

Fictional and Metafictional Strategies in Ian McEwan's *Novelatonement* (2001)

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Abstract- *Ian McEwan's adaptation traces the evolution of twentieth-century fiction from modernist a morality to post modern relativism and unifies their common recognition of narrative subjectivity. But the novel uses these forms of subjectivity and moves beyond them as part of an ethically engaged study of memory and history. On the other hand, McEwan's author character Briony fails to ethically grapple with historical memory, but comforts actual historical memory. McEwan's novel itself, which holds Briony's work at a critical distance, offers no consolation. Rather, it creates an experience where readers must move past Briony's short comings and embrace a more nuanced acceptance of the trauma, war damage and gender violence of history: a way to truly do justice to historical memory. Keywords: Atonement, Ian McEwan, story, ethics, consolation, history.*

Indexed Terms- *Forgiveness, Sin, Philosophy, Morality, Sacrifice, Ethics*

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Foregrounding the Media: Atonement* (2007) as an Adaptation, Christina Geraghty argues that *Atonement* (2007) is "an adaptation that draws attention to its own status as an adaptation by distancing the use of different media"(107). That is, the references to "contemporary cinema, the so-called golden age of the 1940s" and the "inclusion of a documentary film of the Dunkirk epic" (99) and the introduction of television as a means of communication in the "third" part of an adaptation (103) is used as a "particular means of drawing attention to its status as an adaptation"(92). Brian Finney further argues that "[wholly]fiction" draws attention to its own fictionality by emphasizing the particularity of the story in question (Finney 77). So this applies not only to the adaptation, but also to the

novel. Robert Swan argues that McEwan's novel "masquerades as a realistic story" because it "seems to be written [by] a fictional creation" who also appears to be "one of the characters" (Swan). In addition, Briony's novel is not simply a novel of redemption or reconciliation; it is a novel about literature and "requires references to both its fictional position and the process of writing a novel" (Ellam 41).

Pilar Hidalgo confirms this, noting that "Briony's emerging literary imagination allows her to trace her development [...] from folktales "to" melodramatist and finally realistic fiction" (Hidalgo 85), a change in genre that was translated . adapt "a different use of media"(Geraghty107). While Geraghty suggests that the position of adaptation is emphasized by "shallowing" different media types (107), Hidalgo also argues that Briony's writing "will foreground questions of genre and narrative technique" (Hidalgo 85). In *Atonement*, McEwan explores the line between fiction and fantasy, as well as the credibility of authors and the level of narrative. He says that he "explores the relationship between the imaginary and the real in the course of the adaptation", and while McEwan notes that "no one really cares whether [Briony] is real or not, [because] she only exists in the novel" (Reynolds and Noakes 19), she makes the reader question authorship along with making Briony a character in her own novel. Briony's importance as a writer is also recognized by presenting her primarily as a writer instead of her personality.

This is also emphasized in Wright's adaptations, and while it can be argued that "in the usual fictional film, what we see has a stronger narrative power than what we hear" (Bordwell20), the inaccuracy of that statement can point to improvement. Briony from the movie. "a dangerous literary fantasy"(Ellam73) in

adaptation because it" opens with two acts of writing made inseparable" (Geraghty 96). He heard the sound of a typewriter several times during the film, which shows that those moments are particularly important to the development of the plot. However, in the novel, thereaderis introduced to Briony's imagination, or atleast an idea of what her imagination can create, since Briony wrote the play. Ironically, Briony's play *The Trials of Arabella* has some parallels with the story that develops later; the fact that they will never get to perform the play she wrote seems to be on Briony's mind as she witnesses the events unfold before her naive eyes that day. However, Briony notes in the novel that thereason the play failed is because "halfway through" the Dahlbäck 4 rehearsals, Briony "decided to become a writer" (McEwan 369). Briony is a writer because she defines herself and it defines her. It is also a testament to how important imagination is to him; it's a tool he uses to feel in control. Thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis is a child who "wants to make the world exactly as it is"[4], a desire that functions as more than a "controllable demon"[5].

His obsessive need to dominate the world around him is partially shown by the immaculate way in which all the toy animals in his "model home" "all face one direction—towards their owner—as if they were singing" (5).), suggesting that Briony considers herself a god; he is the creator and director of the fantasy world. This belief is also indicated in the "purposeful way" he writes in his adaptation of the novel, "THE END" (McFarlane 12), emphasizing that "the play is his creation, and he alone knows when he wants it to end"(12)..Briony clearly wants to be in control and nothing can happen without her permission, both in the world she is in and the world she uses her imagination to create. "Writing stories not only involved mystery, but also allowed him all the pleasures of miniaturization" (McEwan 7).McEwan partially exploits this combination: Briony's love of imagination and the need for "everything right"(4).which McEwan uses to show "the power of the written word"(McFarlane 10), both as "a means of giving form to experience" and as a "means of control"(10). Briony's love of fantasy and need for control are therefore important to her as a writer. Both Briony's "obsession with cleaning" around her and her love of fiction are temporarily satisfied by

writing. He sees himself as able to make an" unattainable world just so"(McEwan7) and that is what he longs for. However, this is not the only thing that keeps Briony's thoughts in check, Robbie describes her as "the kind of girl who lived in her mind" (233), imagination is her oxygen; he breathes fiction, and without it he feels that he is "shrinking"(76).

As Briony moves from the world she made to the "world" that instead "made her"(76), she is no longer the person in control of everything that happens. When she loses control and becomes a normal person, a character over whose fate she has no control, Briony feels helpless. When this happens, his first instinct is to recover, and he is immediately filled with the desire, the need and the feeling that "he could write the scene" (40) as before him - to take on the present and the reality without; a moment's hesitation. Into his hands Dahlbäck5; to write what he saw, to try again to be the person, the god, who controls what happens next. Since Briony has an obvious need to inhabit the world around her and is the author of the next novel, the choice of narrator so far most importance. In the film adaptation, the said "model animals" not only "face the same direction", but a real most arranged "two at a time, as if lining up a sheet of paper" (Hampton1).The combined transfer and adaptation of these toy animals, along with biblical allusions, add to their significance in how Briony perceives herself.

He is the god of the world she created, and so his choice of narrator is quite significant. Finney argues that life in adaptation "often imitates fiction and acknowledges the central role of narrative" (Finney 78) in life. In the first three parts of the novel, the narrator seems to be omniscient, which could be defined as a narrator who has "a god-like power to know and see all actions" (Reynolds and Noakes 189). By adopting an omniscient narrator as the narrator of her reconciliation, Briony satisfies her need for control and her perception of herself as a "god-like"(189) figure. Briony had lost her divine power of creation, but the loss was only apparent in this moment of return; part of the magic of the dream was the illusion that he was helpless before its logic: the international competition forced him to compete at the highest level among the world's best and to accept

the challenges that came with the dominance of the majority in his field-nettle operation. Push your limits to calm the roaring crowd and be the best, and most importantly, unique. (McEwan 76) Here, "cutting the nettle" could be used as a symbol for some occupation where Briony feels the need to stand out. He is above all a writer, and therefore his need to be "the best in his field"(76) would presuppose the profession of a writer.

It would give him an all sense of control; which for Briony can only be achieved when she feels that she has the power of an omniscient and ever-changing god in charge of the world she alone created. By allowing the narrator to be "god like"(Reynolds and Noakes 189), Briony ensures that her final novel, and therefore the final message she leaves to the world, is as true to herself as possible. This is her first and last novel, and her choice of narrator is so true to how she sees herself, both in relation to fiction and her apparent need for control. Although she feels the need to satisfy the "roaring crowd," Briony gives herself the "creative power of a god"(McEwan 76) that she Dahlbäck desperately needs and strives for as she tries to master both the real and the imagined. Moreover, the omniscient narrator, along with the overall plot of the novel, may suggest that Briony's actions, her testimony, changed the lives of her characters, changing her status as a writer in control of her fictional world. or even of the "unique" (76) god responsible for its creation. So Briony is in charge of her characters and the events of the novel, all according to the purpose Briony thinks they should serve.

Briony manages to blur the line between fiction and reality without intending to; his overactive imagination leads him to accuse Robbie Turner of a crime he did not commit. His love of fiction combined with a wild imagination made it almost impossible for him to distinguish fiction from reality. In an attempt to atone for his crime, which put his sister Cecilia and Robbie's future out of reach, he turns to what caused that tragedy: fiction. If Briony invented not only people and objects, but also events, she can use the past as she remembers it to create a fictional future. Briony's novelist hushes at one moment, her way of giving to her sister and the Medicine Prince what she actually took from them, as she sees

it. Blurring the line between fiction and reality as defined within her novel, Briony gives Robbie and Cecilia a future, if not in real life, then at least in the pages of her book. The power of the written word thus ensures that Briony's imagined reality, the fictional copy of her life that she accepts as her truth, offers her character versions of her sister and Robbie an endless future together. So Briony could give her sister and Robbie a future in fiction, while in reality they lost together.

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