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# In quest of meaning: Narrative and (un)reliability in Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love* and *Atonement*



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# In quest of meaning: Narrative and (un)reliability in Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love and Atonement*

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## Abstract

In this thesis I will discuss the notion of unreliability in the narratological environment of Ian McEwan's novels *Enduring Love* and *Atonement*, in relation with the formalism theory and a cognitive approach, respectively. The effects of traumatic experiences along with the concept of memory as an unreliable narrator will be considered as focal points in my analysis. In McEwan's novels what constitute an unreliable narrator are his specific characteristics derived from the personality of the fictional character/narrator and the narratological setting. The research questions examined are how narrative is used as a way of making sense of the world, which narratological techniques in the aforementioned novels result in unreliability, and what the effects of unreliability are for the characters and the reader.

**Keywords:** narrative, unreliability, unreliable narrator, formalism theory, cognitive narratology, traumatic experience, McEwan, *Enduring Love*, *Atonement*

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## Introduction

Narratology as a branch of literary theory examines and studies how a story is shaped. Narratologists, as literary theorists, focus on understanding and deciphering the structure and application of the author's narrative strategies that allow them to fit together to tell a story, in a way that combines all the individual elements and options into a single aesthetic whole (Cliff , 2007, pp 62). Although most people interested in a literary language know that narratology as a branch of literary theory is mainly related to the studies and research of Russian formalists and French constructors, it has not been sufficiently understood that the narratological methods stemming from these theoretical schools have not lost their relevance and value. Later theorists have evolved the tools of narratology and clearly defined the relationship between literature, social structure, and reading, without undermining the primary role of the text and the understanding of the work as an autonomous entity.

Studies that began in France in the late 1950s distinguished the narrative from the other forms of speech, with the result that narratology developed as an autonomous branch of literary theory, to separate it from, rhetoric, and stylistics (Herman , 1999). The aim of the first direction of narratology, is to study the techniques used to develop the temporal structure of the story, perspective, form of speech, narrator's position, inflection, and verb voice. The second direction of narratology is semiotics, which aims to presents the underlying semantic structure inherent in the content of the literary text (Fludernick , 2007, pp36-59). This version of narratology is a form of literary semiotics that influences all fields of science because it introduced a revolutionary way of exploring narrative texts (Dancygier , 2012).

The impetus for preoccupation and reflection on narrative discourse was given by Russian Formalism (1915-1930), which was expanded by structuralism and semiotics of the 1960's by Marxism's historical and sociological view, as an attempt to apply to literature the methods of the founder of modern structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (Cain, E. William and A. Laurie). However, the theory of narration is placed in ancient times and, more specifically, in the Platonic State (imitation, narration) and Aristotelian Poetry (myth = plot) (Leszl , 2017, pp245-336).

The Russian formalists gave form and shape to the narrative theory, approaching the textual environment with more scientific literary devices offering a close reading regarding the structure, the form, and the semiotics, which refers to the understanding of the operation of the text. In other words, priority was given to aesthetic creation on which their relevant reflection was based. Although initially, the two schools -formalism and structuralism- were at odds with each other, they then followed a familiar path to achieving common goals (Toolan , 2006, pp459-473). The main link between formalism and modern structuralism was the work of the Russian linguist formalist Roman Jakobson, who contributed significantly to the study of poetry, which he perceived as part of linguistics (a poetic function of language). He believed that words were combined to convey patterns of resemblance, opposition, parallelism that resulted from their sound, their meaning, their rhythm, and their co-indicative meanings (Cain, E. William and A. Laurie 2010).

It is worth noting that the term structuralism is associated with the term semiotics, which means the methodical study of signs and is what structuralists attempt in their study of literature. So, semiotics is related to a form of literary criticism, influenced by structural linguistics, which involve sensitivity to the richness of form and language (Toolan , 2006, pp453-479). Structuralism admits that narrative texts derive from the human narrative ability. However, within them, there is a level related to the structure of language - metaphors, literal language, forms of speech- and another level about the style and structure of their expression in a statement (Cain, E. William and A. Laurie 2010). In more detail, the structuralists claim that the

literary work is an autonomous system and seek to describes its narrative elements, place, characters, and action, to understand the structures and reach the essence of the story (Min and Park , 2019).

There are two different ways of approaching narrative. Palmer in his research, discusses narrative more as a way of thinking, while for the participants in the narrative procedure, meaning the writer, the reader and the fictional characters, narrative is considered as a way of understanding and explaining the world. In this thesis, I aim to study narrative as a means of interpretation of life's, mainly traumatic, experiences, and as a way of communication among the people. I suggest that, both narrative as a thinking process, and narrative as an interpretational tool, derive from the same origin, which is the cognitive state of people's mind. Narrative, either as a way of thinking, or as a way of perceiving, is a function of the human mind, and every procedure with regards to it, occurs inside our mind. In Ian McEwan's novels, *Enduring Love* and *Atonement*, the characters use narrative in order to make sense of their life. In both cases, narrative is a process of remembering and re-experiencing central events in their life trying to understand them and consequently to recover or atone from their trauma or their sufferings. In other words, the act of narrating is linked to psychological reasoning describing the human need to shape experience and face reality. Some attribute to narrative the virtues of a testimony, and how it helps people to reconcile and find inner peace. Moreover, in many cases, fictional narrative is the only way to approach the ineffable, such as the balloon accident in *Enduring Love*, or a child's sexual abuse in *Atonement*. McEwan also seems to be in consistence with the above, since his fictional characters, in one way or another, share connections with literature engaging the act of narrative in their daily life. In the analysis of this thesis, I attempt to answer the questions of narrative as a way of making sense of the world and of interpreting our experiences and relationships in it. Further, I aim to answer how the notion of unreliability has been structured as a narratological tool in McEwan's *Enduring Love* and *Atonement*, and to explore its effects on the participants in the narrative process, namely, the reader and the fictional characters.

Nevertheless, in both novels unreliability concerns the narration as it is derived from the characters expressed points of view as a narratological technique and affects the textual environment of the novel and the cognition of the reader and of the characters. In both novels the synthesis of a story through memory fragments and the various modes of narrative result in unreliability. The effects of the unreliability apply both to the fictional characters and to the reader. Following the plot, the reader constantly identifies with the protagonists and shares their experiences. In *Enduring Love*, the dominant first-person narrator is by nature unreliable since as a narratological method overshadows other perspectives and makes the reader feel uncertain and unease while doubting for the narrator's credibility. In *Atonement* on the other hand, the narration follows the third person mode until the novel's ending where it turns to first person narrator, revealing that way Briony herself as the narrator of the whole novel. The complex narration, such as the multiple perspectives and opinions about the same scenes, and the frequent flashbacks underlines the unreliability by confusing the thinking process and the point of view of the characters in the story, and of the reader as well. The trauma that the characters encounter in the novels, along with the fact that the narrators trust their shivering memory as a reliable agent to retell their stories, also adds to the unreliability in the narratological environment since they still strive to recover from their psychological wounds. Joe in *Enduring Love*, as an unreliable narrator affects the storyline due to his over growing obsession with his opponent Jed Parry, deforming his cognitive functions and understanding process. Through their perspectives the two men represent the clashing approaches of science and religion. Joe as irreligious and rational portrays the scientific way of perceiving reality and facing life, as opposed to Jed's point of view that appears to rely on God for his understanding of the world. In *Atonement*,

Briony builds her unreliable narration affecting the course of events by lying to the reader and by destructing her surroundings in the novel.

In terms of cognitive narratology, the selected approach to study the *Atonement*, also regards the field of literature as the natural environment for narrative (Manfred 1997, pp441-468). For instance, the main characters in *Enduring Love*, Clarissa Melon and Joe Rose, have created a special connection, over the years, with the narrating process due to their professions - Clarissa is a literature professor in the university, and Joe is a scientist who is occupied as a writer in a scientific journal- where they have acquired an analytical way of thinking. Joe and Clarissa in the novel are presented as a couple, who makes use of different modes of narrative in their daily communication, such the form of dialogue, letters, and storytelling, quite often in their relationship. For example, their long conversations after dinner, and their discussions about their day in work, to communicate and connect with each other, and to resolve things. Furthermore, in the climax of the novel, all characters, Clarissa, Joe, and Jed Parry use narrative in their attempt to understand the inexplicable incident, to come to terms with an unknown appalling reality, and to familiarize again with life, themselves, and the others. In *Atonement*, although the characters also use narrative as a means of communication and interpretation, they often misread each other's feelings and intentions. They write letters to each other trying to avoid miscommunication, to explain themselves, and finally to reach an understanding.

Similarly, as in *Enduring Love*, McEwan in *Atonement* associates his main protagonist, Briony, to literature by setting her to be a writer. He relates his fictional characters with the field of literature to propose that narrative is the appropriately selected way to interpret with life events, traumatic experiences, and human relationships. In that sense, McEwan does not insist on a specific narratological approach, but rather he investigates various modes of narrative in *Enduring Love*, such as scientific, literary, and religious points of view. By this narratological mixture, he underlines narrative as a way of thinking, and further, as a way of existing, regardless the outcome. However, judging from his novels ending, through narrative process characters along with the reader, always manage to reach the truth, and to achieve catharsis. For McEwan, the narrative process is experimental and adventurous to simulate life, and leads people to explore paths that maybe, otherwise, they would never have the chance to undertake since narrative broaden one's horizons.

Furthermore, in the present thesis I will study the notion of unreliability in the narration of these two novels. In terms of the *Enduring Love*, I will discuss the unreliability in the text along with the formalism theory and the concept of focalization as a narrative technique based on Genette and Bal's research. I will suggest that the notion of de-familiarization and the concept of dominance from formalism, along with the first-person narrator as a subjective perspective, and the focalization of the other characters, diminish objectivity and stability in the narrative process, highlighting the unreliability in the novel. All these techniques result in a complex narratological environment where neither the fictional characters, nor the reader feel certain and confident of a trustworthy outcome in the story. Moreover, I will present the unreliability in the narration as a post traumatic effect since the narrator as a participant in the novel struggles to recover and to deal with reality after experiencing a horrifying accident which led to the unfortunate death of a fellow character. In other words, the protagonist of *Enduring Love* and narrator, Joe, longs for stability again in his life, to make sense of his trauma and to reclaim his position into this world. These characters strive to make amends with an unknown reality while feeling detached from the world and distant from themselves and the others. The de-familiarization contributes to the unreliable narration, especially, considering the aftermath of a traumatic experience. Trauma disrupts the course of people's everyday life causing a discontinuity to the narrative process of the stories that trauma survivors retell through memory about themselves and the other (Tuval-Mashiach, Shalev and Freedman 2004, pp 4).

Similarly, in *Atonement*, the main character, and the narrator of the novel, Briony, undergoes a traumatic experience considering the innocence that accompanies her youth. After witnessing an intimate intercourse between her sister, Cecilia, and her childhood friend, Robbie, she invents a lie to temporarily escape the appalling reality. I will approach narrator's unreliability in a cognitive approach as it is depicted, mainly, in the research studies of Herman, Bamberg, and Phelan. Herman explores narrative as a way of thinking and communicating in order to comprehend human life. In addition, he supported, among others, the interdisciplinary studies and literature's association with other scientific fields such as psychology, linguistics, and sociology (Herman 1999). Bamberg's research also focuses on conversational narrative within its social context, offering insights to understand fictional characters' personalities by forming their identities, and to further explore the relationships among them (Bamberg 2005, pp213-267). Phelan discusses the metafiction in McEwan's novel examining its use and its effects. He suggests a demanding reading to decode Briony's narrative within McEwan's, and that this metanarrative level complexes the narration mirroring Briony's cognitive state, who frequently mistakes reality with fiction (Phelan 2007). Briony's mode of narrative, and the layers added by the numerous perspectives in the novel and by the flashbacks, confuses the reader and delays the revelation of the truth and the atonement.

Overall, in McEwan's novels the act of narrative through storytelling is a dominant concept. In both of his novels the characters experience a traumatic event which impacted the rest of their lives, and they try to escape it. Through narrative they re-evaluate their relationships and life itself. As post traumatic effects, the characters lose their center, and their relationships with their beloved tested in a crisis. In order to make sense of their surroundings and to survive the crisis, the characters create stories from their memory's fragments regarding the traumatic events in order to come to terms with the world, to reveal the truth to the reader, and to atone for their own actions and decisions. In *Atonement*, Briony seems to face two different traumatic occurrences. Firstly, she is traumatized by the unpleasant early experience of accidentally witnessing her sister during a sexual intercourse, and secondly she is further traumatized by the premature unexpected loss of her sister, which blocks her chance to atone for her lie and get Cecilia and Robbie's forgiveness.

McEwan does not propose the narrative to exclusively assist his characters, but rather he also uses it to artistically confuse them, and the reader. He composes a multilayered narratological environment in which the characters try to survive and ultimately to escape it, while the reader seeks for the truth. In addition, he treats narrative as the initial source of the problematic in his novels, but he also suggests narrative as a solution to these artificial complexities. In *Atonement* the whole misreading and misunderstanding among the characters, which results in an unreliable narratological environment, begins with a fictional lie, originated in a faulty narrative. However, through narrative again, and through writing, Briony will also atone from her past mistakes. Thus, narrative seems to compose and later to discompose the complications within the novel. Between *Enduring Love* and *Atonement* there are detected similarities, such as the first person narrator who is also a participant to the story as an internal narrator focalizer, the perception of a story-world where the characters resort to in their attempt to make sense of the world, and there is also the mixture of different perspectives trying to communicate and understand themselves and the other.



## Modes of Narration and Unreliability in “*Enduring Love*”

### Opening Remarks

In this chapter of my thesis I will venture a formalistic narratological approach, applying the core values of this theory to Ian McEwan’s novel *Enduring Love*. I will use the notions of point of view/focalization to discuss the reliability and unreliability in the literary narrative. Therefore, I will attempt to give an overall account regarding focalization as a narrative technique as it has been introduced by Genette, and how it further evolved in several studies by literary critics and analysts. In this chapter, I will additionally consider the aforementioned term according to Bal’s theory as a component of the story of the narrative text. Moreover, I will include the aspects of the matter as they have been developed in the work of Patrick O’Neill, “Points of Origin: On Focalization in Narrative” (O’Neil , 1992, pp331-351). Developing these theories according to this novel, I aim to answer the questions of how the notion of unreliability is constructed and underlined within the narration, and what the effect of this is. Thus, I suggest that unreliability is derived from several internal workings within the narration, such as the first-person narrator and the playful usage of focalization. Concluding, I will support that with these narratological techniques and by using different modes of narration, the writer does not strive for presenting the one absolute truth related to only one supposedly “right” perspective, whether that is scientific, literary, or religious oriented. Instead McEwan wishes, through a focus on different view angles, to investigate the narrative process itself.

Structuring the chapter, I will first offer an introduction to the novel by presenting the characters and the plot. I will then discuss three aspects derived from formalism theory, namely, the literariness of the text, the concept of de-familiarization in narrative and the theory of dominance, introduced by Roman Jakobson -in relation to this novel (Cain, et al., 2010). In order to gain a deeper knowledge of McEwan’s characters, of how each of them comprehends the world around them, and of how they relate to one another, I will present their perspectives on the main events in the novel. Furthermore, I will employ the theory of focalization in the narration of *Enduring Love*, with an emphasis on Genette, narrative and the focalized subject. I suggest that focalization demystifies and provides a more detailed approach on the narrative; as in this novel, where the “I” mode of narration has increased possibilities of outshining the rest of the characters’ angles of vision for the reader. Lastly, I will suggest that perspectives do not only vary among different people, but rather they are functions of the mind expressed through innumerable ways of thinking that a person acquired throughout his life.

These different perspectives of life derived from peoples’ background and experiences constitute the structure of our thoughts. Thus, I will introduce the characters’, their occupation, and their relationships in order to further understand the impact of their life experiences on the various ways of thinking presented in this novel. The main protagonist in *Enduring Love*, Joe Rose, is a science journalist who shares his life with his partner Clarissa

Mellon, a literature professor. They are in a long-term, but childless relationship. The story begins with the carefree picnic day for the couple being interrupted by an air balloon accident. Along with other witnesses of the accident, Joe puts all his efforts to save a little boy who is inside the wagon of the balloon. Despite their efforts, the balloon gets detached from the ground and flies into the sky (McEwan, 2004). One man cannot let the rope off his hands, resulting into his fall and his senseless death. Among this companionship, there is a man named Jed Parry, who after a glance that he exchanges with Joe, gets convinced about Joe's affection towards him. Now everyone is trying to make sense of the horrifying event and subsequently of their own life. Back home, Joe and Clarissa strive to cope up with this unfortunate evening through narrative by retelling the story from their memories. Later that night Joe receives a phone call by Jed Parry, who is letting him know that he understands Joe and that they share a mutual love. The days that follow, Jed's presence in Joe's and Clarissa's lives becomes disturbing through several phone calls and letters that are all addressed to Joe. Jed has persuaded himself about Joe's love and for that reason, he declares to be obligated to return the feelings by bringing God in Joe's life (McEwan, 2004) (Roth, 2009).

The reader follows the overgrowing obsession between Jed Parry and Joe resulting in an antagonistic, love and hate relationship among the two men as they both drawing deeper and deeper in this overwhelming situation. Clarissa is worried about her partner's point of view and the way he handles the events happening related to Jed. She starts doubting that Jed even exists while she is alarmed about Joe's state of mind. Joe believes that Jed suffers from de Clérambault's syndrome; a mental disease where a woman is convinced about the King's love feelings towards her and will stare at the palace waiting for him to send her his royal love (Palmer, 2009). Joe is assured that his and Clarissa's life are in danger and seeks protection by acquiring a gun from a former friend for self-defense. Meanwhile, he receives a phone call learning that Jed holds Clarissa in their home, threatening her with a knife. Once Joe gets home, he tries to calm Jed down through reason. Jed sets Clarissa free but hurts himself. After his attempted suicide, Jed is being held in a mental hospital from where he is trying to reach Joe through written letters. However, his attempts fail since the hospital never sends them out in order to keep Joe and Clarissa safe and calm. The couple now lives together again and adopts a child. In the appendix of the novel, the writer presents research of a case study on the Clerambault's syndrome and provides doctors' and psychologists' signed positions in order to strengthen the validity of his story (McEwan, 2004).

## Formalism Concepts and Unreliability in Narrative

A formalistic literary analysis has been chosen to be applied on this novel venturing a combination of selected methods and tools of formalism theory with the narratological unreliability. Formalism was the first school in literary criticism to approach literature in a scientific basis free from the mystical atmosphere and the sediment of modernism. In other words, formalists are pioneers in close reading and in applying scientific methods of analysis on an artifact (Cain, et al., 2010). Due to this scientific perspective, formalists were more interested in a literary work of how this work has been composed, rather than of what it is written (Scholes, 1973). In order for

their analysis to be effective, inspired by scientific techniques and tools, they invented their own appropriate devices to apply in art and in literature in particular, such as the technique of de-familiarization, the concept of dominance, and the theme along with the motifs as part of it (Cain, et al., 2010). By choosing the aforementioned devices to approach the novel, I attempt to suggest that they complement the unreliability I discuss regarding the novel's narrative. For example, through de-familiarization the traumatic nature of the events is underlined shocking this way characters' perspective for their surroundings, an outcome that generates vulnerable and unreliable thinking process. Similarly, the concept of dominance also attributes to the notion of unreliability since it is tied together with the prominent use of a first-person narrator weakening the objectivity in the novel. Moreover, the dyadic nature of the theme of an enduring love also is in alliance with the narratological unreliability since it provokes reader's wondrous mind by suggesting different ways of reading. In other words, the novel instead of offering answers and solutions complicates the events in a manner that the readers and the protagonists will lead to resort in different narratological modes as an ongoing process of thinking and understanding. In the analysis that follows I will further explain those techniques and methods that are applicable on Ian McEwan's novel, *Enduring Love*.

Regarding the notion of de-familiarization, one of the characteristic scenes within the narration is the scene with the balloon accident, a life changing experience for the characters. Ian McEwan chose to start his novel with this traumatic event which is the beginning of every minor or major aspect of the plot. In other words, it is the starting point or rather it is the plot itself since it introduces the main thematic question of the role of narrative in our perception of reality. Additionally, it is inserting the question of the use of narrative in an attempt to make sense of the world and deal with a traumatic experience. The aftereffects for the trauma survivors are the creation of a whole new perspective making this way an outstanding point for the notion of de-familiarization in the sense that the post traumatic effect of a change in character and in point of view de-familiarizes the participants from everything reliable and familiar their life. That is the reason why Joe, for example, while processing the event loses part of himself drowning in an obsessed connection with Jed, or for instance, that is why Jed is convinced, after the event, that it is not only him that has to be a devotee God but that he also needs to recruit and convince Joe about their supposedly sharing love which appears through Jed letters almost identical to the way God taught love. After having experienced such a traumatic event, individuals usually undergo extreme stress levels, which demand dealing with a whole new, unexpected, and unfamiliar situation. A traumatic encounter raises the question of meaning in life to such an extent that people grow frighten and unsettled changing their worldview (Tuval-Mashiach, Freedman and Bargai , 2004, pp1-16). The reader becomes a witness and receiver of agony and horror from the description of the balloon accident. By making the choice of a balloon accident that leads to a tragic death, the writer achieves what is known in formalism as the concept of de-familiarization (Cain, et al., 2010). The cleverness of the writer to compose such a scene and the weirdness of the nature of the accident are intriguing for the reader's curiosity. McEwan does not write about a common car accident where most people are already aware of its consequences, but rather

surprises the reader with a horrific event that most people's mind cannot even capture. It is exactly the eerie nature of the accident and its effect on people's feelings that through the uniqueness and cleverness of this caption the unreliability is now triggered as an unstable perception of the world for the protagonists. This is a technique used in art in order to make things and concepts of life unfamiliar so as the reader to see it from an unconventional perspective this time and achieve a prolonged perception (Pinotti , 2013, pp75-90). McEwan forces the reader and the characters in the novel to face a familiar concept for people's nature, the concept of death under very unusual and different circumstances. De-familiarizing the concept of death fueled a series of events where characters' minds and consciousness challenge their limits.

Both the aforementioned technique of de-familiarization and the following concept of dominance are treated within this analysis in a manner that unreliability in narration is underlined. Additionally, both concepts are presented as tools within a narratological environment where the characters are struggling in the process of making sense of traumatic events. Thus, Roman Jakobson's concept of dominance, which is considered to be a major and a productive concept in Russian Formalist theory, is being considered since it is notably beneficial in the construction of the novel (Cain, et al., 2010). The dominant as the focusing component on the literary text, determines and transforms the remaining minor components but all together shape a whole in order to offer and convey meaning.

Accordingly, I would argue that the main dominant elements in terms of the content are the enduring love as the title indicates along with the first-person narrator throughout the story. McEwan discusses in this novel about enduring love, in other words about love not as a static constant feeling but as a force which is dynamic enough to lead in life changing experiences (Rogers, 2014). The reader of the novel becomes the witness of two different kinds of love, both however enduring. A conventional positive one presented to the reader via the caring relationship between Joe and Clarissa and an unconventional negative one, presented via the overgrowing obsession between Jed and Joe. However, both the obsession and the caring love, transform characters' relation into a dynamic moving force, able to alter everything around them, themselves and even the plot. McEwan employs here the double meaning of the word enduring to indicate that love through its motivation and movement can be either something that lasts or it can be a negative feeling that deteriorates peoples' relationships and becomes haunting and unbearable (Rogers, 2014). The meaning that the adjective "enduring" poses to the word love, as a feeling, underlines the unreliability of the binary nature of it in the narration. This duality reintroduces the term love from a different view angle questioning what it was so far commonly perceived as love within humans and creating instability by attaching a different provocative sense in this word. It is disturbing, for example that the term has been selected within the narration as the selected way to describe Jed and Joe's relationship, while on the other hand, it is also disappointing when referring to Clarissa and Joe's love to the extent that their relationship has been transformed in insecurity and mistrust.

So, in both cases the word love bears an ironic sense in the title and in the narration. In other words, the theme of an enduring love implies narratological unreliability by evoking reader's mind and by suggesting different

ways of reading. Moving further to the dominant components of the novel, I would suggest the first-person narrator to be one of them since this form of narration is being maintained almost through the entire novel. Joe as narrator has the major influence upon the events, however, I would argue that he is also the most influenced one; he is the person to undergo extreme changes in his psyche inner world. The narrator here not only can affect the parts of the story, but rather can also be the governor of the other characters thoughts and feelings since he is placed between the plot and the reader. An obsessed relationship and the concept of the “I” narration are extremely influential in the development of the plot and become the forces that move the characters further, help them to evolve and to dictate their next move (Bal, 1997). The “I” mode of narration seems a priori unreliable since its functionality overshadows the objectivity in narration.

## Modes of Narrative

The theme in *Enduring Love* is how people, or rather society, deals with love and death by presenting in the novel various ways of explaining the world. I suggest society, because I propose that the three characters namely, Joe, Clarissa, and Jed, represent three different pillars of the modern society. Joe is the rationalist one who seeks for a scientific oriented interpretation and longs for an absolute, objective reality, Clarissa, as a Literature PhD researcher and teacher, influenced and characterized by her field of studies, is the romantic and literary interpretation of life, and finally, Jed Parry represents the religious approach in the life events.

The idea of narrating and reading indicates the various points of views operating like lenses through them; people perceive life differently creating various different ways on how to retell a story resulting in different modes of narration (Genette, 1980). For instance, Joe as a scientist portrays his belief that the event is an accident attributed to chance through a scientific narrative. Clarissa as an English literature professor holds a more romantic sense of our surroundings. Jed on the other hand, believes that everything around us has been determined from fate which he calls God and he is a believer of God’s bigger plan for people; just like this accident, which happened for Jed and Joe to meet and join together the path of God’s love. Thus, they all have their own way to perceive and explain life itself and each of them represents one way of understanding this world.

However, the reader does not follow equally the aforementioned perspectives, since there is only one narrator and that is Joe who speaks of science (Rogers, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the dominance of the scientific method in the narration, the reader is still able to sense what the writer wishes to designate through the focalization in the narration of the other perspectives as well. By presenting different modes of narrative, McEwan aims to help the reader understand the usefulness of narrative as a method of perceiving and understanding the events take place in our life, without excluding any possible approach, but rather he encourages a collaboration of narratological modes depending on the context. Nonetheless, he votes for the narrative despite the variation among narratological modes.

Joe Rose, the protagonist of the novel, is the main narrator of the events taking place and of the other characters' thoughts and feelings. In a first person narration the reader actually has a limited point of view as they follow plot's development exclusively from one perspective (Bal, 1997). The "I" narration in terms of the language means that a technical vocabulary and the type of language provided by the narrator is dominant throughout the entire novel (Bal, 1997). To exemplify, Joe Rose being a former failed research scientist himself and a current writer of scientific subjects, addresses the reader by using scientific vocabulary or methods (facts, logic, and reason) to describe the events taking place in the novel. Eventually, this extremely specific way of expression, also leads to limited perception of the reader. Joe who is the science representative, throughout the novel tries to deal with the unfortunate balloon accident that caused John Logan's death with rationalism. The reader follows Joe's thoughts while he is searching for reasoning behind the tragedy. He finds John Logan's action, who decided not to let go the rope of the balloon until the end, which cost him his life, totally inexplicable, pointless, useless and irrational (McEwan, 2004).

Moreover, Joe not only has to deal with the weirdness of this death, but he also needs to deal with the feeling of guilt that he carries after the balloon accident. There is only one main thought that occupies his mind now, and that is, who first let the balloon go. Since they formed a team who cooperated to keep the balloon down to the ground in order to save the boy, one man's action affected the others' men effort. Consequently, he believes this one man, who let the balloon off his hands, is responsible for changing the course of events that caused John's death. And all he wishes for now is that he was not the one who let off the ropes of his hands first, finding consolation in the thought that he did everything possible to save the child and for the rest of the team (McEwan, 2004). The peak of Joe's obsession is when he announces to Clarissa his wish to go back into research field of science, something that Clarissa argues that he had dropped years ago. Joe's decision to go back in science is a result of his obsession with Jed, whom he wishes to study as a project. Joe is convinced that Jed has a condition related to the functions of the mind and he wants to be the researcher of his case in order to find proof and solution to this threat.

Clarissa, from literature's point of view, sees things differently than her life partner Joe. She has a more romantic and sensitive perspective in life, and she needs to believe in people. After returning home from the life changing accident, she says to Joe that for her, John Logan's action was an action of bravery and of affection for children. Being a father himself, John Logan acted under parental instinct which led to his death. Both are shocked and sad, and they desperately want to feel lively again even though they cannot help but think about this event repeatedly (McEwan, 2004). In order to deal with this, Clarissa thinks that to love each other and to take care of their devoting relationship is a mighty solution. In terms of Clarissa's point of view, Joe, as the "explicit narrator" is the one who retells her perspective to the reader. In this meta- narrative level it becomes evident that when someone transfers another person's words or thoughts, the point of view never remains the same (Bal, 1997). Nevertheless, the reader is only able to witness the events through Joe's point of view since he always tries to interpret with the facts and to attribute to them his own meaning and his own needs. That

eventually results in maintaining his perspective in the other characters' points of view as well. For example, when Joe hands Parry's letters to Clarissa, she observes how much alike their handwritings are; however, Joe confirms that his friend is right through this fact, albeit from his own point of view (McEwan, 2004).

In account of Jed Parry's point view, the reader is able to witness it only through Jed's letters to Joe, otherwise, in the entire narration Joe's scientific angle is the influential one. Within these letters we can observe Parry's love and obsession towards Joe. Parry is a believer who apprehends his life through religion's narrative. He feels the constant present of God and now has set as purpose of his life to bring Joe under God's love (McEwan, 2004). However, apart from Jed's emotional situation and state of mind, we can also sense an overgrowing obsession in terms of Joe's relationship to Parry. At this point in the novel, it is exactly when the reader becomes suspicious about Joe's perspective and Jed's threatening existence. The events that help grow this suspicion are; Clarissa's comments about the similarity of the handwritings, the fact that Joe is the only one to communicate with the reader, and the fact that some events in the novel are presented as if they were hallucinations of Joe's. There are several times for example, where Joe and Jed would meet alone, or where Joe would be the only one to see Jed Parry outside the house and then he would be gone again. Under these circumstances it seemed like, even Joe would doubt himself about Parry's appearance in his porch yard, realizing that Jed Parry is not the only one who is obsessed (McEwan, 2004). The nature of their encounter and how this evolved between them reminds us of the two different sides that can be oriented and traced to the character of one person. It is one "bad" and one "good" self, one rational and one irrational. Joe and Parry share an antagonistic relationship where only one will prevail, reminding the battles that sometimes one has with himself.

In relation to the previous perspectives and points of views, I will study the notion of focalization that Genette launched in order to further clarify the concept of the narrator and his role within the narration (Genette, 1980). According to formalism, exceptional role has the "literariness" or the artfulness of a text (Cain, et al., 2010). Literariness makes an art what it is, an aesthetic object lying entirely in its devices. Despite the focus being on the form of the novel, the text's internal workings can give important information about the meanings and the writer's conception (Pinotti, 2012). For instance, internal workings regarding the narration, such as a play with the mind and the plot of who narrates something, but also who really sees it or feels it, and most importantly how the reader perceive these treatments from the author and the text. The matters of focalization -who narrates and who really sees or feels- and that of narratological points of view, consider to be some of these playful internal workings that complement the literariness of the text. The above, in combination with the narratology, first-person narration and the different point of view further showcase the unreliable narrator. Genette sensed that there is a more appropriate question to be posed in the discourse of the narrative theory. To that extend, Genette proposed a necessarily distinction between "Who speaks?" and "Who sees?" (O'Neil 1992, pp331-350). In other words, he aimed to a separation of the narrator from the perspective within the environment of an artifact (Genette, 1980).

Generally, the discussion on focalization orients two scales, that of the text and that of the narrative. Analysts like Bal and Rimmon-Kenan, suit focalization on the level of the text, whereas others, on the level of narrative (O'Neil 1992, pp331-350). Text focalization illustrates how focalization operates, while narrative focalization raises the questions of “who is to say” or “which narrative agent” (O'Neil 1992, pp331-350). For the purpose of this chapter, I will be starting from the focalization in the narrative in order to conclude on how focalization is conducted throughout the text. Detaching the narrator from the concept of focalization, Bal proposes focalization as a technical term having a strongly manipulative effect on the narration process, on the characters, and on the reader (Bal, 1997). Focalization is the relation among a character in the story, its environment and what is seen by a particular character (O'Neil 1992, pp331-350). In addition, it is of great importance for the analysis to consider that the context of reading determines the perceived focalization. To exemplify, Bal, as other various literary experts, tries to avoid any identification between the narrator and focalization. The subject of focalization is called focalizer and within a certain environment in a story, it is possible that the focalizer is the narrator, since the focalizer is the point of view from which a story is being verbalized through the narrator (Bal, 1997). There are two distinguished types of focalizer namely, the internal focalizer and the external focalizer (O'Neil, 1992). An internal focalizer would be a character focalizer, who participates and relates to the events of a particular story within the narration. An external focalizer on the other hand, is a subject which is neither connected directly nor participates to the story of a particular time and framework within the narrative (O'Neil, 1992). In order to familiarize my analysis with the aforementioned terms of focalization, internal, and external focalizer, I will study sentences as examples from within the novel.

Reading this sentence, “She (Clarissa) said it all again, and repeated the lines from Paradise Lost. Then she told me (Joe) that she too had willed deliverance, even as he was mid-air” (McEwan 2004, pp29), it is suggested that Joe is the narrator, and that Clarissa is the subject of focalization, consequently she is the focalizer. More specifically, Joe speaks (narrates) of what another person, Clarissa, thinks and feels. Therefore, it is a different person the one who speaks (the narrator), and it is another one that sees (the focalizer). Rimmon- Kenan developing further the discussion about “who speaks” and “who sees”, suggests that the verb “see” has a broaden meaning and it does not only imply the action of seeing something, but rather also includes feelings, thoughts, dreams, and so on (O'Neil, 1992). In other words, the question of “who sees” is the question of who perceives inside the story, whose reflections on the events the narrator is presenting to the readers. So, in the passage reviewed above, the focalization concerns Clarissa’s point of view (focalizer) of the events in the story.

The examples of focalizers in the following sentences demonstrate the cases of an internal focalizer and an external one respectively; “When he (Jed Parry) heard me (Joe) moving away he got to his feet and came over. He really didn’t want to let me go. (McEwan 2004, pp20)”, Joe Rose is the narrator and as a participant to the story himself he is an internal character focalizer. “When she steps into the hall, he is waiting for her... He has a wild look... She associates this look with over- ambitious schemes... (McEwan 2004, pp80)” Here, the focalizer is an external omniscient narrator where the parts of this focalization are Joe and Clarissa as the focalized

objects. In the narration of the novel however, we mostly experience internal focalization, since the narrator and the other character's perspectives as the subjects of focalization, are all participants in the story. Focalization as a mode of narration, along with the first person narrator, underline the unreliability in narrative and by inserting the rest of the characters point of view, strengthen the argument of the process of narration as a whole through which humans gain understanding in life.

## Unreliability in Narrative

The aforementioned modes of narration, namely the first-person narrator and the characters' points of view as the subject of focalization, develop the notion of unreliability in the narration. Due to the predominant "I" mode in narrative the events take place remind the reader more of subjective and doubtful opinions of the narrator since his way of telling the story is the only available source. This kind of narrative is not generally approved and bears the weakness of the unreliability. Especially due to the post-traumatic nature of this narration which is derived from memory in great shock and stress levels. Joe, who is the narrator, and a journalist by profession, has mastered the production of a story and of the possible ways to tell it in order to reach the desired result. This leads the reader to think of the artificiality in the narrative, and how all this is actually a story which has been rewritten from subjective perspectives (Genette, 1980). Every character has his one story to tell through Joe's narration, hoping that the events will make sense for their own benefit and wellbeing. Thus, in order to make peace with the horrifying events and with themselves, the characters in the novel need to either deal with their trauma or to try and distract themselves by being occupied while concentrating in other aspects in their lives. This is the reason why Joe's attention is absorbed and devoted in solving Jed Parry's mystery, why Clarissa by misreading John Logan's intentions as loving and carrying attributing them to his parental instinct seems to be in denial of the peculiarity of his tragic death, and why Jed Parry makes the purpose of his life to recruit Joe in God's love. The fact that we follow the narration in the entire novel almost exclusively from Joe's point of view creates serious doubts and leads the reader to assume an unreliable narrator.

Continuing the discussion about unreliability, I shall do so in relation to the memory of traumatic events, which have an important role in McEwan's novel. Memory is also an angle of vision, which when revisiting, can bring to the surface new perspectives even of the same narrative. Constructing a story, people insert meaning into their life justifying their experiences and their choices while through these stories they shape their identity and reveal themselves to others. Undergoing a traumatic event, the continuity and the meaning of these stories are shaken resulting in flawed, unavailable, and fragmented versions of the story as opposed to a healthy narrative process which is coherent and meaningful. Studies that approached the matter structurally emphasize the form more than its content underlining the relationship between partial recollections and memory capacity of organization (Tuval-Mashiach, Freedman and Bargai, 2004, pp1-16). Even though memories belong to the past, the act of remembering and retelling a story, however, belongs to the present (O'Neil, 1992). During the attempt to remember a story and everything that will emerge from the remembrance, different points of view are

created which are hardly the same to the original story, or to the point of view we had the first time we revisited that memory. Therefore, memory is an unreliable agent of the narrative process, especially for traumatic experiences where the person only seems to recall fragments and pieces of the event, failing to construct a decent and meaningful framework of narrative or focalization.

For example, the balloon accident and John Logan's death were unpredictable events that had a great impact on the characters of the novel. Each of them in order to deal with the guilt and the remorse had to create their own narrative and thus point of view out of memory. Joe Rose is being comforted by being devoted to science and exhausting himself in a quest of finding the truth and the "bad" guy. Joe wants to achieve this so that he could tell proudly to himself that he did achieve something worthy in this horrible story. Clarissa Mellon felt that it was easier for her to think that what had driven John Logan to this madness were bravery, pure love, and responsibility towards the children as he was a father himself. Jean Logan, in an attempt to ease her pain for her departed husband, composed her own subconscious narrative according to which, her husband had intimate relationship with another woman and that he was with her at the time of his death (McEwan, 2004). The aforementioned arguments are examples of unreliable narration of the various view angles and focalization points in order for these characters to deal with the pain and the guilt that a traumatic experience can cause.

The reliability or unreliability of the narrator determines what and how the readers perceive about the characters of the novel and the events of the plot (Bal, 1997). When the narration is in the first person, we follow one point of view denying that way a more concrete perception of the plot which normally a third person narrator would offer. This is achieved by excluding the rest of the characters' points of view. That way readers doubt about the objectivity of the scientific method in the novel, whether the events depicted in it are real and to what extent are in relation with pragmatic rationalism. In the following passage narrator's scientific perspective is highlighted through his point of view to the event and the vocabulary he chose to describe it not in confidence but rather in a state of doubt feeling insecure

“... this was the last time I understood anything clearly at all... What we running towards? I don't think any of us would ever know fully. It was an enormous balloon filled with helium, that element gas forged from hydrogen in the nuclear furnace of the stars, first step along the way in the generation of multiplicity and variety of the matter in the universe, including ourselves and all our thoughts... We were running towards a catastrophe...” (McEwan , 2004, pp3).

Especially in *Enduring Love*, where the unreliable narrator represents science, then we as readers actually question the validity of a scientific interpretation not only in the novel but also in life, thus we are driven in adapting a complicated and complex narrative as a way of thinking the events in life.

In this turn of events, it seems more demanding than ever, when we are searching for answers by taking into consideration different perspectives rather than putting all of our hopes into one discipline's point of view. That is to say, that a mere objectivity could be approachable, by combining the perspectives of science, literature and religion in order to come closer to any reality in the novel (Rogers, 2014). The ending of the novel proves that

Joe was right all along, that Jed not only exists but that he is an actual threat for him and Clarissa. McEwan suggests that taking into account in the narrative process a scientific approach is probably accurate and effective to reach a conclusion, however, he is not authoritarian about the matter, since he puts the protagonist's scientific perspective under question and makes him consider giving room for other narratological interpretation as well through the focalization of the literary and the religious oriented points of view. I believe that the writer rather prefers to play and intrigue our mind in discovering new paths of thinking, rather than to make a clear dogmatic statement.

Accordingly, I propose that McEwan considers narrative as a way of thinking rather as an answer. When recreating the narrative of a story like this, the characters revisit their trauma as a suggested way of perceiving and understanding the world by relaying in a variant of narratological modes. Furthermore, in order to attribute some objectivity to the narration, McEwan explores the scientific world with the appendix at the end of his novel to further support the claims and the argumentation of the novel (McEwan, 2004). For example, in the appendix, the reader becomes familiar with evident names and research conducted by prominent scientists of psychology and psychiatry, where they would present their developments on a case study of de Clerambault's syndrome, similar to the one McEwan based his story on. Once the book was published, remarkable experts from various scientific and academic circles initiated a discussion about writer's capability of approaching a relatively unknown to him matter and adjusting it with such efficiency to his narrative (Burkeman, 1999). However, the article published in "The Guardian" reveals that Ian McEwan in an interview admitted that the appendix part of his novel was not real and that the story of the novel was not build upon scientific facts, but it rather was the product of his own cleverish and artistic inspiration (Burkeman, 1999). Even though, some question the authority and the ethical part of claiming that something is real by supporting it through false scientific discoveries and scientists names, McEwan maintained his right on creation and inspiration even if it was to enrich the narrative with manufactured details. Closing, this is further revealing, firstly for the manipulative purposes of a narrative text, and secondly, regarding the reliability within a narration both in an attempt to attribute some scientific objectivity in his writing but also to show how narrative is used for scientific purposes in order to deal with life and make amends with our post traumatic reality. Even if something appears to be a dogmatic perspective that holds the truth, the reader should always consider an open narratological interpretation.

## Closing Remarks

The most important aspect in this chapter is the assumption that both domains each other with science borrowing from literature the narrative and with literature imitating science's developments and approaches to convey its messages to society (Burkeman, 1999). Moreover, both literature and science strive to understand human nature, with literature being the way of presenting, analyzing, and understanding our world. Such is the case of McEwan's *Enduring Love*.

The whole novel is constructed on different perspectives and focalization points as a playful process. The writer, Ian McEwan plays with the minds of his characters and of his readers, as they struggle to cope with what they perceive as reality. However, this reality is not to take for granted and each of us has to be careful so as not to lose track of it. The notion of unreliability is prominent throughout the whole novel until the very end. Directing the story in that way, McEwan almost never allows to the reader's minds a moment of relaxation. He rather finds it preferable and creative to provoke thought, just as how the narrator of the story Joe Rose does. Specifically, McEwan juxtaposes multiple views of love and logic in the novel indicating that none of them is the ultimate truth since the narrative also implies that looking for a logical relation or answer is not always an appropriate response. Moreover, the reader should neither exclude other narrative approaches, nor they should depend exclusively upon an authoritative mode of narrative which might only be on the surface objective. On that sense, it is preferable to consider several aspects before reaching a conclusion. A combination of the insights that the various points of view have to offer might prove to be of great efficiency in reader's journey to solve the mystery of the novel and in their quest to reach the truth of the narrative process. Nevertheless, readers should rely on their own authority for creation and for perception and extract their own meaning from a narrative.

## A Cognitive Narratological Approach on Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

### Opening Remarks

In the previous chapter, I discussed the notion of the unreliable narrator along with selected concepts from formalism theory. In this chapter of the present thesis I aim to approach the unreliability in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* by identifying impressions of cognitive narratology in his work. The novel explores the psych-synthesis of the characters and their relationships as they grow in the narration mainly around a childish yet an exceptional lie. Briony Tallis, the protagonist of the novel, a young girl with a wild imagination, witnesses her sister Cecilia getting undressed and diving into the garden cistern under the gaze of their friend Robbie Turner, whose affection towards Cecilia develops gradually. Due to Briony's misinterpretation of a series of events their lives would change forever. Robbie and Cecilia crossed a line in a way they could have never imagined and fell victims to Briony's childhood fantasy. The latter, being incapable to perceive adults' world, their way of thinking and living, due to her adolescent mind, after having witnessed the young lovers in a sexual intercourse, she is convinced that she just saw an assault take place with her sister, Cecilia, being Robbie's victim. During the same night, the whole family experiences another unfortunate incident, where their cousin, Lola, have been sexually assaulted and Briony recognizes in Robbie her cousin's attacker. Although, she identifies him without doubt to the police forces, however, later on the novel, the reader is being informed that she based her testimony on something that she thinks she saw, a shadow figure which resembles Robbie's characteristics in her mind. This misinterpretation of events resulted in a lie which costs the separation of Robbie and Cecilia and doom the whole family in a different, bitter future that what they expected. She witnesses unacknowledged mysteries and committed a "crime" from which she did not stop trying to atone for the rest of her life (McEwan 2001).

Many critics and readers consider *Atonement* to be Ian McEwan's best novel, especially when invoking the vividness and cleverness that characterize the depiction of delicate in nature social angles such as the matters of childhood, love, war, and that of social status. Marketa Michlova in her research discusses a plethora of historical issues depicted in *Atonement* to conclude that in 1930s in England the bourgeoisie class considers itself to be above morality (Michlova 2008). The novel's trajectory explores the characters' feelings and state of cognition, such as shame, atonement, and the hardship of forgiveness. The notion of obsession, which concerned my previous analysis as a dominant concept in the textual environment of McEwan's *Enduring Love*, as an element of the narratological unreliability, is also present in *Atonement*.

Obsession presented through the descriptions of the dangers of innocence, the impact of the past on the present, and the penetration of evil into a seemingly simple and harmonious life. However, here the issues are boldly orchestrated, resulting in a sympathetic work, invoking the feeling of identification to the reader. The story revolves around a lie, invented by a little girl just thirteen years old. A lie, that will lead to the imprisonment of her older sister's lover, Robbie, and will disrupt the life of the bourgeois family. At the same time it will reveal the psychological inadequacies and disabilities of the heroes and it will confront them with a series of dilemmas, reflecting the class rivalries of England in the 1930s and the social upheavals brought about by World War II (McEwan 2001). Regarding Briony's consciousness, is obsessed with fantasies, and with the creation of new stories. Having been lost for quite a while in her fictional world, she faces certain difficulties to adapt to actuality. Consequently, she misreads adults' connections, and misinterprets real-life events resulting in her unreliability as a narrator.

The selected approach to study this novel is cognitive narratology focusing on the notions of unreliability, and that of narrator, their functionality, and their possible and searchable relation with the theory of narratology. More specifically, the neuro-novel genre is examined as a modern literary genre through social components, science, and narrative. Throughout this study, I aim to demonstrate how the three central characters desperately struggle to maintain the fragile mental state among them. Moreover, I attempt to show how the cognitive approach in narrative attempts to unfold fictional minds' workings within a story-world, either self-contained in themselves, or with the minds of others by emphasizing on their character structure and experiences.

This approach to fictionality illustrates other aspects of McEwan's fiction, especially some of its meta-fictional moves. The research question arises from the above theoretical framework which will be analyzed in this chapter. The role of narrative in an attempt to explain and to make sense of the self, and of human relationships, what constitutes an unreliable narrator and its effects on the novel, and how narratological modes are a resource of interpretation, providing a basis for understanding the conduct of ourselves and others within the world. In the novel, techniques, such as the use of a metanarrative level, the flashbacks, the third person narrator that presents a variety of counter- perspectives to the main narration, along with the focalization, as well as the "I" narration, stretch the unreliability of the narrator and the relativity of the truth in the novel.

Research based on mind-narrative connections and relations encompasses not only how stories can be used to build worlds but also the way in which the act of narrating is a means to extend and improve mind functions for an enabling and living mind. Briony's storytelling for instance, the lie and the narrative world-making she creates, is a product of an unconscious procedure of a young girl's mind to make sense with an unknown reality, which for her is the relationships of the grown-ups. Relevant research regards narrative as an object of interpretation and as an instrument of mind (Scherr 2016). Briony seems to have gain control over the stories she creates, however, the girl is not fully aware of what counts as reality and what as fiction. According to Finney, she subconsciously absorbs details of the actual world to incorporate in her fictions as it fits to her own needs (Finney 2004, pp68-82). In other words, Briony associates real life experiences with the story-world. Other relevant studies, further their research by pointing on narrative psychological reasoning, or on the ordinary daily process of narrative that people use in order to understand human relationships, society and several events that take place in their everyday life and the world they live in (Herman 2009). Moreover, the discussion includes the question of how world-making stories are able to provide the means for evaluating our conduct with our own self and also others, while taking into account cognitive psychology's link and interpretation in a narratological environment. David Herman inserts the notion of "un-worlding", where the reader "de-realizes" the story-world by interpreting it "as a fiction within the fiction" rather as "textual actual world" (Herman 2006, pp452-459). In the metanarrative level of the novel, Briony makes the effort to atone for her mistake by identifying the offender, and by dismissing the falsely accused Robbie, achieving the process of "un-worlding".

## Cognitive Narratology and Unreliability

Cognitive narratology formulated in the late twentieth century and as part of literary criticism considers literature as the natural space of narration (Manfred 1997, pp441-468). The field of cognitive narration expanded further its research horizons when the social and humanities studies engaged the “narrative turn” in the 1970s (Herman 1991). That movement recognized the act of narrating as one of the ways human beings function intellect, as a way of thinking, and as a way of processing reality into experience (Kreiswirth 2005). I will discuss the notion of cognitive narratology in the novel as it is derived from the characters’ level of consciousness, their points of view, and the special features of their personality, such as Briony’s imagination as an acquired capability, and a state of cognition.

McEwan in his novels includes various narratological techniques to portrait his fictional characters. In terms of the narrator, although he frequently favors the “I” narration, as I pointed out in the first chapter, for the analysis of the *Enduring Love*, in *Atonement*, however, he writes most of the story in the third-person narrative, enables this way, the reader to enter the consciousness of different characters by presenting their perspectives. In the library scene, for example, the reader follows, firstly, the narrator’s, Briony’s, point of view, and later, he follows Robbie and Cecilia’s perspectives as opposed to the previous one:

-“The scene was so entirely a realization of her (Briony’s) worst fears that she sensed that her over-anxious imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books... Briony stared past Robbie’s shoulder into the terrified eyes of her sister (McEwan 2001, pp123)”, -“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 lifetimes habit had taught her to ignore... 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 were the one to say them first... She was calling to him, inviting him, murmuring in his ear (McEwan 2001, pp137- 138).”

In addition to this particularly complex narration, Briony’s personality should also be taken into consideration to enlighten this cognitive approach. Briony Tallis is a little girl who wishes to become a writer one day, and who, due to her vast imagination, confuses quite often in her mind, what is real and what is an illusion, as if she lives in a fairytale, or in her favorite childhood books (McEwan 2001). She uses her creative imagination to produce fictional stories, and then she manages to persuade everyone in the house about the actuality of the events in her story. However, there is certain juxtaposition about Briony’s character: on the one hand, she seemingly, keeps everything in a harmonious order in her perfectly organized word, while, on the other hand, her actions result in a great distraction for her family, and for her sister, Cecilia and her relationship with Robbie. Briony’s incapability to understand, and to behave accordingly, to the actual world, and further, to the adults’ world, is to blame for these disturbances. Regardless, Briony’s lies and unreliability, the reader is still misguided due to the innocence of her young age, and to her childish manners. This perspective of her innocence is expressed in the narration through her mother’s, Emily Tallis, words; “Poor darling Briony, the softest little thing, doing her all to entertain her hard-bitten wiry cousins with the play she had written from her heart (*Atonement* 2001, pp65). During the first and the second chapter it is not clear yet to the reader that Briony is the narrator since she constructs with sincerity her narration. Thus, the unreliable “I” is concealed behind the phenomenological objectivity of the third-person narrative, the revelation of which, takes place at the end of the novel, in the chapter “London, 1999” where Briony signs her writing with her initials, B.T (McEwan 2001).

The field of cognitive narratology considers to be relatively new which challenges the interdisciplinary research among scientific and literary aspects, often resulting in vague interpretations as opposed to more thorough examinations. The term “narrative” drawing its material, initially and mainly, from the field of literature, has

now incorporated various approaches of different scientific fields. Thus, narrative contributes to the study of the phenomenon of narration outside of the realm of literature, with a plethora of theoretical approaches, tools and concepts (Herman 1997, pp1046-1059).

Cognitive narratology, the identification of a certain way of representing reality, as I mentioned above emerged from the field of narratology. It was formed in the attempt to define narrative, as a phenomenon that is not limited to the production of literary texts, and from the recognition of its importance to daily communication. Cognitive storytelling argues that several positions of classical narrative that required the application of common sense should be evaluated with skepticism (Manfred 2005, pp169-178). An example of criticism that the cognitive exercises in classical narratology is that the latter considers narratives as self-sufficient without the need to combine different genres and without the need to be continually revised. Similarly, classical narratology ignores the impact of parallel psychological, social, cultural, and historical contexts (Manfred 2005, pp169-178). McEwan's writings, however, despite the fact that several research avoid their categorization, I would suggest that they are in a dialogue with post-classical, modernism and post-modernism features, and with different fields, such as science, psychology, art, sociology, etc. To exemplify, his *Atonement* reminds Virginia Woolf's psychoanalytical novels, exploring the relations, and the psyche inner world of the upper middle class of England. Whereas, his *Enduring Love* and *Saturday* are in correspondence with a plethora of disciplines since their protagonist are scientists, doctors, or artists and from academic circles. Contemporary narrators, however, also distinguish two phases in the history of narrative studies: firstly the classical narratology (1960 to the early 1980's), where structuralism and post-structuralism prevails through major theorists such as Todorov, Greimas, Barthes, Genette, Bal etc., who attributed scientifically in the field, and secondly the post-classical period, which without rejections or cancellations of the objectives and with tools and methodologies of the classic narrative, redefines them by enlarging and examining them from multiple points of view (Fludernick, 2007, pp36- 59). To that extent, at the closing section of the novel, the revelation of Briony's as the narrator, raises a series of questions, in the reader's mind, regarding the unreliability as the story proceeds, and a discussion about the certainty of what actually, happened. Similarly, developments in cognitive narratology, such as post-classical narratology, provide various ways to investigate Briony's credibility as a narrator.

Another common admission of contemporary narratologists in the process of retrospection is that narrative and cognitive narratology have generally followed the progress in the field of linguistics and were fertilized by them (Toolan 2006, pp459-473). More specifically, during its first phases, classical narratology considers Saussure's linguistics as a scientific model able to introduce principles and methodology in the study of narrative texts. Consequently, structuralism theory in literature follows the principles of linguistics inspired by its scientific structure, methods, and content. That shift in approaching narrative in a scientific and structural way by following the course of linguistics science, led to more pragmatic paths in cognitive narration (Fludernick 2007, pp36- 59). The texts are now examined in their context of communication where they are produced and interpreted. The narrative was also impacted by developments in the field of sociolinguistics and was influenced by the work of Labov and Waletzky (Labov and Waletzky 1967, pp12- 44). Shaping the post-classical narrative idea, research concluded that narrative findings should be harmonized with the study of narrative even outside of literature. The realization of an overgrowing need for interdisciplinary studies among different scientific fields is gaining ground and broadens the horizons of scholars who indicate a renewed interest in the discussion around the model of narrative communication, which Chatman introduced (Prince 1987) (Chatman 1978). Fludernick and Ryan also focused on formulating a definition for narrative in a variety of genres (Fludernick 1996) (Ryan, 2004). Herman on the other hand, is still interested in narration as a thinking

tool and a communication practice aiming to understand human brain functioning during the narrative process (Herman 2013). Thus, in the theoretical framework that he proposes, narrative is a way of thinking to process and understand the reality which determines our experience.

Consequently, the field of narratology and its research lens is gradually expanding. The post-classical narratology deals with the same concerns as the classical while seeking answers by using results, theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools from a wide variety of scientific fields (Herman 1999). Narratology is now in constant dialogue with cognitive linguistics and with the speech-act theory of sociolinguistics as a critical discourse analysis. Moreover, post-classical narratology seeks to enrich its tools with contexts derived from the realm of realism in society along with an obvious sensitivity towards social events (Bamberg 2004, pp331-353). In this conversational approach, I will present the crucial research study of Labov & Waletzky along with Bamberg's analysis. Common element of the two approaches is that the focus on their research is on conversational narrative, studying it as a social practice. The term conversational describes the narrative that concerns the cognitive relationship with ourselves and our intercourse with others. In this supposed relationship, we interpret and contribute as participants in the context of everyday conversation. In other words, both Labov & Waletzky and Bamberg approach the production of the narrative as an act of communication determined by the social context within which emerges and systematically studies the structural elements of the narrative text as coded functions and objectives that it performs and fulfills respectively (Labov and Waletzky 1967, pp12- 44) (Bamberg 1997, pp335- 342). Thus, cognitive narratologists identify the ubiquitous presence and variety of narration in our lives. Our interpersonal relationships are "taught" by the study of common conversational narrative and act. The cognitive studies attribute to narrative some unique features according the context regardless of whether they are realistic or fictional and regardless of the semiotic environment in which they arise. Cognitive narratologists being loyal to their ideals, try to identify some formalities in their narrative texts through abstract features, in an attempt to reduce them to the narrative model, forming a flexible generalization of what we usually expect from a narrative text. This set of features, as well as the degree of their absence or presence and the variety of ways with which they are implemented, determine the narrativity of the texts (Herman 2009). Consequently, the term "narrative" refers to the "literariness" of a text, which is highlighted through selected concepts that I will be discussing in the following paragraphs, for instance, the variety of points of view in the text, the significance for the narration and the operation of the fictional names, and mainly, the rhetorical devices and the figures of speech, namely, the use of irony and of symbols, included in the novel.

The threads of cognitive narrative should be further analyzed for its theoretical conclusion in the narrative turn of the study of humanities which is characterized by the inclusion of other research fields such as science, sociology, and psychology, among others. Cognitive narrative should also be analyzed regarding its relation to structuralism, since cognitive narrative explores issues that the latter established such as the universality of the narrative mechanism or its independent history from the semantic medium that initially encoded it. Cognitive narrative is also powered by cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence and their mutual interest in the cognitive processes of production, interpretation and editing of narrative texts. Their contribution to cognitive narrative is evident from the appearance of structural frames and scripts in its contexts. Finally, with Herman's contribution, cognitive narratology becomes more receptive to the issues raised by the specific social context included in the narration. Thus, it incorporates partly the context of conversational analysis and partly the sociolinguistic and functional approaches to narration. Consequently, cognitive storytelling shows interest both in conversational storytelling experiences (Labov and Waletzky 1967, pp12- 44) and in the way

narration becomes a mechanism for constructing identities and positioning speakers and listeners in a given set-up, through speech and discursive psychology (Bamberg 1997, pp335- 342).

Conversational narrative, cognitive interpretation, and communicational capacities, as studied above, are essential aspects in *Atonement*. Misinterpretations and miscommunication among its characters occur frequently as an implementation of the cognitive state of the fictional characters, their way of thinking, and the relationships they develop with each other. For instance, Briony's way of thinking, her stories, and her lies are the results of such miscommunication with her environment. She constantly misunderstands other people's behavioral signs, possibly, due to her young mind, and her untamed imagination, especially, Cecilia and Robbie's relationship:

"The sequence was illogical...should have preceded the marriage proposal. Such was Briony's last thought before she accepted that she did not understand...she had privileged access across the years to adult behavior, to rites and conventions she knew nothing about, as yet...for her now it could no longer be fairy-tale castles and princesses, but the strangeness of the here and now, of what passed between people, the ordinary people that she knew...and how easy it was to get everything wrong (McEwan 2001, pp39)."

Cecilia and Robbie, also, perceive the events differently and misunderstand each other; Cecilia thinks a provocative act Robbie grasping the vase, in the fountain scene, while he thinks that "she had taken off her clothes in front of him- so indifferently...Of course...The idea was to humiliate him (McEwan 2001, pp80)". Lastly, Mrs. Emily Tallis, the mother of Cecilia and Briony's, during the family dinner, mistaken Robbie's behavior, and his character:

"She thought of Robbie at dinner when there had been something manic and glazed in his look. Might he be smoking the reefers she had read about in a magazine, these cigarettes that drove young men of bohemian inclination across the borders of insanity? (McEwan 2001, 151)".

Cognitive experts place great emphasis on how humans perceive embodied experience and recognize this perception as the basis for analyzing and defining an environment and how they fit into it. Concepts of embodied experience derive from the way we interact with the world and other people around us. These concepts arise from neural networks and sequences within our brain, resulting in shaping thoughts and meanings (Ungerer and Schmid 1997). According to the sociolinguistic schema in narration, considering the social practices and the cognitive relationships within the novel's context, Robbie's character is represented by the narrator as young, irresponsible man, full of fantasies. A free spirit with nothing to lose nor care about, who is capable of anything. Briony as narrator, by revealing such personal aspects of Robbie's character, incriminates him in reader's consciousness as a suspect of her cousin's, Lola, attack. Similarly, her mother's, Emily Tallis, suspicions about Robbie grow, as the reader witnessed through her character's focalization, in the dinner scene in Tallis residence. Emily appears to be a class-conscious figure, and protective towards her children, thus her worry regarding Robbie's behavior bears sociological reasoning due to his lower class. In a sense, both Briony's and her mother's negative thoughts appear to be predetermined and that they have already convicted Robbie in their mind.

Following the previous discussion within the textual environment of the novel, cognitive narrative considers conversational narrative to be of paramount importance and an implementation of the narrative phenomenon (Ryan 2004). At the same time, Herman in "Basic Elements of Narrative" warmly supports the need for the study of narrative to incorporate a socially placed practice. Furthermore, in order to present the tools of narrative theory, he adapts Bamberg's analysis on narrative as means of constructing the private and social identities (Herman 2009). In the novel, the personality and the identity of a character is constructed through their perspective of the events, and in relation with the others. The names of the characters, and their specific

usage within the narratological environment, are important aspects in the construction of this identity. This is a discussion of how the reader is able to recognize the existence of a certain character by attributing to them specific features, and by following coherent information that is attached to the name (Frow 2014). Through their fictional names, the reader establishes and situates the characters in relation to the story-world and in the relation between them. Therefore, Robbie Turner is commonly known as “Robbie”; who signifies to the reader that this is the persona who is the childhood friend of Tallis’s girls, the son of the cleaning lady, Cecilia’s lover, and Briony’s main suspect. On the other hand, Paul Marshall and Danny Hardman are always referred to as “Marshall” and “Hardman”. When people mention someone by their family name, it usually designates some proximity or distance between them, either out of respect, due to age difference or to hierarchy, or they are not acquainted. Additionally, the act of referring to someone by their surname is associated with social class distinction ascribing power and status (Frow 2014). Consequently, the reader is detached and relatively alienated from Marshall and Hardman’s characters, while in terms of Robbie, the reader has gained access to his most personal moments and thoughts. This sociolinguistic approach of Labov & Waletzky and Bamberg’s stems from the field of Discursive Psychology. The former, examines mainly the extensive conversational narratives of personal experiences or experiences of others and links their structural scheme to the functions that the narrative text performs on the context of a conversation (Labov and Waletzky 196, pp12- 44). Bamberg on the other hand, examines narration as a means of constructing identities and seeks to highlight those elements of the narrative text that encode the individual’s attempt to create a specific image of himself, his intentions, his relationships with other recipients and of his life in general (Bamberg 2005, pp213- 237). In addition, in “Narratology and the Sciences of the Mind”, Herman, expands his argument in a more socio-cognitive direction taking into account the findings of evolutionary psychology, which seek the phylogeny of language in the socialization of people, and pursues an overall approach to the narrative phenomenon as a coding tool both for reality interpretation and for social practice (Herman 2013). Similarly, everyday conversational storytelling is critical to the comprehensive study of narrative as a communicative phenomenon and cognitive tool since it restores the narrative to its “natural” space. The cognitive linguists emphasized that the literally language, such as metaphors, metonymies, irony, exaggeration etc., are first and foremost tools of non-figurative speech, which assist people in daily communication and in understanding reality (Ryan 2004). Similarly, the centrality of the narrative was recognized as a kind of text in daily conversation. Its importance in communication was highlighted regarding the psychological and social formation of the individual’s identity and regarding processing reality into experience. The thought behind this position is that literature aesthetically utilizes the possibilities offered by language primarily as an instrument of communication and coding of reality (Dancygier 2012).

The use of figurative language in the novel as a communicational tool within the given narratological environment, signifies textual unreliability. The use of the metaphor, the concept of blending points of view, the creative imagination and the understanding of natural domains are tools contributing to the understanding of the abstract environment (Turner 2008, pp13-32). In *Atonement*, there is an extended use of metaphors, irony, and symbols which, mostly derives from Briony’s obsession with her efforts to convict Robbie. The literary speech in the novel’s environment, undoubtedly, originates to her limitless imagination, and to her difficulty of telling the difference of what is real and what is fictional. Briony’s illusions and hallucinations resulted in her ironic testimony between what she claims that she saw, and what she saw indeed. Capturing a shadow figure in the dark, she associated in her mind with Robbie’s physical characteristics:

“Even so, before they reached the driveway, before he had the chance to set Lola down, Briony was beginning to tell him what had happened, exactly as she had seen it (McEwan 2001, pp172).”

Additionally, the reader observes the great irony of the story when Briony, an extraordinary storyteller with an exceptional playful mind, her memory fades as she grows old. An unfortunate fate for skillful writers who lived their life counting on and valuing the use of their mind and their memories. Regarding the workings of the human mind, for example, human thoughts, imagination, and memories cognitive linguistics promote an important encyclopedic conception, as connoisseurs believe that words offer access to concept networks or stored knowledge networks, which arise through processes of shaping, generalizing, and removing our bodily, social, and cultural experience. These organized networks of stored knowledge are the cognitive and conceptual categories that are widely known as “frames” or “scripts” or “idealized cognitive models” (Fillmore 1975). Every linguistic expression is essentially a sign that offers access to such structures. The emphasis is on the fact that frames and scripts are stored, forming crystallized and systematized experience structures that should not lead to the misinterpretation that these structures are static and finite in number or that they are genetically registered. Basic cognitive mechanisms, such as the projection of one structure on another, which are uniformly derived from the imagery and the cognitive tool of imagination, constantly produce new structures by utilizing the old ones on the basis that they are our bodily and cultural experience (Langacker 1987).

Furthermore, cognitive narrative is complemented by the work of cognitive linguists such as Turner and Dancygier. The former is interested in narration as a tool of thought and examines the significance of the key components of the story, such as the concept of the perpetrator, the intentional action, the reaction, the initial state of calm and its overthrow, for the organization of experience, memory, thought, etc. The findings of artificial intelligence experts’ studies show that much of our stored knowledge is organized narratively (Turner 1996, pp291-295). In fact, by examining knowledge in the form of examples, parables, myths, etc., we explore the limitations of human mind in displaying metaphorically the culturally available stories from one area of experience to the other. This way, the use of the narrative scheme as an explanation is highlighted (Turner 1996, pp291-295). Dancygier on the other hand, applies tools of cognitive linguistics in the study of literary narration and includes the cognitive processes adopted by the recipients. These processes are implemented in order to understand complex literary narratives where perspective often changes or the story unfolds in distant places and times (Dancygier 20012).

Another textual component that designates unreliability in the narration is that of symbols. Several narratological symbols in the novel indicate that the reader should anticipate something peculiar to happen. The narrator, Briony, despite her constructed character as young and innocent, does not reveal the truth but rather, she postpones to attribute justice to the other characters, and to atone for her mistakes. Thus, these symbols signify inconsistencies and unreliability in the novel. For example, Briony’s first fictional writing, “The Trials of Arabella”, describes the adventures of an unlucky girl who made unfortunate decisions in her life:

“At some moments chilling, at others desperately sad, the play told a tale of the heart... was that love which did not build a foundation on good sense was doomed. The reckless passion of the heroine, Arabella, for a wicked foreign count is punished by ill fortune when she contracts cholera during an impetuous dash towards a seaside town with her intended (McEwan 2001, pp3).”

Briony’s perspective is underlined through this symbolic reading, such as her perception about morality, and her opinion regarding a careless love. In that sense, when the assault takes place, she is ready to accuse Robbie, who should be punished accordingly, as Arabella did. Furthermore, he is a commonalty, therefore, she judged him unsuitable for her sister, Cecilia. In addition, the image of the broken vase that belonged to her uncle, represents her family’s assets which now are shattered, subsequently, it implies the separation of her family, and the tension in their relationship. Based on perception and on communication, one of the basic

threads of cognitive narrative should be sought for in the field of cognitive linguistics. The influence of cognitive linguistics in cognitive narratology initially appears in the common approach of language in general, as a tool for interpreting and coding reality and as an expression of the integrated experience of the speakers. In addition, cognitive narratology attempts to define narrative as a conceptual category that has an original core and formal characteristics and treats the actual texts as more explicit representative examples of this category. Finally, it approaches the narrative as a way of thinking and as a communication tool (Herman 2006, pp452-459).

Summarizing, it is notable that the prior discussion on cognitive aspects of communicational and interpretational needs, as they were described above, are neither homogeneous, nor are they recalled whole each time the linguistic expression is used, nor do they have clearly defined limits. They activate networks of concepts that for communication purposes, one may enter the other. These structures are dynamic in the sense that the context of each determines how and to what degree its conceptual content framework will be revoked or activated and with what content from adjacent frames it will be combined. This is because, when we participate in real communication, we create, by recalling from the contexts and idealized cognitive models what we need, ad hoc small and flexible structures, the mental fields or spaces, to meet the needs of communication (Langacker 2008). This mental model includes the information related to who we are, what role we undertake, to whom we are talking to and about what. Therefore, according to this view of linguistic significance, there is no question regarding the definition of words, the definition of the narrative category. That certainly does not mean that cognitive narrators or linguists deny the existence of categories, claiming that there is neither context nor an idealized cognitive explanation model. Narrative is not described by a closed already established definition, but rather is open to different interpretations depending on the relative context and the interaction with other disciplines.

### The Problematic of Unreliability in *Atonement*

*Atonement* is a novel incorporating several cognitive narrative features. More specifically, it has strong elements of the psychological novel which is a traditional genre in British fiction. The difficulty of constructing mentalities in the first part of *Atonement* seems to be this novel's main concern. In this chapter, the fundamental questions of cognitive narration are explored along with the approach to fictional minds according to Palmer's theories as well as the concept of narrative and narrativity from Herman's perspective. These subjects are the basic theoretical pillars for the analysis of the central characters' mental functioning in *Atonement*. Briony Tallis spends her life trying to reconstruct occurred incidents and compensate for her terrible lie, of Robbie and Cecilia's feelings and relationship, which ruined the couple's life and seeks to restore the truth. The narrative deals with fragments of memory, historical events, and the fictionalization of the past. In *Atonement* everything begins with an initial misreading which leads to deadly consequences. The lie orbits around the fact that even though she only saw Lola's attacker in half-light, due to her feelings towards Robbie, claims mistakenly that he was the culprit (Nayerbpour 2017).

In *Atonement* the central narrative concern is the uncertain internal relationship with ourselves and the external relationship with others. Over the course of McEwan's perspective within the shifting narrative, the reader often finds the characters realizing that they are bounded by the otherness. In other words, characters in the novel are oftentimes affected by the interiorities of other people's minds impacting their own development in the story, as their own worldview interchanges; "... Cecilia dared not disobey. It was extraordinary that she was unable to resist him... What strange power did he have over her (McEwan 2001,

pp38).” The aforementioned are evident, for example, in the effects that Cecilia’s and Robbie’s relationship has, in the mental functioning of the focal character, Briony (Nayerbpour 2017).

When Briony in the story sends out the early draft of her novel, “Two figures by a fountain,” to Horizon magazine, and receives Cyril Connolly’s rejection letter, McEwan incorporates in his novel Briony’s fictional novel complicating this way the relation between the two novels. In Briony’s writings the episode regarding the intercourse between her sister Cecilia and Robbie and the lie that followed are of great importance, since in her mind the aftermath of this event is the force that motivates her to retell the story through her novel and finally atone for her actions. Briony’s development as a writer is a crucial contribution to the story and invites the reader in a comparison between her character as it is shaped in her own manuscript and the character of Briony in McEwan’s novel. In addition, this meta-narrative move implies McEwan’s experimental thought related to the aesthetics of late modernism posing the question of variable focalization in a short narrative story within a narrative, in which the judgment of the focalizing characters is undetected. In meta-narrative McEwan executes this thought experiment by using his fictional character Briony and her fictional manuscript to convey his own view (J. Phelan 2017).

Briony’s role in the novel is threefold since she is the author of the fictional story incorporated in McEwan’s story-world, she is the narrator, and she is also one of the fictional characters. The fact that she is simultaneously the narrator and a participant in the novel makes Briony an internal narrator. Most parts in *Atonement*, are seemingly, and narrated by a third person who is irrelevant to the narration and who focalizes the other characters’ points of view, secrets, and special aspects of their personality. At the end of the third part, Briony reveals herself as the author of the prior writing, while in the following section, London, 1999, the narration shifts to the first-person mode. Therefore, despite the clues and the indications throughout the novel, only in the closing pages the reader is reassured that they were guided, or rather misguided, by Briony’s point of view all along.

In terms of the narration of the story, emphasis has been given to the fact that Briony confuses the actual world with the story-world, as if she lives in her stories and she fails to meet reality. This along with her young and naïve nature, underline the unreliability and the uncertainty in the narration. Revisiting the issue through the lens of fictionality reinforces the view that Briony’s move comes across evasive, precisely because within the world of her narrative, there is no return to the actual. In other words, the fictionalization is not a way to engage with the actual but to escape from it, and ultimately to deny it (J. Phelan 2017). This denial is prominent in the novel to the extent that Briony as narrator delays to divulge the truth and through its revelation to atone for her erroneous judgment. Through the lies, and the complex narration of the events Briony hides the truth. Even when she composes her own novel, despite her longing for atonement, she constantly postpones her confession. Instead of using narrative, as a way to make amends and to compensate, she perplexes further the situation by continuing to lie in her own writings.

“Whenever she was conscious of them, which was not often, she was driven back, with a little swooping sensation in her stomach, to the understanding that what she knew was not literally, or not only, based on the visible. It was not simply her eyes that told her the truth. It was too dark for that...But nor was this figure invisible, and its size and manner of moving were familiar to her. Her eyes confirmed the sum of all she knew and had recently experienced. The truth was in the symmetry, which was to say, it was founded in common sense (McEwan 2001, pp168- 169).”

Through these lines a different reading emerges where Briony not being able to see her cousin’s, Lola, assailant, lied about her confident testimony. The thin line between the act of seeing, and the state of knowing, suggests an unreliable narrator, and offers numerous ways of interpreting the events. Briony is an

untrustworthy witness, and the reader has hesitations about Robbie as a suspect. In other words, Briony based her accusations not on the fact that she saw Robbie in flesh and bones, but rather on her knowledge of Robbie's "size and manner of moving" which were similar to the attacker's (McEwan, *Atonement*). Moreover, she believes him to be a threat for Cecilia, so considering her experience on the matter it had to be him.

Preceding the story, Briony twists the course of events to favor her point of view. She ignores in her narration the fact that Robbie died in 1940 in Dunkirk, and Cecilia died in Balham Underground station's explosion during the same year, and she arranges the fictional and rather impossible meeting of the three of them in the apartment in Balham where she expresses her wish to make amends and atone for her past mistakes (McEwan, *Atonement*). When writing fails to meet historical facts for the satisfaction of narrative, Richardson defines it as "de-narration" (Richardson 2006). Phelan also discusses the links between history and fiction to establish the ethics of the storytelling (J. Phelan 2007).

Similarly, in the novel the central ethical issue of Briony's justification is examined as foregrounded by the delayed disclosure of the novel within a novel structure (J. Phelan 2017). More specifically, this delayed closer raises the question if atonement is, indeed, the purpose of Briony's writings, and if narrating the story is the way to reach her goal. Within the story-world, Briony's departure can be understood as a turn to fictionality to engage with the actual. Briony presents her atonement in the following passage:

"I like to think that it isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them at the end" (McEwan, *Atonement* 2001, pp371).

Quite ironically for the characters involved and for the actual facts, Briony with her novel attempts to soften her guilt by offering to the two lovers, Robbie and Cecilia, the happiness that her misreading of the events prevented them from experiencing in their own life.

I find the turn to fictionality very promising, but I should acknowledge that many narrative theorists are more skeptical. Some find that, in a world that recognizes such matters as the complexity of the psyche and the importance of perspective, the distinction between fictionality and non-fictionality is far more difficult to sustain than proponents of the turn acknowledge (J. Phelan 2017). In an attempt to find the boundaries between reality and fabrication, or in a desperate move to have the victim's, Lola, support, Briony addresses to her cousin posing the question:

"It was him, wasn't it? ... After many seconds Lola said in the same weak, submissive voice, 'Yes. It was him.' Suddenly, Briony wanted her to say his name. To seal the crime... (*Atonement* 2001, pp165)."

After retrieving the desirable and convenient answer to her narrative, Briony constructs the reality of her story where everything matches. Despite Briony's efforts, however, neither her cousin nor the reader, are entirely persuaded of Robbie's faulty behaviour. Cecilia defends her lover and accuses not only her sister who as a matter of fact is an adolescent, ignorant girl, but she also becomes hostile towards her family:

"They turned on you, all of them, even my father. When they wrecked your life, they wrecked mine. They chose to believe the evidence of a silly, hysterical little girl. In fact, they encouraged her by giving her no room to turn back. She was a young thirteen, I know, but I never want to speak to her again. As for the rest of them, I can never forgive what they did (McEwan 2001, pp209)."

The rest of the characters are represented ordinarily from the narrator who conceals the truth and misguides his audience.

The complex narration confuses the reader as his uncertainty of the nature of the events grows. Briony wishes for more people to balance between the actual and the unreal as she does. The multiple perspectives around the same scenes, the different focalized opinions, Briony's young and innocent personality, the alterations in

the narration from the third to the first person, the obsession in the novel, mainly Briony's, and the flashbacks, create an overwhelming, unreliable yet refreshing atmosphere for the reader.

Through the following lines:

"Poor vain and vulnerable Lola with the pearl-studded choker and the rosewater scent, who longed to throw off the last restraints of childhood, who saved herself from humiliation by falling in love, or persuading herself she had, and who could not believe her luck when Briony insisted on doing the talking and blaming. And what luck that was for Lola barely more than a child, prized open and taken to marry her rapist (McEwan 2001, pp323)."

Briony reveals Lola's actual attacker. It is her lawfully wedded husband, Paul Marshall, a revelation that she made to her sister Cecilia earlier in her story-world with a letter.

The narrative in *Atonement* asks for a productive reading and while exploring limitations on the workings of the mind, approaches the matter in multiple ways (J. Phelan 2017). Such workings, within the novel, are the interpretations based on misreading characters' intentions and minds in the given narratological environment and occur frequently bearing consequences. For example, Briony's lie is the result of the misidentification of Robbie as Lola's assailant, an assumption derived from Briony's misreading of Robbie's character, feelings and intentions (J. Phelan 2017). Further, Cecilia and Robbie also misread each other until Robbie gives her his apology note, where he coarsely yet unintentionally, expresses his desire for her (McEwan, *Atonement*). Suddenly, after that they are able to connect, both mentally and physically (Palmer 2009).

Indeed, McEwan creates a loop between Briony's reading of Robbie's external behavior, Robbie's writing, and her mind-reading abilities. Briony having mistaken Robbie as a "maniac" she confidently links him to the attack towards Lola happened in the dark (J. Phelan 2017). She perceives only "a figure, a person [...] backing away from her and beginning to fade into the darker background of the trees" (McEwan, *Atonement*). However, her aversion towards what she thought to be Robbie's actions lead her to misidentify him. The delayed disclosure adds another layer to the mind-reading since it requires for the readers to reconfigure the source-tracking. Thus, considering for example, the passage in chapter two, where Cecilia reflects on Robbie's recent behavior towards her, and in particular her conclusion that "she was being mocked, she knew" (McEwan, *Atonement*), the reader captures that what it is perceived as McEwan's novel is actually Briony's metanarrative within the former resulting in various perception levels (J. Phelan 2017).

McEwan acknowledges that Cecilia knows that Robbie believes that she deserves to be mocked. Here we have three levels of embedded intentionality. After that disclosure our inferencing has to add two other layers of embedded intentionality, one for Briony the novelist and the other for Briony the character: McEwan acknowledges that Briony the novelist is aware that Briony the character thinks that Cecilia knows that Robbie believes that she deserves to be mocked. And now we are at five levels of embedding and thus stretching our mind-reading capabilities beyond their usual limits (J. Phelan 2017).

## Closing Remarks

Human relationships are continuously built and broken in any reader's real world. Similarly, *Atonement* narrates the breaking down process of two intimate relationships. By the help of cognitive narration's terminology, this chapter explores the reasons why apparently safe relationships can breakdown by some unexpected, but latent events (Nayerbpour 2017). The overlapping or interconnection between reader's real-world experience and the reading act experience functions as a fundamental frame based on which reader's

narrative experience is actualized. Such interdependence not only adds to the reader's engagement in the reading act but also it activates their subjective or conscious and unconscious abilities too. In this way, reading act enhances the reader's ability to cope with similar story-world situations in their real-world context. From this perspective, which is also emphasized by both Palmer and Herman, McEwan selected narratives proved to be rich in terms of providing universal mental models, which widely engage the reader's minds. Besides highlighting the cognitive activities of the central characters, the representation of the impact of some historical moments on the operation of the central fictional minds is seemingly their primary goal (Nayerbpour 2017). Accordingly, McEwan in his *Atonement* uses intra-mental characterization as a narrative technique to reveal the degree of egocentrism and inability of the characters to take into account perspectives opposite to their own, which can lead to catastrophic results, such as Cecilia and Robbie's turn in their relationship and fate after Briony's lie. Answering to the research questions, it is evident that narrative attempts to make sense of an embodied traumatic experience by revisiting it and recreating the narrative as part of an intra-mental healing process. A corpus of different modes of narrative, for instance a linguistic cognitive approach, enables the participants to further comprehend the internal workings of themselves, of others and of the world they try to fit in. In this procedure, important role plays the structuring and the functioning of the human mind resulting in a coherent interpretation of our life events in thought and narrative. The effects of unreliability are important in *Atonement* where the narration is misleading due to Briony's erroneous criminalization of Robbie. Briony as an external narrator complicates the situation, as an internal narrator through lies and fiction again repeatedly, suspends her obligation to restore the truth.



## Conclusion

In general, narrative choices remained a significant concern for theoretical and literary scholars, accepting that form and content interact in a text, so that its aesthetic perfection is linked to the elements that shape our co-construct its structure and overall body. To this finding, other researchers have added reading comprehension as a factor in shaping the aesthetics of the work (Soter 2010, pp 204-225), and others have attempted to unlock literary writing with tools of psychoanalysis. Others focused on the interaction with the social structure of the time the work was written or noted the importance of cultural reality (Rawolle and Lingard 2013, pp 117-137), which seeks to interpret each literary text in its time. No point of view or theoretical principle, however, has undermined or erased the value of understanding or studying the mechanisms that carry out the narrative process within the textual act.

In short, styles and literary currents, schools, trends, and literary generations in all domestic literature took advantage of and were chosen with the dynamics, variety, and usefulness of narrative choices inherited from the global and national literary tradition. That is why a writer's decision to move away, take advantage of, modify one of the narrative models of his culture, or even create a new form or blend of the traditional ways of telling a story is an exorcism of an aesthetic choice of significant importance for shaping his literary style, for the evolution of the national literary history and the formation of the cultural reality of his place and his time. Therefore, the study of narrative methods is not a minor process but is a necessary tool for understanding the literary code, highlighting the peculiarity of the stylistic indicators of a creator, distinguishing literary texts with literary criteria, and evaluating them and generations.

McEwan proposes narrative as a way of perceiving and understanding the world. His characters strive for salvation through analytical narratological procedure. This extended use of narrative in their daily routine is evident by the way they chose as a communication between them and as internal workings within themselves. Each of the characters in the two novels narrates or is being focalized by the narrator using various perspectives and points of views to interpret the same events. The writing and the storytelling are dominant narrating techniques used from the characters in order to understand themselves, their relationships with others and to comprehend the trauma they go through. McEwan uses narrative not only to solve the misunderstandings and the characters' traumas occur in the novels, but also to recreate this problematic in the first place.

Jed Parry's misreads Joe in *Enduring Love*, while Briony in *Atonement* misreads Cecilia and Robbie's relationship. This misreading is originating to the cognitive state of mind of the aforementioned characters. Jed suffers from de Clerambault's syndrome setting him unable to function ordinarily, and Briony is a young adolescent girl who is unable to separate fiction from the actual. These incapacities result in misinterpretation within the narratological setting. In the research, "Coping with trauma: Narrative and Cognitive Perspectives" it is mentioned that people with psychological and/or emotional disturbances tend to adopt defective or limited perspectives, while a "healthy" mind acquires the ability of coherent and meaningful narrative (Tuval-Mashiach, Shalev and Freedman 2004, pp 1-16). Briony at the final lines manages to face the truth of her trauma and atone for the misfortune she caused, while Jed in the appendix of *Enduring Love* still struggles with his condition trying to reach Joe through his intimate letters. Joe the narrator of *Enduring Love*, although, he is generally a well minded person, momentarily, loses his balance and the center of his existence drowning by the obsessed

relation with Jed which complexes his way of processing the events and sets him an unreliable narrator for the reader. Respectively, in *Atonement* Briony as narrator also creates an unstable perception of the events in reader's account since she hides herself and her lie behind multilayered narrative and by delaying the reveal the truth.

The narrative as way of understanding ourselves and our surroundings it is not only well suited within a textual environment, but rather it originates from life itself. Real, non-fictional people use narrative as a way of thinking and as a communicational tool among them. Narrative in life is all the thoughts that are shaped in our mind and we give them meaning by wordily and writing expressions. This is people's way of trying to understand the meaning of their life, and to express themselves to others. It is not always efficient nor offers the desirable results, but it is above all a way of being. It constitutes, among others, human existence in our modern society, and as human race we evolved to reach this privilege of perceiving, explaining, understanding, and communicating within the world.

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