbie: "When the young girl went back to the window and looked down, the damp patch on the gravel had evaporated. Now there was nothing left of the dumb show by the fountain beyond what survived in memory, in three separate and overlapping memories. The truth had become as ghostly as invention" (39). Only after Cecelia and Robbie have left and the wet spot on the ground (from Cecelia's wet clothes) has vanished, does Briony begin to construct her idea of the situation; she thinks the only way to do so is through a story. The truth "had become" equal to invention, so Briony is able to construct her own reality within her narrative. The gravel has no markings on it and does not show that anything has happened, much like a

blank piece of paper; the scene is able to be changed and written on. Briony's reaction to what occurs between Cecelia and Robbie represents not only construction of the story but also the narrative and the diegetic (her telling the scene how she sees what happens) nature of her story as well (Chatman 32). Briony describes to the reader what she has seen and what she will write down, so the reader reads and knows that Briony is creating a story because she states her premise for a story. In Part Three, the narrator seems to reveal that the novel has been constructed by Briony and that she never saw Robbie and Cecelia together in their apartment. After Briony leaves Lola's wedding she explains that she stops at a café before walking to see her sister. Her inner turmoil as well as her authorship is represented in this passage:

She left the café, and as she walked along the Common she felt the distance widen between her and another self, no less real, who was walking back toward the hospital. Perhaps the Briony who was walking in the direction of Balham was the imagined or ghostly persona. This unreal feeling was heightened when, after half an hour, she reached another High Street, more or less the same as the one she had left behind. (311)

Here it is revealed, although quite ambiguously, that Briony does not walk to see Cecelia and Robbie. That part of Briony walking to their flat is, perhaps, imagined. So, although Briony the author conceals to the reader the actual fact that she did not see Robbie and Cecelia due to their deaths, she hints toward that notion. She does not quite reveal the truth, and thus controls the narrative. Her act as author allows her to create this situation because as long as there is one copy of it written down, then it is a reality.

In the last section of her journal entry, Briony explains her reasoning behind the ending of the novel. She asks who would want to know the truth of the situation, and then explains that the facts do not matter: “When I am dead, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, we will only exist as my inventions. Briony will be as much of a fantasy as the lovers” (350). Briony creates herself as a character in the novel because then she will only be fictional after she is dead. Invention becomes reality because it is written and is a part of the novel. This can be viewed as a form of misinterpretation because Briony feels that she has the power to create situations and change history, but she is still just a character in McEwan’s novel. Not only is Briony a character within her work, but, because her book is a novel within McEwan’s novel, she is a double character. Toward the end of her journal entry, Briony further suggests that readers will not care what happened, or what was misrepresented in her work. If they do, and if they ask what truly happened, she explains that, “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” (350). She suggests that as long as one written copy of her narrative exists, then a reality is formed and the lovers do survive, at least, within that novelistic world. Truth does not matter because in one reality of the literary world, Robbie and Cecelia survive and are happy.

Further in his essay, James Phelan analyzes the ethical and aesthetic judgments that arise from readers due to Briony stating “The attempt was all” (350). He explains that the readers of Briony’s book would not see her diary entry and, therefore, would accept Briony’s attempt because she gives so much detail to Robbie and Cecelia’s thoughts while also promising their happy ending. Phelan then declares that McEwan’s audience does have access to the journal entry and the reader of this treats it differently due to the knowledge of Briony changing history

in relation to her fiction making in her novel. He goes on to explain that the reader accepts Briony's reliability and that what she is revealing about the deaths of her sister and Robbie must be true; there is no reason for her to create more untruths.

Phelan argues that the separation of invention and historical contexts helps the reader notice and "come to terms" with Briony's fiction making of history. The reader first questions whether Briony alters every historical event when she does change the vase from Ming to Höroldt as C.C. suggests in his response to her essay submitted to *Horizon*, but in "London, 1999" Briony points to a better distinction. Phelan states,

Briony has actively shaped the historical events as she has constructed her novel. Her goal has not been to make every detail as accurate as possible but rather to highlight the disastrous consequences that follow from the historical intersection of her development as a writer with Cecelia and Robbie's discovery of their love. In other words, the diary entry does not attest to the absolute correspondence between every detail that Briony does not acknowledge having been altered and the historical unfolding of events, but it does identify a line between history and invention and it shows how and why Briony crossed that line. ("Delayed Disclosure," 124)

He is suggesting, here, that the diary entry is where Briony reveals that she does cross a line by fictionalizing history, but also explains why she made this authorial choice. Briony acknowledges the problem of altering the past, but if she does not at least try, then she will not indicate to her reader how invention and history become muddled when writing a novel.

Phelan does criticize Briony's choice of altering history and her notion of her novel being the only artifact that is needed to convey that Robbie and Cecelia are happy as long as one copy of her book exists. He mainly states that, although Briony does try to balance all minds and give them representation within her novel, her "aesthetic commitment" to equally representing each character's mind does not "provide the ethical grounds for the liberties she takes with the story of Cecelia, Robbie, and her own transgression" (127). So even though it is pleasing to know that Robbie and Cecelia can flourish because Briony wrote that they ended up together in the end of her book, it is not ethical for her to take the historical fact that they are both dead and fictionalize her ending in order to form the "happy ending" that readers (and Briony herself) desire.

Although it could be said that Briony is controlling and takes over McEwan's role as author, it is interesting to note that Briony is just a character – she even describes herself as such: "When I am dead, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, we will only exist as my inventions. Briony will be as much of a fantasy as the lovers who shared a bed in Balham and enraged their landlady" (McEwan 350). Just as in her own work she is fictional, within *Atonement*, Briony is a character invented by McEwan. He controls her. In "London, 1999" he allows her to take the blame for fictionalizing Robbie and Cecelia's death. As biographical author, he forces her to do this and makes her the victim of his authorial choices.

Concealment: Passion for Secrets

Briony controls the text because she is the author, but she is seen as having a controlling personality when she is a young adult as well. Throughout Part One, Briony is characterized as imaginative, but also orderly. In the opening chapter, the narrator describes Briony's room and even notes that it is the cleanest room in the Tallis home. It also contains tiny figurines as well as

secret compartments: “A taste for the miniature was one aspect of an orderly spirit. Another was a passion for secrets: in a prized varnished cabinet, a secret drawer was opened by pushing against the grain of cleverly turned dovetail joint, and here she kept a diary locked by a clasp, and a notebook written in a code of her own invention” (5). Briony yearns for the idea of secrets, but also must have order and control over them. She keeps her notebook with her diary in a hidden drawer, and she inscribes the notes and words in a coded language that only she knows. This yearning for manipulation conveys to the reader that Briony has no secrets: “But hidden drawers, lockable diaries and cryptographic systems could not conceal from Briony the simple truth: she had no secrets. Her wish for a harmonious, organized world denied her the reckless possibilities of wrongdoing” (5). Briony keeps no confidential information because she must have control and order, but this order also makes her covet secrets; she must create or manipulate a situation in which she has a secret. Further in his article, Peter Mathews explains that “all of Briony’s passions – her storytelling, her love of secrets, her penchant for miniaturization – stem from an obsession with order, in both a moral and a physical sense” (148). Briony’s need for total control creates her longing for concealment. Mathews suggests that Briony’s treasures have hidden knowledge, (the coded language, the fool’s gold in her floorboard, and the double acorn) so he analyzes this idea even further into the rest of the novel and finds that the notion of hidden knowledge is a theme within the text.

Mathews investigates another scene in which Mrs. Tallis wonders why moths fly toward the light. He explains, “The moths fly into the symbolic light of reason, exposing themselves to a likely annihilation, all in pursuit of a deeper but illusory darkness. The secret, in other words, is a promise of knowledge, but it is a promise the emptiness of which may forever remain a mystery” (149). He indicates that this theme is present throughout the novel, and is mainly related to

Briony. She desires knowledge – her passion for secrets – but she is finding emptiness; Briony is absentmindedly searching for an absence. This pursuit leads Briony on a quest for knowledge and secrets perpetuate a need to conceal. Because the secrets harbor absence, Briony is always concealing an absence and often substituting her own view of reality for what she does not understand. Hyperreality, in itself, masks an actual absence and simulates or replaces reality within the world; Baudrillard uses Disneyland as an example – Disneyland represents the imaginary in order to make the rest of America seem real, but “all of Los Angeles and America surrounds it are no longer real but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation” (12). Through Baudrillard’s examples, hyperreality could relate to the storyworld in which Briony lives; her imagination represents the real so that everything else that surrounds her seems unreal; her imagination replaces the reality of the actual world which surrounds her. Because she conceals the fact that she does not understand what she sees, she replaces the truth with her own idea of that truth.

Through her search for secrets, Briony now creates an act of concealment by falsely accusing Robbie; while she acts upon her plan to accuse Robbie, Briony’s motivations to do so are unclear. Mathews suggests that Briony’s treatment of this situation as she has grown up becomes complex, “for while the revelation of her *secret* accuses her, the *mystery* of her motivations simultaneously excuses her – yes, she committed a crime, but her youthful naïveté meant that she acted without ‘full’ knowledge” (150). Although Briony is guilty for accusing Robbie, she is also innocent because she was too naïve to realize the reasoning behind her accusation at the time she performed this act. Briony becomes the accuser and the accused – she accuses herself and feels the guilt of her action.

In “‘The Eternal Loop of Self-Torture’: Ethics and Trauma in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” Georges Letissier explains how the novel is about Briony’s guilt as a survivor of her situation. He indicates that while there is no actual cure for Briony’s guilt, “writing can be regarded as what permits the young woman, and later the novelist, to survive the traumatic experience of having wrecked two lives” (211). Even though the blame is placed on Briony for falsely accusing Robbie of the horrible act done to Lola, she is still just a young girl when she makes this mistake. She eventually realizes the repercussions for her action and is consumed with the guilt and becomes obsessed with fixing what went wrong. Her act of writing allows her to survive her guilt because although she is reliving her past mistakes, she is also able to create a world and change the ending so that she does not tear Robbie and Cecilia apart.

With the act of falsely accusing Robbie, Briony commits “a missed encounter with the outside world” and wants to fix this issue, so she constantly relives her trauma by writing about it. Letissier states that traumatic experiences may induce mental disorder because the person has “the incapacity to relate properly to exterior circumstances” (218). Briony’s experience growing up in the Tallis household, along with the events from that specific day result in her obsession with the images and occurrences that took place on the night in 1935, which is why she chooses to write her novel. Her guilt comes from her experience of that night and her inability to relate to the people who surrounded her at that time. In this sense Briony becomes a victim rather than an instigator.

Briony as Author

Briony’s control issues become so serious that she appoints herself as author and takes that role away from McEwan. She must be in control of the novel so much so that she forces

McEwan out of the construction of the work because she places herself in charge when she admits to writing *Atonement*. Before the reader even knows that Briony is the author of the text, she is still presented as a writer. After reading her journal entry from 1999, it is evident how creation and writing enter into her life. At the opening of the novel, Briony is constructed as an author before she is even characterized—her play is mentioned in the opening sentence. Not only that, but in the same chapter it is revealed that she discovered how to write a story at the age of eleven, “But this first clumsy attempt showed her that the imagination itself was a source of secrets: once she had begun a story, no one could be told. . . . Only when a story was finished, all fates resolved . . . could she feel immune...” (6). Briony’s first attempts at writing and constructing stories not only link back to Briony’s obsession with secrets but also to her role as a writer. She cannot cope with the idea of letting someone know of her act of construction, but only allows others to see it after it is finished. As Brian Finney claims in, “Briony’s Stand Against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” Briony is committed to existing as an author and “ruthlessly subordinates everything the world throws at her to her need to make it serve the demands of her own world of fiction” (69). Briony’s controlling behavior is due to her situation – she is stuck in a life filled with the literary media of books, plays, etc.; Briony is constantly reading and writing fiction, and even peruses the dictionary and thesaurus for words to use in her stories. She is left to her own devices because her sister simply ignores her, her mother is an invalid because of her migraines, and her father and brother are never home. As a result of this, she sees literature and writing as possibilities that fix problems in her life.

Briony is not able to separate her imaginary, literary realm from the reality of the world going on around her. Only from literature can she interpret situations, which is why she “reads”

the fountain scene between Robbie and Cecelia in a melodramatic way. She also misreads the love-making between Robbie and Cecelia in the library. She does so because the love scene takes place against the books that Briony has read and learned from; they have taught her the dangers of a sexual relationship between an unmarried couple. The narrator says that what Briony saw was formed by what she thought she had already known: “The scene was so entirely a realization of her worst fears that she sensed that her overanxious imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books” (116). In this instance Briony admits that her imagination could have made up Robbie’s and Cecelia’s bodies being in the corner – that this scene has been constructed by what Briony already knows or imagines from reading; she even thinks that seeing them against books is an illusion of her own. Finney explains that Briony suffers from misinterpretation or “mis-recognition on the part of the ego” (79). She cannot understand this scene fully and thus, cannot enter into the adult world because her view is blocked by the novels that she has read. Because she is confused, she places her own interpretation onto the scene – she is able to place her own reality or thoughts on the scene because the last evidence of the meeting has vanished (the water spot on the gravel). After this situation, Briony suggests that she is able to think of other people’s feelings and write the occurrence in three different perspectives,

None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly good. She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral. She need only show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive. It wasn’t only wickedness and scheming that made people unhappy, it was confusion and misunderstanding; above all, it was the failure to grasp the simple truth that other people are as real as you. (38)

Here Briony states that she can see and write about the minds of other people; she now knows that other minds are real. She even says that she does not need to judge the minds and that if she misunderstands the situation, then that is a form of failure. Although she seems to have grasped this thought, Briony goes back to misunderstanding situations and not thinking about other people. She first misinterprets Robbie's letter because she does not understand it, but she also grossly misrepresents Robbie as a whole when she sees him as a maniac and accuses him of raping Lola.

After reading Robbie's apology note to Cecelia, Briony changes her view of the fountain scene and now believes that Robbie is evil and "perhaps even criminal" (McEwan 107). Her opinion of him comes from her (mis)interpretation of the fountain scene, the letter, and from Lola's belief of him being a maniac after being shown the letter. During Lola's rape, Briony thinks she sees Robbie get up from Lola and run away – "it is her novelist's need for order that clinches it" (Finney 79). Fiction becomes the only truth and reality for Briony. Phelan states that Briony believes she sees Robbie in that situation "not because she has ocular proof but because that interpretation fits the narrative she is scripting on the basis of her earlier encounters with Robbie" ("Delayed Disclosure" 118). She must make Robbie the rapist because this would be the final stage of her characterization of Robbie within her mind. She presents Robbie as the maniacal, evil rapist whereas she is the hero who becomes Lola's protector.

Because Briony thinks she feels certain about the other minds surrounding her, she forgets about Lola's true feelings when she questions Lola about the rape and names the predator for Lola; Briony believes that she is an authority on this event and knows who Robbie is as a person, so she places her own preconceived notions onto the situation. As David O'Hara states in "Briony's Being-For: Metafictional Narrative Ethics in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*," that Briony

does not allow Lola to tell anyone about what happened because she feels the need to be in control of the situation: “Her cousin’s victimization need only be made to fit with her own dramatic expectations. Bullying Lola into line with her authority, Briony hijacks an event that has nothing to do with her” (70). Due to the fact that Briony wants situations to fit perfectly with her own narrative, she forces those circumstances to happen according to her needs. Now, Briony slips back into her practice of not thinking about other minds (as she said she would try to do when discussing writing and understanding other people’s thoughts [McEwan 38]), but it is near impossible for her to think of other minds, even as an author. It may seem that she has thought of those minds and has written about them from Part One to Part Three, but as an author, she creates these minds. Briony, as a self, cannot fully comprehend, much less write about other minds, so she creates this otherness herself. There are other minds in the novel but, because Briony writes them, there is no truth to the thoughts of those minds because they are all her own thoughts. Although she makes other narratives fit into her own novel, she does it with purpose now. As an author, she is paying tribute to Robbie and Cecelia – it is the only way she can atone.

In Part Three, Briony begins to imagine herself in a narrative world of another mind when she talks to Luc, the French patient who is about to die. She inserts herself into his story and learns how to become a part of a fictionalized world, which could lend to her ability to characterize her younger self throughout her book. Also, after her journal entry is read with the rest of the piece, it can be said that she “is emphatically attempting to imagine an Other’s experience. She is, in effect, paying testimony to Robbie, something she immaturely failed to do as a character in the first part of the novel” (O’Hara 93). As she places herself into Robbie’s and Cecelia’s minds, she does fictionalize their thoughts and feelings, but she only attempts to do so because atonement can only be reached through that act – narrative is Briony’s way to

redemption. The ethics of this situation become quite tangled because Briony does take history as well as other minds into her own narrative and creates a reality that does not quite exist. Phelan suggests that due to the last entry being from her journal, it was meant for her and says she must be telling the truth. From this journal entry, the reader also learns of Briony's newly developed disease of dementia. Because her own imaginative construction of situations resulted in consequences for Robbie and Cecelia, she must now suffer the backlash – her memory and narrative abilities will all slowly disappear. She explains that due to her diagnosis, the preceding piece is her final draft and it is only to be published after her or Lola and Paul Marshall's deaths. Briony does this because only she knows the truth that Paul is Lola's rapist and she has never told anyone; so, her reflections on this in her journal entry reveal "that her long delay in finishing her novel has also been a way to avoid taking the one concrete step toward atonement available to her" of making an admission of Lola's rape by Paul Marshall (Phelan 126). She explains that this step is troublesome because the Marshalls could sue her for libel; because Briony did not take that step, she pushes Robbie further into his position of her scapegoat. Further along in "London 1999," Briony suggests that an author is so much like God that there is no true entity in which she can atone to; the attempt of writing is all that is needed.

Due to the fact that Briony reveals herself as the author of this work, she becomes god-like and must atone to herself; so, she must forgive herself, but, by writing her novel she also asks her audience to forgive her as well. A reader of just her piece would not see her journal entry, as it is included afterward (In McEwan's text), so that audience could forgive her because she does physically atone to Robbie and Cecelia at the end of Part Three. The fact that Briony writes this atonement, admission, and history in novel form allows her to fictionalize history and certain situations in order to bring about this forgiveness. With that practice she also creates

multiple realities – when she portrays Robbie and Cecelia’s minds in the novel she creates their reality, when she writes that she apologizes to Robbie and Cecelia and admits to lying about him being the rapist, she invents another reality, and in her final journal entry when she suggests hypothetically that Robbie and Cecelia died, she introduces yet another reality. Briony, herself, even says that “As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft” then her ending and other fictionalizations exist (350). If the possibility of the ending exists, then it is possible that all of the realities she has brought up exist simultaneously; because her book and her letter both remain, then all of her realities prevail. Thus, portraying other minds, her written act of going to Robbie and Cecelia in order to atone, and the ending she brings up in her journal all exist together. In “London 1999,” Briony explains why she wrote that she atoned for her crime to her sister and Robbie, as quoted before on page four of my text. Within that quotation and the following lines, Briony gives many different endings. She explains that she ended up unable to talk to her sister because she was scared; she says, “My walk across London ended at the church on Clapham Common, and that a cowardly Briony limped back to the hospital, unable to confront her recent bereaved sister. That the letters the lovers wrote are in the archives of the War Museum. How could that constitute an ending?” (350). This ending that Briony does not wish to give to her reader also becomes true because it is written down and is in physical existence. Even though Briony does not come out and explain that she actually does walk back to work, the notion that she brings it up and even writes in her journal places it into play with the other ending. Baudrillard states that the last two steps of an image becoming a simulacrum are as follows: “it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (6). With his theory it can be said that Briony’s fictionalized ending and her representation of Robbie and Cecelia’s minds in her novel mask an absence, but

the ending hidden from her reader in her journal entry does as well. If these invented realities are all on the page and exist together, then reality is no longer possible. Briony creates so many “truths” that there is no relation to reality – truth is obscured so much from the creation of many other forms of verisimilitude that reality seems nonexistent. It seems this way, but because Robbie and Cecelia exist within the reality of the storyworld that McEwan creates in *Atonement*, then they can be viewed as real in the storyworld in which Briony lives. Briony knows of the reality that they both faced during the war, and knows that she will never atone unless she writes her novel. She needs to write that they live and are happy together in order to attempt to make her atonement to them; this fabrication of truth would supplant the actual reality of Robbie and Cecelia dying.

As an author, Briony suggests her ending as a truth and misrepresents Robbie and Cecelia. By attempting to write in Robbie and Cecelia’s points of view throughout her work, Briony also misrepresents reality because she herself creates those views – she invents Cecelia’s and Robbie’s thoughts and feelings because she does not have full knowledge of their true minds. Furthermore, if the reader of McEwan’s novel sees Briony’s journal entry, then another ending is told and written down, thus inventing a third reality. With the journal entry of “London, 1999” and the ending of Briony’s piece, along with the representation of Robbie and Cecelia’s thoughts, multiple realities exist among each other. These multiple endings and representations not only mask an absence, but due to the multiple truths there is no link or representation of truth at all. Because there is no representation of reality at all within Briony’s text, then her book becomes a simulacrum.

This simulacrum could extend even further. In his essay, Finney explains that some readers complain about the novel ending with “London 1999,” but he states, “To complain about

the metafictional element in the book is to fail to understand that we all are narrated, entering at birth into a preexisting narrative which provides the palimpsest on which we inscribe our own narratives/lives” (79). So it seems that narration not only determines Briony’s life, but because of her authorship role, it determines the lives of everyone around her as well. Analyzing what Finney notes, Robbie and Cecelia are then known to be dead since the beginning of the novel by Briony. Their own lives are narrated out by Briony, so their death is known by her and brought out by her. Not only do Briony’s many fictionalizations mask an absence so much so that they do not represent reality whatsoever, but her whole book does as well. Briony’s whole novel, itself, becomes a simulacrum. It is a representation of multiple realities as well as a preexisting narrative for Robbie and Cecelia from the beginning. They have been dead since its opening, so Briony makes this happen in her novel. She creates this whole narrative because she must become the sole author of her story, which affects Robbie and Cecelia, whom I will analyze further in the next chapter.

Due to the theme of letters and mystery, Heta Pyrhönen explains that *Atonement* alludes to Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” in “Purloined Letters in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*.” She explains that Briony places herself in the detective role when reading Robbie’s letter to Cecelia and sneaking around watching the two. The ending of the book also has a twist, much like the endings of detective pieces (Pyrhönen 104). The most important sections in Pyrhönen’s essay analyze how Briony controls Robbie and Cecelia, especially in regard to letters. Further on in her essay, Pyrhönen questions the use of the letters in Briony’s novel. She indicates that in Poe’s story, Minister D –, who steals a letter addressed to the Queen after she read it, changes the appearance of the letter so as not to be caught with it. She compares Poe’s work to *Atonement* and states: “Similarly, Briony repackages Robbie’s note and the lovers’ correspondence by

embedding them within her novel, which has the revelatory epilogue as its seal, disclosing her authorship” (109). Briony disguises the letters by placing them in her novel; she believes that by doing so, she is in control of the letters and furthers her dominant role by exposing herself as author.

It is interesting to think about Robbie and Cecelia when it comes to the reader’s contact with the letters that they wrote. Pyrhönen looks into this notion and into Briony’s role as author and explains that, “as an author, Briony erases Robbie’s voice altogether – except for his note to Cecelia. While she quotes at length from Cecelia’s last letter, she provides only paraphrases of Robbie’s correspondence. Consequently, readers come into contact with Robbie *only* through Briony’s representation” (111). If a reader is to think of Briony’s novel and take her journal entry as her reality, then it could be considered that Robbie is only represented (except once) through Briony’s authorial control. She quotes her sister’s letter and gives her a voice, but mostly the two lovers are given voices because Briony makes them into characters within her novel. She is in constant control of what happens to them from the beginning: Briony decides Robbie’s fate when she accuses him of Lola’s rape, but she also shapes Cecelia’s future when she points the finger at Robbie, and then she controls them by characterizing them and forcing narrative on their lives. Briony controlling the lives of Cecelia and Robbie especially becomes interesting because it seems that the two lovers are aware of their lives being narrated. Robbie and Cecelia’s self-awareness could be Briony’s attempt to indicate to her readers that life is controlled somehow or reality seems fictionalized. The theme of fictionalized reality conveys that hyperreality is present, which is ironic because it is formed within Briony’s novel as well as McEwan’s. Ultimately, no matter how much Briony believes she is in control, hyperreality forms

within the text because of her use of replacing the reality that is in her storyworld with her own truth of her novel.

Chapter Three

The Manipulation of Robbie and Cecelia

In this chapter, I will analyze Robbie and Cecelia including their relationship with each other as well as the characters around them and their self-awareness (or sometimes lack thereof) within the text. Although they do not quite take themselves out of their fictional world as Briony does, Robbie and Cecelia often have a sense that their reality is constructed or that they are a part of some odd (fictional) world. Briony, as author, controls them in the text, but there are times when they acknowledge a strange feeling of being controlled. Although their judgment of each other seems skewed in the fountain scene, their curiosity about the world around them indicates that they are knowledgeable about their surroundings.

Robbie and Cecelia's Relationship

In Chapter Two of Part One, the reader finds out that Cecelia and Robbie have been childhood friends since they were seven and that both went to Cambridge, though in different social circles. It is obvious that there is some form of tension between the two, especially viewed from Cecelia's position. When Cecelia goes to the fountain to fill her Uncle Clem's vase with water, she sees Robbie there, and they begin discussing literature. She then asks him why he wants to go to medical school, and he takes the question as a jab at him for going because her father is paying for it. The narration, which seems to be from Cecelia's own point of view, states that Robbie has been acting strange: "[Cecelia] had thought she was imagining it, but in fact she was right – there was something trying in Robbie's manner lately" (26). This is extremely interesting because the clause of "in fact she was right" is from her own point of view and from the narrator's point of view, which seems to confirm Cecelia's judgment of Robbie and that what

she feels is a reality. Although they seem to misstep and misjudge each other when they are around the other person, Cecelia and Robbie each truly know and judge what the other person is like. The constant misunderstandings that occur between the two convey that the tension in fact *is* evident when they are around each other. Cecelia first notices the tension when Robbie comes to the house to ask for a book from the library, and instead of acting relaxed and normal, he takes off his shoes and socks in order to tiptoe across the floor, which Polly is cleaning. When he does this Cecelia thinks that, “Everything he did was designed to distance her. He was playing the cleaning lady’s son come to the big house on an errand” (26). Cecelia feels a gap between them because she is a part of the richer family, whereas Robbie is the son of their cleaning lady. She did not notice their distance until she goes to Cambridge and barely talks to him because they are both in different groups. Cecelia believes that Robbie is punishing her by mocking her, distancing her, and having trying mood with her.

Cecelia tries to talk to Robbie when she first sees him at the fountain, but the conversation is ruined when he takes her question about medical school too seriously. The narrator notes that, “This was what happened when they talked these days; one or the other was always in the wrong, trying to call back the last remark. There was no ease, no stability in the course of their conversations, no chance to relax. Instead, it was spikes, traps, and awkward turns” (26). This rhetorical dance between Robbie and Cecelia comes from the sexual tension between them. Each have known each other since childhood, and both are now growing into adulthood, and now they have this desire to experience sex with each other. Although both of them seem angry with the other person, the two are actually quite comfortable with each other, but it does not seem that way because they both have come back home and are getting back into the swing of old times at the Tallis household. Cecelia and Robbie are falling back into their

friendship from childhood, but they are also trying to test the waters of building a romantic relationship.

Because Cecelia feels that Robbie is punishing her with his mocking and flippant behavior she wishes to punish him for her feeling the brunt and embarrassment of it. She is able to do this after they both fight over the vase, it breaks, and the pieces fall into the water. While Cecelia attempts to fill the vase with water while the flowers are in it, Robbie tries to help her and suggests that he fill it while she holds the flowers, but Cecelia denies him the satisfaction of assisting her. Because she does not give in and because Robbie takes hold of a top corner of the porcelain, it breaks: “With a sound like a dry twig snapping, a section of the lip of the vase came away in his hand, and split into two triangular pieces which dropped into the water and tumbled to the bottom in a synchronous, seesawing motion, and lay there, several inches apart, writhing in the broken light” (28). It is interesting that the piece which breaks off of the lip breaks into two and is seen “writhing” at the bottom of the fountain. These pieces represent Robbie and Cecelia, both writhing in discomfort when they speak to each other. The pieces are triangular as well, which points to the fact that this scene is shared not only between them, but with Briony as well, who witnesses this interaction in from her bedroom window. Now, Cecelia has her chance to get back at Robbie.

Cecelia wants Robbie to feel the brunt of his actions of punishing her, so she dives into the fountain to retrieve the porcelain pieces after he attempts to help again by taking of his shirt to get the pieces:

[Robbie] began to unbutton his shirt. Immediately [Cecelia] knew what he was about. Intolerable. He had come to the house and removed his shoes and socks—

well, she would show him then. She kicked off her sandals, unbuttoned her blouse and removed it, unfastened her skirt and stepped out of it and went to the basin wall. He stood with his hands on his hips and stared as she climbed into the water in her underwear. Denying his help, any possibility of making amends, was his punishment. The unexpectedly freezing water that caused her to gasp was his punishment. She held her breath, and sank, leaving her hair fanned out across the surface. Drowning herself would be his punishment. (28-29)

Cecelia's thoughts indicate that she feels she is getting back at Robbie by punishing him because she is making him the viewer of her actions. She feels punished by him because he was being sarcastic with her, making her more aware of her rich parentage by exaggerating his entrance into the house by carefully tiptoeing from the door. She mocks and toys with him by placing herself in a situation where she would not normally be placed and makes Robbie watch. Her action of stripping down and making a show of going into the water places him in the viewer position – he watches her do this and gains pleasure from it. Even though Cecelia thinks she is punishing him by plunging into the basin, she only arouses him more because she teases him sexually by exposing herself and only allowing him to watch her.

This situation places Robbie into the role of spectator because he watches her disrobe. Although Cecelia initiates it by taking off her clothes, Robbie stands there, thus deciding not to leave, and witnesses her undress and plunge into the water. By taking off her clothes and shocking (or in her words “punishing”) Robbie, Cecelia places herself in the objective role (McEwan 29). Even though she is wearing underwear, her breasts and genitals would be seen and exposed. She does this to shock Robbie and wants him to suffer as punishment. It seems that the fountain scene is a chance for the two to test the water, so to speak; Robbie and Cecelia want

to know where the other stands in their relationship. This scene equals to sexual foreplay before the main event in the library.

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey looks into the act of looking and gaining pleasure from that action. Although her theory focuses on cinema, her ideas pertain to my analysis of Robbie and Cecelia’s situation. Mulvey explains that scopophilia is pleasure from looking and she relates Freud’s ideas to this act. In her work, Mulvey explains that scopophilia subjects people to a “controlling and curious gaze” (434). In “Three Essays on Sexuality,” Freud explains that with “the perversions which are directed towards looking [voyeurism] and being looked at [exhibitionism]...the sexual aim occurs in two forms, an *active* and a *passive* one” (Freud 157, italics original). Mulvey suggests that, in the situation of women in narrative cinema, the female is passive, whereas the male is active. Mulvey’s idea of the female being passive could be applied to Cecelia because she is subjected to Robbie’s gaze (and Briony’s curious gaze who thinks Robbie’s gaze is controlling) when she is standing on the basin wall. While she situates herself in this position, Robbie still looks upon her. Mulvey states that scopophilia or gazing “has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt...asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness” (438). She is indicating that Robbie’s gaze subjects Cecelia to punishment. He is the controlling male dominating figure who watches her undress, which is the opposite effect Cecelia wishes to cause. She wants to reprimand Robbie by undressing and exposing herself to him. She feels that the shock of disrobing punishes Robbie; when together, the two misjudge each other due to the sexual tension that occurs between them. Neither is in control; the only person dominating the situation is the unseen gazer – Briony. Because she sees Cecelia as exposing herself and being gazed upon and Robbie as the controlling gazer, Briony is able to have authority over the scene,

which is why she is the author of the novel. Briony believes that she can be in charge because Robbie and Cecelia misjudge each other, even though Briony also misreads and misjudges them as well.

James Phelan suggests that Robbie and Cecelia misinterpret each of their situations in the scene at the fountain. Cecelia believes that her actions of plunging into the cold water and her “drowning” are punishing Robbie, whereas these acts are actually hurting her more; he would actually gain pleasure from watching Cecelia undress. Phelan goes on to say that Cecelia’s “ethical judgment that [Robbie] deserves punishment is off the mark” (“Delayed Disclosure” 114). Both of them broke the vase and both are guilty of making their meeting awkward, Robbie is not the sole person to be blamed. Cecelia’s actions convey that she is not able to leave her parents’ home because she wants to be with Robbie. Phelan explains it as “a desire that Cecelia has only partially repressed. That repression is revealed in the scene in her overt anger at Robbie and her covert anger at herself..., [which] provides the cover under which she can display her body before him” (114). Cecelia’s desire expresses itself in her exhibitionism, but it also fogs her mind. Phelan believes that the reader sees her actions as repression and so, he or she judges her accordingly:

Cecelia’s interpretive and ethical misjudgments are more significant as indicators of her unstable situation than of her permanent character, and, as a result, we regard her with considerable sympathy. Though the chapter ends before we learn a lot about Robbie, our developing responses to Cecelia lead us to desire positive developments in their relationship” (114).

Phelan is explaining that the reader notes that Robbie and Cecelia are both victims of their awkward situation and repression of desire for each other, so he or she wants a relationship to form between the two characters. A sexual relationship comes to fruition in Chapter Eleven, when Robbie and Cecelia make love in the library.

As in the fountain scene Cecelia's repression is noticeable through her anger, so too is it seen in both Robbie and Cecelia when they finally come together sexually in the library. Once they are able to finally be together, they cannot hold their anger in and they ravage each other; there is biting and forceful behavior: "She bit him on the cheek, not quite playfully," "she bit him hard on his lower lip," "their kissing became a gnawing," "She was licking his ear, then biting his earlobe. Cumulatively, these bites aroused him and enraged him, goaded him" (127-128). All of this frantic behavior leads to the final moment where Robbie enters Cecelia, "Instead of an ecstatic frenzy, there was stillness... The closeness of a familiar face was not ludicrous, it was wondrous" (128-129). The sexual tension between them is gone because what each of them wanted has been fulfilled; they no longer feel uncomfortable around each other or angry due to repression of their feelings. They no longer misjudge each other because finally they are able to be together, without hindrances from the other person's feelings. This single moment allows Robbie and Cecelia to realize their love for each other:

Robbie stared at the woman, the girl he had always known, thinking the change was entirely in himself, and was as fundamental, as fundamentally biological, as birth. Nothing as singular or as important had happened since the day of his birth. She returned his gaze, struck by the sense of her own transformation, and overwhelmed by the beauty in a face which a lifetime's habit had taught her to ignore. She whispered his name with the deliberation of a child trying out distinct

sounds. When he replied with her name, it sounded like a new word—the syllables remained the same, the meaning was different. Finally he spoke the three simple words that no amount of bad art or bad faith can ever quite cheapen. She repeated them, with exactly the same slight emphasis on the second word, as though she had been the one to say them first. (129)

Cecelia's and Robbie's anger at the fountain scene stems from their repression of desire; they must not desire the other because of their different class positions. Cecelia has learned to ignore Robbie as a potential lover because he is the cleaning lady's son. Robbie distances himself from Cecelia because he believes that his passion for her could never turn into anything more. Finally when they are able to act on their desire, Robbie and Cecelia drop their guard and can see the change and beauty in the face of the other person; familiarity becomes promising. Robbie first states that he loves Cecelia and she responds with her love. The two are finally together, and the reader wants to see this relationship last.

Unfortunately, it does not last physically because Briony walks in at the exact instant of climax. Robbie and Cecelia's moment is lost because Briony must witness and control the lovers. Being the controlling and watchful person that she is, Briony must witness the sexual encounter between her sister and Robbie. Walking in allows Briony to control the lovers because she is able to control their orgasm. She, and she alone, is in charge of what happens between the two, which is evident in this scene as well as in her journal entry "London, 1999."

Cecelia and Robbie: Metafictional Characters in a Metafictional Storyworld

In their storyworld (defined in my introduction by David Herman), Cecelia and Robbie become metafictional elements due to their self-awareness as characters and their intuition that

the world around them is constructed. The majority of theory on metafiction, as defined and explained by Patricia Waugh, is in the introduction, but I would like to focus on Waugh's overarching idea of metafiction: "Any text that draws the reader's attention to its process of construction by frustrating his or her conventional expectations of meaning and closure problematizes...the ways in which narrative codes...artificially construct apparently 'real' and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently 'natural' and 'eternal'" (22). Although the main point is about the text as a whole, Cecelia and Robbie are characters, and, thus, elements of the narrative. Because they point to the notion that their reality is constructed, they are metafictional in and of themselves.

The first time that Cecelia thinks that the world around her has been built in the past becomes evident is in Chapter Four when Cecelia first meets Paul Marshall and sends the Hardiman boy upstairs to place Marshall's things in a spare bedroom: "All day long, she realized, she had been feeling strange, and seeing strangely, as though everything was already long in the past, made more vivid by posthumous ironies she could not quite grasp" (45). Her character feels strange because Briony's book is written after the physical Cecelia has died; Cecelia the character in the novel can see the construction of the novel around her and can feel that a part of her is dead. In the same chapter, Cecelia again feels a hint of construction: "she felt it; it had happened a long time ago, and all outcomes, on all scales—from the tiniest to the most colossal—were already in place" (50). This time, Cecelia realizes that the reality around her has been created and she is just a character placed into her surroundings. She feels that all outcomes of options have been exhausted because her world fabricated. Cecelia is not the only character aware that reality is constructed; Robbie hints about the same thing toward the ending of Briony's novel while also making the reader aware of the irony of his situation. At the end of

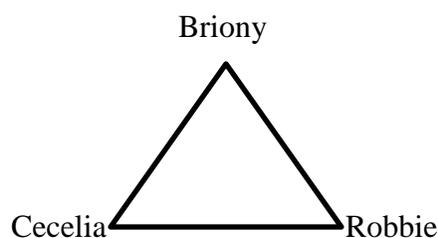
Chapter Eight in Part One, he is walking to the Tallis home for dinner, carrying the note he writes to Cecelia and feeling the openness of the evening he realizes that, “In the years to come he would often think back to this time, when he walked along the footpath that made a shortcut through a corner of the oak woods. . . One word contained everything he felt, and explained why he was to dwell on this moment later. Freedom” (85). The phrase “in years to come” suggests that Robbie will be imprisoned because the opposite of freedom would be imprisonment. The irony of this section is that this is the last time that Robbie is able to feel freedom because in the rest of the novel he is never truly free – he is with Cecelia, at dinner, searching for the twins, literally imprisoned, trapped as a soldier in WWII, and then he is dead. It is also ironic because although Robbie’s character feels free in this imagined moment, even then Briony controls his actions by writing him into her novel.

In the library scene, Cecelia admits to Robbie that she has feelings for him and she tells him about her odd feeling that she has had all day, “I’ve been seeing strangely, as if for the first time. Everything has looked different—too sharp, too real. Even my own hands looked different. At other times I seem to be watching events as if they happened long ago” (125). Cecelia explains to Robbie how she believes the world around her is real, but it seems to overcompensate – it seems too real to be existent. Then she seems to be viewing reality as it has happened in the past. Cecelia’s admission to Robbie indicates to the reader how the characters think that not only reality is a construct, but their existence is as well– they only become real because they are created, or recreated and written by Briony. They end up together because of her; Briony realizes that this must happen first in Part Three: “If something happened to Robbie, if Cecelia and Robbie were never to be together. . . Her secret torment and the public upheaval of the war had always seemed separate worlds, but now she understood how the war might compound her

crime” (271-272). Robbie and Cecelia must end up together, not because a different outcome would hurt Cecelia, but because it would torment Briony. She places them together at the end of Part Three so she can atone to them. It is interesting how, throughout the novel, Robbie and Cecelia sense that their world is fictional and their lives have come to an end before the narrative occurs. The metafictional element of these characters guides the reader to see that reality is a construct and ultimately, Cecelia and Robbie are never in control of what they do in the novel.

Triangular Relationship: Robbie, Cecelia, and Briony

Within *Atonement*, as I explain in Chapter One, the theme of three and triangles comes up often; there are the three sections of the novel, the three characters witnessing and taking part in the fountain scene, the triangular section that is gone from one of twin’s ear, the two triangular pieces broken off of the vase, the Church of the Holy Trinity, etc. Peter Mathews suggests that the threes indicate the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of Christianity, while also alluding to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (156-157). Although this interpretation is possible, it can also be said that there is a triangular relationship among the three main characters in the novel – with Briony present at the top of the triangle.



Although Cecelia and Robbie both have relationships with Briony and with each other, Briony is at the top of the triangle because of her controlling nature. By placing herself in the authorial

role, she controls Robbie and Cecelia as characters. As long as they are a part of her novel, they are not able to make their own decisions or truly be with each other.

In the previous section, I explain that Robbie and Cecelia are self-conscious about their situation, which is the result of the text created by Briony as well as the historical author of McEwan. Briony seems to create them as self-aware because she wishes to convey that they have freedom, which they did before she writes her novel with them in it. Ultimately by her fictionalizing them, they become mimetic of the physical Robbie and Cecelia who are alive before the War and “real” before Briony writes them into her work (Chatman 32). What is even more troubling is how Cecelia and Robbie are not only controlled and fictionalized by Briony, but doubly by McEwan. They are entered into the novel world by Briony, but are truly created by McEwan; they, as characters, never have any freedom at all. Briony at least gains some freedom by being alive at the end of the novel and writing what she has done in “London, 1999.” Briony having freedom is possible, or as I said in Chapter One and Two, McEwan places Briony into the authorial role and forces her to take the blame for fictionalizing the end because he does not want the audience to misjudge his actions.

Although Briony can be viewed as a tragic figure and victim because of McEwan’s action, the real victims are Cecelia and Robbie. They were able to be with each other physically in Part One, and for a little bit of time in Part Two, but they are never able to see each other after that. Because of Briony’s mistake of pointing the finger at Robbie, he becomes a soldier in WWII and dies at Bray Dunes. Briony also does not let her sister or Robbie die without her controlling that part of their life as well; she has to rewrite their history and fictionalize the fact that they are able to see each other again, all so that she can atone and forgive herself. Briony’s fictionalization is cruel on her part, but the ultimate cruelty comes from McEwan because he

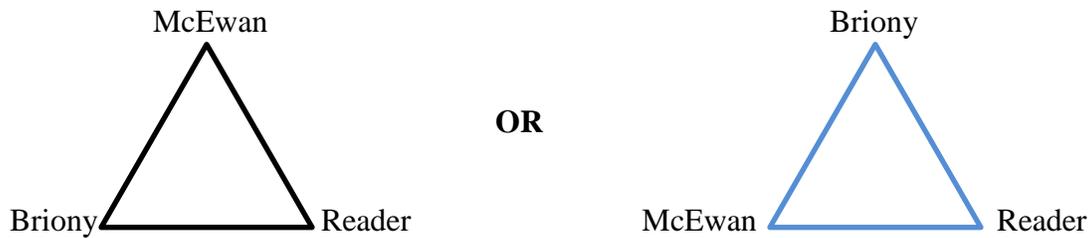
creates Robbie and Cecelia to annihilate them at the end – Robbie dies of disease, and Cecelia dies in the Blitz. He then has Briony take the blame for fictionalizing the happy ending between Robbie and Cecelia. They both, although self-aware of their situation, are mere characters in a fictional world. The fact that Cecelia and Robbie are characters in a novel hints at the metafictional/ postmodern element of life, we as humans are born/ created in order to die, and the reality which surrounds us can be seen as constructed. The notion of creation for demise may be why readers, in general, yearn for happy endings; they want to see a positive life for fictional characters, because it is not a reality for every person to have the quintessential positive ending in life. The knowledge that not every person has a happy ending with life leads to Briony knowing what the reader wants and supplying that ending, only for McEwan to take it away, making the reader question this common trope in literature when he places “London, 1999” at the end of *Atonement*.

McEwan constructs the storyworld within *Atonement* and creates Briony as well as the other characters within that world, but Briony is the one who also creates a storyworld within her text. Robbie and Cecelia are manipulated in Briony’s novel because she must control them, even their fate, in order to write her book. This manipulation becomes quite interesting because it can make Briony seem controlling to the reader, or she could be manipulating Robbie and Cecelia because she herself is manipulated by McEwan. Briony feels that she must be in control of something because her life is controlled within her storyworld, so she writes a novel, in which she manipulates her sister and sister’s lover. The reader can understand Briony’s actions, but can also control the text because he or she passes the ultimate judgment of the work.

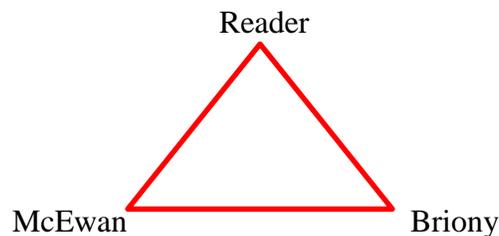
Chapter Four

Readerly Judgment: The Ultimate Power

As I have discussed previously in chapters two and three, the shape of the triangle is a prominent theme throughout *Atonement* and although it represents many aspects of the novel, it can also point to the relationship the reader has with the text, Briony as author, and McEwan as biographical and implied author. This relationship can be represented as follows:



The first triangle represents McEwan as the main person in control because of his implied authorship as well as being the flesh-and-blood author, whereas the second triangle places Briony in control because she takes the authorial role away from McEwan when placing herself as author at the end of Part Three and in her journal entry in “London, 1999.” In Chapters One and Two I explain how McEwan and Briony both can be seen to have control over the text because of their authorial role, but what I will do in this chapter is explain how the reader is ultimately in control of the text and how he or she passes the final judgment on the novel. In order to do so, I propose a new triangle to indicate the relationship among the reader, McEwan and Briony:



This concept places the reader in the top point of the triangle, indicating that the reader has control over the text. Furthermore, the reader sees the relationship between the text, McEwan, and Briony, but he or she also reads and therefore judges *Atonement* as well as Briony and McEwan.

Does it Truly Matter Who the Author of *Atonement* is?

Although I believe that the author is important as related to the text and how the reader views the text, it is also important to note how the reader could be viewed as the most important aspect of the novel – he or she takes away understanding from the text because of what he or she already knows. The author writes the novel and publishes it, but that same author cannot control how it will be judged or regarded by the public. Oftentimes, there are arguments about authorial intent within novels. However, as I will explain in this section, McEwan’s intention does not matter. Although Briony atones to her sister and Robbie by writing her novel, her confession in “London, 1999” about her ending being fictional and her question about atoning to a higher power ultimately comes down to the reader. She cannot be forgiven until the reader accepts her confession and atonement. In order to fully explain how the reader’s role is most important, I will first analyze how Roland Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author” can relate to *Atonement*. This essay, although quite controversial, examines how the reader maintains the most control with a text. Barthes’ concepts about the author are important to examine in relation to *Atonement* because his ideas convey how the authorial intent of a work does not matter – much like what I say in this chapter. It does not matter whether Briony atones or not, and it does not matter if McEwan gives control or places the blame on Briony in the final section; all that matters is the reader’s interpretation and judgment of the novel as a whole.

In “The Death of the Author” Barthes points to why the author’s metaphorical death occurs, “As soon as fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively...finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, [a] disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (142). Both Briony and McEwan face death because they both fictionalize their stories and do not want to act on reality. Briony fictionalizes the meeting of Robbie and Cecelia because the reality within McEwan’s storyworld is that they both died during the war. What is also interesting is that within her reality (McEwan’s storyworld again), Briony is quite aged and will die soon; it seems that McEwan is commenting on the death of Briony as the death of her as an author, especially with her comments on page 351 about atoning to God when the author is like God in that he or she is able to control their narrative and world that they create through it. This seems to relate to a point that Barthes makes, “We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash” (146). With this quotation Barthes is stating that no writing is original because writing has been recycled from author to author, text to text, etc. and no text has one single meaning.

Although Briony is not claiming to be original—in fact, she takes after Woolf and many other modernist writers as I have explained in Chapter Two—it is interesting how she views the role of author on the final pages of “London, 1999.” She questions how she can truly atone for her act because of her authorial position, “How can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God?” (350). Here, Briony is questioning forgiveness from God, when she is like God because she forms and shapes the outcome of her novel; she even explains that “[i]n her imagination she has set the limits and the terms” (350-

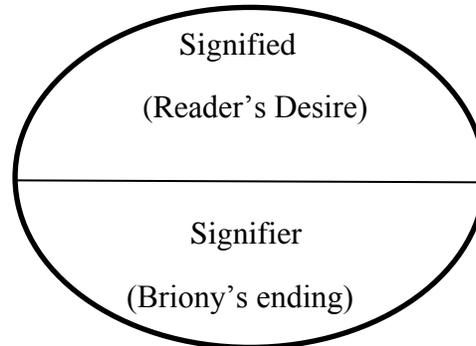
351). As author, Briony sets the limits and the terms of the novel, but Barthes claims that this closes the novel from meaning: “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147). Briony places herself as Author and limits the text; she is forgetting about the reader because while Briony believe she sets the limit and the meaning of her work, the reader truly decides her fate and the fate of her meaning. Barthes conveys that because writing is not original, texts blend together and enter into dialogue that is mutual, making it a constant flow of multiplicity, but this multiplicity becomes focused in one place – the reader. He explains this further in the following sentence: “The reader is the space on which all quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (148). The reader is the destination of the text because he or she holds the power to understand and judge it as a whole. With this conclusion, Barthes ends his essay stating that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (148). Although it can be said that the reader and author can exist together, Barthes is saying that the Author as God figure cannot exist with the reader because said Author imposes their own meaning on the text, when the reader is the one to have his or her own interpretation to the work.

With her final speech about the author being like God, Briony makes herself an Author and therefore must die for the reader to gain meaning from this text, which is why she is dying in her storyworld, and why McEwan creates her. Briony is ultimately a character within the storyworld that McEwan constructs and he pushes her toward death because he knows that the reader needs to understand his work. Not only is he commenting on the role of author with Briony, but he is invisible to the reader’s eye because Briony is making these claims. She is seen as placing limitations on the novel, not McEwan. He tests the reader on how he or she can judge

Briony as an Author, a person/ character, and how he or she will judge *Atonement* after reading Parts One through Three and “London, 1999.” Because it is commonly used throughout popular fiction, most readers typically expect a happy ending. The reader who wants this type of ending does read and receive it at the end of Part Three, but that notion of “happily ever after” is taken away from the reader when Briony reveals herself as author and explains that Robbie and Cecelia are dead. In my next section, I will examine this readerly expectation along with Briony’s act of fictionalizing the end of Part Three with theory background from Saussure and Lacan.

Briony’s Ending to Part Three and Readerly Expectation

The following model shows how I will be analyzing Briony’s end to Part Three as well as her confession in “London, 1999” in relation to the reader’s expectation of the novel.



In this example, the signified is the reader’s desire for a happy ending, mostly due to his or her expectation of such an ending from reading other forms of narrative, as the “happy ending” is a trope often used in fiction. In “Will the Real Author Please Stand Up? Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” Earl Ingersoll suggests that the reader wants a happy ending because the narrative is limited due to its randomness of plot in Part One. He further suggests that, because of the plot, the narrative could take any number of routes but, “desire for the right kind of climax is aroused

in the readers, especially those male readers who want to witness the completion of the scene in the library. This openness of possibilities also creates a realistic sense that life is being represented here: desire for the right ending *may* be fulfilled, but then again it may *not*" (155). Although I disagree with him about just the male reader wishing to see the end of the library scene, I agree with him about the rest of his theories. Earlier in his essay, he looks at the library scene and explains that Robbie (and Cecelia, I believe) do not reach climax because Briony walks in on them. So, the reader yearns for such a climax with his or her act of replacing that with the happy ending. Also, Ingersoll explains that the reader believes this desire to be realistic and the plot to be as well; although he or she hopes it is fulfilled, it may not be the climax he or she is hoping for in the end. Ingersoll then explains that the ending located in "London, 1999" is perverse because it denies the reader climax:

What turns out to be a state of the interruptus for eternity in the "real world" [of McEwan's storyworld] is compensated for by a climax perversely delayed for years until part 3 where it is related but not dramatized. Then this climax is re-presented in part 4 [*sic*] as a 'fiction,' an imagined climax, part of the writer's art atoning for the denied climax in life, rendered forever impossible by the artist's 'crime'" (162).

Because Briony walks in on Robbie and Cecelia she interrupts their love-making, thus denying them a climax. When Briony accuses Robbie of raping her cousin she then, again, interrupts their opportunity of a climax because there is no chance of them being together again, due to the fact that her accusation sends him to jail and to WWII. At the end of Part Three, the climax for Robbie and Cecelia, as well as the reader is in reach because the two lovers live together happily. But, in "London, 1999" Briony explains that this ending is false because Cecelia and Robbie are

dead. The happy ending that the reader yearns for is denied to him or her because of Briony's crime and her need to atone in her diary entry. Although it is not fulfilled for the reader, the desire still becomes important throughout the text because McEwan still writes the ending of Part Three as a "happy ending."

As I have stated in previous chapters, McEwan seems to be aware of this desire and gives the reader what he or she wants in the final chapter of Briony's work. At the end of Part Three Briony sees Robbie and Cecelia living in Cecelia's flat together and it is revealed that the two have a cottage in Wiltshire, which can be described as positive because the two are finally together even after Briony and the war pushed them apart. The reader's desire is met due to the signifier of this happy ending because it is the meaning that the reader finds at the end of the chapter and at the end of what they believe to be the novel. The reader of just Briony's novel, one who may exist in her reality, would just see this ending and believe it is the reality and truth of Briony's story. Only the reader of McEwan's book is privileged to see "London, 1999." The meaning changes for the reader and he or she is met with his or her own question about narrative truth.

As Saussure explains, people search for the meaning or truth of the sign, and in this instance the reader seeks for the truth of the novel. Saussure's theory is present in the ending of Briony's novel as the signifier of the reader's expectations (signified). The reader of McEwan's novel is given this happy ending in Part Three, but it is taken away with the epilogue and the realization that Briony has written the previous work. On the last page of Part Three, there is "BT 1999," which represents Briony Tallis, 1999. The reader now sees that McEwan has not written what has been read, but Briony has. The meaning of truth that is thought to have been found at the end of Part Three is now up in the air again. In the epilogue, an entry from Briony's

journal it seems, Briony admits that Robbie dies of a blood disease at Bray Dunes in 1940 and Cecelia dies at the bombing of the Balham Underground station in the same year. The meaning of the book no longer becomes the resolved happy ending in Part Three, but now leaves the reader questioning his or her own expectations out of the novel. The signified still being readerly expectation, the signifier is still Briony's narrative, but her narrative is fictionalized. The readers within her world would read to the end of Part Three and be satisfied, but her ending is not truth. Only the reader of McEwan's novel understands this and it seems that although the expectation of a happy ending remains for that reader as well, he or she is left to question reality, truth, and his or her own role as a reader. As Lacan would suggest, in his work *Écrits: A Selection*, there can be no fixed formula for meaning, so the reader cannot expect to have a happy ending with each novel because not every novel will have this formulaic end. McEwan seems to urge the reader to realize this fact to go into reading with no expectations. Not only does he do this with the ending, but he urges the reader to carefully examine each novel; he drops hints throughout the work, but the reader barely notices them until he or she knows about the epilogue and goes back to reread. Because McEwan wants his readers to reread and rethink their own expectations he also conveys that their judgments are important. The reader has the power to decide how novels will be viewed, and McEwan not only allows his readers to pass judgment on his work, but also his character – Briony.

Reader: The Destination of Control

Not only does the reader judge Briony on her admission about fictionalizing the ending of her book, but also because of her explanation that “the attempt was all” that is needed for her to atone in the first place (351). Although I have previously analyzed the following lines in Chapter Two, I would like to also insert them again here so that I may explain them in a different way:

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. (350-351).

Briony is explaining that the attempt is all that she needs, since she cannot atone to a higher power. Although she believes this because she thinks of the author as god-like, Barthes would deny that. He seems to say that the reader holds the most power when it comes to the novel, because he or she takes in and understands every word within that space. So, Briony can atone to the reader and by appointing herself as the writer and because McEwan includes her diary entry with his work, she asks for this. Her attempt at atoning is actually her asking for forgiveness, she cannot get this from Robbie and Cecelia because they are dead, so she tries to make them together when she writes that she saw them at the end of Part Three. She offers up this ending with her novel to the reader and he or she must judge her for it. Briony also writes the diary entry and it is offered up for the reader to also see. Ultimately, Briony's fate is in the hands of the reader.

Briony must forgive herself for her "crime," her role as author, and her act of fictionalizing the end of her book. After this, the reader is placed in the position of forgiving her. He or she has read her book and her diary entry and he or she is the only one who can decide to forgive her or to judge her harshly for her actions. As biographical author, McEwan creates Briony, her story, and her diary entry and the reader is able to judge his book as a whole. No

matter what Briony or McEwan think about their role as authors respectively, the reader holds the most power because he or she decides whether to forgive them or not. The reader has control because he or she can decide to keep reading, to like or dislike the novel, to keep it, to donate it, or to share its title with the world singing its praises. Ultimately, it is the reader who is god-like and decides the destinies of Briony and McEwan.

Conclusion

Before *Atonement*, Ian McEwan's novels were quite dark; his nickname used to be Ian "Macabre" due to his works, which included incest, murder, and dogs preying on humans. *Atonement* comes as quite the shock to readers of his fiction because it does not seem as dark as his other pieces; critics from Ingersoll to Phelan claim his work to be like that of a mystery/detective novel with a twist. Although enlightening and shocking, *Atonement* is also a bit dark. The plot involves two lovers who never have a chance, a chase in the night, crime, war, rape, sacrifice, and finally a happy ending – all controlled by Briony Tallis, the self-appointed author of Parts One through Three. What truly makes this novel dark is revealed in "London, 199," in which Briony explains that she fictionalizes the ending to Part Three because she needs to fix what she has done to Robbie and Cecelia; her attempt was all she needed. The darkness comes from her view of control as well as how she cannot see past herself so much so that she forgets about the reader. She claims that there is no entity to whom she can atone, but the reader becomes this entity by simply reading, and thus judging the book as well as its author. The darkness does not come from incest or murder, but from the mind of a controlling author.

Briony becomes so controlling that she takes the authorial role away from Ian McEwan, and fictionalizes the ending to her work so that she can feel satisfied with herself. This ending thus represents a false reality, masking an absence because, not only is it untrue, but Robbie and Cecelia are dead; their bodies no longer exist in Briony's world. Because she claims that her book is based on the "reality" of her childhood, Briony's novel represents that particular reality and should not stray from it. Because her book's ending is fictional, her whole novel comes into question. Within McEwan's storyworld, where he creates Briony's reality, Briony's book then would replace the real – hyperreality would surround it because not only does her ending hide an

absence but it takes over the reality that Robbie and Cecelia both die and replaces that with her ending. Therefore, her book within McEwan's storyworld becomes a simulacrum.

I come to this conclusion by analyzing Baudrillard in relation to *Atonement* in my Chapters One and Two. Because Briony's ending bears no resemblance to reality, masks an absence, and itself replaces the original reality, it cannot be true within McEwan's text. Briony writes her ending to hide the truth about Robbie and Cecelia because of her controlling nature. Through looking at critics such as James Phelan, Brian Finney, etc. I explain in Chapter Two how Briony can be seen as manipulative and as an author. Ultimately, she places herself as author within the text because McEwan allows her to do so.

In Chapter One, I convey how McEwan acts as an author and really delves into his role; by examining essays by McEwan himself, Richard Robinson, Peter Mathews, and Kathleen D'Angelo I suggest that McEwan must write under Briony's mind as well as his own. He has to create his text to seem like he is writing it, but so is Briony. His creativity lends to the novel's modernism framed by postmodernism. He also plays an important role in the relationship among Briony and the reader, because he pushes the reader to reread, think critically, and question his or her expectations about novels through his use of allusions and the epilogue. He also creates situations of misreading, especially between Robbie and Cecelia with the fountain scene in Part One.

In Chapter Three, I explain how Robbie and Cecelia often misread each other's signals and language, which conveys to the reader not to misread the novel. These characters also represent important metafictional elements with the novel because they are aware of the novel being constructed, or that their reality is fabricated. This freedom indicates that they have meta-

awareness and realize that they are a part of some form of non-reality. Robbie and Cecelia also become crucial to the novel when their deaths are revealed in “London, 1999” because they have been controlled even in death. The fact that Robbie and Cecelia are controlled comes from Briony placing herself in the role as writer and replaces their deaths with their happy ending of living together. She takes control to a new level when she does changes the ending of Robbie and Cecelia’s lives, but ultimately, the reader has authority over Briony and the text.

In Chapter Four, I indicate how the reader has the final judgment call over *Atonement*, McEwan, and Briony because the reader must understand and make meaning of the novel. At the end, Briony explains that she cannot atone to anyone or anything, and no one can forgive her; the reader is able to decide whether to forgive Briony and is placed in the most powerful position. Because Briony writes her book and offers it up to her reader within the storyworld surrounding her, as well as the reader of *Atonement*, her work will be judged, and she may be forgiven. Although Briony’s novel is judged by the reader, it is also true that her attempt at writing the story is all that is needed; as long as Briony writes her novel and her diary entry that is all she, as the author needs to do in order to start the process of forgiveness – the final decision is up to the reader.

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January 22, 2013

Marissa D. Nelson
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Dear Ms. Nelson:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract titled "Postmodernism in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*: Briony Controlling the Text." After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study is an analysis of publicly available information it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

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