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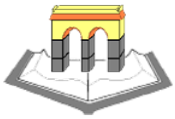

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The Use of the Unreliable Narrator in Postmodernist British Novel: Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* (2011)

Dissertation submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Magister in British Commonwealth and American Studies

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Dedications

To those who brought me to this life and taught me how to live it and who deservedly deserve my life...

To my lovely siblings...

To the one whose name although cannot be mentioned here, his stamp does exist and cover every letter in every page of this work...

And particularly to those who never expected my mother to do it...

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight the subject matter of the unreliable narrator as a narrative strategy adopted in postmodernist fictions. As asserted by many critics, the unreliable narrator has triggered a wave of ecumenical research. Accordingly, this research work orbits around three major aims: to find out the purpose of postmodernist writers in making use of such a literary technique in their literary texts; and this will help to trace the borders between the postmodernist theory and the unreliable narrator. It seeks also to comparatively analyse this literary device in two selected novels: *Atonement (2001)* by Ian McEwan and *the Sense of an Ending (2011)* by Julian Barnes in order to demonstrate the distinction between the two novels in terms of similarities and differences in what concerns the narrators' types and function. Therefore, the methodology that has been followed is twofold; theoretical and comparative-analytical. The findings, hence, reveal that the authors used this technique as a way to show the truth and not to hide it except for some events which bring their narrators disappointments because both novels fall under the self-narrative categorisation. Moreover, the postmodernist background of both authors contributes to their implementation of such a narrative strategy as they both believe in the veracity of truths. The reader can discover a new identity about both narrators; Ian McEwan's Briony as being a deliberately untrustworthy narrator and Julian Barnes' Tony as being a self-deceived yet a sincere fallible narrator. Finally, the narrators' memories contribute to a great extent in their unreliability as they are both aged personas and they rely on a retrospective narrative.

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A Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Literary Devices	Literary Devices refers to the typical structures used by writers in their works to convey his or her messages in a simple manner to the readers. When employed properly, the different literary devices help readers to appreciate, interpret and analyze a literary work.
Modernism	A style or movement in the arts that aims to depart significantly from classical and traditional forms.
Narration	Story-telling, or the communicative act or process of relating a sequence of events or giving an account of a situation, as distinguished from either the narrative which it produces or from the story.
Narrative strategy	Narrative strategy is a use of certain narrative techniques and practices to achieve a certain goal.
Postmodernism	Postmodernism is the philosophical proposal that reality is ultimately inaccessible by human investigation, that knowledge is a social construction, that truth-claims are political power plays, and that the meaning of words is to be determined by readers not authors. In brief, Postmodern theory sees reality as what individuals or social groups make it to be.
Retrospective narrative	A retrospective narrative is when the story being told is not happening at the time the narrator is describing it. The events happened in the past. Retrospective narratives highlight changes in the narrator because of and since the events of the story transpired.
Self-narrative	An introspective recounting of a person's development.
Unreliable narrator	An unreliable narrator typically displays characteristics or tendencies that indicate a lack of credibility or understanding of the story. Whether due to age, mental disability or personal involvement, an unreliable narrator provides the reader with either incomplete or inaccurate information as a result of these conditions.

General Introduction

Being delved into a story means giving up to the one who tells it. This actually happens when someone is into a story and surrender to the storyteller as he is taken hostage by the world of the author. Being immersed in that world causes the reader often to forget to have a rest and to stop his trip in order to visit the places of the novel's exactness and truthfulness. Did ever someone ask him/herself how many times he has re-read a story for the sake of discovering a new reading that he has missed in the previous one? Few are those who do that unless provided with the hints and clues of the narrator's doubtful and inaccurate statements that are revealed through his contradictory words.

When they are younger, people, sigh for an uncertain and unknown future, yet when they are old or better say aged, they dig into a vague past. This, in fact, what characterizes postmodernist novels that are swamped with themes such as: the past, issues of history and truth as well as memory. All that is thought to be called absolute, definite, exact, fix and truthful has melted in the air from the postmodernist perspective and is instead replaced by terms such as: multiplicity, relativism, suspicion, constructions and subjectivity. In other words, in the postmodernist thought, truth can be valid according to each person's vantage point. No single truth is accepted, various truths from individuals are never rejected, and they are rather welcome. That is why postmodernist authors made use of a literary device that is known as the unreliable narrator who, as its name implies, reports events that the reader takes with a grain of salt. Such kind of narrator is usually contradicted by other characters' views which awaken the reader's consciousness and invites him to be involved in the story in order to unveil what is either out of sight from the narrator or hidden by him on purpose.

The postmodernist phase has attracted the attention of various critics and scholars; for instance Bentley Nick (2008) referred to one of the most prominent features of postmodernism that is its suspicion towards grand narratives such as the idea of history and truth. Other scholars such as Sim Stuart (1998), James F. English (2006) and Chalupský Petr (2009) agreed that postmodernist literary works were interested in the theme of the past, re-calling and re-telling it through individuals' retrospect. Hutcheon Linda (1988) and Bentley Nick (2008) gave less importance to the ultimate truth; they

did not care about the truth itself; however, what mattered for them was the source of the truth and where it comes from. Truth and history were no longer taken for granted, they became a moot point and completely dubious according to the position from where they are told and viewed. In her 2012 academic research, Eva Sràmkovà considered that since postmodernist writers were suspicious of an absolute and objective truth, they made use of the unreliable narrator literary device and memory as a way to explore the narrator's incredibility and untruthfulness. Additionally, Chalupský Petr (2009) argued that in contemporary fiction, unreliable narrators are not motivated by the urge to depict reality as it was but rather as it could have been through the use of subjectivity and imagination. In their articles entitled 'The Attempt Was All- The theme of memory in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*' Chalupský Petr as well as Hidalgo Pilar's article entitled 'Memory and Storytelling in Ian McEwan's Atonement' focused on memory as being the mechanism responsible for the narrator's unreliability. In like manner, Holmes Frederick M., in his article labelled 'Divided Narratives, Unreliable Narrators, and The Sense of an Ending: Julian Barnes, Frank Kermode, and Ford Madox Ford.' shed light on this type of narrator. Moreover, Piqueras Marciel Oró in her article entitled 'Memory Revisited in Julian Barnes' The Sense of an Ending.' Emphasized the theme of memory as being an unstable mechanism which hinders the process of retrieving past events accurately.

Accordingly the concern of this research work is: the two novels *Atonement (2001)* written by Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* which in the aforementioned studies have been studied separately even though the tackled issues are similar, yet those studies did not tackle their unreliable narrators in relation to postmodernism. The choice fell upon these two novels in particular not because they both have a first-person unreliable narrator as this is obvious to the reader beforehand, but because of the desire of detecting each novel's type and function of unreliable narrator. To illustrate more, it can be said that Ian McEwan has provided what is known as multiperspectivity; that is to say even though the reader is aware that Briony is a first-person narrator, there are other parts in the novel that are told by other characters in order to support or contradict with Briony's views. However, when it comes to Barnes' novel, the narrator is fixed and no other opinions are provided.

This study tends to unearth the goal targeted by both of Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes' in making use of the unreliable narrator literary device in their novels standing

as case material. To hit on the aforementioned aim, this study is put under the following research questions:

1) How far is Ian McEwan's and Julian Barnes's postmodernist context contributing to their inclusion of the literary device of unreliable narrator in their present works of fiction?
2) What are the clues that help in detecting each of the narrator's untrustworthiness?
3) How is this narrative technique unfolded through the memory of characters?

In order to find out answers to the above mentioned questions, this research work offers some hypotheses:

1) Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes are thought to have made use of the unreliable narrator literary technique in their fiction in light of the theory of postmodernism which advocates that a fixed truth does not exist and is not taken for granted in the present time.
2) Some of the clues that help in finding out the narrators' unreliability are based upon a mixture of approaches that have discussed this issue and among the clues are the narrator's contradictory statements, language imprecision and other characters' contradictory views.
3) The type of unreliable narrator that has been adopted in Ian McEwan's *Atonement (2001)* is not entirely similar to the one adopted by Julian Barnes' *the Sense of an Ending (2011)* yet they function as truth-tellers and hence this technique is used ironically and memory of the aged narrators plays a crucial role in revealing their unstable accounts and hence displaying their unreliability.

This research hinges upon a variety of methodological approaches: It is theoretical; the narrative theory is studied in relation to postmodernism that is to say to link the postmodern theory to the literary device of unreliable narrator. It is also analytical because the main issues and concepts are analysed and broken into parts, each part has been examined deeply. This process is going to be done through analysing both novels and identifying the types of unreliable narrators that are used by both authors through applying the approach of Olson that is based on synthesising classic approaches and then finding out the purposes that are devised by both writers in making use of the literary device of unreliable narrator. Additionally, in order to detect each novel's signs of unreliable narrator, the researcher was compelled to use a variety of approaches that discussed this issue amongst is the Cognitive approach of Nünning. And since the

researcher opted for two novels that are similar and different in some issues, the comparative contrastive approach has been adopted. Finally, by joining several researches together, the approach had to be interdisciplinary.

This research is divided into four chapters. The initial chapter is theoretical as it is confined to the literature review in which the researcher deepened the exploration of the theory of postmodernism associated with its salient aspects that are closely linked to the literary technique of the unreliable narrator. It is also an attempt to clear up the concepts that are linked to narration as well as an endeavour to spot the clues which detect unreliable narrator in a literary text through relying on some theories which have investigated this issue. It also sheds light upon the types of unreliable narrators. Furthermore, some clarifications are made on memory as being a mechanism which cannot be always trustworthy as well as one of the reasons which may contribute in the difficulty of reporting past events exactly; hence preventing the narrator from telling his tale accurately.

The second chapter is entirely practical wherein the extent to which *Atonement* carries a postmodernist aspect as well as McEwan's postmodernist mode as not to believe in one single truth but rather in a plurality of truths through providing several perspectives is revealed. Another objective that it addresses is to spot Briony's unreliability both as young and old; whether it results from ignorance or self-interest. It also targets to discern and analyse how memory is contributing in increasing the narrator's unreliability and hence affecting her being-unable to portray the past events precisely.

The third chapter mirrors the Barnian's eleventh realisation as being a postmodernist literary work making use of the unreliable narrator. It seeks to figure out whether unreliable Tony is willingly or unintentionally deceiving the readers and himself. Furthermore, it intends to show the extent to which Tony's memory is a reason behind his untruthfulness; consequently, affecting his reports about his personal history. It also aspires to reveal whether Tony is a sincere unreliable narrator or whether it is just a way to gain sympathy from the readers in order to avoid shame. Lastly, this chapter seeks to show if the use of an unreliable narrator is considered to be a window through which one can ironically discover how gloomy and unfathomable his reality about himself is.

Finally, the last and concluding chapter is restricted to the comparative study of both postmodernist writers under scrutiny in using the unreliable narrator to tell their narratives; that is to say the rationale of this chapter is to show whether these authors share the same purpose, type and function of the unreliable narrator presented in their works.

Chapter One

Postmodernism and Narration: A Theoretical Framework

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1. Introduction

With the shift from one phase to another was the announcement of the end of what was known as modernism to the alleged postmodernism. This latter holds the belief in uncertainties and relativism, and that truth is thought to be non absolute and incomplete as it is told from individuals' perspectives that might be, due to various reasons, subjective and untrustworthy. Consequently, this chapter aims at giving a comprehensive account of the literary movement of postmodernism as it reveals some of its salient aspects that are connected to the literary device of the unreliable narrator that is deemed to render accounts inaccurately. This literary technique is supposedly presumed to date back before the Second World War (1939-1945) after which the postmodernist novel started to come into existence. It additionally attempts to clarify the concepts that are related to narration as it endeavours to spot the clues by which the unreliable narrator is detected in a literary text through relying on some theories which have investigated and discussed in a way or another this issue. It also sheds light upon the types of unreliable narrators. Furthermore, some clarifications are made on memory as being a mechanism which cannot be always trustworthy, even though important for people's lives as well as one of the reasons which may contribute in the difficulty of reporting past events in an exact way and preventing the narrator from telling his story truthfully respectively.

2. The Shift from Modernism to Postmodernism

The consecutiveness of modernism and postmodernism resulted in the rejection and the denial of the principles and beliefs held by each of the labels. Both of them reject realism which characterized the 19th century. Each of them carries unique and specific aspects which characterize the one from the other. However, it cannot be denied that despite the slight differences between them, they are akin to each other in some aspects. Some features that are found in modernism such as: alienation and historical discontinuity are preserved in postmodernism as well. When it comes to human development, they both carry subjectivity as they discuss the consciousness of inner voices[1]. In this respect, they are entwined in a way or another with each other and the boundary that separate between them is not that strict. (Li Ma 1339)

[1] Summer 2013 Coursebook, p. 02

Chapter One: Postmodernism and Narration: A Theoretical Framework

Postmodernism aims to go beyond modernism (Li Ma 1339). While modernism is concerned with the dominance of the theory of knowledge, postmodernism questions the nature of existence (Brian McHale). Postmodernists believe in the supremacy of truth and reason as well as man's perfection. However, these are rejected by the postmodernists who deny any objective reality and that the world is with no centre. Universal and valid explanations which are supported by modernism; in addition to the determinacy of rationalism are resisted and denied by postmodernism which rather believes in different standpoints and perspectives and invites to indeterminacy. This latter invites to skepticism and the construction of the world as it resists traditional styles through sustaining the denial of definiteness (Li Ma 1339-40).

3. Postmodernism: an Overview

The term postmodernism is a catch-all word which encompasses various fields and categories such as, architecture, literature and art, to mention but few. In addition to that, postmodernism is a global phenomenon. Thereby, it is not an easy task, postmodernism, if ever attempted to be defined (Mulley12). A belief that postmodernism is swamped by is that an absolute identity to anything cannot be found in the present time. Trying to locate an identity to things is like trying to find the centre of the ocean, once this centre is found and pointed; it easily flows away in the water (Somatkar 60).

The focal point of the intellectual movement of postmodernism is that it denies the idea of an absolute truth as it rejects the so-called 'grand narratives'[2] and that the world is not resulted from hidden structures (Sim 108-109). Rather than subscribing to metanarrative, postmodernists prefer 'little narratives' that offer limited, qualified truths particular to a specific situation (Lindas 06). Starting from the point that humanity, culture, history and truth are at the present time fragmented and fractured, postmodernism queries every aspect of what is known as realism. It presents the world with no assured and fixed facts. Certainty is replaced by uncertainty. From the postmodernist perspective, age is cut from

[2] Grand narrative also known as metanarrative or mater narrative is a term developed by Jean-François Lyotard to mean a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events, experiences, and social, cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values. http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Metanarrative accessed on 07th February 2016
Postmodern subjects do not and cannot believe in metanarratives , a general and universal structure with which to understand the world, because they are conditioned in a world self-aware of the imperfect nature of language and narrative, and are attentive to the notion that the same event can, and will, create multiple, valid experiences (Lindas 06).

the past traditional values as it is rather preferable to doubt and suspect everything than certitude and conviction. Everything has melted into destruction (Pritam 42).

Postmodernism adopts Jacques Derrida's idea of deconstruction[3] which does not mean destruction; yet it refers to firmness and veracity opposition, as it is explained by Mowery "It [deconstruction] does not mean destruction, but rather it is a critique of the criteria of certainty, identity, and truth." (622) the theory of postmodernism is based on its refusal that there is no complete explanation to things because human knowledge is incomplete and fragmented due to subjective conditions such as facts that result from emotions which make them changeable and unstable (Mulley 10). Mowery hints that postmodernists are concerned with "being self-conscious, experimental and ironic." (615) further, he emphasizes that they are fascinated by "imprecision and unreliability of language and with epistemology, [and] the study of what knowledge is." (615), that is to say, the language being used is inaccurate and untrustworthy and knowledge is put under question.

4. Some Aspects of Postmodernism

There is a variety of features that postmodernism is comprised of; however, only three of them will be covered as they are linked to the issue that is discussed within the body of this work.

4.1. Subjectivity

According to David Lodge the objective representation of reality is impossible in a postmodernist context and this encourages the abundance of subjectivity (175). As its name suggests, knowledge, according to the view of each individual, is valid and emphasized; that is to say all the subjective perceptions of different individuals of knowledge will, in return, form subjective realities. Each individual is convinced by his personal idea or report and this will be taken into account and that what makes truth a matter of perspective. As a result, postmodernism reckons that subjectivity is in a continuous change and that it is rather unstable (Nicol 118).

[3] Deconstruction means the exploitation of tension, paradox and contradiction (Lupşa Marinela 280).

4.2. A Relative Truth

From the postmodernist thought "truth is relative and contingency is everything." (Wakchaure 07) It is believed that truth can be built solely upon eventualities since approximately nothing at the present time is fixed and veracious. Lodge confirms this view as he states "Postmodern worldview is constructed by probabilities based on theories of relativity and quantum mechanics." (176) this makes truth a matter of perspective as it is emphasized by Somatkar who reflected that those who support this view "believe that truth is relative and truth is up to each individual to determine on himself." (68). Each individual can produce a fact and report it as he believes it to be. This makes individuals believe in the veracity of their standpoints and claim them to be true. Additionally, according to the postmodernist understanding, interpretation is everything. Human being can have access to reality through interpretations that are the product of individuals' way of seeing and perceiving matters. There is no one singular truth as it was the case in the past, yet "there are only truths in the plural and never one truth" (Hutcheon qtd. in Nicol 104) as there is a reliance on the individuals who are interested in it and what their interest consists of (Wathore73-74). From the postmodernist facet "truth […] is relative to one's viewpoint or stance." (Mulley 11-12). It is often questioned because each person's belief is likely to be true or false as well as the points of views are not considered to be the final truth.

4.3. A Constructed Truth

In a postmodernist age, realism and values to morality are no longer given because these are meant to be the product of human thoughts only. Lyon qtd. In Pritam elaborated what is involved here by saying "All that is solid has melted into air, that reality and morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs." (42) In other words, reality is meant to be reflected not only according to the understanding of humans of it but also to the way it is constructed in that mind which tries to comprehend it, as it is demonstrated by Somatkar "reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to its own particular and personal reality." (59) These aspects and many others have been found in art and literature because these fields in particular have been influenced by the postmodernist trend.

5. Postmodernist Literature

Literature is one among the many fields that have been influenced by the postmodernist proclivity. This literary movement is made distinct from its counterpart; modernism, in many ways that make it specific and unique.

5.1. Identifying Postmodernist Literature

According to postmodernist writers, uncertainty is considered the only constant matter, and change is seen as the only certain thing. Ideas that are related to wholeness and certitude are no longer there and thoughts such as decentering, the negation of certitude, fixity are replaced by multiplicity (Pritam 41). What characterized the postmodernist storyline is that "it is marked by a tendency to question the legitimacy of the narrative itself, the refusal to offer any universal truths and multiple points of view." (Sim 10)

There can be noticed also that as postmodernist writers are dubious about certainties; they no longer trust ideas of completion and wholeness which are aspects associated to traditional stories. Therefore, they rely on different ways for structuring narrative, the so-called the multiple-ending in which closure is not advocated stands as an example. Postmodernists; however, insist on providing numerous probable results for the plot (Sim 174).

5.2. The Postmodernist Narrative

Postmodernist novels are interested in the technique of telling[4] rather than showing[5], and "since most of the text is concerned with the process of telling" this kind of stories reflects the difficulties that the storyteller encounters in his process of telling (Dan 07). This storyteller has in fact a limited access when it comes to knowledge; as he "is by definition partial, limited in the range of perspectives from which he can observe the narrative." (Nicol 101). This can be seen as a technique among the many features which have been linked to postmodernism as it is stated by Malpas "Many techniques such as

[4] This mode refers to the narrative that evokes in the readers the impression that the events are told to them; it is also referred to as 'a large distance' that is to say between the readers and the events. For instance 'John was angry with his wife'(Klauk 01)

[5] It is a mode which refers to the narrative which evokes in the readers the impression that the events of the story are shown or that they somehow witness them; that is to say they are being immersed in the story. It is also known as 'a small distance' which means the readers are approximately near the events. For example, 'John looked at his wife, his eyebrows pursed, his lips contracted, his fists clenched. Then he got up, banged the door and left the house' (Klauk 01).

frame narratives, ontological indeterminacy and unreliable narrators […] were identified as crucial to the postmodernism." (27) It has been noticed that with the transition from modernism to postmodernism, narrators have been changed as well, as it has been pointed by Sutton in the academic journal *the Guardian* "as modernism shifted into post-modernism and we all became that much more cynical, most narrators were expected to be complicated." and their "unreliability became inextricably linked with malevolence- not to mention duplicity, delusion, even derangement." (01). Postmodernist narrators are characterized then by complexity and their unreliability is deliberate and results from false ideas.

5.3. Past and History from the Postmodernist Perspective

There is a link between the literary movement of postmodernism and the notion of the past as this latter is revisited by postmodernists ironically (Selden 199). Theorists believe that history does not mean the past, it rather means a narrative that is based on documents and reports that are produced in the past (Nicol 99). Hutcheon Linda quoted in (Nicol 114-117) claims that history is not conclusive and final. Thereby, one of the features of postmodernism is called historiographic metafiction which refers to the limits of humans' attempts to know about the past and have an access to it for the simple reason that all that is available in the present time is no more than textual documents. Postmodernism raises questions about how the past is constructed as it doubts and suspects its authenticity (Selden 200). It is believed that the gap that exists between the commonly named real past and its representations is never connected and cannot be bridged and that is mainly what boosts and motivates the production of historical novels and increases critics about them (ibid, 103).

5.4. Postmodernist Author and Reader

In literary texts that have been produced before the postmodernist era, the interpretations were made patent by the author as he is the omnipotent over his literary work; yet with postmodern theories questions as to why the author has the final say[6] are made "[the writer's] work is not actually completed until there is an audience." (Lindas 12) Postmodernist fiction does not give an importance to the author who writes the literary

[6] For a useful sampling of opinion, see *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes.

work as "his genius is no longer valid or viable." (Lindas 11) This does not; however, deny completely his role, it rather suggests that the final say is no longer his and that his interpretation is made invalid as compared to the readers' understandings and this invites the more the audience read the more they gain meaning that its research is "never-ending" (Lindas 12) Consequently, postmodernists give the readers a role to cooperate in the story. As they are aware and allowed to provide their interpretation as far the text is concerned, history and fiction will not collapse into each other and their representation will not be completely rejected because "the reader [is asked] to explore the space between." (Nicol 103) Thereby, the meaning of the postmodernist text is associated with the reader "once a text is written it ceases to have a meaning until a reader reads it." (Mowery 622) This confirms the vital role that is given to readers by postmodernists.

5.5. Metafiction

The readers' cooperation in the text is explored through the technique of metafiction which "undermines the writer's authority"[7]. Its essence is to invite the reader to investigate through his world as well as the various realities the impact of both reality and fiction on each other[8]. Sjöberg Rebecka in her description of metafictional novels mentioned Waugh Patricia's view who confirms "Metafictional novels often end with a choice of ending [o]r...with a sign of impossibility of endings." (05) Contemporary writings, in which metafiction is used, are deemed to give a sense about reality as being provisional and a world that no longer contains a fixed veracity , only constructed artifices (Brian Finney76). Metafiction is thus considered as a powerful technique which is used in any literary text as it is seen as a compulsory for the writers for the pivotal role it plays in the perception of reality. This point has been emphasized by Christopher Priest who demonstrates:

> The perception of reality maybe questioned through metafictional devices. Also memory or truth or social assumptions can be challenged. The question of identity can be raised. The reader's assumptions maybe undermined. As a literary device metafiction lends itself to many superb extra opportunities for the writer who is prepared to take a chance or two: for example the text might become unreliable, or incomplete, or deniable by other characters. It is a powerful and compelling technique. (01)

[7] Summer 2013 Coursebook, p. 01
[8] Summer 2013 Coursebook

Metafiction is a tool that can help in questioning reality. The assumptions that are made by individuals as well as identity can be challenged and all the postulations that are made by readers can be then destroyed and any text may be apt to be disbelieved, denied or incomplete.

6. Dealing with Narration

Baldick Chris has given a definition to the word narration as being the process of telling a series of events. Narration includes the narrative (the story), the narrator (the one who tells the story), the narratee (the addressed person in a given story), etc (165).

6.1. The Narrator

Before coming to grips with this concept, a distinction between what is known as the voice and mode should be made and considered. These two concepts have been provided by Genette who has distinguished between the two. He elucidates on the one hand that the voice refers to the one who speaks in the story or the novel which means that the reader has to know and identify who is speaking, be it a narrator, an author, a character, etc. On the other hand, the mode indicates the one who sees and observes as it is all about the perspective from which the narrative is shown and presented (Fludernik 98).

As there is in real life a need for narrators, in literature or fiction authors have to use a voice through which they can transmit their stories to the readers. In fiction, a narrator is a fictional figure whose task is to report what seems to him real yet not factual to the readers. This point has been elaborated further by Thomson-Jones Katherine

> A narrator is a fictional agent who tells or shows a story, be it in a film, a novel or a play, from inside the story. Because the narrator is part of the story, the events of the story are real for him or her, whereas they are fictional for us. So when the narrator tells the story, he or she tells it, not as a fictional story, but as a series of actual events. The task of the narrator, fictionally at least, is to report or present those events to the audience. (78)

A storyteller is neither supposed to be completely true nor is the reader compelled to believe all that he says "the narrator's role is to tell us what is true in the story, and, like tellers in real life, she may have it wrong, or wish to tell us other than what she believes is

true." (Curries 20) This gives the readers the stance of awareness that storytellers are after all fictional and that not all the reports that are made by them should be taken for granted.

6.2. Types of Narrator

Narrators have been categorized differently by scholars. One of the most famous groupings of narrators is the one made by Genette who coined two terms to refer to two different types that are: heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators.

6.2.1. Heterodiegetic Narrator

According to Genette this type of narrator is "absent from the story he tells" (245) it is also known as the omniscient narrator; that is to say he knows everything about the narrative as he is an outsider who does not take part in the narrative. (Logan Peter Melville 530)

6.2.2. Homodiegetic Narrator

This type of narrator has been referred to by Genette as the one who is "present as a character in the story he tells" (245) It has been also confirmed by Logan that this kind of storyteller is a character narrator[9] as he is the one who observes the primary action line and that he/she is a protagonist of that primary action (552). This sort of narrator is referred to as a first person narrator as well, as it is shown by Haruki "in a first person narrative, we use the word 'narrator' for 'I' who tells his story and at the same time is also a character in the story." (44-45) this kind of narrator speaks to the audience about an experience or a self-narrative that he reports.

6.3. First-Person Narrative

Most of the novels which have been published in twenty first century are meant to be written in a first person narrative or having used the first person storyline due to the inclination for using this kind of narrator rather than the omniscient one as a way to render the world that seems contrasting to everyday experience. This use of first person narration

[9] There is another type which is about a narrator who tells a story about himself, as he called it a homodiegetic-intradiegetic narrator (552). For further details read the book entitled the Encyclopedia of the Novel by Logan Peter Melville

goes in line with the postmodernist questioning of the alleged metanarratives. Truth has become a personal perspective and relative to each individual's views as it has been discussed earlier. The point of using first person narration is that it allows the reader to be in the text effectively more than other types can do for the sake of making the reading process more enjoyable. A first person narrator is thought to be akin to the author (Childs13 qtd in Senekal 76). Fludernik Monika assents that one of the characteristics of this kind of narrator is that it uses a confessional style. Moreover, she observed that there is a point of interest when using a first-person narrative in fiction; that is the focus is going to be on what is referred to as self-narration (90). Fludernik cleared up this idea; therefore, she indicates: "when events and actions are reported from the perspective of a now older and wiser narrator, this narrating self often indulges in retrospection, evaluation and the drawing of moral conclusions." (90) That means retrospective narratives are often intended to evaluate the past as pointing to ethical issues. However, narrators are not always reliable; as they cannot be fully trusted when revealing the truth; mainly when this supposedly truth is told from a personal perspective.

6.4. Unreliable Narrator

The narrator is the persona who is supposed to recount events objectively as he is the only source that the readers can get the information from as they are subjected to believe all that is said by him. Nicol; however, opposes this view when he believes "no matter how objective a narrator claims to be, he or she is inevitably partial." (27) This shows that a narrator's knowledge is sometimes unavoidably incomplete and this can be detected in the way he interprets facts and makes judgments on them (Phelan qtd in Logan 50). This process of rendering events unreliably and dishonestly can be both implicit and explicit as it is up to the reader to discover it (Haruki 44).

6.4.1. Defining the Unreliable Narrator

Booth Wayne has been found to be the first to coin the term unreliable narrator when he defined a storyteller as the one who does not speak analogously with the norms of the implied author[10], regarding this he reveals: "I have called a narrator reliable when he

[10] a term coined by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) to designate that source of a work's design and meaning which is inferred by readers from the text, and imagined as a personality standing behind the work.[…] the implied author stands at a remove from the narrative voice, as the personage assumed to be

speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), unreliable when he doesn't." (158-159) Rimmon-Kenan clarified this type of narrator; hence she exposes that he "is one, whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it, the reader has reasons to suspect." (103). The reader may doubt the reports that are given by the narrator when his words are ironical as compared to what is understood and interpreted from the story (Haruki 47).

It has been maintained that the question of unreliability is restricted mainly to the participant narrator in the narrative, that is to say character-narrators because all the accounts are told from the perspective of a first-person narrator which are personal, in this vein Dan elucidates:

> Narratologists have mainly dealt with unreliability in homodiegetic narration. In this kind of narration, however, the text only contains the first-person narrator's account and insofar as the decoding process is concerned, 'the implied author's norms' can only be a matter of the reader's inference and judgment (03).

It is only through the contribution of the reader that he can get to know about the norms that are targeted by the implied author. Olson reinforced this view as she paid attention to the uncertainties that this type of narrator encounters during his process of gathering information, she justifies:

> Homodiegetic narrators are subject to the epistemological uncertainty of lived experience. […] Such narrators reliably report on whatever informational puzzles they are currently piecing together. Of course they do not and cannot provide their readers with vital pieces of the puzzle until they themselves have found them out, typically towards the end of the narrative (101).

For Olson, as they are uncertain, these narrators are convinced about their reliability since they are bringing together the parts that confuse them and this task is often accomplished by the end of the story. The narrator's perspective is personal; that is why such kind of narrators has been named 'personalized narrators' because "the narrative vantage point is confined to one character's consciousness, the narration is likewise confined to that character's interpretations." (Bushnell 27) Margolin added to this standpoint and extended it even to a greater distance, as she displays:

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responsible for deciding what kind of narrator will be presented to the reader; in many works this distinction produces an effect of irony at the narrator's expense.(Baldick123)

> Personalized narrators, and only personalized ones, may on occasion be deemed by the reader as unreliable, meaning that the validity of some or even all claims made by them is low or non-existent, that those claims need consequently to be rejected, and if possible, replaced by more valid reader reformulated ones regarding the given topic (08).

Another point that has been emphasized by Montgomery who has insinuated a distinctive point that is the use of a young storyteller, who although is a protagonist in the story, he does not have a full access to what is happening. On this regard he denotes:

> First person narration, therefore, usually has in-built restrictions, especially when told from the viewpoint of a minor character, though even a central character will be ignorant about some of the things happening around him or her. Whatever its restrictions, however, it projects the reader inside the consciousness of someone in the story giving the events from a defined observer's position (264).

The reader needs to pay attention to these points from the very beginning of the narrative in order to detect whether the narrator is trustworthy or not as he needs to be aware about making a distinction between what he wants to hear from the storyteller and what the fictional story is about[11], in this vein Lodge clarifies:

> Even a character-narrator cannot be a hundred per cent unreliable. If everything he or she says is palpably false, that only tells us what we know already, namely that a novel is a work of fiction. There must be some possibility of discrimination between truth and falsehood within the imagined world of the novel, as there is in the real world, for the story to engage our interest (154-155).

This gives the sense about the reliability of the narrator's unreliability within the imagined story which is after all no more than a fictionalized narrative that the reader has to pay attention to before making judgments on the narrator.

6.4.2. Reasons for Being Unreliable

Narrators are either willingly or unwittingly unreliable. Scholars vary in providing diverse causes which may lead a narrator to be untrustworthy. Haruki believes that narrators are not always reliable tellers because they are either deliberately or unconsciously unreliable; accordingly he attests:

[11] There is an important point that must be referred to understand the argument of Lodge which is that of the implied author who refers to the message that the writer of the book wants to tell in the fictional reality of the book. The narrator is deemed unreliable when he, due to different reasons, is subjective and untruthful and he provides incomplete picture of the fictional reality (Šrámková Eva 05-06).

> The narrator who narrates a story is not always reliable. Sometimes he may intentionally distort the events in the story and gives false impressions to the reader. Or he may be lacking in the ability to depict the events as they happen and unintentionally give the reader inaccurate accounts of the events (54).

One of the supporting arguments to the aforementioned point is the one provided by Fludernik qtd in Dan who notices various reasons that make a narrator unreliable. She draws attention to some examples as the one related to what she refers to as 'deliberate lying' where the narrator tells lies on purpose or that he is unable to attain sufficient access to fully complete information as she believes this maybe the reason of some signals of illness (04).

Logan, in his book, refers to the idea made by Phelan who observes that "because narrators perform three main functions –reporting about facts, characters and events; interpreting those entities; and evaluating them- they can be unreliable by under-reporting or misreporting, under-interpreting or misinterpreting; and under-evaluating or misevaluating." (552) a narrator's function is a three-way process; reporting, interpreting and evaluating. As this process seems to be demanding, he can be deemed unreliable in two ways, when he 'under' or 'mis' does the aforementioned functions.

Another important point to consider is the one of memory. This latter plays a pivotal role in the lives of individuals as it connects them with the past which in itself serves to form their identities. Memory is a link "when the past is seen as increasingly inaccessible and disconnected from the present." (Vecsernyés Dóra 32) In addition to that, memory both personal and collective, gives human beings an account of who "[they] are and what [they] have become." (Anita Brookner). It is a gateway to past and present identities.

This mental process is in fact characterized by various aspects which turn it to be dynamic, selective, relative and meditative (Chifane Christina 186). These features affect the work of memory, thereby "[it] does not simply reproduce the past; it refigures it in order to fit a new paradigm." (186). What human beings think as the exact image to their past turns to be wrong, as memory is responsible for reproducing it in new ways; hence, it is believed to be relative in that it does not consider the authenticity of reality, it is rather influenced by other factors which makes it hard for people to remember and this makes their recollections of events inaccurate (187), this point has been shared by Damasio (qtd

in Miquel who put it this way "whenever we recall a given object, [...] we do not get an exact reproduction but rather an interpretation, a merely reconstructed version of the original. In addition, as our age and experience change, versions of the same thing evolve." (147). Damasio emphasized the idea of age and experience which may be responsible for the non-static position of memories and thus leading to new facets of past events. In this case, memory is a way to retain some few incidents of the past but it may be a barrier against some others due to age, cultural level, preoccupations desires or interests (Chifane Christina 186).

It has been aforementioned that the past shapes people's identities but it is not a one-way street; that is to say it does not go in one direction only. Human beings by nature shape their understanding through getting rid of unpleasant things while keeping up the attractive ones. So, in a narrow angle, they form an image about themselves by modifying their memories while no one can question their self recreation as there are no witnesses to their inner thoughts, perceptions, hidden deeds and so on (Kendrick Kuo). Furthermore, memories can be deemed true and trustworthy, yet the more there is an attempt to retrieve them, the more they are apt to be distorted. For instance, if someone has emotions regarding a given event, be it pleasant or unpleasant, it increases his ability to remember (Nikl Radek 52). So, memory, as it is reconstructed and faulty is considered unreliable because of its construction and encoding by perception and selection, this hinders it from being an objective recording process (Ball Magdalena). However, this does not deny the importance of memory even though it is uncertain, it is necessary for people's own being, without it they are lost in identity (Cairnduff Max, para. 01). Memory is often seen as fragmented and lacking continuity, being composed of pieces of facts, scattered images and hints (Chalupský, *The Attempt was all* 91) So, in case memories are inconsistent and inaccurate either deliberately or unconsciously choosing to elide memories of discomfort and their true image is put into doubt and question, shall someone's sense of self be broken or come to fail as well? Oro-Piqueras viewed memory as a double-edged weapon. According to him is a door towards the past as it constructs life but it plays also another role that it reminds people that all past deeds and the future deeds are retrieved by feelings and emotions which add subjectivity to memories and this entails reconsideration, re-evaluation or rewriting the identity of people's being at whatever age (94).

6.4.3. Reasons for Using an Unreliable Narrator

It might be a wondering question to what for an author should make use of such a literary device in his work which might bring the reader a sense of unease. Contrastingly, Booth viewed it as a useful element that may help the writer; accordingly he asserts:

> If an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, then the psychic vividness of prolonged and deep inside views will help him. If an author wants to earn the readers' confusion, the unreliable narration may help him (377-378).

While Booth considered that one of the functions of an unreliable narrator is to bring the sense of bewilderment, Bushnell and Lodge viewed it from a rather different angle that is to increase a noticeable difference between what the character reckons and believes in and what the reader considers to be true; in other words, there is a gap between what people think they see and what the truth really is which is often misreported by them and this is a reader-task. When the narrator "is discovered to be untrustworthy", as it has been mentioned by Booth "then the total effect of the work he [the reader] relays to us is transformed." (158) the text that is being read is then apt to be completely modified.

6.4.4. Types of Unreliable Narrator

There are many theories and approaches that categorized the unreliable narrators differently. Consequently the two types that are going to be mentioned in the core of the present study serve the analysis of the novels that stand as a template for this work. It has been mentioned earlier that while some narrators are deliberately unreliable, others are not. Some of them are self-conscious while the others are unself-conscious. This latter is easier to be detected by the reader while the other is hard (Jacobi qtd in Dan 07). Olson's categorization is similar to the one of Jacobi yet she has cleared it up in a more precise and simplified way as she "differentiates between 'fallible' and 'untrustworthy' narration, the former attributable to external circumstances and the latter caused by the narrator's disposition." (Dan 04) Olson's distinction shows that a fallible narrator is the one who is thwarted from telling exact and accurate facts due to circumstances that are beyond his ken and the other is unreliable because of his personal tendency and self-interest. Olson insinuated that "how readers respond to these types of narrators differ, as do their attempts to determine what makes them unreliable." (99) Readers interact and respond to such

narrators differently as it is entirely their task to discern the reason behind this untruthfulness.

6.4.4.1. Untrustworthy Narrators

This kind of unreliable narrator is thought to be unreliable according to his disposition; that is to say he reports facts in accordance to his mood as asserted by Olson "untrustworthy narrators strike us as being dispositionally unreliable." (102) she suggests that such kind of narrators, according to the inconsistent language they use, seem to have stubborn behaviours or they are self-interested (102). In an attempt to describe untrustworthy narrators or to provide some clues by which to detect this kind of narrators, Olson conveys: "untrustworthy narrators contradict themselves immediately or announce outright that they are insane." (104) Self-contradiction and madness confession are the key points of an untrustworthy narrator personality.

6.4.4.2. Fallible Narrators

This type of narrator is considered to be situationally unreliable. To put it in other words, it can be said that fallible narrators are regarded to be motivated in telling their stories relying on certain circumstances. There are certain situations in which these storytellers are thwarted from reporting in an authentic way other than ethical factors. Olson cleared up as she expounds:

> Fallible narrators do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased. Fallible narrators' perceptions can be impaired because they are children with limited education or experience […] their reports can seem insufficient because their sources of information are biased or incomplete. (101)

What characterizes and distinguishes fallible narrators from untrustworthy ones is that they do not provide accurate and reliable judgments as they do not perceive matters correctly. Certain similarity exists between the two as they are both prejudiced, when there is a bias, there is in fact a self-interest which is common between the two types. Yet, the perception of fallible narrators is damaged and weakened because they are immature with a restricted knowledge. As a result, the information they report and transmit to their audience is yet incomplete.

6.4.5. Clues for Detecting the Unreliable Narrator

In an attempt to answer the question about how a reader can trust or not a narrator, Rimmon-Kenan has listed some indicators that can be detected from the text. According to her view on the unreliability sources, she suggests the limited knowledge of the narrator, in addition to his personal involvement and what she names as 'value-scheme problematic'; that is to say when other characters' views do not conform to those of the narrator. Furthermore, she mentioned another issue that is of a young narrator whose knowledge and understanding might be limited, as well as the idea of an idiot narrator, adult and mentally normal narrators who can report events they do not fully know (103).

Rimmon-Kenan has extended her view as she refers to different textual signs by which an unreliable narrator may be indicated. She believes that one of the indicators is the narrator's contradiction between his views and the real facts. She adds that if there is a gap between the result of the action and the erroneous earlier reports of the narrator, then he is unreliable. Additionally, a narrator is convicted unreliable if there is an evident discrepancy between other characters' standpoints and his. Eventually, she concludes with what she calls internal contradictions and double-edged images in the narrator's language in order to refer to his inner confusion (04).

There is another form that is brought into play in order to estimate a narrator's unreliability that is the one given by Michael Smith who concludes that there are seven points by which a reader can identify the type of narrator being confronted with him. He begins with listing the heading one that is related to the self-interest of the narrator in the story; that is to say, the storyteller takes a crucial part in all that he is telling to his audience. Moreover, the reader needs to query the extent to which a narrator is being sufficiently self-experienced, acknowledgeable, moral and too emotional to be reliable. Besides to this, the reader must pay attention to whether the narrator's words are too inconsistent with his actions. One more final thing is about the healthy conditions of the narrator; whether he is or not healthy enough to be reliable (16).

Dan referred to the approach of Nünning who "focuses on the textual and contextual signals that suggest to the reader that a narrator's reliability might be suspect." (08) Nünning's theory hinges completely upon the text in giving signs to the reader; this latter

is granted a crucial part in detecting that. Nünning has asserted and believed that textual features are through which a narrator's unreliability can be spotted. He has listed fourteen factors, among which are the contradictions of the narration besides to other discrepancies in the discourse of the narrative; that is to say when the narrator is reporting, the reader can easily discover that he is unreliable through the contradictions that are evident in his discourse. Another factor is the one which deals with the discrepancies between the statements and actions of the narrator which means that what a narrator says contradicts with what he does. Another factor which the reader may find easy to gauge the narrator's potential degree of unreliability is when there are differences between the descriptions that are given by the narrator about himself and other characters' perceptions about him. Additionally, if there are contradictions between what a narrator expresses explicitly about other characters and his hidden characterization of himself or the involuntary uncovering of himself. What are more are the inconsistencies that exist between the accounts of the events given by the narrator and their explanations and interpretations; as well as the incongruities between the story and the discourse. The verbal remarks or body signals and features that are associated to other characters through the words of the narrator should be also considered as well as the different perspectives that are given of the arrangements of events in addition to giving many versions of the same events that are dissonant and contradictory. According to Nünning, consideration to the backlog of remarks that are related to the self should be given; that is to say the narrator, including the linguistic features which denote his subjectivity and expressiveness, Nünning, hence underscores:

> One could also mention such lexical indications of unreliability like evaluative modifiers, expressive intensifiers, and adjectives that express the narrator's attitudes […] All of these stylistic expressions of subjectivity indicate a high degree of emotional involvement and they provide clues for the reader to process the narrator as unreliable along the axis of facts/events, the axis of ethics/evaluation, and/or the axis of knowledge/perception. (56)

Moreover, it is easier for the reader to discover the unreliability from the part of the narrator if he notices the galore of being directly addressed as well as the narrator's showing of conscious attempts in order to gain sympathy from the reader. Some syntactic features are found to be a signal to detect the storyteller failure of telling the truth, in this vein Nünning stresses "there are also syntactic indications of unreliability such as incomplete sentences, exclamations, interjections, hesitations and unmotivated repetition."

(55). The emotional level of the narrator's involvement is also considered by Nünning in checking out his level of reliability.

Another factor which has been put into account by Nünning as to show the narrator's untrustworthiness is his telling and writing about himself, grand-narratives and clear discussions of the teller's believability. Besides to all this, the narrator may admit and confess in a way or another that he lacks reliability and that he has gaps in memory in addition to his comment on his cognitive limitations. Another factor is the confessing situational prejudice. Eventually, some para-textual features might help the reader, they include: titles, subtitles, and prefaces (97-8).

So, as listed above, textual signs are a reader-task to discover. Nünning has emphasized the role of the reader to spot the narration unreliability which cannot be a firm matter. As a result, the function of the reader is to decipher and find it out, so the reader is granted a crucial role considering the understanding of a literary work as compared to traditional works (97). Since the interest of this work is to show the use of postmodernist novels of the literary device of unreliable narrator, Van Brunt emphasizes this point and asserts that it is a reader-centered role to find out whether the narrator is deemed unreliable or not. By so doing, he is going to be able to add his version on what is true and what is not to the text he is being exposed to. Bushnell concluded some insightful remarks that an author should consider, regarding this matter, he goes on to say:

> You have to know not only who your characters are but also who they pretend to be, not only what they care about but also what they say they care about, not only what ideas they live by but also how these ideas are false. You have to figure out why your characters are blind and how they have managed to maintain their blindness. (28)

The writer should be fully aware about his characters as to interfere in their inner thoughts, behaviours and to know about the veracity of the beliefs they live by and the way they see and perceive matters and to discover the reasons behind that.

7. Conclusion

To conclude with, it can be said that postmodernism is an intellectual movement that has an impact on various disciplines, among them literature. This latter is characterized by certain features such as no absolutism, relativity and so on. Its salient one is the rejection of

a fixed truth and replacing it with multiplicity. Due to this latter, everybody becomes concerned to tell facts according to his own perspective and view and this has led to a variety of opinions and ideas that are supposed to be accepted but not as a final reality. That is why in the postmodernist narrative, authors make use of the unreliable narrator literary device whose reporting of the events is prone to uncertainties and suspicion. However, on the one hand, this narrator is not always misleading the readers on purpose, as he may have reasons which make him as such. On the other hand, readers are not compelled to believe this kind of narrator, they in return have to be aware of that fact and hence they need to detect him in various ways that scholars and critics have shown in different studies. These strategies will help the reader to develop consciousness and enjoy the reading process.

Chapter Two

The Use of the Unreliable Narrator in Ian McEwan's *Atonement (2001)*

Chapter Two: The Use of the Unreliable Narrator in Ian McEwan's *Atonement (2001)*

1. Introduction

Some people's life is fraught with fiction and swamped by fantasies that are hard to escape because of the influence of books they have once read. All they see, all they assume they understand represent no more than fictive thoughts. Welcome then to the life of Briony Tallis. At a young age, Briony was unable to understand matters and issues related to adults. She was full of confusion and due to her being engulfed in a world of fiction where her passion for reading and writing about fairytales quenched her thirst only. Shattering both herself as well as the lives of people she loved most was the result. As a young eyewitness, she was untruthful and her reports were disastrous that is why readers cannot trust what she tells as far as her interpretations on what happened are concerned. Her attempt was to repent for what she had done in the past when she was motivated and triggered by her world of fantasies. Using the same tool which once caused harm again to redeem that damage was what Briony thought might help her as writing a novel; atonement. Now that she is both the author and the narrator, the reader questions her motives for writing the novel. Being much older, supposedly much more mature, she may be reliable in telling the story. But the question to whether she wants to appear as honest as possible is one of the main concerns of this chapter. It aims also to reveal the extent to which *Atonement* (2001) carries a postmodernist aspect as well as McEwan's postmodernist mode as not to believe in one single truth but rather in a plurality of truths through providing several perspectives. Another objective that is addressed is to spot Briony's unreliability both as young and old; whether it results from ignorance or self-interest. Lastly, it is targeted to discern and analyse how memory is contributing in increasing the narrator's unreliability and hence affecting her being-unable to portray the past events accurately.

2. Critical Assessments on *Atonement* (2001)

A plethora of critics has been found on the novel *Atonement (2001)* which is one of Ian McEwan's salient novels to be viewed from different angles by various scholars. Amongst are, on the one hand, those who acclaimed it, while on the other hand, there are reviewers who harshly have it criticized coupled with its author. It has been reckoned that the novel is intended to show the power of storytelling and the outcomes of a deliberately or unwittingly erroneous action. Besides to that, the story warns against

certitude and that its writer's aim is to invite the reader better to be uncertain about matters rather than being exposed to changes over certainty (Patrick Henry 84) this viewpoint has been supported by Han Jie and Wang Zhenli who aver: "McEwan's Atonement is a novel about storytelling. The writer focuses on issues like [...] imagination, [...] thus imagination plays a vital role in this novel, helping the story develop into the final incidents." (135) Imagination has been given a paramount importance in the novel as the whole narrative is constructed upon it and this can be applied to the character Briony who through her world of imagination creates stories and it helps in the novel's final events as well. Concurrently, Hidalgo quoted in Emma Helander has viewed the novel as being an exploration between what is real and what is imagined. This can be noticed as the first parts of the novel carry a realistic aspect when it is thought to be narrated from a third person point of view. Yet as soon as it is revealed that the character Briony is the one who has written the whole narrative, it seems that all that has been reported results from her imagination (07).

It has been illustrated further that Ian McEwan has aimed at making a distinction between subjective and objective realities. He does so by revealing the extent to which individual experiences can produce reality. This has been displayed through his novel *Atonement (2001)* which deals with the historical and real interpretation and shows subjective narrative that the reader until the end can figure out and thus he is left confused and disappointed about the truth (Zohre Ramin and Fatemeh Masoumi 99).

Mathews Peter quoted in Constantakis in describing the structure of the novel agrees that "each new chapter forces the reader to revise his or her understanding of what was revealed earlier, sowing seeds of doubts that make the text blossom into a set of irreconcilable uncertainties." (13) The text invites the reader to doubt because each chapter is told from a different perspective; hence, each event is reported differently and this compels him to revise the earlier accounts because one character is imagining the thoughts of the other characters, that is why O'Hara quoted in Pernille Brøndested Nielsen agreed on *Atonement* as a novel about imagining other people's lives from a single standpoint and perspective (46-7). Besides, Finney Brian in his description of the novel *Atonement* referred to the character Briony who is according to him no more than a young girl who has been involved in a life that is not hers, he believes: "Briony is a

child who becomes involved in an adult sexual relationship that she is ill equipped to understand." (72) Being immature leads Briony to get things wrongly on what concerns complicated issues that belong to adults. Additionally, Sibişan Aura viewed the novel as a subject matter of human mind's capacity in making enough and sufficient representations of the world (116) and this is what its protagonist Briony proved through telling about her life course from adolescence until old age.

Several critics have pondered about McEwan's use of a child's voice in his novel *Atonement*. According to him, this is not with the aim to cause shock but to have a narrative of a portrayed child and understanding through using a language of adult. He uses Briony to be the author of his work and let her describe her childhood as she is the only concerned persona about herself through the voice of a mature novelist (Pernille Brøndested Nielsen 57-8) Finney Brian shares the same view as he refers to Ian McEwan's emphasis on this point:

> I didn't want to write about a child's mind with the limitations of a child's vocabulary or a child's point of view. I wanted to be more like [Henry] in *What Maisie Knew*: to use the full resources of an adult mentally remembering herself. (72)

McEwan intentionally uses an old woman who retrospectively recalls her past memories to talk about an event which changed the whole course of many people's lives. His aim is to avoid a child's voice with a broken and probably less formal language. This has been mentioned and anticipated earlier in the novel that Briony is going to be a famous writer sixty years later thought Cruise Linda (part II, para. 47)

2.1. *Atonement*: The Fusion of Modernism, Realism and Postmodernism

It seems to be arguable to categorise the novel *Atonement* under a specific trend for this literary work in particular appears to be attributed to different literary movements. The novel has been seen tricky and misleading for it is a challenging task to have it classified within a specific mode.

2.1.1. Modernist *Atonement*

According to Habibi Seyed Javad in *Atonement* "the emphasis is on the development of the narrator, on the modernist concern of consciousness rather than the postmodernist one of fictionality." (99) This renders the novel to be classified as a modernist work. The novel discusses a series of scenes that are told from individual perspectives; this issue has been given a particular attention in McEwan's works. For instance, *Atonement* can be seen as a living proof for this view as its chapters are told from separate minds. This shows that McEwan recognises the inability of language to portray an accurate and exact reality; that is to say there is a gap that is not bridged between the signifier and the signified. This can prove the categorisation of Ian McEwan to the modernist trend for he values and appreciates individual perception of truth rather than objective judgements and realisations that are most of the time rejected and declined (Candice de Canha 90-97).

2.1.2. Realistic *Atonement*

As readers browse through its very first parts, they notice that they are told in a third person voice. Using an omniscient narrator renders the novel to be a realistic work, regarding this point, Pernille Brøndested Nielsen commented: "at the very beginning Atonement seems to be written in a realistic mode through using an omniscient narrator." (16) One of the aspects of realism is its use of an all-knowing narrator who guides the reader into the text and by whom he is trusted. Furthermore, Ian McEwan has opted for a mixture of realist and modernist styles in order to show the limits of fiction and this carries an ironical purpose. The first three parts of the novel reveal a discontented ending of the characters Robbie and Cecilia. By doing so, McEwan proves his novel to be realistic.

2.1.3. Postmodernist *Atonement*

At the end of the novel, Briony herself has destroyed the realistic aspect that her novel seemed to carry. Her attempt was to make a sense of satisfaction and hope for the readers by writing the coda which reveals a happy ending for the lovers. According to

Briony, people who care about what really happened are condemned to what she refers to as 'Bleakest realism' as it is mentioned in the novel:

> What a sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism? (McEwan 350)

By doing so, McEwan has proved the novel not to belong to the realist mode and he also displays that it carries verisimilitude but not an absolute truth. It seems like he is warning the audience to question Briony's omniscience (Nakajima Ayaka 80) This point has been maintained by Finney Brian, as cited in Stenport Ingegerd who agrees that there are many truths and by making Briony the fictive narrator it is impossible to interpret the novel entirely as realistic and judged from a realistic point of view (18). Moreover, Briony's ending shows that she suffers from an illness which affects her memory. McEwan's aim, by doing so, is to end up his work in an ethical way thought Nielsen (70).

McEwan has been referred to as being strongly influenced by the postmodernist techniques of contemporary novelists (Han. J and Wang Z 135) An abounding idea that McEwan's works seem to carry and which is recurring through the whole course of his *Atonement* is that he warns the reader that there is no such thing called a full story, he claims that he wants to go into the inner life that is not governed by rationality but by hints and baseless certainties. Nielsen viewed that McEwan's choice to keep it until the end to inform the reader about Briony as being the storyteller of the whole work is a proof that he implemented a postmodern narrative. (16), in this vein he added:

> Until the epilogue which the realistic narrative have been manipulated by a narrator, who has changed events to make them fit into her own fantasies and imaginations [...] the effect that the metafictional form has is that it poses questions between fiction and reality. In other words, as the realistic illusion is shattered, it is questioned whether what has been narrated has been real or not. (42)

Chálabi (80) and (Wood qtd. In de Canha) affirm that *Atonement* is a postmodern realisation par excellence and they regard the book as purely postmodern. From the postmodernist point of view, the natural world cannot be objectively represented, even

if attempted to, the representations are always limited. This is what can be noticed in the major works of Ian McEwan. He is able on one hand to reveal a certain reality in his novels and on the other hand he ends up his works in a metafictional way which discerns a rejection of certainties. This can put the novel *Atonement* under the postmodernist classification as the accounts of Briony's tale are taken with a grain of salt (70).

The function of the postmodernist writer is to disregard and deny the sense of satisfaction for the reader and draw his attention to the incompleteness of knowledge and the impossibility of certainty as well as the distortion of bias and viewpoint (Robert Swan) this can be applied to the novel *Atonement*. It has been discussed earlier that one of the salient aspects of postmodernism is the difficulty if not the impossibility to know an exact truth which is rather destabilized coupled with its meaning (Ellam Julie 59). This can be applied to *Atonement* mainly because McEwan has chosen Briony to be ambivalent and to tell a lie with the goal of showing various sides of truth to demonstrate the necessity of ethics (60). According to Ellam, this shows his questioning of the relativism of postmodernism. This is made patent in the last part of his novel entitled 'London, 1999' where he put the reader in the position of both accepting and refusing what is called the absolute (59). Hidalgo Pilar reinforces this idea; accordingly he observes: "The introduction of the first-person epilogue turns the novel into a postmodernist metafiction.[12]" (85) The last part of the novel has proved the novel to be a postmodernist realisation as it questions the novel's status as being a fictional work, Childs Peter qtd. In Habibi has added a point regarding this idea: "The novel ultimately emerges as at least in part a postmodernist novel, because it questions its own fictive status, exposing itself as a construct." (57) Since the reader is made aware that Briony is the one from whom the last part is told; the meaning, she, as an individual made, is constructed and subjective because knowledge of humans is subjective (Sibişan 116).

Metafiction has been adopted in *Atonement* in order to keep the reader reminded that the work is merely an artifice and a constructed plot as well as to make him aware about the process of writing (Vipond 08). The ending of *Atonement* which left the reader

[12] It is a literary device used when the author of a work of fiction wants to call attention to the fact that what has been written has been fabricated. Its purpose is to make readers consciously aware that fiction is not the same as reality (Constantakis 10).

confused and not satisfied with what happened can apply to what have been stated by Waugh. From Waugh's view, the reason behind using this device is to draw attention to the work's status as an artefact as it is aimed to query the relationship between reality and fiction (Sjöberg 05).

In the last part of the novel, Briony confesses her fictionality as an author of the tale; moreover, it becomes patent that the preceding parts of the novel are merely a one version of the many drafts written earlier by Briony (Sjöberg 05). McEwan has done that with the aim to make his readers alerted about the untrustworthiness of the fictional world. By authorising the text to Briony and creating different endings to the story, McEwan focuses on the language as being uncertain to represent the world. Through metafiction he displays the way words, in a way or another, can change and alter the world that is being described (Constantakis 11).

In spite of all the afore mentioned arguments which render his novel to be considered as postmodernist work, McEwan denies that fact, in this regard, he says: "I don't hold with the sort of postmodern relativist view that the only truth is the one an individual asserts. I do believe there are realities that await our investigation. In that sense I'm an objectivist." (Roberts Ryan 189) the idea of plurality which is a feature within postmodernism is used in McEwan's *Atonement* where various versions of truth are showed and this contradicts which what was aforesaid by him. What reinforces this point is the following statement by McEwan who goes on to say: "The only truth you can know is through one character's eyes, or conversely, you can vary it as you go along or opt for some god-like omniscience." (Roberts Ryan 189) this is in fact what his novel *Atonement* is about. His character Briony is the narrator of her story both as omniscient and homodiegetic even though this was not revealed until the ending part of the novel, the only truth that has been transmitted to the reader is through her eyes.

3. *Atonement*: the Act of Narration

In order to transmit a tale or a story to the reader, a voice by which words are told is required. In an attempt to define a narrator, Helander refers to the one given by Jahn who describes the narrator as being the agent who is in charge of establishing a communicative contact with an addressee. Additionally, the storyteller is the one who

decides what and how to tell and what to leave out (12). All that is said in a story is put under the control of the narrator that is why it is believed that in order to gain the believability to the narrative, a third person narrator might be useful, as Cruise Linda (part II paragraph 28) thinks that only one character is capable of seeing all or knowing all, instead, that is left to an omniscient narrator. This latter is the voice that reports accounts which are not prone to be suspected by readers for he is not involved in the story and he is rather an outsider. By opting for such a kind of narrative style, McEwan intends to mislead his readers showing that it is a human nature to do so in real life situations.

According to Chalupský Petr (*the Attempt was All)* a narrative strategy has been implemented by Ian McEwan in his novel *Atonement* is "the convoluted narration of a somehow detached, willingly or unwillingly uninvolved narrator." (64) McEwan has made use of a complicated narrative strategy that is represented in a narrator who is unbiased, deliberately or unintentionally not involved.

Unlike the last part of the novel which is written in a first-person narrative, the first three parts are written in a third person voice. This is with the aim to mislead the reader as not to doubt the objectivity of the narrator (Vera Kutálková 35) this point has been reinforced by Habibi who assents:

> Atonement is the third person/ first-person intrusion narrative in which an apparently autonomous world is broken into by a first-person narrator who attempts desperately to hang on to her 'real' identity as the creator of the narrated text; however when Briony enters the text, her own reality and reliability are also called into question. (100)

The novel is blended with two voices: third person and first person narratives; however as soon as the latter is introduced in the story its reliability is put under fire because "the more the narrator becomes self-conscious, the less he becomes reliable." (Habibi 100) As soon as the reader is aware about the subjective reports of the narrator Briony, he needs to reassess the story because it is swamped by Briony's imagination and the novel's reliability is doubted (Nielsen 15) Since Briony has an aim that makes her appear biased, as a result her act of atoning should be interpreted cautiously, Ellam justifies:

> It is only in hindsight, after Briony's revelation that this is her work, that the apparently distant third person of Part One is seen to be crafted from her subjective perspective. This is also when we understand that she has assumed the perspectives of others while claiming to make reparations for the sin of lying. (23)

The first parts were in fact written by Briony's subjective view and this shows that what she provided as other characters' accounts is merely her product in order to amend for her lies.

3.1.The Choice of Third Person Narrator

McEwan's choice to have the first parts of the novel told in a third person voice was in fact with a goal in mind. As third person storytellers are deemed to be reliable, this could help Briony to get readers trust her accounts as it is stated by Helander "She has chosen to tell her story from a third person point of view to increase her reliability, as third person narrators traditionally are seen as more reliable than first-person ones." (13) While third person perspective is considered trustworthy, first-person point of view is subjected to limitations as it is confined to personal and subjective opinions without having access to know what is happening in other people's minds. That is why a narrator with such mind's restrictions will have a lot to tell about his/her motivating factors when telling his/her story (Helander 14).

3.2.The Choice of First-Person Narrator

Finney has described that act of narration as being all about interpretation which in itself is prone to misinterpretations (79). This can be applied to the character narrator Briony whose interpretations of events are mere narrated misinterpretations. On the use of first-person narrator in novels, Vipond proposes that "there is always something the reader is not quite being told that is left open to plethora of assumptions." (07) Again this strategy is intended to awaken the readers and get them involved in the literary work.

Chapter Two: The Use of the Unreliable Narrator in Ian McEwan's *Atonement (2001)*

4. The Unreliability of the Narration in *Atonement*

The analysis of the unreliable narrator literary technique is not going to be restricted to the last part of the novel which is told from first-person point of view only, but the preceding parts are also going to be considered. Since Briony is the narrator of the whole work, her accounts cannot be trusted and they are taken with a grain of salt as her tale is for the sake of expiation, this makes her rather involved and subjective.

4.1. Contradictory Interpretations and Misconceptions among Characters

The technique of unreliable narrator is recognisable in many works of Ian McEwan. It aims to sharpen the sense of readers in order to awaken them to become sensitive to narration. This technique however, is not restricted to first-person narrator only, it is also used in a third person omniscient accounts. Dzikowska Joanna has supported this claim; therefore she has mentioned the perspective provided by Lee on unreliable narrator:

> This technique is often employed in first-person narrations [...] however, even the third person narrator can be found unreliable, mainly by providing multiple accounts on the same events which are confused and confusing to the reader. Lee's perspective on unreliable narration can be assigned to Briony's different perspectives given on the same events, like the fountain or the library moment [...] the final revelations in 'London, 1999' remove the reliability from them. (31)

McEwan makes use of narrative perspective which is the multiple third persona narrators in the first part of his novel *Atonement*: Briony, Cecilia, Robbie and others. It is also referred to as multiple narrative perspectives.

Moreover, Bentley Nick has claimed the novel to unfurl the impact of romanticized accounts on real life events in leading to what he names as "dangerous misinterpretations." (154) this does not apply to Briony only, Cecilia and Robbie read falsely each others' signs when it comes to their relationship. One example is when Robbie removed his shoes when entering the Tallis house, this act has been considered by Cecilia as an act of exaggeration of showing class difference, as the passage reads:

> Robbie made a great show of removing his boots which weren't dirty at all, and then, as an afterthought, took his socks off as well, and tiptoed with comic exaggeration across the wet floor. Everything he did was designed to distance her. He was playacting the cleaning lady's son come to the big house on an errand. (McEwan 26)

While for Robbie this represents a rather different matter "Kneeling to remove his work shoes by the front door, he had become aware of the state of his socks-holed at toe and hell and for all he knew, odorous- and on impulse had removed them." (McEwan 79) This has to do with the cultural codes that are employed in the novel which influence the way people interpret each others' behaviours and attitudes (Bentley).

Similarly, Robbie misinterprets Cecilia's undressing at the pond, for him it is an intended humiliation (Finney 80). Even Cecilia falsely assumes Leon will want a roast for dinner, she speaks up: "I persuaded Emily against her will that we should have a roast in your honour, regardless of the weather. Now you're sticking to salad while the rest of us are suffering because of you." (McEwan 121) this stands as a proof of the characters' unreliability as well. In a response to this technique, McEwan cited in Kutalkova argues "You can have unreliable narrators that will draw the reader into the wrong side of dispute and turn it round later." (335) For instance, the library scene is regarded by Briony as an attack while when Robbie remembers it, it was for him a love making scene (Kutalkova 335) Chalupský (*Discontinuity*) comments on McEwan's multiple narrative perspectives as being complex, he considers "the narrative of Atonement is somehow complex through obtaining the same information from various characters' points of view." (07) As the reader is subjected to contradictory views, he cannot distinguish the true from the wrong ones. While Vipond views this technique as a way to gain empathy for the characters by selecting one standpoint from the many provided and as an opportunity for the reader to be in charge of the final meaning (10). Cruise Linda (part I) sees that McEwan has used that technique with a goal in mind, in this vein, she refers to the notion of limited viewpoints that seemed restrictive, but upon further consideration, it becomes apparent that truth is in fact multi-faceted and extremely pliable, allowing for distortion and manipulation by authors, narrators and characters alike. When the narrative is told from the perspective of one character, it seems confined to the thought of that storyteller only, however, the fact that truth is a

versatile concept and prone to be twisted and manipulated makes it told by narrators and characters as well.

The scene at the fountain is revealed separately from the perspectives of Cecilia, Robbie and Briony mainly when they have been struggling about the vase. From the perspective of Briony and through her vision from the window, Robbie seems to be proposing to her sister:

> There was something rather formal about the way he stood, feet apart, head held back. A proposal of marriage. Briony would not have been surprised. She herself had written a tale in which a humble woodcutter saved a princess from drowning and ended by marrying her. What was presented here fitted well. Robbie Turner […] had the boldness of ambition to ask for Cecilia's hand. It made perfect sense. (McEwan 36)

When Briony has seen Robbie raising his hand; she understands it is an order and that her sister has had to obey him (Ellam 25) as the novel reads "however, was how Robbie imperiously raised his hand now, as though issuing a command which Cecilia dared not disobey. It was extraordinary that she was unable to resist him." (McEwan 36)

Even Cecilia is uncertain about her behaviours in front of the pond, whether she is really angry at Robbie or not. Even Briony is confused about the things that happen during the dinner night, whether Robbie is really the rapist or he is in love. Whether the rape of Lola is true or she is just embarrassed to admit that she is complicit. This increases the distance between fiction and truth mainly when it is said that Briony is the one who has written the story. It seems like McEwan does all that to show that nothing in his narrative is meant to be true (Constantakis 09).

By taking authority on writing about other characters' accounts, Briony cannot know about their thoughts for sure, this is another sign for her unreliability. She has written the scene from three points of view, and this shows that there exists no absolute truth of an event, only different people's meanings about it (Han. J and Zhenli. W 135-6).

Finney stresses: "But we cannot forget that several other characters misread behaviours, including every person seated at the dinner party who fails to read Lola's scratches appropriately, as well as Paul Marshall's reactions to them during the ensuing discussion." (95) It was only Robbie who is able to notice the scratches on Paul Marshall as it is shown in the novel "There was a two-inch scratch, Robbie noticed, from the corner of Marshall's eye, running parallel to his nose, drawing attention to the way his features were set high up in his face, bunched up under the eyes." (McEwan 119) Cecilia and Robbie mistakenly believe that Danny Hardman might be the culprit of Lola, this idea has been reinforced by the fact that he has been caught looking to Lola at time when he was supposed to be at work "Danny Hardman was there too, leering at their sister when he should have been at work." (McEwan 84) this is with the aim to shift the readers' attention from the real truth as Helander thinks: "there are many examples of misinterpretation in Atonement. My standpoint is that they are intentional and a result of how Briony uses her narrative power." (03) It can be concluded that the multiple perspective was used deliberately in order to increase Briony's power on her story as well as to mislead the reader.

4.2. Briony the Child: Unable to Distinguish between Fiction and Reality

Constantakis has referred to Joyce Hart who described the character Briony as follows:

> Briony is thirteen when the story opens. She is on the verge of adulthood, curious about the ways of adults but having no experience with which to compare them. In the first part of the story, it is obvious that Briony overreacts, misinterprets, and twists events to make them match her beliefs. (14)

It seems that Joyce Hart shed light on Briony as an immature person who is inexperienced and because of that she is apt to misinterpretations that belong to her private kingdom of thinking. Finney focused on the imaginative side of Briony that is the reason behind her inability to distinguish between reality and fiction. Considering this point, he insinuated:

> Briony at the age of thirteen, she is already committed to the life of a writer. She ruthlessly subordinates everything the world throws to her need to make it serve the demands of her own world of fiction. Brought up on a diet of imaginative

> literature, she is too young to understand the dangers that can ensue from modelling one's conduct on such an artificial world. When she acts out, her confusion between life and the life of fiction, the consequences are tragic and irreversible-except in the realm of fiction. She attempts to use fiction to correct the errors that fiction caused her to commit. (69)

It is understood that Briony is an unripe girl who aspires to become an authoress. She acts according to what her fictional thoughts order. She is engulfed in the world of children's books and at the same time this crippled her from grasping the perils that can result from behaving according to the norms that those books designate. Finney has added that "the young Briony suffers from an inability to disentangle life from the literature that has shaped her life. She imposes the patterns of fiction on the facts of life." (79) For her life is like a fairytale where evil is to be eradicated while the good must reign. That is why after having seen from the window Cecilia and Robbie's encounter at the fountain and after the two figures has left, she is free to interpret it the way she wants and pleases (Finney 79). But unfortunately, this influence has led her to commit a tragedy against her beloved people that is why Briony wants to use the source of her crime to do the redemption. Her first confession starts when she has seen her sister Cecilia and Robbie from the window; thus she interprets the scene when she has seen Robbie who has made a gesture as a command that her sister dares not to disobey (Hidalgo 86).

Ellam focuses on the focal role that imagination does play in the novel, apropos of this view she goes on to say "the role of imagination is central to the writing, and consequently, places doubts over the claim that this is a work of atonement." (34) This shows that all that is reported is no more than the product of fancying thoughts, and this increases questioning the work as a whole. Stenport supports that Briony is immature as he asserts "the committed crime can be considered as understandable and forgivable because she was immature and very young." (13) Similarly to this point of view, Joyce Hart cited in Constantakis demonstrates that Briony's interpretations that are typical for her childish and immature attitudes are humorous at the beginning; as her description of Robbie as a monster when he shows a lust for her sister because such an understanding shows that she does not know about sexual desire, similarly, when she has seen her sister Cecilia at the pond, she has thought that she will drown herself in order to prove her love to Robbie who will in return save her from death, this is due to her innocent

view of love and this does harm to nobody; up to this point Joyce Hart finds that Briony's behaviours can be forgiven as typical to her age and overdeveloped imagination because this will not affect in a negative way the others (04). However, as soon as she reads the obscene letter of Robbie, she is convinced that her sister is in a danger and needs help and that Briony is the only one who can rescue her (Tereza Nemcová). One thing that helps Briony commit her crime against Robbie is that she does not share empathy with others. Because of her imagined fairytales she forgets that other people are just as real as her as the novel tells the readers "the failure to grasp the simple truth that other people are as real as you." (McEwan 38) she does not feel tolerant and sympathetic with her cousins who are just victims of their parents' divorce. She appears also heartless when it comes to her decision about sending Robbie to jail without considering Robbie's mother anguish when her son is taken away by the police. Her misunderstanding causes havoc to those around her. This fact, however, can only be redeemed through construction (Cojocaru Monica 72).

4.2.1 To Know is to See

Knowledge cannot be accessed through seeing only, there are, however, other criteria that should be considered in order to build that knowledge. Briony acquired her knowledge from what she had seen, it was until later that she discovered that seeing is not sufficient, in this regard De Canha suggested: "McEwan draws a distinction between 'knowing' and 'seeing'. Briony realises later that the understanding of what she knew was not literally, or not only based on the visible." (70) Briony was angry that her play would not be performed. Standing at the window, she observed an incident that occurred between her sister and Robbie. She tried to interpret what was happening and adding meaning to it but her interpretations were false. She first assumed that Robbie was commanding something to her sister; later on, her misconceptions have been found to be disastrous. Briony interpreted what was seen according to her will and "she sees what she expects to see." (Han Jie and Zhenli Wang 135-6) that is to say, she saw what her imagination drew, this point has been also believed by Sibişan who put "Briony wants to observe the world carefully, only that she interprets what she sees according to her vision of the world. She sees what she wants to see and her interpretation of the facts proves to be mistaken." (115) her vision of the world is limited according to her

age and the fact that she is influenced by fairytales boosts her to misinterpretations. Briony was convinced that "seeing was equivalent to knowing." (Stenport 13) this is what O'Hara quoted in Habibi believes in, that Briony can watch only and not interpret. After that, all that she can do is to use her weak intimation that life can be contradictory in ways that go beyond preconceived narratives (80). Taking as an instance the scene of the fountain when Briony thought Robbie's raising hand as a command to her sister, while Robbie in fact raised his hand because "for a moment he thought she was about to step backward onto the vase, and he raised his hand and pointed, though he said nothing." (McWan 28)

Contrarily, (Constantakis 26 and Stenport 05) think that Briony did not invent the truth through relying on her eyes only, she rather had suspicions, regarding this point she illustrated "upon a sexual encounter between the twins' old sister and a mysterious figure she believes to be Robbie for reasons that have more to do with her suspicions than her eyesight." Briony who was on the cusp of adulthood cannot be deemed to have a lack of understanding, no one can tell whether she can differentiate between fact and fiction or not.

4.2.2. Young Briony Fraught with Order

The theme of order has been given a plentiful attention in the narrative. In the novel, Briony enlisted her cousins in her play the way she wanted and pleased, she wanted to be both the author and the heroine, by doing so; she seemed to look for her own self-satisfaction (Helander 09). This point is also shared by Sibişan who observed "Briony has her own system of representation of the world, with an acute sense of justice and order." (115) Briony's constructions of the world have their unique system that is represented by order. According to her, the difference between good and evil is clear and evident and that they stand against each other. This is at least what her play reveals as a view on life. For Briony, the play is a way by which to obtain attention from her members of family. The fact that her father is absent, who is according to her view an order token, leads her to look for it by herself (Kultaková 14)

Briony had an unnatural desire for order which can be considered as the principal source for her humorous interpretations of the events happening in front of her as well as it shows that she is unable to differentiate between facts and fictions and this is the reason behind her disastrous false claim about Robbie. As she is eager to win the attention and respect of adults, she is convinced that what she assumes she has seen at that night is the correct version of events. Relating to this matter, Chalupský (*Discontinuity*) asserts "Briony feels the urge to win adults' attention through offering them something that could surprise or even overwhelm them. She manages this by her testimony." (06) Due to her obsession with order, Briony is determined to classify Robbie under the category of a villain and bad person (Nemková). Additionally, Finney agrees that Briony's naïveté is the product of her authoritative order of the self. He adds that the effect of this idea is to prevent the reader from taking parts in her misinterpretations of the events and at the same time prompting the questioning of her true accounts as far as part one is concerned (80).

4.2.3. Briony and the Purloined Letter

The letter, in McEwan's *Atonement*, is conferred a significant role as to encourage Briony to believe in her illusory thoughts which condemn Robbie for a crime that he did not commit. First, Robbie gives Briony a letter in an attempt to be transmitted to Cecilia, a letter that is mistakenly confused with a different intended one. For the first time Briony believes she has a secret to share as she is certain about the idea of growing up, she discloses it to her cousin Lola in order to show her that she is old and that her experiences must be recognised (Cojocaru 71). Obscene and read by Briony who misinterprets it, the letter stands against Robbie. Briony, in her testimony against Robbie, is reinforced by that letter for the obscene word it contains, the less Lola is willing to admit what really happened to her; the more Briony is convinced and confident about her own account (Kermode Frank, Para. 09). In order to backup her testimony of accusing Robbie as being the rapist of her cousin Lola, Briony has given her mother the letter that Robbie has written to her sister Cecilia (Joyce Hart, quoted in Constantakis). This letter, in fact, shows the extent to which Briony might be deemed unreliable as Finney comments "this letter that Briony purloined acts as the signifier that determines her subjectivity." (79) Since she is subjective in reporting the events,

this reveals the extent to which she is involved in the incidents and hence she is biased when it comes to telling the truth and that makes her accounts hard to be believed by the readers.

4.3. Briony's Lie

Deceptive statements are copiously found in *Atonement*. The most noticeable scene which backs up this claim is the lie of young Briony when she declares Robbie as the rapist of her cousin Lola. What is more is when she refers to the journey she has made to her sister's flat in order to ask for her forgiveness for the sin committed over the last five years. As readers, it is easy to believe they have met each other mainly when it is shown that Briony has sent her sister a letter in which she informs her that the fact of growing up allows her to decide to change her testimony in order to free Robbie. It is shown in the novel that Cecilia's answer to her has been as follows: "If you were lying then, why should a court believe you now? There are no new facts, and you're an unreliable witness." (McEwan 317) Briony, in fact, never dares meeting her sister, this does not happen and this event is purely the invention of Briony's imagination (Nemková 05) This stands as a proof on Briony's unreliability as a narrator. Another significant opinion which prompts the idea of Briony's lie is well recognised by the end of her novel. She is now old as she admits that it is important to write stories that readers want to read where there is hope and satisfactory endings that is to say far from realism. That can be considered as a reason for not ending up her novel telling the truth, she goes on to say as the novel reads "how could that constitute an ending? What sense of hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account?" (McEwan 350) this expresses that the end of her narrative represents a lie as she herself admits that fact. And as a novelist, she presumes she is excused in doing so, she justifies that by stating "how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God?" (McEwan 350)

As a writer, she should be honest. Stenport, when emphasising the lie that is revealed in the postscript, suggests:

> An autobiographer and a memoirist always have a contact with the reader based on honesty: they are supposed to retell a real memory, even if that memory can shift by time. The old Briony tells a lie because at this point she knows the difference between reality and fiction. (77)

When accounting memories, honesty should be present. It is revealed that Briony is old; the fact of being able to distinguish at this age between fiction and reality makes her tell lies. Accusing Marshall for raping Lola is another lie told by old Briony; Nakajima has a point in that "aged Briony aware that it was not Robbie who committed the crime does not prevent her from accusing Marshal too." (75) The fact of being uncertain about her belief does not prevent Briony from appearing malevolent.

Briony believes that her judgements and interpretations that she made unconsciously and unknowingly when she was young are false. Now as being old, she is aware and unable to make them again. However, this is not true because her judgments when she is old are just as inadequate as those she made at the age of thirteen (Phelan James 331) This point has been elaborated further by Stenport who finds out that the way Briony represents herself prompts the idea that she still has got the same views she once had at the age of thirteen, because in her narrative she is not questioning her misinterpretations of what she thought to be true when she was a child "her arguments are selfish and she manipulates reality with the intention to remain highly appraised and respected. She preferred to publish her novel until her death and the Marshall's." (19) This carries a kind of manipulation, Briony does not want to lose and contaminate her status by revealing the exact facts and she has left her novel to be posthumously published.

4.4. Briony Commanding the Truth

What in fact is meant by commanding the truth is to control and authorise it. This is what Briony is doing throughout her novel since she is the authoress. This is evident mainly when she confesses in her novel that "If I cared so much about facts, I should have written a different kind of book." (McEwan 340) this confession is thus considered by Helander as a proof which discerns her subjectivity and dishonesty; therefore, Briony is in charge of the truth the way she pleases. (16) Instead of telling it, Helander adds Briony is commanding it (Helander 11).

The way Briony follows in controlling and holding a sway over her narrative is through telling it in a reliable and powerful way (Helander 14). In the very beginning of the novel, Briony appears to be a heterodiegetic and a covert narrator; that is to say she

narrates the story of other people's experiences. She prefers to appear from the outside in order to manipulate the events the way she wants. She has an omniscient power as if what she has revealed is truthful and thus would be accepted by the readers and not apt to doubts. However, her last postscript shows that she is n o more than a homodiegetic narrator and that her story is of a personal experience. In this respect, Helander claims: "Because she appears to be outside the story, the reader will automatically assume that she gives a more objective account, when in fact, her account is nothing but subjective." (15) Although trying to appear covert, Briony became more overt (Helander 16).

This gives the novel an aspect to be seen as an autobiography that is rewritten and revised several times. As a result, questions about truthfulness and trustworthiness are raised. In this vein, Nakajima hints "the more Briony rewrites her stories, the further the content is distanced from the facts." (70) And this can be observed in her alteration of the story's end. Stenport contends "Briony is faithful to her passion for storytelling but not taking responsibility for her crime. She rather changes the facts. As the fictive author of the novel, she is not trustworthy." (01) When the narrator is both the author, he is inevitably the autobiographer as he cares about his image as not to be blurred and this increases his/ her untrustworthiness. Consequently, Nakajima agrees and concedes that the use of the notion of storytelling by Ian McEwan serves as a self-justification (20)

4.5.Ignorant or Self-interested Briony

It is agreed that a narrator can be rendered unreliable when the accounts he reports and tells are untrustworthy. This unreliability has its reasons that may result either from ignorance or self-interest which in itself makes the narrator speaks in a subjective way, making mistakes and lying. All these signs are spotted in the persona of Briony who is both ignorant when she was thirteen years old and self-interested when she is seventy-seven years old (Sjöberg 06).

Martin Jacobi finds that "the thirteen-year-old Briony [...] has immersed herself in literature her entire young life and seems to see the world through the lenses of romantic melodrama." (59) This stands as a justification for her past deed when she believes that

she has been right in her judgement about Robbie to be the culprit. Furthermore, Jacobi adds "it seems clear that Briony's misreading is the result of a faulty schema, in which she has linked the patterns of romantic melodrama with the actions in the world and thereby produces disastrous results." (66) The plan that has been drawn by Briony is entirely faulty because of her inexperience and this can stand as an excuse for her, this point has been supported and elaborated further by Jacobi who again indicates:

> Further, as a child she has a pathetic appeal: she should seem to have no reason to lie, especially about someone who has been a friend of the family and, so far as everyone knows, with whom she has been on cardinal terms, further still, she has the benefit of believing the accused to be a 'maniac' because of evidence and a subsequent logic she believes to be compelling, and her self-assurance allows her accusation to sound true to the constables and to her family. (60)

This, in fact, stands as a justification for Briony's act as not to be deliberately intended for causing Robbie harm for the evidence has been clear and from her view this is a sufficient proof to have him convicted, and it seems to be used for an empathetic purpose.

This, however, does not prevent Briony from being self-interested as well. Now that she is old, she is motivated by an objective that is represented in atoning. Her subjectivity is incited as she wants to correct and clear up her image solely. Ellam has referred to the view made by Brookner who states: "as the novelist, she is in the position to shape the perspectives of characters as she chooses. If these aspects are not evaluated, then the irony of Briony manipulating the readers as well as her family is also missed." (60) Ellam invites to the re-assessment of all that have been narrated by the character-narrator Briony as she is the one who is in charge of the whole book. As a fictive author, Briony is self-interested and she gives descriptions to characters the way she wishes. Nakajima reinforces this point; accordingly she goes on to say: "Briony proceeds to confess that the last pages of Part Three are nothing more than figments of her imagination and she justifies this deception by referring to a novelist's license to alter the facts to suit her artistic purposes." (67) Briony has been deceptive in her narrative and she renders the reason behind that is represented in her right to modify the events in order to serve her purposes as a writer. Nakajima adds: "in the narrative, the fictional author, Briony embellishes and alters the facts deliberately, thus the readers cannot believe that Briony conveys the perfect truth to her readers. The very process of

narrative itself implies the impossibility of perfect objectivity." (68) he has intentionally altered certain events and this prevents her from imparting truthful accounts, and this can be widely noticed when Cyrill Connolly has rejected her work and informed her in a letter about some events that were not mentioned and that Briony on purpose has preferred not to reveal. (69) Additionally, Briony seems self-interested in the last part of her novel, when she has reported the survival of the lovers which in fact did not happen at all. By doing so, she has proved to be an unreliable narrator, author and an old woman who has devoted her life to expiate for a sin she has committed over sixty years ago (Habibi 101).

4.6.Jealousy as a Self-justification

The issue of Briony's honesty has been emphasised by critics who on one hand agree that Briony, during the process of writing her novel, has tried to be as honest as possible (Helander 66), while on the other hand Hart Joyce cited in Constantakis raises several questions about Briony's jealousy as being the impetus behind her false testimony. Aged Briony recalls her younger self when she was in the company of Robbie at the pond. While swimming, Briony has dived deeply into water in a risky spot that she might have drowned. Actually, she has done that deliberately to test Robbie's will in saving her. Young Briony wanted to show him that she has fallen for him and by doing so; she would detect his love back through rescuing her life. The scene stimulates the reader to query the motives behind Briony's accusation of Robbie for the rape, whether Briony is jealous because Robbie preferred her sister Cecilia over her or the scene of the fountain that occurred between Robbie and Cecilia noticed by Briony from the window reminds her of her downing scene. Accusing Robbie may result from a desire of revenge rather than a false interpretation. (Constantakis)

From the point of view of Hart Joyce, the drowning scene is intended to reveal that Briony has been infatuated with Robbie when she was adolescent. If this account is true, it means that Briony, at that time, felt humiliated by Robbie's rejection of her and that what has propelled this feeling is his love to her sister Cecilia. Such an account will make the reader feel a kind of sympathy and tolerance toward Briony as her fake

drowning makes her look a confused little girl, this is in fact what Bentley suggests to be the motive:

> The older Briony seems to understand that what was motivating the thirteen-year-old girl was the unconscious reaction to the rejection by Robbie of her adolescent romantic attraction to him. This is why the motivation is left out of the earlier text. It is only when Briony remembers this event that she can identify it as a cause for her attitude towards Robbie. (155)

It is seems that Briony has written about the scene and referred to it wittingly by emphasising her innocence in order to exonerate herself and thus to atone for her crime. (Constantakis 14 &16) Briony's jealousy is not related to her sister and her beloved only, but also to her cousin Lola when she is much older. Nakajima relating to this matter exposes "Briony [...] feels strong jealousy towards Lola who seems to have led a successful life without any sense of guilt." (77) This in fact designates that Briony has a potential to become untrustworthy narrator or a godlike novelist (Nakajima 68).

4.7.Untrustworthy Briony

Briony, when she is old, does not tell the truth. This might be due to two reasons, either because she cares about her career as a writer or because of her illness which affects her memory, or it can be both. Finney finds that her aim in making a happy ending is because of that "but the imminent onset of vascular dementia together with her painfully acquired honesty makes this fantasy unlikely to be realised." (81) As opposed to her intentions, this attempt seems hard to be achieved because of her illness and purposively sakes.

4.7.1. Briony the Novelist

It has been argued by various scholars that the last part of Briony's novel in which it is revealed that she has become a novelist and the author of her own work or story gives her the right to change the accounts in order to suit her artistic purposes (Finney 69) Catherin Seruham supports this view; therefore, she notices:

> This is one of the factors that make Briony as unreliable narrator; she is no longer only concerned with telling what happened, she is an author and as an author she is also concerned with the artistic and aesthetic parts of her writings. (08)

As a novelist, she cares about her image that is why she finds it entailing to embellish the facts to suit her purposes. Besides to that, Stenport emphasises that Briony's way of telling the truth serves her self-esteem, accordingly he estimates:

> Briony's version will strengthen her position as the well-known writer she is at 77 if adopting McEwan's idea about multiple truths. Briony as the fictive author however makes clear that she is aware of the fact that she has accused Robbie falsely not taking responsibility for her action which once again shows that her fabricated memories are myths, psychologically essential for her self-esteem. (06)

Although Briony is now an aged woman who is able to understand issues and matters more maturely as compared to her younger self at the age of thirteen, she still does not report accurately what really happened because of her career which she does not want to make damaged by her past false testimony.

Stenport considers: "Briony is the fictive author and as such not reliable since she is the one most interested in presenting the story to her advantage [...] Briony is interpreted as an unreliable character." (21) Briony is hence directed by her selfishness and her self-esteem controls her for she wants to appear appreciated as being a novelist. This makes her unable to reach the quest of atoning.

4.7.2. Aged Briony with a Flawed Memory

Chalupský, *the Attempt was All* (63) and Bentley (128) assent on the abundance of themes such as: history and memory that are saliently used in the works of Ian McEwan. They upheld that historical truth and fictionalising the past are present in McEwan's *Atonement*. It is agreed that the past cannot be recovered. People at least insist upon reconstructing and reinventing it by adding new meanings to it through figments of imagination. Knowing about the past is not an easy task because there are factors which contribute either to helping doing that or preventing it from happening. This might go in tandem with the opinion made by McEwan who comments *"*I think it's quite difficult to do anything about a deed done in the past. But there are some things you can do." (Roberts Ryan 193) these things in fact can be represented in the act of atonement as his novel suggests, McEwan adds "Atonement is simply being aware of the past rather than repressing it or distorting it." (Roberts 193) this is what his character

Briony attempts to do through her work of literature. She is able to do in fiction what she could not do in real life or never did. Her endeavour is to reverse the past or change it. She is simply willing to re-write a part of it (Chálabi 78).

What matters for people is how to know the past. It is simply through memory which is responsible for all the recollections of former events experienced in the past (Chalupský 65). The process of remembering is associated to old age; when someone starts to re-evaluate what he did in the past as he comes to his final years. Ramin and Masoumi have mentioned this idea when commenting on the character Briony:

> When Briony reaches the last years of her life [...] at this stage one looks back at life with a sense of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. One may feel peace with herself and the world, or she may have regrets and doubts- positive or negative feelings emerge and as one becomes old, this powerful stage is similar to a window to the past. (98)

All the deeds once committed in the past and which come retrospectively cause its beholder a sense of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It is a kind of meditation on the past that comes only in people's last stage of life.

Memory is deemed to be a source of credibility of the past that it gets its reliability from the eyewitness. However, the nature of memory can be prone to doubt because it is principally unreliable (Chalupský Petr 65). As history is collective and can be shared with others, memory is privy. People hide their memories in terms of personal privacy. This contributes to subjectivity. Each one is free to transform his experiences into a subjective version of reality that is why "there is rarely and absolute overlap and correlation between two different recollections of the same event." (Chalupský 65)

Memory is made inconsistent due to forgetting. Although the experience is perceived consecutively of flow of events, memory records it separately. Casual connections are no more than the working of individual's imagination and assumption. That is why the past is constructed according to people's wishes as imagining it the way it should have happened in order to explain its consequences. This makes it always in concord with people. Memory is characterised then by its untrustworthiness and difficulty to be retrieved. As a result, memories are personalised, revised and reinvented through

imagination. Notions about how things should have happened are changed. That is why the aim is not to relate the past objectively but rather to adapt it in order to manipulate the present (Chalupský 66).

Chalupský claims that "in Atonement his [McEwan] interest shifts to the theme of the past, the (im) possibility of knowing it objectively and exactly, and the ambiguous relation between memory and reality." (67) Memory blurs reality and prevents it from being accurately and objectively reported. For Chalupský, though the past did exist, what is important is how one can know it and what he is able to recall of it; that is to say whether it can be retrieved accurately or not (67).

Atonement is categorised as a contemporary literary work. This kind of fiction tends to use narrative perspectives which note the narrator's subjectivity and it questions his ability to relate the past in a certain way (67). Such kind of fiction makes use of narrators who believe in their reliability and they integrate their memories and recollections, but in *Atonement*, Briony "although she tries to convey truth and reliability, she ends up destabilizing the narrative and presenting herself as unreliable because her accounts contradict her previous story and she is now a mentally ill old woman." (Chálabi 99)

Memory depends on scattered moments and remnants; this gives the past the sense of being constructed by stitching selected facts together into stories. Using memory in fiction is not intended to restore the past but to give definition and meaning to the subject to the reader in order to push him to give his own touch on the world and himself (Chalupský, *The Attempt Was All* 68).

In an attempt to construct the past, people often revise and select parts of it. Consequently, this carries an aspect of lying or partiality and incompleteness. Briony in her novel uses different perspectives to tell her story as it has been previously stated. By the end of the novel, Briony is told that she is suffering from vascular dementia; which is an illness that will lead her to lose her memory. All these contribute to the disbelief of her accounts. In fact, people receive and perceive events around them differently and

then they later remember and collect them and that makes the reader aware about Briony's misguiding account (Chalupský 69).

Dzikowska deduces that "Atonement shows how memories can be shaped according to the will of the one who remembers." (03) This shows how memories can be selective and subjective according to individuals' desires. This point is shown in the novel *Atonement* when Briony confesses "Now there was nothing left of the dumb show by the fountain beyond what survived in memory, in three separate and overlapping memories. The truth had become as ghostly as invention." (McEwan 39) that is to say as soon as the event is over, no real version survives in memory except its shades and no objectivity will exist, all that is left is the individuals' subjective stamps and this makes the process of telling truth a hard task and thus all reports about it unreliable.

The second part of the novel is entirely unreliable because as Briony did not witness the war, she cannot tell about it. Even though the perspective was that of Robbie, it is detected that that was purely Briony's imagination coupled with few information gained from his friend. As Briony did not hear those facts from Robbie, her account remains suspect. Even the drowning scene purely results from her imagination mainly when relating it from the point of view of Robbie; she cannot really know that he remembered it. Moreover, the letter of Cyrill Connolly stands as a proof against Briony's reliability because instead of writing about the original events as they happened, she cuts most events and moments. She has selected the most convenient parts and revised them while ignoring some others (Chalupský, *The Attempt Was All* 72). This in fact proves that the novel is a self-reflexive work as it questions the reliability and unreliability of its drafts.

Briony herself confesses that she is now an old woman with a disease that will make her forget many things; she is in descent into vascular dementia "I face an incoming tide of forgetting, and then oblivion." (McEwan 350) this fact shows the reader that it is not clear to know whether her control over her mental faculties is lost or not, that is why this illness may cause her unreliability. This can be seen as a failure for Briony in making atonement; such an illness causes memory loss as well as the language until it reaches the degradation of the nervous system (Hartung 62-3). It cannot be known for

sure which events have been reported exactly by Briony and which events have not been. Jacobi elaborates this point:

> We do learn that Briony now suffered from the early stages of vascular dementia, but there is no evidence given to believe that she already has forgotten the important events of her past, however Briony does make some comments in the last pages that suggest she has misinterpreted some of the history she portrays in her novel, leading perhaps to a suspicion that she also misrepresented Robbie and Cecilia's survival. (68)

Briony might have missed some events due to her illness, and since the novel has been drafted many times, the reader cannot tell which one carries the true version of what really happened. Her diagnosis might have affected her narrative. There may be some time when she forgets some facts. This point has been also emphasised by Albers Stefanie and Torsten Caeners who agree that one of the reasons which render Briony as an untrustworthy narrator is her memory and her act of atoning, regarding this point, they clear up:

> Among the reasons is her mental condition. No one can be sure how far this has affected the narrative. Then there is a long span of time between the events and the final version of the story, which may have caused loss or alteration of events in Briony's memory. Also there is her agenda of atonement which has to be taken into consideration. (712)

Since the events have passed a long time ago before the final version is told which is sat in 1999, Briony's accounts may seem untruthful as well as her memory's effect on what happened. This seems to be important to consider, taking as an example the confusion of the scratches of her cousin Lola being reported mistakenly in chapter eleven and twelve as Nakajima notices "it is obvious that Briony suffering from a memory disorder confuses the events both preceding and following the rape." (74) her illness, in fact, does not give her the chance to be totally trusted by the audience.

5. With the Aim of an Involved Reader

Han Jie and Wang Zhenli agree that, in his work of fiction, McEwan has employed what is referred to as a tactical trick in the narration; that is to say the use of the unreliable narrator in order to take an advantage of the readers' innocence. This is coupled with the view made by Finney Brian who indicates that McEwan's target was

to play with the reader by taking into account their primary and naive expectations in order to lead them to the wrong judgment (138). McEwan, in fact, wanted to transmit a message that is telling stories is no more than telling lies; accordingly, he sought for his readers' awareness to question everything. The problems that face people as far as epistemology and accurate records are concerned cannot be inevitable, that is why he presented them in his works (Candice De Canha 86). For McEwan, when it comes to truth, it is better to be uncertain and doubtful because facts are apt to various possibilities of interpretation and perception (De Canha 89). *Atonement* comes up with the aim that readers are required to make new significations on the story being confronted with; through re-reading and re-arranging it in order to reach rather different responses that result from their own critical thinking and understanding (Chálabi 99).

Despite the fact that McEwan possesses the novel and its characters, his target has been to warn the readers about what literary imagination can cause as well as alerting them not to trust a fictional author anymore (Ellam 23). Readers' confusion is prominent and salient in McEwan's novel. As soon as they get into the reading process and dig in it, they are able to notice and detect the untrustworthiness of Briony who due to her inability and irresponsibility for stating and relating what exactly happened at the time when the events took place is suspect (Stenport 16). In order to fool his readers, McEwan used the technique of focalisation[13] mainly with his character Briony who as a fictive author related her perception on the event as well as the ones of her sister Cecilia and Robbie. Briony has used this technique in order to make the reader aware about the perils that perception can cause since the reader is exposed to different versions of one same event, he cannot tell which event from all the other presented ones is the truest account which can better accurately tell what really happened. This is obviously with the aim to awaken the reader's suspicion and doubt about the objectivity of the narrator (Helander 16).

In his work of fiction, McEwan appreciates and values reading which Briony seems to lack during her perception of what she assumed to be the truth. All the narrative that Briony constructs has been intended to remind the reader about the crucial role of

[13] Focalization, a term coined by Genette (1972), may be defined as a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld. (Burkhard Niederhoff)

reading. By doing so, the reader is granted a role of a paramount importance which McEwan implicitly has shown that is represented in the ethical responsibility of readers of contemporary fiction. The final saying and power is hence bestowed to the readers as far as the act of interpreting, judging and atoning are concerned and this can be achieved and realised through critical thinking (D'Angelo 89).

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that Ian McEwan's *Atonement (2001)* is proved to be congruous to the postmodernist genre which suspects certainties and completion of knowledge as it advocates the idea that history and past cannot be fully accessed to with a sense of accuracy and fixedness. What helps making Briony's endeavour difficult to be achieved and thus deemed unreliable is both herself as being a young girl and an old woman. When she was young, she was ignorant and immature and hence unable to conceive reality as adults; that is why she misinterpreted events that have resulted in fatalities against people around her. When she is old, and even though, supposed to be much reliable as far as the accounts are concerned, it was not the case because she was impeded by various factors amongst are her memory which once again renders her untrustworthy. It can be also thought that her career as a novelist and a highly appreciated writer makes her self-interested and thus deliberately unreliable as to make her reports suit herself only. By doing so, McEwan aims to make readers aware as not to rely on fictive narrators because they are simply unreliable since they are created by the author. No matter how readers try to put things together in order to gain a full conclusion, McEwan's task is to tell them not to do that easily because fiction is no more than unreliable accounts and characters.

Chapter Three

The Use of the Unreliable Narrator in Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)*

Chapter Three: The Use of the Unreliable Narrator in Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)*

1. Introduction

Certain people's knowledge about the world is determined by ideas, which in a subjective way, shape their perception. They supposedly and convincingly, think they have a God-like understanding about their personal history yet they are instead confronted and surprised by their self-ignorance about it. More importantly and precisely they themselves are a different image from the one they have, long ago, drawn. In other words, the histories, be them private or public that people tell themselves and the others alike are not absolute and exact versions of the real ones. An individual may discover that he is the most salient type of untrustworthy storyteller about his own life. This is in fact Julian Barnes' narrator Tony Webster of his 2011's *the Sense of an Ending*. As it has been mentioned in earlier chapters, narrators are thought to be unreliable and proved to be so by taking into account other people's views about them and the clues that are provided in the text as well as the outcomes that are displayed and sometimes memory does play a role in that. Memories define and shape people's identity that is why they cannot be distrusted. People cannot grow older bare from their memories just because they might be deceitful as they are unable to put their memories aside and move forward. The objective that this chapter seeks to reach is to shed light upon the Barnian's eleventh realisation as being a postmodernist literary work making use of the unreliable narrator literary device. It endeavours to find whether unreliable Tony is deliberately or unwillingly fooling the readers and himself alike. Besides to this, it aims to show the extent to which his memory is responsible for his untruthfulness; subsequently affecting the version of reporting about his personal history. It also aspires to reveal whether Tony is indeed an unreliable narrator yet a sincere one or whether it is just an attempt to gain sympathy and empathy from the readers in order to avoid much blame. Finally, the paper aims to show if the use of an unreliable narrator maybe a window through which one can paradoxically show the gloomy and the unfathomable side of reality.

2. Critical Views on the Author and his Literary Work

Critics have spotted a variety of aspects which characterized Barnes' writings which are different from the other contemporary writers of his phase.

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2.1. Julian Barnes' Writing Style

It has been noted that Julian Barnes is delved into confusion and his interest is to mystify his readers as he attests: "mystification is easy, confusing the reader is easy." (Guignery Vanessa and Ryan Roberts 107) By doing so, Barnes' aim is to mislead the reader at the first place. Knodeva cited in Childs and Groes has noticed that Barnes "is interested in individuals' inner voices and their own truths rather than the ultimate truth." (07) That is to say his interest is subjected to that sort of truth which concerns individuals about themselves and their self-discoveries. Barnes himself confesses as he claims "I am interested in such things as the difference between how we perceive the world and what the world turns out to be. The difference between the stories we tell others and the stories we tell ourselves." (Jeffrey Brown, para.16) The way individuals have a self-image may be different in reality from what they really are. This idea may go in parallel with the one of Guignery Vanessa related to his belief in the non-existence of such a thing called a comprehensive knowledge of the past (*The Fiction of Julian Barnes* 67-68)

Barnes has been categorised among the writers who "questioned the means and modes of acquiring any knowledge about the past and threw doubt on the possibility of ever representing past events objectively and faithfully." (Guignery, *Novelists in the New Millennium* 09) this raises the notion of the quest to reach past's accuracy, thereby; it can be assumed that Barnes' characters thirst for reaching a definite knowledge is often unquenched. One of the issues that have been thrown light in Barnes literary texts is the one of history be it private or public. He does so by exploring the different facets of characters as he sees it "part of the novelist's job." (Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes* 62) he shows individuals who are interested in forming stories of their own in order to hide the facts that they do not want to be known or that they do not accept. They keep some of the facts and skew new version of story around them and that is how history is formed from the Barnian's perspective (Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes* 66). This is in fact what led theorists to presume Barnes as being a postmodernist writer par excellence.

2.2. Julian Barnes the Postmodernist

Julian Barnes's literary works challenge a clear categorisation as it is hard to classify Barnes as a realist or modernist writer because his fiction does not conform to those modes of writing (Groes Sebastian and Childs Peter 03).

As postmodernism denies totalities and advocates that reality and truth are not absolute and that "the search [for an objective truth] can be enlightening and confusing." (Salman Volha Korbut 212), literary works that have been classified into the postmodernist trend often carry "the theme of the validity of memories, credence of history and the ability to seize the past." (Salman 206) this is in fact the core subject that "underlies most of the novelists' works, interpreted as clearly postmodern." (206) this can be noticed in Barnes' works where issues related to history and past have been discussed. His novels are considered to indicate "[an] emphasis on the elusiveness of truth and the indeterminacy of meaning." which are viewed as features among the many aspects which represent the postmodernist thought.

Guignery has referred to the notion of an objective truth that is often deconstructed and then re-inscribed in Julian Barnes' works and that renders him a postmodernist writer (*The Fiction of Julian Barnes* 68). This makes the concept of truth no more than an idea of approximation, in this regard, Groes and Childs see that Barnes' novels are characterised by his use of "a string of words designed to encompass the subject as a fishing net [that] is a web of string in which to catch fish; but, a net can logically be thought a collection of holes tied together." (09) Consequently, this is how truth is described and seen from the postmodernist view. However, this does not deny the seriousness of Barnes in writing about other issues that are far from subjectivity, regarding this point Groes and Childs add "...but to portray Barnes primarily as a relativist would do insufficient justice to the seriousness and intellectual intensity of the writer's engagement with the world beyond the subjective self." (03) Barnes' quest for an objective truth is paved through the holes of subjectivity which are close to that target. Furthermore, Barnes' works raise questions about history and its authenticity, as he avers:

> Crosses ontological boundaries between fiction and history, but the confusion between invention and reality fails to grant credibility and verisimilitude to the fictional world, in contrast to what happens in traditional historical novels. Instead, it throws doubt on the validity of historical facts and raises the question of whether we can know the past.
>
> (Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes* 67)

This shows an entirely postmodernist stance since ideas related to history are doubted and questioned.

2.3. Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)*

Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* has been viewed differently by critics as each one of them tackled it from a specific angle. It is a postmodernist work where characters are restricted and passive and this is one characteristic of Barnes' creations. His characters make theories about philosophical matters such as: history and reality, memory and remembering, etc. They prefer to ruminate about these concepts and mediate about life instead of living it (Vecsernyés Dóra 29). One of the topics that his novella examines is memory as being unclear and the way people tend to repair their past deeds in order to suit their wellbeing thought Matthew d'Ancona (para. 13.)

Barnes' idea about writing a novel on memory stems from a contradiction of views that raised in a discussion with his brother who views memory as being false and fallible which instead of bringing a clear remembering, it is rather imaginative, whereas, Barnes' opinion about it is rather pragmatic and different. But it seems that with his novel *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* his view has been changed, accordingly he conveys: "I certainly increasingly think that it's not only faulty but sometimes over-reliant on the imagination." (NPR, para. 06) that is to say, memory is not always flawed, but it sometimes relies on imaginative thoughts.

The novel has been considered to be a literary work of what happened and not of what is happening. Although its first part is set in the past and concerned with Tony Webster's retrieved memories and its second part is meant to reveal the present time, this means the effect of that past is the moot of the novel, regarding this point, Barnes clarifies: "the novel's first part takes place- unrolls- in the mode of memory, and then the second part, which is where the book starts now, as it were, then unrolls at the pace

of life, and it quickens, and it quickens." (Frederick M. Holmes 47) Holmes considers the novel's narrative to be divided. According to him, the first and the second parts of the novel are divided as in the first section Tony appears to report events that he was certain about, in the second section all he related previously is destroyed by external realities which enhance uncertainties (41). The way individuals view themselves may not be accurate since there are other people who may destroy that image, thereby *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* "questions the individuals influence over the narratives of the self, and emphasise the role of external reality in the shaping of our stories about ourselves." (Høyland Øyskin, 01) this brings the sense that self-knowledge is influenced by external factors which make it prone to be changeable.

Toibin's point that is quoted in Holmes's article comes to define the novel as being "a meditative novel, once which reflection rather than action or character at its centre." (49) Novels which rely on memory are called novels of recollection that their main concern is uncertainty. Such stories are about the past and the multiple point of view of truth (Chalupský Petr 90). It was memory that the protagonist reconstructs and through which he discovers his dual personality (Maqsudul Arefin). Memory is always used as a theme in Barnes' previous novels. His characters distrust their past recollections of events because these recollections are seen fallible (Cheryl Julia Lee12). Yet, Barnes' novels celebrate the past ironically as Guignery in *The Fiction of Julian Barnes* has observed (01).

Dhananjay Jagannathan has viewed the novel from another perspective as he sheds light upon the difficulty that the protagonist encounters in making sense of himself. On his way to discover knowledge about himself he fails because his past is twisted together with other people. This brings the sense that certainties that individuals rely upon in making sense of their lives are apt to be waned and fallen apart. Tony muses about that limited perception in the novel when he confirms: "the history that happens underneath our noses ought to be the clearest. And yet, it is the most deliquescent." (Barnes Julian 57) Individuals think they are certain about their own stories yet they discover the opposite due to different reasons that come later in life.

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Barnes annotates on the theme that his novel examines and he notes that his aim was to write a book about memory and time; that is to say the way these two concepts interact with each other as the effect of time on memory represented in its changing and altering. Memory is transformed by time as Tony Webster comments "to some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty." (Barnes 05) Both time and memory remain imperfect and unexplained (Arefin 26).

Holmes argues that the novel does not convey a sense that human beings are wholly able to understand reality or facing it in anytime. For instance, Tony has kept some ambiguities on others, he "even [remained opaque to his] own motives and instincts [that] are not fully comprehensible to [him]" (41) narrators like Tony who are stunned into their own realities tend to be more interested in the quest rather than the goal. They relate their tales because of the sense of consolation they obtain after telling them. Telling their stories is an evasion from the terrible reality as it is an opportunity for them to draw the readers' attention to the different perspectives of other various worlds and truths as well (Bojana Aćamović 257).

The novel is about the nature of human being, as noticed by Remington, the chairperson of the booker prize 2011. No one can exactly know his true being. People can present themselves in a variety of ways but the way they show themselves may deceive the beholders, hence, they are not true about themselves (Mathews d'Ancona, para. 14). Human beings are characterised by subjectivity which means all they perceive is biased. What is called absolute truth and fact is available to their apprehension. Their understanding is constructed in the ways that conform to the current development, be it scientific, cultural, and so on. As a result, it is problematic to represent reality (Vecsernyés 30).

The words history and past, in fact do not only refer to what is collective and shared by communities, it is also about the past of individuals and their personal history. This is the main concern of Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* which tackles these issues through the voice of Tony who recollects his past and personal history through memories during his journey to truth seeking (Nikl Radek 49). The novel is also about

individuals' lacking self-knowledge due to aging. In a conversation with Jeffery Brown Barnes emphasises:

> We get to tell our stories and then as we get older the witness to our lives diminish, and so there are fewer people who actually can check or quarrel with our version of events. So if something comes along which puts your nose up against the wall of untruthfulness, that's part of what generates the energy and the action of the book. (para.14)

Barnes sheds light on the act of forgetting as people age when there is no way by which to check the accuracy of stories, because those people who once witnessed the events are called for help, they are hard to come by which makes the verification of those stories a hard task if not an impossible one. So the untruthfulness of those stories will increase and that is the essence of the Barnian's novel.

The novel is full of confusion, obscurity and ambiguity that blurred the narrator's way to discover clarities (Holmes 41) This emphasises the reader's involvement in deciphering veracities yet for Kermode it is rather the opposite "the veracity of fictions can never be determined." (qd. in Holmes 41) One last standpoint is the one made by Deresiewicz William who considered the novel to be concerned with the betrayal of memory as it deceives its owner. The novel shows the scattered recollections that are insignificant and that is the point for him.

2.4. The Structure of the Novel

The Sense of an Ending (2011) is a novella as it consists of 150 pages. It encompasses two parts; the first part is shorter in length than the second one. The novel is told retrospectively from the point of view of Tony Webster, a first-person narrator who "embarks on a journey of recounting his personal history, attempting to create a coherent autobiography" (Vecsernyés 31). This, in fact, has been covered in the first section of the book until the second section in which the reader is shown the "re-evaluation of [Tony's] life [which] takes the form of revisiting and rewriting memories described in the first section." (31) In the first part Tony was present yet in the second one he was absent. Tony attempts to recall his past events in order to check their truthfulness which does not belong to his concern only, but also to people with whom he was once connected. He wanted to know the exactness of those events and the way

this involved him. The story eventually reveals or puts its core on memories and the influence of time on them (Šrámková Eva 15).

3. Dealing with Narration Unreliability in the Novel

Julian Barnes' novel can be considered as a case study of narration unreliability due to many reasons.

3.1 The Theme of Memory in *the Sense of an Ending (2011)*

The subject matter of the novel of Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* is said to be about "the trick of memory and its fluidity." (Mary Beth Simmons 45) This idea is quite made patent from the very beginning of the novel as its narrator takes heed of the truthfulness of his memories "so I need to return briefly to a few incidents that have grown into anecdotes, to some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty." (Barnes 04-5) This proves that all the narrated events by the storyteller are gained from memory which does only provide approximations not factual truths. Tony's story is told from his reflexions. All that the reader knows concerning alteration of judgement and his warning from the imperfections of memory is believable; the reader trusts all that the narrator says because he himself believes his memories. All human beings believe their own memories and judgements despite the fact that they maybe fallible because there is nothing that they can do about that except to believe (Deresiewicz, para.21).

Consequently, the past of Tony is considered to be hazy and unclear as he is shackled by his memories' imperfections and this increases the inaccessibility of his own past (Vecsernyés 32). But Tony can do nothing about that except "[To use] his memories, regardless of how clear or unclear they maybe, as the source of a puzzle." (Kulvete 48) Tony in the first part of the novel, and while recollecting his own memories, is not aware about their untrustworthiness, he just confesses that he is playing with memory; the way this latter plays with everyone (Simmons 45). Šrámková shares the same view that the first part of the novel is a full record of Tony's past that is told from his autobiographical memory. He does not have evidences to prove or deny the truthfulness and the accuracy of his memories he has relied upon in the first section, he only knows

that those are his own reflexions and that they are reliable for him. It seems until he reveals the second section that deconstructs the first one that the reader doubts Tony's memories exactness. In fact, memories' fragmentation is the recurring idea throughout the whole novel (16).

The Barnian's novel is a demonstration about the interconnection of memory and time. The protagonist of the story aims to both construct and deconstruct his memory as a way to explore his life through time. This can be noticed in the first part of the novel which seems to be full of disordered memories which are shown when the narrator starts his tale by "I remember, in no particular order." (Barnes 04) this means that his remembrance is not ordered, it is rather unsettled and this is due to the nature of humans' memories as being fallible and selective and also due to the effect of time on them (Arefin 26). The past is often hard to retrieve because it is either forgotten or distorted (Oró-Piqueras Marciel 90). In the novel, Tony forgets many things and sometimes he is confused about them; this can be seen in his statements, for instance "Later that day- or perhaps another day." (Barnes 07) Or when he has been doubtful about the age of his daughter "She's thirty-three, maybe thirty-four" (Barnes 96) This blurs Tony's reliability as a narrator.

During the process of telling his tale, the protagonist Tony queries issues that are related to his memory's quality and function when one gets into old age. He discovers that his memory is unreliable and he questions the extent to which this memory is built through remembered emotions that he was full of over that period of time rather than through the real events as they really happened at that time. The novel is about a reflexion upon the guile of memory that is triggered by the need of human beings to go on and carry on with their lives even though they have been through murky episodes in their life. This act of revising and revisiting memories at a late age leads the narrator to discover new things about himself represented in a remorse that he hides deep inside and at the same time he tries to disregard it through the modifications and adjustments of those episodes that he remembers about his life (Oró-Piqueras 87-89). Later, as the story advances, the readers are aware that Tony's memory is far more edited than they would like to believe. (NPR)

Throughout the narrative, Tony tries to defy the exactness of his memories by stating his own thoughts or by recollecting the discussions between his school teacher and the rest of the class (Šrámková 16). History has been the main subject that was discussed as when Adrian reflects upon its subjectivity, he goes "the question of subjective versus objective interpretation the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us." (Barnes 12) Yet for Tony, it was rather about "the lies of the victors." (Barnes 16) but his teacher went straightforwardly to say that it is also "the self-delusions of the defeated." (Barnes 17) The views about history differed. Tony's other classmates also doubt its exactness "each of the protagonists has a sense of unreliability of historical narrative." (Paynel Oliver 03) They have seen it as being repetitive in terms of stories and events in addition to that, history is selective and unreliable. The most powerful standpoint was the one provided by Adrian who suggests "History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation." (Barnes 17) Adrian has put up with his argument by providing the suicide of one of their friends as he has pondered about his death and the pregnancy of his girlfriend which is apt to suspicions according to him. Such assumptions are all that is available coupled with the note their friend left to his mother and that is at least what they were told. They cannot be sure whether the paper still exists or not as they cannot know for sure the reasons behind their friend's putting an end to his life as well as his state of mind which remained unknown. That is why writing his story may be a hard task, for Adrian "Historians have always been faced with the lack of direct evidence for things." he has added that "Historians need to treat a participant's own explanation of events with certain scepticism." (Barnes 18) scepticism is hence necessary to know about history.

The Sense of an Ending (2011) main concern is memory. The narrator raises questions about it. As he revisits it, he is confronted with its deceitfulness. Barnes uses memory on the narratorial level by using an unreliable narrator to tell the story relying on his subjective recollections of the past (Šrámková 22-3). Memory is explored in that neither account of it can be verified than the other, yet both accounts play a vital role that they point the subjectivity and untrustworthiness of memory (Nikl 10). It is a key theme, memory, in the novel as it is responsible for the slippery of some events from individuals' lives which may have caused, on the one hand, harm to others, while on the

other hand, pain and guilt to the ones who felt comfort and complacency. Tony has mused about that through his narrative "what you end up remembering is not always the same as what you have witnessed." (Barnes 10) people cannot trust their personal recollections.

Angus Miranda notices the untrustworthiness of memories in the novel, according to her; they are "either wilfully forgotten or confused between imagination and reality." (para.02). There is a sort of deviation from the events that really happened but also that they cannot totally contradict the truthful ones. The exactness of Tony's memories is challenged as soon as the reader starts to notice their falsity where the pieces of information that Tony provides hardly fit each other. So the novel depicts a kind of digging through memories and the revelation of a murky and melancholic mediation over the past. It is about the nature of memory and the way it works. Memory, from the Barnian's perspective, is non-static, unsettled, fluid, changeable and prone to subjectivity because of the effect of time on it as it obscures and makes it rather ambiguous (Wirth Charlotte, para.03).

3.2. Tony Webster: Unreliable Narrator before Receiving the Bequest

Barnes' novel *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* is written with a first-person voice. It is "a case study of unreliable narrator, whose self-awareness leads him to announce the limitations of his own credibility." (Samuel C Kulvete 01) It is told from a singular point of view that seems to hold a sway of authority over the whole narrative. It has been beforehand discussed that from the postmodernist view, no objectivity is obtainable; concepts like truth and meaning are worn away as they become apt to alteration and indeterminacy and any attempt to reach conclusions has been marked to represent humans' stupidity. As a result, using the literary device of the unreliable narrator may help the reader to suspect any totalised logic (Daniel Lea 16-18).

Unreliable Tony is detected from scratch; mainly when he mediates upon his school days about memory and history. He reveals hints about his unreliability which are taken at a face value (Jagannathan 05). He opens the novel by listing short memories that not all of them he had seen, as an instance, he confesses "this last is not something I actually saw, but what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have

witnessed." (Barnes 04). He adds "If I can't be sure of the actual events anymore, I can at least be true to the impressions those facts left. That's the best I can manage." (Barnes 05) It seems like the narrator is warning about some of his memories as they might be imagined rather than real and this may expose them to distrust. It is like a reminder to the readers as not to take everything for granted. This can be noticed in statements such as "Was this their exchange?" (Barnes 18-9) these show that the storyteller is uncertain.

Tony, at first thought that his knowledge about the past is accessible but the truth has been found to be different from what he remembered (Cairnduff Max, para.04). The first part of the novel is reported retrospectively from the gathered recollections of Tony; however, those were not trustworthy memories as he himself confesses "few incidents..." (Barnes 04) In this sense, his memory does not act well; it serves in hiding his real self of the present which is the outcome of his real past that he could not reach for the sake of self-preservation only. This is unreliable Tony before the alert of the bequest that turned all that was narrated into the first part of the novel to be re-evaluated and deconstructed because it does not represent accuracy.

3.3. Tony Webster: an Unreliable Narrator after Receiving the Bequest

Tony has described his personal history in the first part as being peaceable. This can be shown when Adrian sent him a letter in which he asks him for the permission to date with his ex-girlfriend Veronica as the novel reads:

> Adrian said he was writing to ask my permission to go out with Veronica [...] Actually, to be true to my own memory, as far as that's ever possible (and didn't keep this letter either), what he said was that he and Veronica were already going out together. (Barnes 40)

Tony's description of his reply has been shown to be of "a moral high ground." (Holmes 35) In description of his reply to the letter, Tony comments "As far as I remember, I told him pretty much what I thought of their joint moral scruples. I also advised him to be prudent, because in my opinion Veronica had suffered damage a long way back." (Barnes 42) For Tony, he unfortunately has sent the letter and did not keep a copy of it for himself (Simmons 01). Later on, things went alright with his life, yet after

he is to realise that "memory is not a reliable scrapbook of the most relevant moments of his life." (Oró-Piqueras 90) so memory remains unreliable.

Before her death, Mrs. Ford, Veronica's mother, has written Tony a letter which has been received by him in his retirement days. This letter, in fact, is responsible for the unsettling of the state of his life. All that he has presented about himself in the first part of the novel is meant to be eroded as Tony is forced to face his past blunders (Vecsernyés 31). Tony notes: "I was informed that I have been left five hundred pounds and two 'documents'- I found this very puzzling. For a start, to get a bequest from someone whose Christian name I had either known or else forgotten." (Barnes 60) In order to understand the reason behind this unexpected letter and legacy, Tony needs to travel back to his own memories fetching for clues that might help him, "I searched for any moment, incident or remark which might have seemed worthy of acknowledgment or reward. But my memory has increasingly become a mechanism which reiterates apparently truthful data with little variation." (Barnes 60) All his endeavours maintain him unsettled as he finds no answer, "I stared into the past, I waited, I tried to trick my memory into a different course. But it was no good." (Barnes 60) He seems to search for what is hidden from his life, the stories he told himself are not that helpful but he could not get the truth because his memories are inaccurate as they throw him surprises (Arefin 26).

In order to get the legacy, Tony needs to be in touch with Veronica because she is the one with whom the letter is kept. Instead of giving him the diary, Veronica has handed him his letter, the one he wrote over 40 years ago to her and Adrian. It was at that time that he discovers his venom and malice which comes to destroy the image that he has given about himself in the first part of the novel (Holmes 35). Tony never expects that his quest for the truth would turn against him. He has been determined to get the diary because he believed that the image he has produced earlier about himself is factual and the only support is, for him "The diary was evidence; it was –it might be- corroboration. It might disrupt the banal reiterations of memory. It might jump-start something- though I had no idea what." (Barnes 72) When Tony read his letter, he was surprised not by its structure, but by its power (Luke Brown, *Tension* 38).

This letter "is a wakeup call for all readers who ever had a tendency to believe Tony's memories" as Šrámková (18) notices. It displays that memories do not match into Tony's self-perception and knowledge because they are changeable or they have disappeared (19). The letter is a stimulus to everyone. Tony's own view about his personal history has been put into doubt because of that diary. He doubts his memories as he believed in their unreliability before the arrival of the letter, but he did not have other resources from which he could get information about his past except his recollections of it which do not carry a tangible record, even "the witnesses to our lives decrease." (Barnes 92), people who shared with him his past and therefore may help him, they have either cut touch or are no longer alive (Šrámková 17). The letter has left old Tony's personality astonished by the young one as he utters: "My younger self has come to shock my older one." (Barnes 92). Now he is aware that his life is no longer peaceful as he imagined it, hence he soliloquizes:

> How often do we tell our life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? And the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account, to remind us that our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about life. Told to others but –mainly- ourselves.
>
> (Barnes 89)

The astounding new facts about his self-discovery that he heartlessly has damaged the life of his friends long ago forces him to think again about his own being and his real identity (NPR, para.03). Tony's versions about his past are apt to be renewed as they contain and cover a new different story about the real events and the protagonists: himself, Adrian and Veronica's motivations (Holmes 40). Tony himself confesses about that "that all my 'conclusions' are reversible." (Barnes 44) The letter serves as a motivator for Tony to look back through time and memory and to try to evaluate his past deeds (Arefin 27) This letter, which has been described by Paynel as "scathing" (06), shatters the consonance of Tony's personal history as being benign. This has been astonishing for Tony as he aims to "use each document to view the same shared past through the eyes of one of the other participants." (Kulvete 11) He also wants "[to see] overlaps between different points of view and seeing how the writing and correspondence confirms or denies what he already believes about the story." (Kulvete 16) Tony's probing into half-forgotten memories of his relationship with Veronica and Adrian in order to solve the mystery behind the bequest (Lothar 04) has been in vain.

The letter allows him to scrutinize his past as well as his identity (Angus Miranda, para.01).

3.4. Character Developed over Time

A character as being changed over time is one of the prominent themes that Barnes sheds light upon in his novel. The character Tony in commenting on the issues that a novel may tackle most says: "the novel was about character developed over time". (Barnes 15) Progressively, after Tony's meeting with Veronica that lasted over 40 years ago of separation and no see, he now wonders about the same question "Does character develop over time?" (Barnes 97) for Tony, the answer to this question is yes and this can serve as proof to spot his unreliability as a narrator. He narrates himself in a way that is challenged later in the novel by a piece of paper that appears in his late life; the harsh and rude letter he has sent Adrian and Veronica. This shows that he tries to appear as innocent as possible for the sake of self-justification only (Brown, *Tension* 36). Tony thinks that "our attitudes and opinions change, we develop new habits and eccentricities." (Barnes 97) Thereby, some of the views he believes in the first part of the novel probably have changed completely into new ones.

3.5. Tony: Misunderstanding, Misapprehending, Misjudging and Self-Contradicting

Some events that have been referred to by the storyteller in the first part of the novel; that is to say before he receives the lawyer's letter, have been in fact spotted to be edited in the second part of the book which shows that Tony has been contradicting his opinions, taking as an example from the first part of the novel Tony's description of the weekend he spent with Veronica's family that was unpleasant for him as he felt inferiority as Brookner Anita annotates: "what remains in his memory is the discomfort he felt on that weekend, a discomfort he cannot explain even at an advanced age." (para.03) This has been revealed when Tony starts to have first impressions on Veronica's father "I couldn't tell if he was being all matily male, or treating me as a lower-class scum." (Barnes 27) Tony's negative judgments on Veronica's father seem to be doubtful.

Tony's judgements have wrapped Jack, Veronica's brother as well. As he goes on saying: "He behaved towards me as if I were an object of mild curiosity, and by no means the first to be exhibited for his appreciation." (Barnes 27) even later when Tony sends him an email, he expects negativities about him, Tony says:

> I was surprised. I'd expected him to be unhelpful- But what did I know of him or his life? Only what I extrapolated from memories of a bad weekend long before. I'd always assumed that birth and education had given him an advantage over me that he'd effortlessly maintained until the present day.
>
> (Barnes 74)

Tony in the letter has accused Veronica as being damaged as he has warned Adrian about that "because in my opinion Veronica had suffered damage a long way back." (Barnes 42) Later on Tony seems to regret that judgement "When I wrote to Adrian I wasn't at all clear myself what I meant by 'damage'" (Barnes 43) because now for him, all people suffer damage, as he justifies that "you might think this is rubbish- preachy, self-justificatory rubbish." (Barnes 44)

Tony maintains his judgements and personal opinions about Veronica; for instance when he criticises her after being informed about Adrian's suicide, he says "if there was one woman in the entire world a man could fall in love with and still think life worth refusing, it was Veronica." (Barnes 50) Tony seems to be obsessed by his pretty self-analysing and false analysis of others like when he felt pity towards himself when he seems to be wondering about the reason behind the bequest "But Veronica was hardly suggesting that her mother was offering money in exchange for the pain her daughter had caused me, was she? Or was she?" (Barnes 76) another similar event is when he was waiting for Veronica to come for their proposed meeting, Veronica has been late for some minutes, thus he begins to make doubts "Also if she's keep me waiting." (Barnes 84) as he doubts her willingness to be there "an evident tenseness suggested she didn't want to be there." (Barnes 84) Tony's justification about his angry letter is that "when we are young and sensitive, we are also at our most hurtful." (Barnes 93) and he questions his acrimony "why had I reacted by going nuclear?" (Barnes 93) He thinks that "Even so, forty years on, I sent Veronica an email apologizing for my letter." (Barnes 93)

During their love relationship, Veronica used to tell Tony "It doesn't feel right" (Barnes 95) whenever he asks her for some kind of intimacy; hence he accused her harshly, later in his old life he says "I wonder if, all those years ago, her words 'It doesn't feel right' were simply a politeness." (Barnes 95) This puts Tony in a state of unease "I wondered if I'd been awkward, pushy, selfish- Not if, how?" (Barnes 95)

Later in his life, Tony retrieves the incident of the weekend, this time he reproduces nice memories about it, to the reader's surprise, in this passage:

> Though I'd met them only once, I had good memories. Well, that was fifty percent true. I hadn't really understood why I asked these questions. I suppose I wanted to do something normal, or at least pretend that something normal even if it wasn't. (Barnes 104)

Similarly, when Veronica informs Tony about what happened with her family, he exposes:

> Veronica's account of her parents' deaths- yes, even her father's- had touched me more than I would have thought possible. I felt a new sympathy for them- and her. Then, not long afterwards, I began remembering forgotten things. I don't know if there's a scientific explanation for this. (Barnes 114)

In the letter, Tony also has accused Veronica as being boring "It's just a question of whether you can get pregnant before he discovers you're a bore." (Barnes 131) but later Tony regrets his words "I hadn't even meant it at the time. I was just failing around, trying to find a way to hurt [...] but never boring" (Barnes 131) all the aforementioned contradictory views need to be re-evaluated by the reader. Tony seems to have kept only unpleasant memories about the weekend, yet this does not mean they were factual, for him they might be self-serving as he can remember factual ones like when he said "I was so ill at ease that I spent the entire weekend constipated: this is my principal factual memory. The rest consists of impressions and half-memories which may therefore be self-serving." (Barnes 27).

Tony's misapprehensions with the others render him unreliable, for instance, in his schooldays, when Adrian has joined Tony's gang, Tony has thought that he was not fully interested in doing that, because Adrian did not care about wearing his watch on the wrist side as the clique, "Adrian allowed himself to be absorbed into our group,

without acknowledging that it was something he sought. Perhaps he didn't. Nor did alter his views to accord with ours." (Barnes 08) Another example is when Tony remembered the picture that Veronica asked for with his friends where she wore heels of height that according to Tony she never did before. To Tony's knowledge, if someone wants to be heeded attention, he needs to lower his voice instead of raising it, but in Veronica's case "Perhaps hers was a similar kind of trick with height." (Barnes 32) In a similar way, Tony never understood Veronica well, for example when she asked him questions about where their relationship has been heeding but Tony did not answer her. This tells Veronica that Tony must be carrying a kind of cowardice, yet for Tony it was rather about being peaceable "You're quite cowardly, aren't you, Tony? "I think it's more that I'm...peaceable." (Barnes 34) while Veronica concluded Tony's behaviours as being the result of cowardice, her rather renders them to peaceablness.

3.6 Tony's Lost of the Art of Communication

The storyteller Tony has been viewed as someone who "lost art of communication." (Mary Beth Simmons 01). This implies that Tony does not know how to communicate or even disregards it. Taking the example of his daughter Susie who keeps telling him that it would be easy to communicate if he learns how to text. Tony is a character who misses conversation, even at its most banal (Simmons 01) For Tony, it is the younger generation on whom the blame should be put as they do not feel the need to keep in touch, while he does not pay attention that he is the one who does not know how to mail. Tony as usual makes assumptions that until the end of his story supposes have been wrong, as he admits "No: I exaggerate, I misrepresent. Susie doesn't feel like that I'm sure." (Barnes 58) This is a proof that Tony is unreliable as he prefers to put the blame on the others rather than on himself (Šrámková 16).

Tony lacks communication as well as understanding as he renders it to aging "the longer we live, the less we understand." (Barnes 124) A consideration to the scene with the barman should be taken into account to show Tony's head-thickness, when Tony asks the barman to do him thin chips instead of fat ones. The barman informs Tony that they do not make them, they just arrive the way they are, yet Tony seems not to get that "Hand-cut chips means fat chips." (Barnes 138) Tony thinks "I never realised that 'hand-cut' meant 'fat' rather than 'necessarily cut by hand'" (Barnes 138)

3.7 An Emotionally Thinking Tony

Various factors contribute to the fallibility and untruthfulness of memories which thwart them from working properly. The factor of feelings and emotions is one among the many that strongly affect memory. Feelings dominate human beings regarding a given event (Oró-Piqueras 93). Daniel L. Schacter's idea has been referred to by Oró-Piqueras who emphasizes that memories are biased due to the attribution of emotions to them or the knowledge that is newly acquired after the event (90).

Tony believes in this same idea which sustains "learning the new emotions that time brings." (Barnes 56) he advocates this view because "discovering, for example, that as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty, as to what you are or have been." (Barnes 56) Tony has long made judgements and opinions that result from his emotions. Liesl Schillinger pays attention to the fact that Tony, when young, accused Veronica as being unable to imagine others' feelings and emotions but he is certainly wrong about that because he is the one who cannot look outside his box.

Tony himself is a mystery, he wants to solve an enigma yet all that he found is that he himself is a puzzle and that he is just like people whom he feared "whose main concern is to avoid further damage to themselves, at whatever cost." (Barnes 43) he has harmed others unconsciously as he confesses "I have an instinct for survival, for self-preservation." (Barnes 41) a fact that he long thinks was about being peaceable. In addition to that, Tony has expected the end of his relationship with Veronica just because his emotions told him so "In my mind, this was the beginning of our relationship. Or have I just remembered it this way to make it seem so, and to apportion blame?" (Barnes 34) Tony has gained hatred against Veronica; mainly after their breakup as he keeps that bad image about her until his late age. Considering the picture that Veronica asked for, it was until his late age that he discovers something new about it as he was examining it, he said "while Veronica- as I have never before noticed- is turning slightly in towards him [Adrian]. Not looking up at him, but equally not looking at the camera. In other words, not looking at me." (Barnes 102) Later on, Tony seems to develop a kind of fondness for her, this can be shown through the nice memories he shared with her as he remembers, for instance her dancing in his room "And suddenly, a

complete memory came to me: of Veronica dancing." (Barnes 107) this brings the sense that Tony's memory is influenced by his present emotions which make his interpretations different regarding the occasion. In fact, this is the mystery of Tony that he interprets the events from an emotional perspective as he is locked into himself and not having a wise point of view. Tony's reliance upon emotional and tentative answers renders him as an untrustworthy narrator (Cairnduff).

3.8. Tony: the Liar

Telling lies is among the characteristics which reveal the untrustworthiness of a narrator "yet lie is never intentional by Tony, this was the result of a distorted memory." (Nikl 48) This same view is shared by Šrámková Eva who asserts that "Tony's unreliability seems to result from fallibility of memory, not from a biased personality or intentional lying." (16) When Veronica asked Tony in the first part of the novel whether he dances his reply was negative even though it was not the case "Do you dance? Here? In your room? By yourself?" He answered her "No, not really." "Though of course I did." (Barnes 21) This, in fact, is a wilful lie that does not have any justification. He also lied about Veronica's dancing yet it cannot be said whether this is due to an intentional lie or a distorted memory, for instance Veronica said to him in the first section of the book "I don't dance" (Barnes 21) Yet in the second section of the novel, Tony absolutely denies this view as he remembers her dancing in his room. Tony provides another lie when he sends Jack an email, yet this time Tony seems sincere about his lie as he admits it: "Let's not exaggerate: I use a certain false politeness- to get information out of him- And then , instantly, I betray him." (Barnes 100) Tony appears to have a justification for his lie in this example which makes the lie rather again intentional. In his email, he lies about his souvenirs regarding the weekend he spent with them despite the fact that it was not the case "I pretended to happier memories of Chislehurst then was the case." (Barnes 68) yet, this reveals Tony's honesty.

3.9. Coward Tony

Tony declares in the novel that "what we called realism turned to be a way of avoiding things rather than facing them." (Barnes 87) Holmes emphasises that Tony hides behind his cowardice and this increases his unreliability. The signals show that

they easily invite the reader to have a critical view on Tony's way of narrating his story. Tony is able to prevent unwanted feelings and when he is faced by his disappointments and self-deceptions, he uses language "to contain them rather than confront them nakedly." (46) This opinion is also shared by Liesl Schillinger who explains: "He [Tony] avoids deep connections rather than embracing it." This is "for fear of risking its lost." (02). In fear of being confronted with others, escaping is the suitable solution for Tony.

3.10. Tony: the Truth Seeker

It has been mentioned earlier that the letter was a motivator for Tony to wonder about several questions that suddenly have invaded him. He makes various assumptions that have been discussed previously. For instance, in his mind, Tony goes back to unearth memories about the weekend he spent with the Fords, he retrieves the memory of "the odd kindness of Veronica's mother and her eventual legacy. His reading of the incident had been inconclusive." (Brookner, para.05). Tony was unable to reach a satisfactory conclusion as to why would Adrian's diary coupled with the letter he once sent to the lovers be with Mrs. Ford instead of her daughter, Veronica. Tony's travelling back to his memories has been a hard task as his recollections of them were not that helpful as they did not work properly. Tony needs to renew his relationship with his past like being in touch with Veronica in order to find answers to his questions as it has been believed by Schillinger "Gradually, Tony assembles his wilfully forgotten past impressions and actions, joining together the links that connect him to those people" (para.05) in order to explain the unexplainable.

Whenever Tony thinks he finds the righteous answer, he is confronted with another facet of reality that does not match with his and which makes him in a state of unease. This is in fact a technique that is targeted by Barnes who "achieves suspense of his readers by implementing this literary device by giving them one information at a time and by first giving them accounts that they suspect." (Nikl 49) so the unreliable narrator may serve another goal that is suspense.

The sense of unease is the outcome of the new image that Tony has acquired about himself "the rediscovered fragments of memory shed new and unflattering light on the image he [Tony] held of himself" (Nikl 49) Additionally, Tony's "New formerly repressed memories that are inconsistent with his habitual narrative about his past contribute to the painful process of revision." (Holmes 36) all that he has found does not correspond with the narrative he provided about himself in the first part of the novel. Holmes mentions the idea of Kermode which can suit the Barnian's novel that human beings produce stories that are in agreement with them and which resist time in order to stand against both believability and doubt. There is a tension between people's need to be consoled by the narrative and their suspicion which they can falsify and which can lead to discomfort and a chaotic reality. That is why there is "a gap between the original apprehension of what the situation signifies and the final understanding that its significance was other" (28) the disparity between the accounts given by the narrator and the reached conclusions invite the reader to doubt.

During his attempt to find clues to what he could not understand, Tony gets lost as he makes "tentative explanation" (Barnes 89) to things, taking as an instance the bequest receiving "there was an inch of Sellotape on the front of the envelope" (Barnes 66) that he could not understand its usefulness. For him "it had been cut off along the envelope's top edge. Presumably, the letter has been attached to something else." (Barnes 61) these are initial and preliminary ideas that Tony could reach as an understanding, after having his lawyer consulted, he finds out that "the second was still in the possession of Mrs. Ford's daughter. That, I realised, would explain the cut of Sellotape." (Barnes 62) the reader is discovering the truth through following Tony that himself cannot see it clearly. By so doing, "Tony avows a certain kind of uncertainty." (Jagannathan 08) Veronica represents the last resort for Tony's perplexing puzzle. The fact that the diary was held by Veronica throws Tony into wonder:

> I wondered how Veronica had retained possession of my letter. Did Adrian leave her all his stuff in his will? I didn't even know if he'd made one. Perhaps, he'd kept it inside his diary, and she'd found it there. No, I wasn't thinking clearly, if that's where it had been, Mrs. Ford would have seen it- and then she certainly wouldn't have left me five hundred pounds." (Barnes 94)

Tony's aim was "to connect dots" (Turrentine Jeff, para.06), however this process is thwarted because of his interpretations and understandings of the past as well as the present regarding his self-understanding that are blurred. Whenever he thinks he tries to find something about the truth, he discovers that he has been deceived and that what makes his narrative lacks certainties. As he manages to get meaning to events and makes sure he grasps them "he does nothing but admits his failure and discover another facet of reality." (Chifane 189) Tony has been waiting and aspiring for Veronica's help and cooperation yet she does not seem to afford him of any and for Tony she is still ambiguous and mysterious as she kept telling him "you just don't get it, do you? But then you never did." (Barnes 94) Hence, Tony's accounts are undermined by Veronica's versions (Vecsernyés 31). Veronica appears to be trying to help him implicitly which gives Tony new assumptions as he goes: "Now I had some answers to the questions I hadn't asked. She had become pregnant by Adrian, and –who knows? Perhaps the trauma of his suicide had affected the child in her womb." (Barnes 132) he comes up with this conclusion after having seen that guy who looks like Adrian in the pub and who has some kind of disability. However, Veronica keeps reminding him "You just don't get it, do you? You never did and you never will." (Barnes 120) This shows that "Tony's questions are answered to his satisfaction, and change is over." (Kulvete 42) Tony's answers satisfy him only.

Tony's unreliability is shown to the reader due to his memory's lapses, which is only one reason of many. Thereby, the book is provided by a corroboration which can supply the version of the truth that is targeted. It is true that the story is Tony's but still there are the few versions of other characters which supply the truth, this puts Tony's narrative voice under doubt as it reveals that Tony himself is a puzzle who is looking for a dissection of a puzzle (Angus Miranda, para.06). By the end of the novel, Tony seems to have grasped the truth when he has been in the bar "Mary isn't his mother. Mary's his sister. Adrian's mother died about six months ago. He took it very badly. That's why he's been...having problems lately." (Barnes 140) Tony reached the explanation he has been looking for in efforts "I got it why Mrs Ford had Adrian's diary in the first place." (Barnes 141) This last scene causes a sense of murkiness to Tony as all that he assumed about himself as having been living a peaceable life was destroyed. Tony has to accept the last reconstructions as he finds the last version of truth which

seems to be the correct one though "it is a betrayal of all concerned." (Brookner, para.05) Tony's quest for the truth has been said to be that of success yet it left him "in a state of distress and hopelessness." (Vecsernyés 31) Tony's last conclusions were murky and disappointing as they do not meet with his expectations.

4. The Narrator and Self-Justification

The end of the novel that Barnes has chosen has not been expected by the readers as it carries a sense of suspense, "the individual parts of the story" that Tony has reported in Part One "are no longer concordant in relation to the end that he had imagined." (Holmes 35). This in fact forces Tony to accept the truth as it is; all that he did in the past means no more than malice towards his friends through which their lives have been destroyed (Holmes 48).

Julian Barnes sets out parameters in his novel which allow the reader to distrust and doubt his narrator. Tony Webster has used his memories to justify his reports of the past events and to show the reader his aspirations that he wants to be fulfilled in the present; such as his contemplation in the novel "you're wanting to live that final memory, and make a pleasant one. You want to be well thought of." (Barnes 101) Tony's final truth surprises him as it unveils a mystery about the self (Brown, *Tension* 38). Although Tony discovers something unpleasant about himself, he does not hesitate to revive his past and make endeavours to make amends by trying to find a self-justification and at the same time admitting his self-deception, this can be noticed in Tony's re-reading his letter "I had been its author then, but not its author now. Indeed I didn't recognise that part of myself from which the letter came. But perhaps this was simply further self-deception." (Barnes 91)

There is in fact another scene where Tony is revealed as having a feeling of remorse and contempt about himself; this comes after reading Adrian's diary as he reveals:

> If Tony had seen more clearly, acted more decisively, held to truer moral values, settled less easily for a passive peaceableness which he just called happiness and later contentment. If Tony hadn't been fearful, hadn't counted on the approval of others for his own self-approval [...] if Tony hadn't been Tony." (Barnes 83)

What can be observed also about Tony is his sincerity and frankness as shown "I thought I would overcome contempt and then remorse back into guilt, then be forgiven." (Barnes 124) he wants to do so by trying to fix back his relationship with Veronica; moreover, he wants to change the past in order to correct his mistakes but the past is unreachable "if his new memories can, in effect, make him go backwards, then perhaps he can, in some fashion, change the past he is living so as to undo his mistakes." (Holmes 37) his remorse is rather unhealed because things are unchangeable.

Tony is a hypocrite, coward and liar as Chalupský (*The Novel of Recollections* 94) reckons. Tony's sincerity does not reveal his honesty even though his aim was so. His sincerity serves instead for empathetic and compassionate purposes. Some critics see Tony "unreliable yet sincere narrator." (Jordan Justin, para.06). From the beginning of the novel, Tony lists his memories while at the same time he warns the reader about their fallibility, this is with the aim of self-defence as thought by Angus (para.02). It is patent that in a confessional narrative, the storyteller is meant to hide some aspects of his life, as the case shows about Tony. The reader knows only what Tony tells him, that is why he cannot be fully trusted. This has been the aim of Barnes in order to awaken the reader to be aware about the lines that should be scrutinized with a special care. The vagueness of the past is not among Tony's faults and that all human beings are unreliable of their own lives, they evade and perjure and make false witnesses, for him "that is how storytelling is born." (Robert Fulford, para.13) Subsequently, ambiguity helps in the development of the plot.

"Tony has sliced and diced his past in order to create a self he can live with."[14] (Knopfly Doubleday) what Tony discovers about himself is that he has a grudged self and that his forty years life is based on incomplete memories that are untrustworthy. Šrámková finds that "Tony's constant questioning of truthfulness of his own memory makes the reader aware of his unreliability. Paradoxically, at the same time, it gives Tony an aura of frankness and honesty." (16) The problem with Tony is that "It is hard for him to confess himself bad feelings or to recall unpleasant or shameful memories." (16) There is an obstacle that narrators face when conveying events about themselves, they cannot report their stories in a direct and straightforward way because the story

[14] http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/8626-sense-of-an-ending-barnes

shows a personal disappointment. And that is why the end of their tales is often inconclusive and it carries a sense of unrest (Bojana Aćamović 247).

Tony represses uncomfortable thoughts and memories with a psychological impetus; he denies them because they bring him shame or bad feelings (Šrámková 17-8). Tony is not "exactly an evil person- after all." (Jagannathan 09) Tony's unreliability does not exist due to a problem of remembering, he rather focuses on some aspects of the same events which seem for him relevant at that time. It is due to spatial and temporal distance which caused and led to changing perspective and to a different interpretation of the truth (Chifane 189). It is not a problem of being thick-headed that kept him far from seeing clearly as he kept saying in the novel "something else" these words have been recurring through the pages 17- 33- 37- 61- 100- 105- 113 and 142 which remained vague to the reader. This in fact may shape and identify his own culpability if considering the version of the breakup and his lie to his wife about Veronica (Turrentine, para. 05).

4.1. Tony: Average at Truth

The idea of being an average person has been repeatedly stated by character Tony throughout the novel:

> Average, that's what I'd been, ever since I left school. Average at university and work; average in friendship, loyalty, love; average, no doubt, at sex. There was a survey of British motorists a few years ago which showed that ninety-five per cent of those polled thought they were 'better than average' drivers. But by the law of averages, we're most of us bound to be average. Not that this brought any comfort. The word resounded. Average at life; average at truth; morally average." (Barnes 94)

This makes critics notice that Tony "is not a pathologically unreliable narrator. He is a reliably unreliable narrator, a representative of the national average." (Geoff Dyer, para.08) This indicates that Tony's truth is neither complete nor incomplete; it is amidst, average as he called it since Tony, by the end of his narrative, is unable to make sense of his ending. He is deemed to be an unreliable narrator yet not a cracked or creepy or obtuse; he is unreliable because all humans are (Dersiewicz, para.20-21).

4.2. Reader's Response

It seems like Barnes wants his readers "to critically assess all narrative and take nothing for granted." (Groes and Childs 05-6) The reader of *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* experiences with the narrator and shares with him the final surprising results that in itself surprise the narrator about his personal past. The reader is hence involved in this process (Brown, *Tension* 38). Another view, however, considers the reader's contribution not to be invited to correct the narrator in terms of unreliability as all that Tony says is believable be it about himself or others. Being confused and misguided by his own judgements does not make other understandings superior to his, Holmes sees that Tony is "less addled as a narrator." (43) That means, in a way or another, that everyone is unreliable as people are blind and make prejudices differently and no one has a "God-like perspective" (Holmes 42)

Holmes adds that the fact that Tony admits his involvement in what happened and despite his quandaries and state of doubt which are displayed to the reader; he is sincere (47). Similarly, Kulvete concluded that it cannot be fully asserted whether Tony is considered a likely person or bad even though he pictures himself as an unpleasant person, still "there's nothing sinister about him to make him a villain." (47) This invites the reader not to blame him for his unreliability.

It can be generalised that Tony makes attempts to understand events that belong to his past, yet the personal account he draws to himself about them has been different from what the truth tells. That is discovered later by him with few help of other characters' views (Cairnduff). By and large, Lynne Peredina concludes that "Barnes' novel reveals how reliable our own unreliability is in shaping how we think we've lived." (para.13) that is to say in a way or another everyone is reliably unreliable and this helps people to newly discover their identities.

5. Conclusion

As a final saying we may understand that Barnes's use of the unreliable narrator literary device serves a great deal in the understanding of the shaping of the individual's perception about themselves. Barnes' sparse use of contradictory perspectives proves

his postmodernist affiliation; that is to say he is a postmodernist writer par excellence. The unreliable narrator brings to mind the idea of incompleteness and the no totalisation of truth versions. It can be also considered as a way for people to show them that they may understand themselves wrongly and that only through having a communication with others in sympathetic and empathetic ways; they may get into touch with their real selves and understand their life and the worth of it. People do not need only to connect dots like Tony but instead to connect themselves with the others.

Chapter Four

Briony and Tony under the Lenses of Comparison

Chapter Four: Briony and Tony under the Lenses of Comparison

1. Introduction

The literary device of the unreliable narrator has been implemented in literary works by a variety of writers who opted for it and through which they embellished their literary masterpieces. In the template standing as an example as shown in the preceding chapters, it has been found that both of McEwan and Barnes are interested in exposing their narratives through the use of a voice whose reports are liable to doubt and suspicion. Thereby, the point of this chapter will be focused in demonstrating the aim of both postmodernist writers under scrutiny in using the unreliable narrator to tell their narratives; in other words, the rationale of this comparative chapter is to show whether these authors share the same purpose, type and function of the unreliable narrator in their works. It should be noted hence that the discussion of both texts is not going to be done in a separate way; that is to say to have each text discussed separately from the other; it will instead be covered in a point-by-point process, that is to say to tackle McEwan's and Barnes' points jointly and comparatively at the same time.

2. Common Comparative Points

Atonement (2001) and *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* are considered to be "an exploration of the possibilities and limits of the single narration voice." (D'Hoker Elke 147) That is why, in this chapter, the researcher favoured to begin with the common points that have been caught between the authors then followed by the different ones. Certain points have been detected between the writers that have been adopted in the present study.

2.1. Postmodernist and Contemporary Writers

As their biographies imply, Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes are both of a British decent. They almost belong to one generation as they are both contemporary authors sharing the same background that is postmodernism. Although being categorized as fully postmodernists, they have been hardly found to fit a total categorization. As shown in earlier chapters, having opted for a complex narrative in his novel *Atonement (2001)* made McEwan's work hard to be categorized as entirely postmodern as its parts are fused into realism, modernism and postmodernism. Julian Barnes is nearly the same as McEwan as his interest is focused in the inner voices' consciousness and this increases

the difficulty of assigning him as a postmodernist writer since this technique is closely associated to modernism. What makes the novels seem to be postmodernist realizations are the aspects they carry. McEwan's *Atonement (2001)* warns against certitude as it invites the reader better to be uncertain about things rather than being exposed to changes over certainty. (Patrick Henry 84) Moreover, McEwan focuses on issues like: history and the nature of truth which are discussed subjects in the postmodernist thought. (Han Jie and Wang Zhenli 135)

Not only McEwan questions such issues, but Barnes also viewed that "any attempt at representing time, reality or order in the mind or in the universe, history or one's own story, is eventually depicted […] as unavoidably incomplete and unsatisfactory." (Vecsernyés Dóra 40) thereby Barnes' works query the notion of history and the way it is produced. According to him no history is complete and conclusive as well as the past which cannot be a totalized version as they are rather fragmented and probable. Barnes holds the view that "what we think of as historical evidence is a very, very tiny fragment of all the total evidence that was there during the lifetime of most of humanity." (Guignery Vanessa and Ryan Roberts 35) historical verification about people's lives almost disappeared and it sparsely exists. This goes in tandem with McEwan's questioning of the absoluteness of knowledge. His novel *Atonement (2001)* offers its reader a variety of truths; for instance the scene of the fountain is told from different perspectives who often contradict each other in terms of veracity. As the protagonist Briony believes in one single truth related to that incident, other characters' versions about the same scene were rather different and they did not match with her own. It seems like McEwan wants his readers to be aware that everyone can make his or her own interpretation about what really the truth is. (Constantakis 08-9)

In a similar way and even though sparsely, Barnes provided few characters' reports which contradict the version being given by his protagonist Tony. These standpoints are not meant to support each one's view about the truth; they are however intended to show characters' opposition with each other. This in fact makes the truth multi-faceted for Barnes as well. Barnes, approximately, shares with McEwan the same aim of describing one same experience from various perspectives.(Kellaway Kate) Both authors paid attention to the awareness to the limits of knowledge and to be cautious

about what one thinks he knows. Barnes' fiction is characterized by its self-reflexivity as well as his clear suspicion towards truth as Groes Sebastian and Childs Peter thought (03)

Another aspect that characterized postmodernist works is the form of the ending. Nakajima Ayaka referred to the confusing ending that is present in postmodernist novels, she posits "In postmodern fictions, as David Lodge observes, readers face the 'multiple ending, the false ending, the mock ending or the parody ending' unlike the closed ending of traditional novels." (69) Thereby, McEwan's *Atonement (2001)* is a postmodernist realization par excellence since the readers witness an unclear ending which is intended to leave them wondering and judging on whether the character Briony has succeeded in her redemption or not. (ibid 69) Finny viewed the last part as being dark with an open-end and doubtful. (81) This part is left open and unhappy and the reader is confused and apt to suspect it. In an attempt to find out the reason behind McEwan's novels carrying at their ends a dark side, Shah Bruno. M pointed out:

> McEwan's novels are ultimately lacking in metaphysical premise. Such hopelessness is revealed most saliently and disturbingly unredeemed characters and unsatisfying endings. But the reason why McEwan's conclusions all evoke existential exasperation is that they have no transcendent reverence for the mystery of human origins. In order that the human person might contentedly anticipate (the prospect of) his own life-story's conclusions as such, one must have knowledge of the beginning…as such, and this need for knowledge of human origins applies to reading McEwan's novels as well. (47)

Unsatisfactory and disappointing sense of an ending characterizes McEwan's *Atonement (2001).* As its central character Briony did not succeed to reach her quest as intended and the title of the novel is a case in point. This idea has been found also in Barnes' novel *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* which end is inconclusive and is left for different interpretations. The novel did not provide the reader with the information that the protagonist found what he looked for and this point has been asserted by Barnes "If it was a book about things he found out rather than things he couldn't, it might have been 250 pages." (Jeffery Brown, para. 12) Some critics agreed that the quest of the novel has been reached yet some others did not consider this view and assume it to be unreachable. Regarding this point, Mary Beth Simmons argued "this story is about solving a mystery and coming to terms with life's disappointments and unanswerable

questions." (47) This supports the view that the quest has not been fulfilled as the protagonist did not fully approach the answers he was looking for; therefore "the many truths he highlights makes it worthy of a careful reading" (Stephan Lee, para. 01) and since the reader is involved in this process, this renders both novels as purely postmodernist.

2.2. The Writing Style

In the same way *Atonement (2001)* is told in a confessional style, Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* used a voice who confesses everything to the reader. In his *Atonement (2001)*, McEwan used "the technique of unrelenting first-person narrative coupled with a confessional one" this "forces the reader into a new critical awareness of his or her customary modes and expectations." (Vipond 08) McEwan used this technique, in fact, to awaken his reader as to immerse him in the re-evaluation and critic of what have been said in the narrative by relying upon his own conventional norms. Barnes' narrator is a sixty years aged man who speaks to his audience in a confessional tone when relating his story as well. Barnes does so with the aim to increase the readers' sense of comfort to accomplice with him. As the story is left open in its end and full of details which give the reader the impression of credibility and believability, all that is said by the narrator is accepted then by the reader because the narrator himself believes his own reports about his tale. (Ball Magdalena, para. 05)

2.3. Growing-up

With respect to the theme of growing-up, both of Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes have referred to it in their narratives. In *Atonement (2001),* the protagonist herself admitted that the act of her changing testimony was due to her 'growing-up'. For instance, in her imaginative meeting with her sister Cecilia and Robbie in an attempt to redeem her sin by changing her testimony, Robbie asked Briony about the motivators that may lead her to change her statements after that long period of time. Briony rendered that fact to be the result of her "Growing up." (McEwan 323) It is shown in the novel that the events given to the reader happened in the past to young Briony and are evaluated in the present by mature one. Nora Foster Stovel considered the novel from a psychological perspective of its growing up character; accordingly she argues:

Chapter Four: Briony and Tony under the Lenses of Comparison

> Atonement is a bildungsroman[15] that explores the psyche of a young girl at the dawn of her self-hood, an impressionable mind at the luminal stage of initiation into the adult world. One word drives her over the bridge from childhood innocence to adult passion. (Paragraph 07)

As stated above Foster Stovel elucidates the growing-up of Briony inside the novel. It has been discussed in earlier chapters, Briony at the age of thirteen aimed to be recognized through providing her testimony; she wanted to show all the members of her family that she is no longer young as she grows older and her reports should be considered. This renders Briony's narrative as being based on unreliable accounts. Growing older and mature allow the person to change his perception of reality and interpretations of past events. As a result, he sees things from a different angle than when they appeared in the first time. (Chalupský 73) for instance, young Briony could not understand the incident of the library that happened between her sister and Robbie, she viewed it as an assault and that is why she accused him to be the rapist of her cousin Lola. Yet, when she grew older, she could understand that the library incident was merely a love affair between the lovers.

Barnes exactly like McEwan used a narrative voice that is at his later years. Usually, the process of re-evaluation comes at this age. The nature of Barnes' novel as assumed by him "it's also a book about discovering at a certain point in your life that some key things you've always were wrong." (Corinna Lothar, para. 13) as one grows older, he starts to ponder about his inner self, by means of that point, Barnes' novel is also considered to be about "grow-ups" (Lothar, para. 13) this has been also referred in Barnes' novel as "a character developed over time" as Tony was thinking about the past events, his memories are re-ordered and put into new contexts. His views changed and are told from new perspectives. This re-evaluation is resulted in light of new acquired knowledge and experiences. Subsequently, people select what they please and get rid and forget what they are not content about. (Chalupský, *The Attempt Was All* 66) that is why they are unreliable.

[15] The term applies more broadly to fiction detailing personal development or educational maturity. (Childs Peter 18)

Barnes commented on this process of evaluating the self as one ages, he accordingly explains:

> You have your own memories of life, you've got the story that you tell mainly to yourself about what your life has been. And every so often those certainties are not. Something happens, someone reports something from 20 or 30 years ago, and you realize that what you'd believed is not the case. (Jeffery Brown, para. 10)

2.4. Retrospective Novels

The authors are similar in that they presented their narratives retrospectively. Both of them relied on the theme of memory in their novels. The narrators Briony and Tony recollect their past through their memories and both of them tell their stories at a late stage and this makes the past beyond their reach due to their memories' lapses and this is the reason for their untrustworthiness yet not the only one.

2.5. Self-interested Narrators

Considering Briony, she is motivated by her atonement and amends for the past deeds and the fact of being faced and confronted with her guilt makes her more selective. (Chalupský, *The Attempt Was All* 74) Similarly, Tony seems to have edited some reports which belong to his concern. The truth that he provided has been distorted with the aim to present himself in a pleasing way both to satisfy himself and to gain trust from the readers; mainly when it comes to shameful events. (Vecsernyés Dóra 32) Briony likewise Tony is self-interested, she is conscious about her fictionalized truth because when reporting it, her intentions were no more than seeking expiation and redemption for her past crime as she is aware that all that she reported were nothing other than constructions. This is with the aim to satisfy her own-being emotionally for she wanted to atone for her dire sin. Stenport believed that Briony is not honest because she did not question her knowledge by which to restore herself. Her narrative serves her emotionally as it represents her appeal for self-forgiveness. Tony's story also provides the reader with clues which reveal him in a state of self-justification rather than having a deep feeling of remorse over the crime he committed against his friends. His changing opinions and judgments about certain characters are a case in point. Šrámková concluded that "Tony sometimes turns to the reader in search of compassion or in an attempt to be empathetic." (17) To cite an example from the novel, it can be referred to

Tony's endeavours in reviving his love to Veronica at a late age. Briony and Tony seem to a certain point to resemble each other in that they carry and share "a defensive tone" (D'Hoker Elke 152) for instance the attempt of Briony is selfish. She is scared from challenging the conventions; as an instance she could not confront her sister Cecilia and her beloved Robbie. Her career as a writer is only what matters for her as well as the presumably wrongdoers represented in the Marshalls. This proves that there is no difference between her younger self and old one because she still believe in what she thinks she saw as she did not question her memories. She acts according to her unconscious assumptions as when she accused Paul Marshall as the rapist of her cousin Lola. Tony did the same thing in showing his self-interest when he did not provide the reader with the version from which Veronica can comment on their breakup. The reader is given Tony's account only. Šrámková noticed that "For the reader, the clues for Tony's unreliability are his unwillingness to recall unpleasant memories or his searching for the reader's compassion while recalling controversial matter." (22-3)

2.6. Class Difference

The issue of class difference is present in both novels. This, in fact, contributes to a certain extent in the increasing of the unreliability of the narrators, Briony and Tony alike. In *Atonement (2001),* for instance, there was a sort of misunderstanding between characters that they link to class differences. (Hidalgo) For example, when Robbie and Cecilia were on their way to the pond, they were discussing an issue which ended up in a loss of communication. Robbie informed Cecilia about his desire to pursue his studies to be a doctor, yet Cecilia had rather a different point regarding that matter which was misunderstood by Robbie as he immediately responded "Look, I have agreed to pay your father back. That's the arrangement." (McEwan 25) he thought that Cecilia's words meant something different that is being disturbed that her father would keep supporting Robbie financially during the whole stage of his studies, but Celilia's reply was totally different as she answered him "That's not what I meant at all." (McEwan 25) This point has been also detected in Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* where Tony felt a kind of inferiority when he spent the weekend at the Ford family's house.

2.7. The Prevalence of Judging through Emotions

The theme of emotions is abundantly found in both novels such as the feeling of jealousy. This is one of the main reasons that led both narrators to commit their crimes and consequently to report their narrative unreliably. Briony's testimony against Robbie was triggered by her infatuation for him. The scene of the fountain reminded Briony of her pretended drowning when she was young. After Robbie had rescued her, she confessed her love to him yet he disregarded her. It was because of that scene that Briony felt a sort of jealousy and relying upon her state of emotion she falsely accused Robbie to be the rapist and then putting him in jail. Tony also makes interpretations from his own emotions. As an instance, when he first introduced Veronica to his gang, he asserted "At first I was interested to see how my friends reacted to Veronica, but soon become more interested in what she thought of them. She laughed at Colin's jokes more easily than at mine, which annoyed me." (Barnes 31) There is another event wherein Tony got his understanding from the backlog of his emotions when he pretended something about Veronica "She seemed happy to keep Adrian for last." (Barnes 31) this is a judgment that entirely resulted from Tony's emotions and probably from a feeling of jealousy.

2.8. Liar Narrators

In a way or another, both of Briony and Tony have been found to be liars as narrators. When she was young, Briony told the police a lie by declaring that she saw Robbie's shadow and hence she accused him to be the culprit of her cousin; whereas she was confused and uncertain about the figure. One supporting statement for this view is when her sister Cecilia heard about her will of changing her witness at the court "If you were lying then why should a court believe you now?" There are no new facts, and you're an unreliable witness." (McEwan 317) Tony equally to Briony admitted in his story that he is a liar. For instance; when he wrote an email to Veronica, he himself declared that the email's only purpose was self-serving; he put "I was determined to be polite, unoffendable, persistent, boring, friendly- in other words, to lie." (Barnes 77) because he believed the diary of Adrian might be holding a key, so as he keeps a good cheer with Veronica, the diary is going to be easily handed to him by her.

2.9. Briony and Tony: Language Imprecision

Both of Briony's and Tony's language is imprecise as they use tentative statements which reveal their state of uncertainty. In *Atonement (2001),* Briony tried to know the figure who raped her cousin Lola. She thought it was Robbie as she asked Lola "It was him, wasn't it?" (McEwan 155) In this statement the use of tag question shows that the narrator was not sure about what she thinks she saw as she added: "It was Robbie, wasn't it?" (McEwan 156) Similarly Tony, from the very first pages he reveals his doubts about his remembrance by using imprecision, such as "I couldn't at this distance testify" (Barnes 27), "I can't from here determine" (Barnes 28), and words which displays his sense of uncertainty such as: "I couldn't tell" (Barnes 85), "I don't know" (Barnes 103), "I'm not sure" (Barnes 103), "I hesitated" (104) until he cleared up his narratorial unreliability "I exaggerate, I misrepresent." (Barnes 58) Tony uses excessively tag questions in addition to the use of adjectives which are all characterised by tentativeness and uncertainty and this proves that he is an unsure narrator.

3. Stark Contrast

The two case materials are totally different from each other and they have certain features which set them apart; mainly on the narrational level.

3.1. Narrational Style

After having both novels analyzed, it becomes shown that there are certain features which characterized each text and made it appear different from the other. When it comes to Ian McEwan's text, it has been noticed that the structure of his novel is totally different from Barnes' tale in that the former did not rely on a fixed narrator to tell his story as it is obvious in his parts. Each part is told from a different perspective that are of Briony, Robbie and Cecilia and this shows that McEwan's narrational style was characterized by multiperspectivity. Even though the reader is aware that Briony is the storyteller and a first-person narrator, the parts that McEwan provided that are told from other characters' points of view renders the novel to be told by multiperspective voices either to support his narrators' claims and views or to contradict with her. However, Julian Barnes did not quite do the same thing McEwan did when providing other

characters' views on one single event. Barnes' narrator is said to be a fixed first-person narrator who can be said to be doing a journey back in his personal past with the aim to discover who he really is. That is mainly the reason behind Barnes' not providing other character's vantage point as to keep the narrator on his own discovering his real self. Briony and Tony alike are other-deceivers; that is to say they deceive in a way or another the reader when unveiling the truth, but Tony went further as he is a self-deceitful person; he deceived himself as his narrative reveals it.

3.2. Intentionally and Unintentionally Unreliable

It has been mentioned earlier that Olson Greta's classification of the types of unreliable narrator is the one provided in this work as it matches with the templates standing as an example. She distinguished between two types of unreliable narrator that are 'untrustworthy' and 'fallible' narrators. Her distinction shows that the former is unreliable because he is personally involved and he is self-interested. The fallible narrator is the one who cannot tell exact and accurate truth due to circumstances that are beyond his ken. This in fact applies to the novels that are under scrutiny. McEwan's novel is about an old woman who relates her personal story. She retrieves events from an incomplete memory similarly to Tony's Barnes. Briony's and Tony's healthy state is incomplete. Character Briony at the age of thirteen was deemed unreliable. Her age symbolizes a limited knowledge about matters as she is immature and naive. She could not grasp totally what was happening in front of her eyes. That is why some critics considered her unreliability to stem from unintentional behaviours; whereas some others viewed that her false reports were deliberately told because of her feeling of jealousy as shown in the preceding parts of this work. The conclusions that Briony made at that stage of life were not absolute as they were drawn from her own imaginative world.

According to the previously stated theories, one may say that at this stage of life one cannot be blamed for his limited knowledge about life and cannot be deemed deliberately untrustworthy narrator; he is instead put under the categorisation of fallibility. Whereas, the last part of McEwan's novel shows that it has been told by aged Briony retrospectively. At this stage Briony is definitely a mature woman with a sufficient understanding of the world. At this age, perceptions about things that are used to be believed in the past should be changed and viewed differently. Yet old Briony at

seventy-seven years old did not change her opinions about past events as she seems to still believe in what happened in addition to her alteration of some events which are shown to the reader and this proves her self-interest and her care for her self-image only as not to be contaminated to the reader mainly that now she is a writer. Consequently, this renders Briony to be classified under Olson's categorisation of unreliable narrators that is untrustworthy narrator.

Contrarily, Tony in his story, from its very beginning warned the readers from his unreliability and this can be represented in his memory's lapses which he himself cannot trust, not to mention the reader. Yet some critics viewed Tony as being untrustworthy because he did not provide other versions of some events that happened to him. Tony unlike Briony did not hide that fact with the aim to delude the reader; he rather does so for the sake of his self-image protection as not to be destroyed by the reader; his aim was to be empathetic. (Šrámková 17) His sincerity soon covers this status as he himself regrets his own-being; the newly discovered truth about himself. Tony as well as the readers witnessed truths about the protagonist himself that were hidden from him and that were newly exposed to him and that surprised him and throw him into a state of shame and remorse. That is why this makes Tony categorised under the second type made by Olson that is fallible narrator who is not wittingly unreliable and whose unreliability can be forgiven by the reader. This in fact makes Briony and Tony distinct from each other.

4. Conclusion

By concluding we deduce that the literary technique of the unreliable narrator that has been used by both of Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes in their narratives that have been chosen in the present study do have a function to fulfill. Contrarily to its name suggestion, the unreliable narrator is not used to refer to truth hiding; it however ironically reveals the truth. In Ian McEwan's *Atonement (2001)* it was not that easy for the reader to discover the real accounts as its narrator was complex and this shows that the narrator was deliberately untrustworthy. It appeared at first to be told in an omniscient tone since it was told in a third person voice. Yet the last part of the novel awakened the reader's attention and invited him for a more careful reading which deepened his involvement and consequently enabled him to detect the truth through the

clues provided in the novel and through his critical thinking as well. When it comes to Julian Barnes' unreliable narrators, one may say that from the very beginning the reader has suspects about the narrator's veracity. Even though he showed some self-justifications which served self-preservation, the narrator was found to be unwittingly fallible narrator who was surprised about his real self at a late age which throws him into a sense of unease. In brief, it can be concluded that the goal targeted by both writers in making use of such a literary device was the same that is to show reality, but the type of narrator was different even though the similarities detected were variable and that is the essence of the postmodernist novel; to increase in the reader a sense of suspense before revealing the truth to him.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This research work sought to elucidate the way postmodernist writers dealt with the unreliable narrator literary device in their literary texts. To put it more lucidly, the present study examines the goal targeted by those writers in making use of such a literary technique. In order to achieve such an aim, two postmodernist British novels have been mustered. *Atonement (2001)* written by Ian McEwan and *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* by Julian Barnes stand as a case material for this research.

As its name implies, the unreliable narrator is a persona within a story who is often characterised to be a half-truth teller. Certain aspects are featured to this kind of narrator amongst immaturity and having insufficient knowledge which does not fit with current events and truth, being too imaginative and dreaming, having memory fractures, being a liar or biased, which are only few of many.

Besides, this literary device dates back before the prevalence of the postmodernist thought and it has been formerly implemented in literary works. Postmodernism is known by its denial of absolutism and its welcoming of what is known as multiplicity. Perspective truth is the only fact which results in different standpoints that are all accepted but not as a final reality. In like fashion, the unreliable narrator's accounts are versatile and the reader cannot tell which report is the truthful one. The fact that twenty-first century novels witnessed an excessive use of this literary technique is what boosted this inquiry. Scholars and critics, on one hand have profusely discussed in a way or another the literary movement of postmodernism associated with its various aspects; on the other hand they have tackled the unreliable narrator literary device, yet each one distinctively from the other. Trying to link between the two is a pile upon which this work stands.

This research is split into four chapters. The first chapter was meant to reveal some preliminary notions to the postmodernist theory as well as the narrational concepts; thereby it is entirely theoretical. Moreover, brief overviews on some approaches that help in detecting that the narrator is unreliable with an emphasis on Olson's approach are provided. This paved the way for the researcher to easily categorise both narrators under scrutiny.

The second and third chapters are wholly confined to cover the analytical part of this work. The former is devoted to Ian McEwan's *Atonement (2001)* which has been viewed from a postmodernist angle and in which the researcher spotted the clues which show the narrator's unreliability with reference to the mechanism and the work of memory as being of a pivotal importance in the contribution to the narrator's untrustworthiness. The later is confined to Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending (2011)* which has been also read from a postmodernist perspective. Clues to the narrator's unreliability have been detected as well as his reminiscence process which to a large extent contributes to his disordered reports.

The last chapter is subsequently destined for the comparative analysis and discussion of both novels where their similarities and differences were checked in addition to the aim of both authors in using this literary device. The results hence show that the writers' postmodernist affiliation is responsible for their use of the literary device of the unreliable narrator as their interest is devoted to the technique of telling rather than showing. This makes the narrator far from reaching a conclusive end. Since both narratives are concerned with the autobiography of the narrators, they both share the feeling of remorse and shame and this increases their self-disappointments. Their truth is not rendered accurately but it is not hidden. Even though the label unreliable narrator refers to someone whose truth is apt to suspicion, this device has been used by both authors to reveal the truth and not to hide it. Some critics view that the narrator should not be always right because this will increase his artificiality as a character. (Candice de Conha 83) Being omnipotent may bring boredom to the reader, yet using a manipulative narrator would allow him to be more authentic as it will increase the sense of suspense in the reader and this in itself propels the reader's involvement in the text and increases his critical thinking as well.

McEwan's novel carries a variety of truths that are only possible and swing between various truths that maybe controllable, emotional or legal (Ingregard Stenport 06). The search for truth results in a mere perception which is only one of many. Ian McEwan's narrator is found to be untrustworthy. Briony as a child could not be entirely blamed and considered to have deliberately been unreliable. Her limited knowledge about life and issues related to adults led to her misinterpretations. Yet her older self is blamed.

Ian McEwan has provided other characters' contradictory accounts to Briony's which makes the reader aware about her malevolence. Furthermore, the reader notices her denial of the truth that she could not admit as she did not question her memories as well as her past reports and views. She did not alter them for the sake of her self-esteem; that is to say her career as being a famous writer. In this case, McEwan's target was to warn the reader and awaken him as not to trust blindly the narrator because at the end, a narrator is no more than a fictional character. Julian Barnes' narrator differs from McEwan's storyteller in terms of his nature as being unreliable. The idea that is given by character Adrian in the novel applies to Tony's must-be revised accounts "we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version being put in front of us" (Barnes 12-3) this proves Tony's bias and involvement. Tony's sincerity remains blurred. In fact it cannot be assumed whether he does not with the intention to gain empathy from the readers or to avoid much blame as well as bad feelings and consequently to be forgiven. From the very beginning of his narrative, Tony Webster warned the readers of his memory's defects. His unreliability serves him in that it displays his new self-discovery and understanding. He acquires a new image about himself. His purpose was not to dupe the reader because he himself was self-deceived. This makes Tony a fallible narrator as he can be said to be a reliably unreliable narrator which is different from McEwan's Briony.

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Appendices

<u>Appendix 01:</u> Ian McEwan's Biography and Summary of his novel *Atonement (2001)*

Ian McEwan's Biography

Ian McEwan is an award-wining British author, noted for his clear writing style and the dark psychological nature of his stories. He was born on June 21, 1948, in Aldershot, Hampshire, England, but grew up in the Far East, Germany, and North Africa, where his father, an officer in the British army, was posted. McEwan received a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Sussex and a master's degree in creative writing from the University of East Anglia (both in the United Kingdom).

In his late twenties McEwan published his first collection of short stories, First Love, Last Rites (1975), which won the 1976 Somerset Maugham Award. Three years later, he published his second collection, In Between the Sheets (1978). These stories received a lot of attention for their emphasis on deviant sexuality and dysfunctional family life. In that same year, McEwan produced his first novel, The Cement Garden, about four orphaned children and their struggles to survive. In 1981, The Comfort of Strangers, a story set in Venice, was published. This novel was shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize, which is awarded each year for the best novel written by a citizen of the British Commonwealth or Ireland.

In the following years, McEwan wrote The Child in Time (1987), The Innocent (1990), Black Dogs (1992) and Enduring Love (1997). These works were followed in 1998 by what most critics believe is McEwan's masterpiece, the Booker Prize–winning Amsterdam, a novel about three men—a composer, a newspaper editor, and a politician—who loved the same woman. The men meet one another at the woman's funeral and make a pact with one another, which sets off a great feud among them. Atonement, published in 2001 was McEwan's next work. He has since published Saturday (2005) and On Chesil Beach (2007), which was also

shortlisted for the Booker Prize. McEwan has also written plays, screenplays, and children's books. McEwan lives in London. (Constantakis Sara 1)

Atonement (2001) Summary

Part One

Part One of McEwan's novel Atonement takes place on only one day in the middle of a hot summer. It is divided into fourteen short chapters. The setting is an English manor house in Surrey in the southeastern part of the England in 1935. The country estate belongs to the Tallis family. Jack Tallis, the father, a government official, who is almost absent from his home. Emily Tallis, the mother, suffers a migraine headache. Their children are left on their own. Briony, the thirteen-year-old, is full of imagination. She has created a play, The Trials of Arabella, which she wants to perform with her cousins, the Quincey children who have come to live with the Tallises because of their parents' divorce. Leon is the brother. He is coming with his friend Paul Marshall from London for a visit, and Briony's play is written in order to welcome him home.

Cecilia Tallis is the sister who has just arrived from Cambridge University. She has confused feelings with Robbie Turner, the son of the Tallises' housekeeper. Robbie also returned from Cambridge. He has always been a close friend to the Tallises as he grew up with them. A sexual tension has grown between him and Cecilia.

Briony sees the encounter between Cecilia and Robbie. She sees her sister talking to Robbie and she is unable hear their conversation. In an inexperienced way, she interprets their body language. She thinks Robbie is proposing marriage to her sister. Then she thinks as if he is commanding Cecilia to do something. After witnessing this scene, Briony decides not to be into romantic fantasy anymore. She decides to watch real people and to cancel the play.

Robbie and Cecilia do not understand why they have both been acting that way. Later, Robbie discovers that he is in love with Cecilia. He wants to show his feelings to Cecilia, so he writes her a letter. He uses words expressing sexual desire. This note was fun to write for his own sake, but he would never use that kind of language with Cecilia. After he dressed to attend the dinner in Leon's honor, Robbie slips the note into an envelope and puts it in his pocket. On his way to the Tallises' house, he meets Briony and he gives her the note and asks her to deliver it to Cecilia. After Briony's departure, Robbie realizes his mistaken note that he has given Briony but it is too late. Briony reads the note. She is astonished and she believes Robbie is a monster who is about to attack her sister and that she has to protect her. In a

moment of confidence, Briony decides to share that secret with her cousin; the note from Robbie.

Briony hears sounds in the library and opens the door. She sees Cecilia and Robbie who seemed to be in a strange state. For Briony Robbie has attacked her sister.

As dinner is completed, Pierrot and Jackson they run away. Cecilia has gone with her brother to search, and Robbie is searching alone as well as Briony. Briony happens upon Lola, who has been raped. Briony saw a dark figure before encountering Lola, but she is insure about his identity. But she is convinced that it is Robbie due to her conclusion on Robbie's letter to Cecilia. Lola did not see the attacker's face. Briony takes Robbie's note and reveals it to her mother who becomes sure that Robbie is the rapist. The police are demanded. Afterward, Robbie comes back with the two lost boys. And he is taken by the police.

Part Two

This part is about the released Robbie from prison early on the condition that he volunteer for the British army. World War II has started. He did not see Cecilia while incarcerated, they just write to one another. Cecilia is working as a nurse. Robbie and Cecilia meet briefly before he is sent to France. Robbie and two fellow soldiers have survived a bomb attack. Robbie reads letters that Cecilia sent him. In her letter, Cecilia tells him that Briony wants to recant her testimony and that she made a mistake. At the end of this, Robbie becomes delirious.

Part Three

Four years after that night when Robbie was arrested. Now the story turns to Briony, who has become a student nurse. The hospital where she works is receiving the wounded soldiers.. Briony attends to young boys whose parts of heads are blown off. She thinks that one of these soldiers could have been Robbie. This makes the guilt of what she has done grow greater.

Briony receives a response from a publisher to whom she has sent a novel which has been rejected. The publisher notes several flaws and offers suggestions for Briony to modify the story. Briony's novel is based on what happened in Part One.

Briony learns that Lola and Paul Marshall are to be married; she went church to the ceremony. To make them know that she knows their secret and will never forget it. Briony believes Paul to be Lola's rapist. This brings Briony's guilt to the forefront as well. Briony visits Cecilia

and is surprised to find Robbie there. He asks her to write a letter to her family informing them about his innocence and to go to court to try to clear his name.

London, 1999

The last section of the novel is headed, London, 1999. The ‘‘BT’’ in the signature which stands for Briony Tallis. What readers learn in this section is that what they have read the novel that Briony sent to her publisher. This last section is the only set outside the boundaries of Briony’s novel. Briony has vascular dementia which will affect her memory. She is seventy- seven and is on her way to the Tallis estate for a family birthday celebration in her honor. Before she leaves London, Briony decided to publish her novel posthumously. Her great-grandchildren put on the play. Briony’s story is clouded. She could have had both Robbie and Cecilia die. Or she could have ended it happily. It cannot be known which parts of the novel are based on truth and which are not. (Constantakis Sara 1-6)

<u>Appendix 02:</u> Biography of Julian Barnes and Summary of his Novel *The Sense of an Ending (2011)*

Biography of Julian Barnes

Julian Barnes was born in Leicester, England on January 19, 1946. He was educated at the City of London School from 1957 to 1964 and at Magdalen College, Oxford, from which he graduated in modern languages (with honours) in 1968. After graduation, he worked as a lexicographer for the Oxford English Dictionary supplement for three years. In 1977, Barnes began working as a reviewer and literary editor for the *New Statesman* and the *New Review*. From 1979 to 1986 he worked as a television critic, first for the *New Statesman* and then for the *Observer*.

Barnes has received several awards and honours for his writing, including the <u>2011 Man Booker Prize</u> for *The Sense of an Ending*. Also in 2016, Barnes was selected as the second recipient of the Siegfried Lenz Prize for his outstanding contributions as a European narrator and essayist.

Julian Barnes has written numerous novels, short stories, and essays. He has also translated a book by French author Alphonse Daudet and a collection of German cartoons by Volker Kriegel. His writing has earned him considerable respect as an author who deals with the themes of history, reality, truth and love. Barnes lives in London. (http://julianbarnes.com/bio/index.html 05/09/16)

The Sense of an Ending (2011) Plot Summary

Part One

The narrative is about a series of recollections of narrator Tony Webster who retrieves his school days when he and his friends have encountered Adrian Finn who was a brilliant student and who joined to be the fourth member of their clique. They discuss many issues such as: their aspirations of the future where they can be free to do with their life whatever pleases them. Later, and after starting university, the clique gets separated and keeps in touch through letters and some scattered meetings. Tony starts dating a girl, Veronica Ford with whom he has been introduced to her family. It was a short relationship as they end it up. Tony pursues his life, but he soon receives a letter in which Adrian asks for his permission to date with Veronica. In a state of anger, Tony writes to Adrian and Veronica a spiteful letter, in which he wishes both of Adrian and Veronica damage to befall them. By doing so, Tony thinks that both of them are now out of his life, forever. After his graduation, Tony goes to the USA for work. When he comes back, he has been informed about Arian's suicide. This part ends up with an overview about Tony's adult life: job, marriage, parenthood and retirement.

Part Two

The second part of the novel reveals Tony's present life; he unexpectedly receives a letter from a solicitor which his ex-girlfriend Veronica's mother sent him. This letter forces him to stare into his past and discover his mistakes through revisiting and rewriting his memories. His deceitful memory allowed him to become an untrustworthy narrator. His research for the truth caused him nothing but distress, hopefulness and a feeling of regret and remorse.

Abstract

This study aims to highlight the subject matter of the unreliable narrator as a narrative strategy adopted in postmodernist fictions. As asserted by many critics, the unreliable narrator has triggered a wave of ecumenical research. Accordingly, this research work orbits around three major aims: to find out the purpose of postmodernist writers in making use of such a literary technique in their literary texts; and this will help to trace the borders between the postmodernist theory and the unreliable narrator. It seeks also to comparatively analyse this literary device in two selected novels: *Atonement (2001)* by Ian McEwan and *the Sense of an Ending (2011)* by Julian Barnes in order to demonstrate the distinction between the two novels in terms of similarities and differences in what concerns the narrators' types and function. Therefore, the methodology that has been followed is twofold; theoretical and comparative-analytical. The findings, hence, reveal that the authors used this technique as a way to show the truth and not to hide it except for some events which bring their narrators disappointments because both novels fall under the self-narrative categorisation. Moreover, the postmodernist background of both authors contributes to their implementation of such a narrative strategy as they both believe in the veracity of truths. The reader can discover a new identity about both narrators; Ian McEwan's Briony as being a deliberately untrustworthy narrator and Julian Barnes' Tony as being a self-deceived yet a sincere fallible narrator. Finally, the narrators' memories contribute to a great extent in their unreliability as they are both aged personas and they rely on a retrospective narrative.

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توضيح موضوع الراوي غير المعتمد كإستراتيجية قصصية منتهجة في روايات ما بعد الحداثة. وقد لفت موضوع الراوي غير المعتمد نظر العديد من النقاد وأثار موجة عالمية من البحث. ولذلك تدور هذه المذكرة حول ثلاث أهداف أساسية: معرفة الغاية من استعمال أدباء ما بعد الحداثة لمثل هذه التقنية الأدبية في أعمالهم الروائية وهذا سيساعد في إيجاد المحاذاة بين التيار الأدبي لما بعد الحداثة والراوي غير المعتمد. كما تسعى أيضا إلى تحليل هذه الإستراتيجية السردية على نحو مقارن في الروايتين المنتقاتين: الكفارة (2001) للكاتب إيان ماك إيوان ورواية الإحساس بالنهاية (2011) للكاتب جوليان بارنز وهذا لتوضيح التشابه والتباين بين الروايتين فيما يتعلق بنوع ووظيفة الرواة. ومن أجل ذلك تنشطر المنهجية المتبعة إلى قسمين، جانب نظري وجانب تحليلي مقارن. وبالتالي توضح النتائج أن الكاتبين استعملا هذه التقنية كوسيلة لإظهار الحقيقة وليس لإخفائها باستثناء بعض الأحداث التي تجلب لهم الخذلان لأن كلا الروايتين تمثلان نموذجا عن سرد الذات. علاوة على ذلك فإن سياق ما بعد الحداثة للأدبيين ساهم في استعمالهم لهذه الإستراتيجية القصصية لأن كليهما يحبذ صحة الحقائق. يستطيع القارئ اكتشاف هوية جديدة لكلي الراويين، بريوني كونها عمدا راويا غير موثوق به وتوني كونه مخدوع ذاتيا لكنه راوي معرض للخطأ وصادق. وفي الأخير تساهم ذاكرة كل من الراويين إلى حد كبير في كونهما غير معتمدين لأنهما مسنين ويعتمدان على السرد القائم على استعادة الأحداث.

Résumé

Cette étude vise à mettre en évidence l'objet du narrateur peu fiable comme une stratégie narrative adoptée dans les fictions postmodernes. Comme il a attiré l'attention de nombreux critiques, le narrateur peu fiable a déclenché une vague de recherche œcuménique. En conséquence, ce mémoire tourne autour de trois objectifs principaux : pour découvrir le but des auteurs postmodernes dans l'utilisation d'une telle technique dans leurs textes littéraires et cela va aider à localiser les alignements entre la théorie postmoderniste et le narrateur douteux. Elle cherche également à une analyse comparative du figure de style dans deux romans sélectionnés : *Expiation (2001)* par Ian McEwan et *Une fille, qui danse (2011)* par Julian Barnes afin de démontrer la distinction entre les deux romans en termes de similitudes et les différences en ce qui concerne les genres et fonction de narrateurs. La méthodologie qui a été suivie est donc théorique et comparative-analytique. Les résultats révèlent que les auteurs ont utilisé cette technique pour dire la vérité pas pour la cacher sauf quelques événements qui leur apportent des déceptions car les deux romans représentent des auto-récits. Ensuite, l'arrière-plan postmoderniste des écrivains est responsable de leur mise en œuvre de telle stratégie narrative car les deux croient en multiplicité de vérités. Le lecteur découvre une nouvelle identité sur les deux narrateurs ; la narratrice Briony de Ian McEwan comme étant délibérément indigne de confiance et Tony de Julian Barnes comme valeur douteuse étant auto-trompé mais un peu fiable et sincère. Enfin, la mémoire des narrateurs contribuent dans une large mesure à leur manque de fiabilité car ils sont les deux âgés et ils utilisent un récit rétrospectif.