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Comparison and Analysis of *Mother Night* by Kurt Vonnegut and *Atonement* by Ian McEwan

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Čestné prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod vedením Mgr. Petra Anténeho, Ph.D. s využitím pramenů a literatury, jež jsou uvedeny v bibliografii.

V Olomouci 17. dubna 2023   Podpis …………………….

Table of Contents

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse and compare the novels *Atonement* (2001) by Ian McEwan and *Mother Night* (1961) by Kurt Vonnegut. The theoretical part of the thesis provides an overview of postmodern literary theory and its techniques. The practical part of the thesis focuses on the comparison of structure, usage of postmodern literary techniques as well as common motifs of guilt, truth, and penance in the novels.

1. Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut and Ian McEwan are well recognized authors who have been at the central focus of literary critics for decades. Throughout their careers they have written numerous texts worthy of recognition. This thesis is going to focus on two novels of their creation, Vonnegut's *Mother Night* (1961), and McEwan's *Atonement* (2001).

While *Atonement* has been a focal point of various interpretative publications and theses, *Mother Night* has been overlooked due to the success of Vonnegut's later novels such as *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) or *Cat's Cradle* (1963). The practical part of this thesis is going to analyse and compare the novels, focusing on their structure, literary tools and shared topics of crime, guilt, atonement, punishment, and the notion of truth.

The theoretical part of the thesis is going to explain the postmodern poetics in literature, primarily referencing the theoretical text *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) by Linda Hutcheon, a leading academic whose works on postmodern literary theory are to this day the base in contemporary publications focusing on postmodernism, despite having been published for decades. While one may argue that neither of the novels is completely postmodern in its nature, both of the texts which are going to be analysed exhibit postmodern characteristics; therefore, the theoretical part of the thesis is going to be dedicated to postmodernism, its comprehension and misunderstanding, features and tools. The subchapters of the theoretical part are going to focus on metafiction, intertextuality, parody, irony and historiographic metafiction.

Despite the novels being published forty years apart on different continents, *Mother Night* and *Atonement* share numerous common features. Both authors use metafictional framing, unreliable narrators, irony, and thus also intertextual references. The novels are also partially set in the period of World War II and share similar motifs. The aim of the thesis is thus to compare and contrast the novels *Atonement* and *Mother Night*, emphasize the different forms the authors decided to use, as well as highlight the common features.

2. Postmodern Fiction

Understanding postmodernism is crucial for this thesis. However, viewing McEwan and Vonnegut as strictly postmodern writers might be misleading. That especially applies to McEwan whose placement within the literary genres has been debated for years. He has been perceived as an author of various styles ranging from realist fiction (Acheson, p. 23) to modernism and postmodernism (Head, p. 5). The complex fusion of styles, as Head (p. 158) names it, which is so typical for McEwan makes it nearly impossible to determine one predominant style in his literary work. Vonnegut, on the other hand, is publicly viewed as the embodiment of a postmodern writer. However, Tally (p. 3) points out that he as well has a tendency towards mixing different styles in his work. This thesis is thus not attempting to argue that either of the authors or their novels which are to be analysed and compared in this thesis are solely postmodern. Nevertheless, both McEwan's *Atonement* and Vonnegut's *Mother Night* feature various postmodern devices as well as themes and motifs which are often interpreted as postmodern and for that exact reason understanding postmodernism is crucial.

2.1 The Paradox of the Postmodern

The essential problem with postmodernism lays in its definition. It is a term which is overloaded with meaning, and which has been used to describe various phenomena across different fields, often changing meaning with time (Nicol, p. 1). Even literary critics who have devoted their lives work to studying postmodernism have difficulty agreeing on what it really is, what its main features are and how they manifest.

Considering that the term postmodernism has been widely used since the 1960s in various academic disciplines, it is only natural for the term to acquire additional meanings and connotations, thus continuously deviating from the vague original meaning of "the new concept reacting to modernism" (Nicol, p. 1). The term has therefore been used to designate new cultural tendencies, dismissive attitude towards modernism or a whole new period, be it second half of the twentieth century, era associated with late capitalism in the western world or the contemporary era (Hutcheon, p. 3; Nicol, p. 2; Prochazka, p. 292).

The vagueness of such attempted definitions is partly to blame for misunderstanding postmodernism as it provides grounds for misinterpretation. Richard Bradford, for example, labels postmodernism 'a blanket term' (Bradford, p. 66) to highlight how vastly the term is underdefined. However, his stand towards the vague term is rather negative and is used as a base for criticism: "Postmodernism has itself become a blanket term, a convenience for those

who seem convinced that the contemporary condition – in all its aspects, from art through consumer habits to politics and personal relationships – is irredeemably bereft of what used to be called meaning" (Bradford, p. 66). Moreover, it links the indefiniteness of the term to lack of meaning, suggesting that the complexity of postmodernism as well as its lack of belief in one correct direction and narration is to be viewed as negative.

In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon highlights the negative dialectics surrounding postmodernism (Hutcheon, p. 3). According to her the public has, similarly to Bradford, often associated postmodernism with loss of meaning and decline in values. The reason for this might be that postmodernism has been often seen as a set of ideas which aims to criticize, disrupt and reject. Because "It suggests no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present" (Hutcheon, p. 19). That means postmodernism does not offer new truths or systems of beliefs, instead it offers a new approach. It does not seek to disrupt; it encourages us to question. Instead of providing the readers with meaning, postmodern literature encourages them to search for it.

For these reasons Linda Hutcheon views the attempts at defining postmodernism as a trap. In her eyes postmodernism is "an ongoing cultural process or activity, and I think that what we need, more than a fixed and fixing definition, is a 'poetics,' an open, ever-changing theoretical structure by which to order both our cultural knowledge and our critical procedures" (Hutcheon, p. 14). She suggests that postmodernism is not supposed to be defined as a closed system, for it is not one. Instead, it should be understood and treated like a living changing body. That is why she chooses unrestrictive vocabulary when describing postmodernism and uses terms such as poetics, aesthetics or idea as opposed to genre, movement or period which are simply too limiting for describing postmodernism.

Despite establishing that postmodernism is a complex, open and everchanging system, one may still ask: what is the essence of the postmodern idea? According to Hutcheon, the essence of postmodernism lies in the paradox (Hutcheon, p. 43). Postmodernism is a contradictory poetics, and it is contradiction that seems to be its most prevalent feature. Hutcheon describes the postmodern idea as a "contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (Hutcheon, p. 3). That means that in order for postmodernism to question, it needs to operate within the narratives and ideas it aims to challenge, thus becoming complicit in their rhetoric.

This feature has, however, become a ground for criticism of postmodern writings. Richard Bradford, who has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, writes in his book *The Novel Now* that "postmodern writing is the victim of a self-created paradox. Through its collective programme of anti-realism involving the persistent avoidance of standardized mimesis and an obsessive concern with the nature of writing and representation it has become what its practitioners sought and seek to avoid, a classifiable field and subgenre of literary writing" (Bradford, p. 70). While Bradford may be partially right, since this thesis is in itself evidence of the fact that postmodernism can be to some extent classified, as stated above, postmodernism is very far from a clearly classifiable field, yet alone subgenre. It is an open system which very much defies clear defining, but even in such system literary writers must have something in common in order for the system to exist in the first place. In case of postmodernism that something is the aim to question. And with the same aim often come tools, in this case literary tools, which are used to reach the aim. Within the postmodern rhetoric also exist such tools or literary techniques, which are typical for postmodern writers. Among the most popular techniques rank parody, irony, pastiche, self-reference, metafiction or intertextuality, all of which will be discussed further in the text. However, these techniques could be used in various ways, and mixed with different writing styles or topics of each postmodern author, they would eventually create a completely unique piece of art. And even in cases where a literary writing checks all of these boxes, it may still not be considered postmodern by the majority, as is the case of the writings in question by McEwan and Vonnegut. Because postmodernism is just that open and complex.

2.2 Metafiction

Books dealing with literary theory describe metafiction in different, often uncoherent ways, nevertheless they all agree on metafiction being a fiction about a fiction. Such fictions often have different purposes, shapes, or forms. And similarly to most literary tools postmodernism uses, metafiction is not a strictly postmodern technique. In fact, it is a technique which is more often associated with modernist fiction than postmodern fiction, a technique, which has been used almost since the beginning of the novel (Waugh, p. 5).

When speaking about a fiction about a fiction, we speak of a literary writing which is self-conscious enough to draw attention to its own fictionality. According to Waugh, the aim is to "pose question about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, p. 2) which brings us back to the postmodern idea of questioning. In case of metafiction, the questioning is taken to a next level by questioning the fiction itself, the reality and the relationship between both. In

her book *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* Waugh continues by saying that "In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (Waugh, p. 2) this means that metafiction is not concerned just by questioning, but also with the structure of the text, a frame of sorts.

The idea of framing is essential when it comes to highlighting the fictionality as it provides boundaries and thus suggests that we only see a fragment of something much larger, we lack context and may be missing something very important in order to understand the reality fully (Nicol, p. 36). That is perhaps why Nicol claims metafiction to be "The most characteristic practice in postmodern fiction" (Nicol, p.16) as it is the essence of limits within a literary work. It somehow questions itself similarly to how postmodernism questions reality and closed systems. Metafiction shows limits, reminds us that we only see through a limited point of view, we see a story, not the truth. It invites us to question what we see, what we read. It also subconsciously reminds us that it is impossible to have something unframed, everything we look at, we look at from a certain point of view, a frame that can never be in alignment with the truth.

While the self-referential aspect of metafiction invites us to question, it also manages to somehow tear barriers down as the difference between fiction and reality fades away in the hands of metafictional authors. Similarly to that, the difference between creation and critique can be erased in postmodern writings. Waugh states that "the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction'" (Waugh, p.6). That means that by the author's need to invade the text, which is not an elementary rule of every metafictional fiction, although it is fairly common, not only the thin line between reality and fiction is erased, but so is the difference between the author and the critic, or any other reader of the text whose intention is to interpret the fiction.

As suggested above, there are varieties to metafictions. Some authors simply break the unwritten rules of writing a novel and by doing so draw attention to its fictionality, others parody well-known older texts, and some come up with "alternative linguistic structures or fictions which merely imply the old forms by encouraging the reader to draw on his or her

knowledge of traditional literary conventions when struggling to construct a meaning for the new text" (Waugh, p. 4, 5). What they all have in common though is self-reference, self-consciousness, framing, commenting on their own fictionality and reminding the recipient of the text that they are merely a fiction, an artificial product, a point of view.

2.3 Intertextuality and Interpretation

To read means to interpret and to interpret means to search for textual relations. That is how the broadest view on intertextuality might look like, at least from the point of view of Graham Allen. According to him, the act of reading is simultaneously the process of searching for the meaning behind the text which is being read, which ultimately means the reader dives into textual relations. The process of going from one particular set to a network of such textual relations is what, based on Allen's claims, makes a text an intertext. (Allen, p. 1)

The idea of intertextuality is thus bound to reader's capability of searching for the meaning behind the text. Intertextual references often lay hidden, waiting for the reader to find them and solve them like a riddle. However, most intertextual texts can be to some extent understood by a reader without them even noticing the intertextual references. Intertextual references simply offer another perspective, new connections, or sometimes slight shifts in meaning. In his book *Intertextuality* Graham Allen makes a claim that "The term intertextuality was initially employed by poststructuralist theorists and critics in their attempt to disrupt notions of stable meaning and objective interpretation" (Allen, p. 3) Thus the idea of intertextuality deprives the reader of the rigid one-dimensional interpretation of the text. In postmodern literature, it becomes a technical device encouraging the reader to question, suggesting that even their understanding of the text may not be complete or true. And with further development of the language and literature, even classic literary texts which were thought to have acquired every possible interpretation, may gain new meanings. Nothing is set, the meaning relies on the reader.

Such emphasis on the reader is prevalent in postmodernism. It is the reader's role to detect the hidden and to interpret, the author is side-lined. This notion is often referred to as the death of the author. The author is not invited to discuss the meaning of his text, his role is to create and the moment he finishes his fiction, the text lives a life of its own. It is open to interpretation of others and the author's original intention are not binding (Allen, p. 12).

2.4 Parody and Pastiche

The tools postmodernism uses are all interconnected, one highlights another. Parody, for example, has been referred to as "the ironic mode of intertextuality" (Hutcheon, p. 225) as it also requires readers to seek textual relations and expects them to be well-informed of sociohistorical and literary context. However, parody has its place in metafictional theory as well as it, similarly to metafiction, breaks frames of what is considered to be set (Waugh, p. 68). Furthermore, it also possesses the ability of being both creative and critical. Its critical ability is natural to parody as it is its main function, since parody has always been recognized as a form of criticism, its creative ability stems from its expressiveness (Waugh, p. 69). Therefore, if we acknowledge Waugh's statement that parody "creates its own comedy out of its critique" (Waugh, p. 69), the creative ability lies in the expressive comedy which stems from criticism.

Having the abilities mentioned above, parody becomes a valuable postmodern tool. Furthermore, it possesses one of the most important postmodern qualities, double-codedness. Parody by definition works with what it aims to criticize and thus is complicit in the rhetoric it aims to ridicule (Hutcheon, p. 11).

Hutcheon's view of parody is rather simple. The author partly distances herself from the 18th century view of parody and instead views parody as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity[…] and paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity," (Hutcheon, p. 26,) aspects which have been discussed earlier in the chapter. Hutcheon thus makes an excellent case against literary critics and authors who view parody as a destructive lower literary form which solely replicates and lacks innovation. Hutcheon's definition implies the exact opposite, parody is critical and complicit, thus partly continuous, while it also advocates for change. Its critique invites the reader to question what has been established, it is "opening the text up," and therefore parody works directly against closed systems (Hutcheon, p. 127).

When reading about postmodernism, another term often appears side by side parody. Pastiche. Some authors even claim that in postmodernism, pastiche is preferred over parody (Jameson, p. 23); however, while both literary tools share common features, they are by no means mutually exclusive. Pastiche is a literary form very similar to parody, as it is also both critical and complicit within the rhetoric it aims to criticize. However, according to Fredric Jameson, pastiche is, unlike parody, blank, deprived of parody's satirical aspect (Jameson, p. 22). It does

not possess the ability to criticize through humour. Jameson is very critical in his attempt to define pastiche, saying that "it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists" (Jameson, p. 23). This negative view on pastiche comes, according to Hutcheon, from Jameson's biased understanding of parody as ridiculing imitation (Hutcheon, p. 26). And since he defines pastiche as parody bereft of its humorous aspect, he is left with nothing but imitation. He reduces the literary form to simple plagiarism.

However, there is more to pastiche than simple imitation. Oftentimes pastiche is a fusion of styles, rather than a copy of a singular work. It is tightly linked to intertextuality, often noticeable only if the reader possesses knowledge of the original literary works or movement. And the decision to incorporate pastiche within the author's literary work is hardly ever random, as Jameson suggests (Jameson, p. 23), as it is created with the intention which lies upon the reader to uncover.

2.5 Irony

Since the former chapter dealt with parody, an ironic form of intertextuality, it is only logical that further explanation of what irony actually is will follow. Nicol defines irony as "a non-literal usage of language, where what is said is contradicted by what is meant (either deliberately or unwittingly) or what is said is subverted by the particular context in which it is said" (Nicol, p. 13). In a way the process of understanding irony is similar to the process of understanding intertextuality. In both cases the reader searches for meaning; however, in irony's case the meaning comes to them more naturally as our subconsciousness solves the riddle for us. Because while understanding intertextuality is often dependent on our knowledge of literature, culture or socio-political affairs, the context we need for comprehension of irony is already included in the text we are reading. Nicol continues to go into detail saying that as we understand words can obtain various meanings, it is understood that "irony is therefore not just cynical, not just a way of making fun of the world. It demonstrates a knowingness about how reality is ideologically constructed" (Nicol, p. 13).

Nicol's final point is crucial, since irony has been facing substantial criticism regarding its usage in postmodern fiction which is by some viewed solely as anti-serious (Hutcheon, p. 39). Irony is thus facing similar obstacles as parody in the eyes of certain literary theorists who chose to limit them to literary forms whose only purpose is to ridicule, completely disregarding their

additional values. Irony, similarly to other literary tools used in postmodernism, is valued for its ability of double-voicing which leads the reader to question and think, not only about the meanings behind the text, but also about how it is being constructed. Hutcheon makes another interesting point saying that to use irony means to look at what is being discussed from a distance. The usage of the form creates a distance from the writer and the topic in order to gain a detached view (Hutcheon, p. 39). This aspect is especially important in postmodernism when referring to the past as we will see in the following chapter.

2.6 Historiographic Metafiction

Historiographic metafiction is a term literary theorist Linda Hutcheon uses to describe historical fiction in postmodernism. According to her, historiographic metafiction is the most representative form of postmodern fiction since it calls into question the one thing that has been viewed as fixed by the general public, the past. The past is the epitome of grand totalized narrative and postmodernism aims to challenge our understanding of it.

However, it would be inaccurate to assume that postmodernism attempts to rewrite history, although some theorists may believe so. As Hutcheon claims "postmodernism represents the attempt to re-historicize—not dehistoricize" (Hutcheon, p. 225) That means that historiographical metafiction does not mean to shatter our view of the past, it solely points out the limits of historiography and brings our attention to the fact that similarly to fiction, history is also a manmade construct which does not necessarily represent the past in its true form. The so-called postmodern attack on history is rather an attack on our idea of unquestionable truth. (Hutcheon, p. 93)

The ground for questioning history comes from the fact that history is in the past, it is out of reach. Therefore, when examining history, one must rely solely on textual sources (be it writings, oral statements, or recordings) which are inevitably influenced by somebody's personal experience, their own perspective. One man's experience of a historical event may not be in alignment to other man's experience and neither of them may be close to the objective truth. Historiographical metafiction thus reminds us that history is never fully liberated of ideology, opinions, or overall bias (Hutcheon, p. 16). It is up to the reader to keep their minds open and to reflect on the text they are reading. Because what historiographic metafiction does, with the help of postmodern tools discussed in previous subchapters, is create a distance from which the reader can examine the text and its historical aspect (Hutcheon, p. 230).

The postmodern contest of the truth is especially important regarding history, since society is convinced of its knowledge of history; however, as implied in the previous paragraphs, that may not be completely true. Not only because when examining history, we are bound to look at it from somebody's point of view, but also because history is shaped through both our personal experience and collective narratives. In their book *Memories and Representations of War* Lamberti and Fortunati note that "the past is not given; it must be re-constructed and re-presented" (Lamberti, Fortunati, p. 39), suggesting that the act of revisiting the past is an actual process of remembering and reinventing the past, which will be inevitably reconstructed with some degree of bias, depending on the context we live in. Media, propaganda, ideology or the social groups we find ourselves in all impact our perception of the past, our singular and collective memory (Lamberti, Fortunati, p .28, 29). That also means that our view on history is not and cannot be fixed since as we evolve as a society, so do the structures which influence our way of thinking, thus a certain change in our perception of the past is inevitable. History is not fixed, nor is our perception of it and it will continue being so (Lamberti, Fortunati, p. 1).

While postmodernism points out the discrepancies within historiography, the critique of viewing and analysing the past is by no means a postmodern invention (Hutcheon, p. 88). However, due to postmodern tendency to contest the absolute and the grand narratives, due to postmodern infatuation with relation to the past and lastly due to the historical aspect of the novels which are to be analysed, compared and contrasted in the following chapters, the critique of examining the past is more than relevant for this thesis.

3. Atonement

Atonement is a metafictional novel of a British author Ian McEwan, first published in 2001. The novel consists of three parts and a metafictional epilogue. The story is set throughout the lifetime of the main character and narrator Briony. She begins her story in the year 1935 on a day that due to her error changed her life and the lives of her loved ones forever, and for which, as the title of the novel suggests, she spends the rest of the life trying to atone.

Thirteen-year-old Briony is an idealistic child, untouched by the complexity of the real world, growing up in a wealthy family, living a life which some might label as privileged. The young girl is particularly obsessed with writing stories and dreams of becoming an author. The grounds of the family's mansion, her dreams and especially the members of her family all become an inspiration for creating her stories. Briony is infatuated with the notions of good and bad, yet she knows so little about it, and it is quite paradoxical that her limits in distinguishing between these two are going to lead her into making the worst deed she will ever have committed.

When Briony witnesses an intimate moment between her sister and a man, she doesn't see it as a manifestation of affection, but rather as an attack. Her childlike mind, unfamiliar with sexuality, prone to seek answers within the realm of imagination when confronted with something unfamiliar and incomprehensible, creates a narrative she is able to comprehend, that Robbie, a man she has known her entire life, is a criminal, a violent attacker who aims to hurt her sister Cecilia.

The moment Briony's teenage friend Lola is found on the family premises bruised and sexually assaulted, Briony points her finger at Robbie, the only man that could in her mind be capable of such atrocity. Not realizing the terrible mistake, she ruins the lives of both, her sister and her sister's lover.

The second part of the novel takes place several years later, during World War II, and follows the path of Cecilia and Robbie after the sentence for the crime Robbie did not commit altered their lives. Robbie finds himself in France during the time British armed forces are retreating from the country after it had been lost to the enemy. On his way back to safety he experiences the horrors of the war, which are in terms of brutality so explicitly described, they even seem vulgar. The vulgarity of the description adds to the reader's contempt of war and the dark humour and irony the soldiers use to describe the war events only exaggerates the cruelty and despair of war. The soldiers have become so accustomed to the tragedies of war and the misery it brings they stopped paying attention to it. Living in a hell on earth has made them accept it.

Robbie's only escape is a thought of Cecilia, so on his way back to safety he goes back in his memory to the times he had seen her before his departure for France. It is the thought of her, the hope of future together, that prevents him from giving up. The hope which has him imagining the bright future with the woman he loves for the first time in years as a free man, only to be shattered by McEwan on the final pages of the novel.

The third part of the novel tells a story of Briony's ordeal she took upon herself as a way to make amends for her former misdoing. As an eighteen-year-old woman Briony gains perspective and is able to reflect on her past mistakes. She decides to go in her sister's footsteps and becomes a nurse. The main character thus leaves her privileged life behind and is for the first time confronted with the reality of the world. In a world led by a harsh ward nurse, she is no longer the centre of everyone's attention and becomes a part of strictly calculated hospital machinery. Doing work that would be considered underneath her and tormented with guilt for both, Robbie with Cecilia, and Lola, who is about to get married to the man who assaulted her five years prior, Briony tries to ease her conscience and resorts to what she has known best, writing. While her attempts to write a novella about Robbie and Cecilia get turned down by the publisher, they become a beginning of her final novel, an intimate confession of her wrongdoings, *Atonement*.

Briony's confessional novel is not her last attempt to redeem herself as she decides to visit Cecilia and Robbie to inform them about her intentions to clear his name, or so are we led to believe. For Briony decided to give the couple a happy ending, a vision of hope at least in the book that was written about them. When in reality, Robbie died in 1940 in France and Cecilia passed later the same year during a bombing attack, as we find out in the metafictional epilogue.

4. Mother Night

The novel *Mother Night* by an American author Kurt Vonnegut was first published in 1961 and is one of Vonnegut's earliest writings. In 1966 Vonnegut added an introduction and editor's note to the volume, which would be found in the later prints as well. The novel thus consists of an introduction, a metafictional editor's note and the main story which is divided into 45 chapters. *Mother Night* follows the life of a former American spy, Howard W. Campbell Jr., from beginning of the World War II to the late 1950s. Campbell not only narrates his own story, he is also cast as a writer in Vonnegut's stead.

Campbell's narration of his autobiographical novel is not linear. He starts his story at the near end of his life journey, in an Israeli prison awaiting trial for crimes against humanity, and on occasion goes back in retrospect, jumping through time as he sees fit. This nonlinear narration, however, does not make it difficult for the reader to navigate through the text as might have been the case of his later novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. Rather it serves as a way to allow him to reflect on the past. The novel might thus be seen as both a confession and a defence.

Howard W. Campbell is to be tried for the crimes he took part in during World War II. In his captivity Campbell leads various dialogues with his guards. While all of them have a reason to despise Campbell, he was after all a part of the machinery that brought misery to them, they always manage to find a common ground, as most of them, similarly to Campbell, have been put during war into situations in which it was impossible to act honourably. This grey space between good and bad accompanies the reader throughout the entire book. There is no purely evil character, nor there is an entirely good person, there is only damage made by war and those who participated in it.

In 1938 Campbell was recruited as an American spy. Since he was an American playwright living in Germany with numerous acquaintances among Nazis, he was an ideal man for the job. His task was to climb the social ladder, befriend important people and broadcast encrypted messages into the world. And so he did. Campbell became the head of Nazi propaganda. However, while passing on strategic information, he participated in strengthening and creating one of the worst regimes to ever have existed. His rhetoric became the carrier of hate, violence, and anguish. While never having killed a man, he still had blood on his hands as one of the orchestrators of Nazi doctrines.

Campbell's worst sin was that he was too good as a spy. While others in his position would have died, he managed to live to the end of the war. In order to do so, his loyalty to the regime

would have to be unquestionable. His actions would have to be irredeemable. However, that would also mean that his deeds would be unforgivable. He got himself onto a path which would inevitably end in catastrophe, and he knew that before he even started to tread it. He was warned, yet decided to proceed as he believed it was the right thing to do.

When the war ended, Campbell fled to the United States, where he spent years in hiding, living an empty unfulfilled life. His location was revealed to the public by Campbell's neighbour who, coincidently enough, was a Russian undercover agent. Campbell thus became one of the most wanted men alive. Ironically, the only people able and willing to help him were part of a neo-Nazi group, who held values Campbell sought to undermine for the majority of his life.

The followers of the radical neo-Nazi group not only gave shelter to Campbell, they also found a woman, who they believed to be Campbell's wife Helga. Later on, it is revealed that the woman in question is actually Helga's younger sister Resi and her sudden appearance in the United States is not a coincidence, as she is also an undercover Russian agent whose task is to bring Campbell to Moscow.

The American intelligence, being aware of the whereabouts and intentions of the Russian agents, invades the safehouse and arrests everyone who is present. Only two people escape prison; Resi, who commits suicide on the spot, and Campbell, who is released due to influence of the man who recruited him to be a spy years ago. Not being able to cope, Campbell surrenders himself to Israeli officials, hoping to be punished for what he has done.

While Campbell never explains his motifs for his surrender, one cannot help but think that guilt was finally catching up on him, despite Campbell denying it multiple times in the novel. For, after receiving news on his case which indicate he is about to be set free, Campbell commits suicide.

The novel was deemed one of Vonnegut's darkest pieces of writing, not only because of the author's dark and cynical humour, which is prevalent throughout the whole book, but also for the existential questions it raises. Vonnegut claims *Mother Night* to be the only book whose moral he knows: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (Vonnegut, p. vii).

5. Comparison of the novels *Mother Night* and *Atonement*

McEwan's *Atonement* and Vonnegut's *Mother Night* are novels which seem different yet have so much in common. Not only whole forty years separates them from the first publication, they were also written on two different continents by authors whose life experience is completely different. Vonnegut's and McEwan's writing styles could not be in bigger opposition as they were both influenced by different personas, events and cultures. Nonetheless, the authors deal with topics that are very similar.

Both of them accentuate the motif of guilt in their novels; their main characters are both architects of horrifying events whose consequences they struggle to deal with. Furthermore, both Vonnegut and McEwan work with the notion of the past. Not only their main characters reflect on their past actions, but they also do it in a creative manner, as authors. Briony and Campbell are cast as authors of their own story, inevitably leaving the reader with a text full of bias.

The two novels are partially set in the period of time when World War II took place, however, while McEwan is more focused on combat and the retreat of British troops from France, Vonnegut aims his attention at political aspects of the war and the subsequent destruction of those involved in the conflict.

Last but not least, both authors use similar literary tools. The two novels feature metafictional frames, intertextual references, and irony. Both authors tend to create parallels within their stories as well as contrasts to highlight the important.

5.1 Structure

Atonement and *Mother Night* are both metafictional texts, each of them contains the description of the process of creating the novel to some extent. In *Atonement* the reader learns about the creative process which will lead to the final novel in the third part of the book, when young Briony first submits her novella *Two figures by a fountain* to a publisher. While her text was declined for publication, she was encouraged to expand her work and continue on writing, which ultimately led her towards writing *Atonement*. *Two figures by a fountain* then became a part of the first segment of the novel. This process of development of the novel is important for the reader as to realize why are the three segments so different from one another. They reflect Briony's journey as an author. After all, *Two Figures by the Fountain* were written when Briony

was only eighteen years old, the novel was finished towards the end of her life. The novel thus reflects her life as she went through it, it mirrors her development and former foci.

McEwan decided to fuse various styles in his novel, leaving the readers as well as literary critics at strain when it comes to deciding which style is predominant throughout the novel. The real question is, to what degree is that important? It is apparent McEwan creates a contest of literary styles in order to highlight the developments in the story and amplify the effects of various contrasts he creates.

The first part of the novel gives away a modernist influence through the absence of omniscient narrator. The third person narration is on multiple occasions interrupted with changes in narration which shifts to perspectives of different characters throughout the scene. The reader can thus become familiar with their consciousness and is able to recognize the impressions each scene leaves them with. The long-drawn descriptive scenes with gradual build-up and focus on the feelings and perceptions of characters also point out towards modernism, as Briony as a casted author admits herself when describing the letter evaluating her novella: "we wondered whether it owed a little too much to the techniques of Mrs Woolf. The crystalline present moment is of course a worthy subject in itself, especially for poetry; it allows a writer to show his gifts, delve into mysteries of perception, present a stylised version of thought process, permit the vagaries and unpredictability of the private self to be explored and so on" (McEwan, p. 312).

At the same time, the first part of the novel carries a realist touch when it comes to its descriptiveness. The involvement of realism is indicated before the reader gets to read the first segment of *Atonement* as the novel is preceded by a quotation from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. The realist aspect is also apparent from the contents of the named part of the novel, as Briony is obsessed with morality and righteousness, an infatuation that will later seem ironic.

As for the second part of the novel, the author seems to have abandoned the modernist palatial techniques, changing the structure of writing to correspond with the dark theme of war. Omitting the grandiose sentence structures McEwan creates a contrast between the previous slow pacing, graceful part of the novel describing the life of the higher class and alters his writing to be more direct, disoriented and expressive, as to be more depictive of the life in combat.

As the writing style changes, so does the narration. The shifts in narration disappear and the reader is left with a single third-person omniscient narrator. At first it is unclear from whose

perspective is the story looked at, as the author leaves the reader in suspense; later on it is revealed that the narrator and protagonist of the second part of the novel is Robbie, the man unjustly punished for another man's crime. Robbie's fixation on his future with Cecilia and idyllic envisions of his future clash with the harsh reality he finds himself in. This creation of contrasts is predominant throughout the book. Be it in a matter of form or content, McEwan inclines towards creating contrasts. He often establishes the ideal outcome, letting the reader and characters relish in it before he completely destroys it, leaving nothing but the harsh reality.

McEwan chooses a peculiar way of describing the anguish of war. He is not only expressive, as was mentioned above, he leans towards idyllic descriptiveness of the most horrifying things. He romanticizes limps separated from the rest of the body, people vaporized after bombing attacks, it almost seems as though he writes an ode to horrors: "The hole was perfectly symmetrical inverted cone whose sides were smooth, as though finely sieved and raked. There were no human signs, not a shred of clothing or a shoe leather. Mother and child had been vaporised" (McEwan, p. 239). His choice of words is rather disturbing, as he picks words that are commonly associated with positive matters and uses them to describe the opposite, thus highlighting the atrocity. This is one of the tendencies in writing McEwan and Vonnegut have in common, however, Vonnegut's play with language in such dark matter is usually accompanied with humour, whereas in McEwan's writing the humorous aspect seems to be omitted, serving thus only as a way to magnify the dread.

The third part of *Atonement* follows a similar pattern, as it features a third-person narrator as well. The story follows the path of Briony and is set five years after her false testimony. The focus is on Briony's personal development. With years she has gained clarity on what her need for creating stories had caused. Thus, Briony treads a new path, trying to atone. She decides to follow in the footsteps of her sister Cecilia and becomes a nurse. The whole segment focuses on her training and her growth, which are closely related.

Coming from a wealthy, influential family, Briony for the first time struggles. She is confronted with the harsh reality of war and life in service, which are in direct opposition to what she has been used to. While the reader sees her recognize the privilege her family lives in, as her mother's biggest concern during the times of war was about her fence and fountain, Briony still fights with the role she is about to play in her new life, since she feels certain tasks are beneath her. Her discontent with her new situation is possibly one of the ways she aims to atone. Getting rid of the luxurious, in a way belittling herself for a life she dislikes. Furthermore, being a nurse

is what her sister chose to do with her life. Briony is thus trying to live the life she condemned her sister to live, and in a quite literal manner as a fully qualified nurse is referred to as sister.

The last segment of *Atonement* is a metafictional epilogue set in 1999. This is the only part of the story narrated in the first person, the only part where Briony directly addresses the reader. The main purpose of the epilogue is to shatter the reader's perception of the whole novel, as it is revealed that Briony is the author of the novel the reader just finished reading, suggesting that it may be partial. Furthermore, as Briony reveals the two lovers died during the war, her changing the finale of the story leaves the reader wonder whether anything else had been altered. Despite the alterations that are evident and parts of story which she must have constructed herself, as she was not present during the time they took place, Briony views her text as a factual testimony: "I've regarded it as my duty to disguise nothing – the names, the places, the exact circumstances – I put it all there as a matter of historical record" (McEwan, p. 369). This obliviousness implies that her story is unreliable, as she does not acknowledge her own bias.

The metafictional nature of the epilogue thus lies with the uncertainty which the sudden revelation of the author brings. It urges the reader to question and to view the story solely as one perception of the past events, as opposed to objective history. The metafiction in *Atonement* serves as a signifier of relativity in fiction. It does not wipe the line between fiction and reality, as it is common among metafictional novels, in a way it does the complete opposite, due to the usage of the doubled author, metafiction in *Atonement* completely separates the fictional from the real.

The purpose of metafiction in Vonnegut's *Mother Night* is, however, slightly different. While both authors cast a completely fictional character as the author of the novel in their stead, Vonnegut decides to erase the link between what is fictional and what is real. He does so by invading the novel as he in his name addresses the reader. What is interesting is that he decides to do that before the reader has a chance to read the novel, in the introduction and in the editor's note, thus erasing the illusion before the reader begins to read the text. Furthermore, in the editor's note he places himself in the role of an editor, treating Campbell as the real author, not an imaginary figure.

The common denominator in Vonnegut's and McEwan's use of metafiction is the emphasis on the unreliable narration, as both Briony and Campbell are biased in their view of their past and thus their narration of the story. Interestingly enough, while Vonnegut admits to this fact saying:

"To say that he was a writer is to say that the demands of art alone were enough to make him lie, and to lie without seeing any harm in it. To say that he was a playwright is to offer an even harsher warning to the reader, for no one is a better liar than a man who has warped lives and passions onto something as grotesquely artificial as stage" (Vonnegut, p. ix). McEwan leaves it up to the reader to deduce the partiality of the narration. Although Briony is guilty of these characteristics in an equal manner to Campbell, if not more, as she demonstrated her obsession with creating stories, often misleading, throughout the book simply for the sake of creation and being at the centre. What is left unsaid is the possible interest of both characters to write a biased novel for their own personal gain, not necessarily for the sake of art alone. As both can use this creative opportunity of writing a novel to justify their actions in life, to gain sympathy and perhaps even forgiveness.

As for the form of Vonnegut's *Mother Night*, the novel is significantly less structured than McEwan's *Atonement*. The novel is divided into 45 chapters which are preceded by an introduction and editor's note, which have been discussed earlier. Unlike McEwan, Vonnegut is very consistent in the style of his writing. His sentence structure is significantly less complex and palatial than McEwan's. Vonnegut's vocabulary is also very straightforward and quite informal, as the novel includes expressive phrases, which often seem distasteful and vulgar, however his usage of language is never without reason.

The simpler construction of the text corresponds with the setting of the novel. In the text, Campbell finds himself in prison, isolated in his gloomy apartment, or in the safehouse of a neo-Nazi group, places, where one would not use sophisticated language. Furthermore, Campbell used to make his living through words. He used to be a playwright, an author and a creator of propaganda, words used to be his domain, through them he constructed beauty and caused harm. However, Campbell has forsaken this life and his simpler approach towards writing seems to reflect that. The protagonist of *Mother Night* even claims to have lost the ability to produce art: "I would never have written a play again. That skill, such as it was, is lost" (Vonnegut, p. 122). Contrary to Campbell, Briony's creative abilities thrived after her realization of her own destructive capabilities.

Campbell's battle with his own conscience left him damaged in other ways too. His experience in war cost him apart from his artistic skills his innocence, leaving him emotionally numbed. That is where his cynicism and inclination towards irony stems from. The text is filled with dark humour and cynical remarks since Campbell is incapable of looking at the world through healthy or even merely positive perspective. This aftereffect of trauma is not restrained solely

to Campbell's character in *Mother Night* as other survivors of war suffered the loss of a certain part of their human nature as well. One can thus argue that such is the price one must pay for participating in war.

Vonnegut's usage of irony is not for the sole purpose of humour, that seems to be only a side effect. As through irony the protagonist perceives the world, it highlights the horrors of war and its aftereffects, similarly to how McEwan's romanticizing of death and suffering emphasizes the bloodshed. While McEwan creates a contrast between beauty and horror, Vonnegut prefers to create contrasts through comedy and tragedy, joking about atrocities one would not dare to joke about: "'Tell those smug briquets!' By briquets he meant people who did nothing to save their lives or anybody else's life when the Nazis took over, who were willing to go meekly all the way to the gas chambers, if that was where the Nazis wanted them to go" (Vonnegut, p. 8). The emphasis on the cynical ruthless description is even more apparent when the reader takes into account the name of the chapter, Briquets. Nevertheless, despite using different approach, the result of their writing is similar. Their critique of war and violence has been communicated and the reader is left in shock.

However, Vonnegut's ironic criticism does not aim solely at war, but in a postmodern manner, attacks narrowminded ideologies. In almost a humanist and pacifist way, he dismantles all ideologies based on hatred, that will inevitably lead towards violence. While throughout the book Vonnegut vehemently criticizes Nazism and communism, he also expresses his strong reservation towards American democracy, suggesting there is barely any difference between any of the ideologies mentioned. His critical focus is however pointed at neo-Nazis, as he perhaps views the re-emergence of the values, he both sought to undermine and was complicit in, as one of the greatest threats to today's society.

It is also important to note the difference in the suggestiveness of the novels. McEwan provides the reader with all the necessary information about the characters and the story. He never attempts to create an objective story, he aims to have an objective, critical reader. While to some extent Vonnegut does the same, especially when it comes to the complexity of Campbell's persona, he is unable to be apolitical and leads the reader towards rejecting ideologies.

5.2 The Crime, Guilt and Punishment of Briony and Campbell

The central motif of both novels is guilt, as both protagonists have committed crimes they consider unforgivable. While both being the antagonists of their story, the reader is inclined to sympathize with them. Neither Campbell, nor Briony are evil; however, they are capable of it.

While there is an obvious parallel between Briony and Campbell, their story seems to be in a slight contradiction. Briony appears to be an innocent little girl, yet she is capable of destruction. Campbell, on the other hand, accepts the role of a spy and becomes a villain, knowing that in the public eye he can never be the opposite, only to be able to do some good. Yet their similar characteristic is that when attempting to do the right thing, they become the architects of someone else's misery.

It is important to note that Campbell knew the consequences of becoming a spy. He was well informed to know that his pretence would cause suffering and would possibly lead towards ending his life. Briony, on the other hand, was only a child when she gave the false testimony. Up to this point, the biggest reaction to her misbehaviour would have been a frown from her mother or a scold from her sister. Not only that, but she was also an idealistic, imaginative, orderly child who spent majority of her time daydreaming and creating stories. Briony deals with circumstances she does not understand through imagination; she imagines and modifies various situations to be able to comprehend them. It is something she as a child has been doing her whole life and it was never wrong. She did something that felt natural for her, from the information that she had and with the information she lacked, she created a situation she could understand. However, this was real life, with real human beings and the consequences in creating a story were grander than she could have imagined.

In a way, the first part of the novel is all about Briony's learning process. Her transition from a childish girl into an adult, as she is for the first time met with obstacles. The first of them being her directing the play *The Trials of Arabella*, which she has written. As a perfectionist with a great sense for detail, she had a hard time dealing with new elements which she was unable to control. Including other children in her play left her with the feeling of uncertainty that was tortuous to her. By being forced out of her comfort zone Briony starts to learn, through her experience with the play, as well as through the consequences of her wrongdoing. The whole day is one big learning experience for Briony, which will allow her to grow, although at a great cost.

However, there are other elements to play their part in the situation. That being Briony's entitlement, loneliness and need for attention, a desire to be at the centre. As the youngest member of the family, she feels excluded, she desires for something interesting to happen to her, she wants to be interesting, to have a secret to tell. And she is finally able to do so. Through her witnessing the young couple at the fountain, following the expressive letter she read which was addressed to Cecilia from Robbie, Briony decided he is a violent figure prior to the assault

of young Lola later that evening. She created a story and casted Robbie as an antagonist before any wrongdoing was done: "this was the story of a man whom everybody liked, but about whom the heroine always had her doubts, and finally she was able to reveal that he was the incarnation of evil" (McEwan, p. 115). Briony thus was not the mere victim of childish innocence, as she accused Robbie of being a criminal before the crime was even committed. Certain of his evil nature, she found it easy to place his face onto a man she briefly saw in the dark. And thus, she finally had a story to tell, a story everyone was eager to hear.

However, while the consequences of Briony's actions are clear, one might only guess what has Campbell's involvement in the Nazi propaganda caused. The extent of his crimes could never be measured; he never had to face the aftereffects of his crimes, apart from his time served in jail and the necessary hiding from authorities. Unlike Briony, he was never confronted with the horrifying stories of those whose life he had destroyed. His crimes were not as tangible as Briony's, despite being far more extensive.

Nevertheless, there is a difference between how Briony and Campbell delt with the aftermath of their wrongdoings. Briony gives up her glamorous life, living a life her sister chose for herself, for the first time in her life experiencing criticism and unpleasantness. Becoming a nurse is her ordeal, a punishment she sets for herself. She feels the gravity of her actions, she is remorseful, yet she cannot bring herself to action. She never overcomes the fear of confronting her sister, the fear of telling the truth while she and Robbie are still alive.

Campbell deals with the agony he had caused in a different manner. He never shows remorse, even claims to have never felt guilt. He does not relive his past over and over; his feelings are numbed. He is living an empty life. He was used and abused in every possible way, deprived of all joyful, all human. The experience of war had completely transformed him, making him lose his wife, unable to write, deprived of all his work and achievements that were usurped by another man; all he is left with is his wit. He did not have to punish himself; he was already punished. Yet he seeks punishment at the end of the story, never elaborating on why. It is quite possible that his claims not to feel guilt were false, why else would he surrendered himself to the Israeli? What else could lead him to suicide, if not guilt? It is a question whether the act of killing himself was an act of justice, or a demonstration of cowardness, as it could be both, a punishment and an escape.

In her Epilogue, Briony claims *Atonement* to be her tribute to the lovers: "I like to think that it isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to

let my lovers live and to unite them at the end" (McEwan, p. 372). She views her decision to let them live in a positive manner. Her novel is in her eyes a memory of the two as well as a confession of her wrongdoings. The title suggests that the creation of the novel itself is her final attempt in trying to atone, however, the irony of her storytelling cannot go unnoticed, as Briony begins the tragedy by creating a story and ends it in the same way. The reader has sufficient information about the inaccuracies in the novel, be it the happy ending of the couple or the changes she made in the first chapter after receiving the letter from the editor of a magazine, where she submitted her novella. It is thus implied that Briony is condemned to repeat the same mistake again and again.

6. Conclusion

This thesis dealt with the analysis and comparison of novels *Mother Night* by Kurt Vonnegut and *Atonement* by Ian McEwan with emphasis on their structure, various literary techniques and motifs of truth, crime, guilt, atonement, and punishment.

McEwan's novel is significantly more structured as well as complex, changing narrative techniques and literary styles throughout the parts of the novel in order to create contrasts. Vonnegut's writing style, on the other hand, is significantly simpler and less palatial with frequent use of expressive language and ironic commentaries. Cynicism and irony play a great part in *Mother Night*, usually as to create a contrast. While McEwan also heavily relies on contrast within his novel, he does so by depicting tragedy in a beautiful, romantic way, whereas Vonnegut inclines towards combining tragedy with comedy. Both, however, aim with their use of language at highlighting the horrors of war and misery.

Possibly the most important common topic of *Atonement* and *Mother Night* is the emphasis on unreliable narration. As both McEwan's and Vonnegut's protagonists are cast as authors of the novels, inevitably altering their stories with their bias. The lack of truth and objectivity is also indicated through implementing metafictional frames in both novels. While McEwan never invades the text as an author, thus completely separating the reality and fiction, Vonnegut does. By doing so Vonnegut erases the border between fictional and real. Moreover, he decides to go further and speaks to the reader not only as an author, but also as an editor of Campbell's story, implying thus that Campbell is a real historical persona.

Both *Atonement* and *Mother Night* feature characters who have committed wrongdoings in their past, crimes they are forced to live with for the rest of their lives. While the protagonist of *Atonement*, Briony, brought the misfortune upon her loved ones as a child, possibly still unaware of how far-reaching the consequences of her actions may be, *Mother Night's* main character Campbell made the decision to do evil in order to be able to do good as an adult, fully aware of the price that he will have to pay. The protagonists' motivation also differed, while in *Mother Night* it was implied that Campbell decided to become a spy for his belief in good and heroism, Briony was influenced by her need for attention and incapability of distinguishing between fiction and reality. Both, however, had the common characteristic of naivety, which they seem to have lost after having committed their crimes.

The difference in the crimes of the two protagonists could not be greater, as Briony hurt her loved ones, facing the aftermath of her actions every day, Campbell caused unspecified vast

amount of damage to millions of people, yet his crimes were not tangible. That is perhaps why Briony seemed more remorseful, as she could not escape her guilt. Campbell on the other hand claimed to feel nothing. It is interesting that while Briony feels remorse, she remains inactive, not trying to reverse her wrongdoings. Campbell's apathy, numbness, and subsequent seeking of punishment, which eventually result in his death, seem to be in direct contradiction to Briony's coping with guilt.

The final actions of both protagonists leave the reader wondering of the motivation behind them. As Campbell ends his novel preparing for taking his own life, the reader ponders whether his motivation for the deed was seeking justice or searching for an escape. Similarly to that, Briony's final way of atoning is to be the publication of her novel, the novel she claims to be a tribute to the lovers, yet one is left in doubt whether her words are sincere, as she may as well simply seek to relieve her conscience.

Both *Atonement* and *Mother Night* are novels rich in substance, having a lot to offer to future interpretations. Their contents, intertextual character and complexity leave countless possibilities, for future analyses, as their nature encourages the readers to return to the text and search for new hidden meanings.

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Résumé

Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na literární díla *Matka noc* od Kurta Vonneguta a *Pokání* od Iana McEwana. Za cíl si vytyčuje analýzu a následné porovnání románů. Teoretická část práce je věnována literární teorii postmodernismu, jejíž porozumění je klíčové pro analytickou část práce. Analytická část bakalářské práce se věnuje analýze jednotlivých děl a jejich srovnání se zaměřením na formální aspekt románů, užití literárních technik a odlišné pojetí motivů pravdy, viny, pokání a trestu.

Annotation

Jméno a příjmení	Viktorie Machalová
Katedra nebo ústav	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce	Mgr. Petr Anténe, Ph.D.
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Název práce	Srovnání a analýza děl *Matka noc* od Kurta Vonneguta a *Pokání* od Iana McEwana
Název v angličtině	Comparison and analysis of *Mother Night* by Kurt Vonnegut and *Atonement* by Ian McEwan
Anotace práce	Bakalářská práce si dává za cíl zanalyzovat a porovnat romány *Pokání* od Iana McEwana a *Matka Noc* od Kurta Vonneguta. Teoretická část této práce obsahuje přehled postmoderní literární teorie a jejích technik. Praktická část této práce se soustředí na porovnání struktury děl, jejich užití postmoderních literárních technik a sdílených motivů viny, pravdy a pokání.
Klíčová slova	Kurt Vonnegut, Ian McEwan, postmodernismus, metafikce, intertextualita, ironie, vina, trest, pokání, pravda
Anotace v angličtině	This thesis aims to analyse and compare the novels *Atonement* (2001) by Ian McEwan and *Mother Night* (1961) by Kurt Vonnegut. The theoretical part of the thesis provides an overview of postmodern literary theory and its techniques. The practical part of the thesis focuses on the comparison of structure, usage of postmodern literary techniques as well as common motifs of guilt, truth, and penance in the novels.
Klíčová slova v angličtině	Kurt Vonnegut, Ian McEwan, postmodernism, metafiction, intertextuality, irony, guilt, punishment, atonement, truth
Přílohy vázané v práci	-
Rozsah práce	34
Jazyk práce	Anglický jazyk