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**SYMBOLS IN IAN MCEWAN'S ATONEMENT
(COMPARISON OF THE NOVEL AND THE FILM)**

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlášení:

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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podpis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the interpretation of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and its comparison with the film adaptation. This thesis concentrates on the use of symbols which are placed into the context of postmodernism. The following chapter introduces the author's life, emphasizing the development of his literary style which provides a basis for the storyline and the narrative techniques used in the novel. A detailed analysis of the symbols is provided, highlighting postmodernism and ending with the last chapter that examines the key differences between both media and movie, specifically, the novel's level of symbolism which has been transformed into the movie

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INTRODUCTION

McEwan's *Atonement* is a great example of different perception of reality. It shows how misinterpretation of one situation leads the novel's main character to an erroneous accusation that has fatal effect for many people. "The truth had become as ghostly as invention"(41) writes McEwan at the beginning of Part One. It serves as a clue to the reader that the story will be as much about the invention as it will be about the truth. In fact, the whole structure of the book is built on a sustained illusion. Throughout the novel McEwan uses a numerous techniques to hint the reader, specifically self-reference, and symbols that are greatly employed in the novel.

I came across the novel in 2008 after having seen a feature film by Joe Wright that was based on it. At first the film had left me in a slight state of confusion, yet it had had an incredible impact on me and led me to reach for the book and get the chance to learn more about the characters and perhaps understand the film version on a deeper level. I was mainly intrigued by the symbols used in the book that clue the reader in the novel.

The main aim of this thesis is an analysis of symbolism used in a postmodern literature and to what extent it has been transformed into the film adaptation. This thesis contains of five chapters. In the first chapter, the novel will be put in the literary context. The second part will be devoted to the author of the novel Ian McEwan, his influences, the aspects of his life and its reflection in the novel.

The third part of the project deals with the interpretation of the book - the storyline will be provided and the narrative techniques will be examined. In the fourth part I will pay attention to the novel's most significant postmodernist features such as the historical issues, self-reflexivity and pastiche.

In the fourth section I will deal with the film adaptation. By comparison I will discuss some incongruities of the two works. Subsequently, the symbolic elements of the film version will be analysed.

1 THE ROLE OF SYMBOLS IN THE POSTMODERN LITERATURE

Ian McEwan has established himself as one of the greatest writers of his generation. Due to the fact that his writing has gone through considerable development and the nature of his distinguished style, there have been some attempts to classify his literary style. Nevertheless, most of the literary theorists agree that his work embodies many postmodernist features (Courtney, 2010).

Postmodernism suggests that our interpretations are comforting illusions. Among the characteristics that make up a postmodernist type of writing some literary theorists point out advanced use of semantics and semiotics, that is word association and the use of symbols. Postmodernist writers make use of symbols, as it gives them the opportunity for free interpretation. In addition, postmodern fiction makes use of “literary symbolism rather aggressively and even promoting the cliché or blatant reference” (Leverkuhn, 2013).

In his writing, McEwan uses symbolic devices as literary technique and also his most praised novel *Atonement* trades effectively on the importance of symbols

2 IAN MCEWAN

While the previous chapter introduces the use of symbolism in McEwan's work, this chapter concentrates on the author's life and an analysis of the novel is provided afterwards.

2.1 Bibliography

Ian Russell McEwan was born on 21 June 1948 in Aldershot, England to David McEwan and Rose Lillian Violet McEwan. His father was an army officer and the family used to move very often to the places where Ian's father was posted. For this reason, McEwan spent most of his childhood living in Far East, Germany and North Africa (Gerrard, 2007). His mother already had two children from her previous marriage to Ernest Wort who died during the D-Day in 1944.

At the age of 11, Ian was sent from North Africa to a boarding school in Suffolk. After graduating at Sussex University, he went to the University of East Anglia where he received his MA degree in English Literature. At the same time he was the first to graduate from the new established course of Creative Writing under the guidance of Malcolm Bradbury (British Council, 2011).

2.2 Autobiographical aspects of the novel

There are some features in the novel that are drawn from Ian McEwan's life. Perhaps the most obvious one is a parallel between the author and the character of Briony. Ian was more than ten years younger to his siblings and therefore considered himself rather an only child (Appleyard, 2007). Briony is also noticeably younger than her siblings and is used to the company of adults or rather spending her time on her own.

Also, the aspect of frequent moving of the family affected McEwan's mother who played a significant role in development of his literary style as it has influenced his approach to both language and writing. In a memoir called, 'Mother Tongue' (2001), McEwan says that his mother never really owned her language and used to transform it according to the situation and the people with whom she spoke to. Affected by his mother, he had some difficulties as a student. During the early years at this school he was met with frequent challenges of overcoming his bad habits. McEwan states (ibid) that only through literature he has learned to give up some of his bad influences by being in a state of constant awareness of the 'language traps' that lied ahead. On the other hand, it has helped him to develop as a writer. He describes the process of alienating of his own language and learning the new one: ".There are gains as well as losses, at least for a writer. Exile from a homeland, though obviously a distressing experience, can bring a writer into a fruitful, or at least a usefully problematic, relationship with an adopted language. A weaker version of this, but still a version, is the internal exile of social mobility, particularly when it is through the layered linguistic density of English class".

This significant role of language that has marked McEwan's early teens can be likened to those years of Briony's life who through writing finds things she lacks in the real world. Due to constant migraines, her mother spends a great amount of time resting in her bedroom, while Briony escapes to the world of literature. In this sense she can be compared to Ian in his early teens, as the author described himself as an intimate child who rarely spoke to others (Zalewski, 2009). Briony finds the process of writing very comforting and therefore tends to escape to this world very often.

Having these strong resemblances with the main character, one might ask a question what made McEwan choose a female character. Ian McEwan (2005) explains

that: “Cognitive psychologists with their innatist views tell us that women work with a finer mesh of emotional understanding than men. The novel - by that view the most feminine of forms - answers to their biologically ordained skills” (The Guardian, 2005).

Additionally, as Ellam (2009) remarks, McEwan comes from the generation born just after the Second World War and he was used to listening to the stories of his father. Thus, another autobiographical element can be seen in Part Two which depicts Robbie during the retreat to Dunkirk and which was inspired by the experiences of the author’s own father, David McEwan.

2.3 McEwan’s literary work

As it was mentioned above, Ian McEwan’s work has gone through considerable development. The following part deals with these changes and focuses on the similarities that occurred in his work before writing *Atonement*.

For his debut, a collection of stories called *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), McEwan won the Somerset Maugham Award. The following *In Between the Sheets, and Other Stories* (1978) as well as his two novels *The Cement Garden* (1979) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) were also critically acclaimed, yet earned him a lurid reputation. His books contained a great number of highly disturbing scenes, described in details and often involving children. From his early work, *the Cement Garden* was especially praised for its freshness and originality. It is the story of siblings who bury their mother in the cellar rather than acknowledge her death. It can be seen as an allegorical story of polarized world.

After a hiatus of six years his third novel *The Child in Time* (1987) was published. It still contained a number of appalling images. Compared to his earlier novels, the novel

is more contemplative. It also differs in terms of narrative perspective. McEwan diverged from subjective narrative perspective, providing an intrinsic as well as extrinsic perspective of the central character (Finney, 2002). His next novels *The Innocent* (1990), *Black Dogs* (1992), and *Enduring Love* (1997) were equally ambitious. The books were on a number of accounts, as shocking as the previous ones - full of images of a snatched child, harrowing ballooning accident, however they “marked more mature phase in McEwan’s career” (Begley, 2013).

Another change came with his satiric novel *Amsterdam* (1998) which was generally well received and won The Booker Prize for fiction. It has brought him on the rank together with the forefront of contemporary British writers, such as Julian Barnes or Martin Amis. It marked another change in his work. His distinctive style has been described by Ryan as “the art of unease” (British Council, 2013). As Finney (2002) observes the significant tendencies of his writing prevail in his work, especially his fascination with the taboo and illicit behaviour. McEwan argues that his obsession with the theme of evil “is the kind of whereby one tries to imagine the worst thing possible in order to get hold of the good” (Hamilton, p. 20).

Moreover, it marked another change in his writing style. “I could not have written *Atonement* without first writing *Amsterdam*”. As Begley (2013) points out “*Atonement* is as much a novel of ideas as *Black Dogs* or *Enduring Love*, as socially acute as *Amsterdam*, as dangerously violent as *The Comfort Strangers*, as sexy as *Cement Garden* – yet in *Atonement* these diverse elements are masterfully integrated.”

For the literary public sphere it came as a surprise. The new novel was nothing like McEwan had written before. It seemed to be far away from McEwan’s early novels that

were shocking and perverse and for which he earned himself a rather mocking nickname “Ian Macabre” (Finney, 2002).

3 ATONEMENT

3.1 Literary context of the novel

The novel *Atonement* was published in 2001 and it has been considered by many critics a masterpiece. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction and the Whitbread Novel Award and it received the W. H. Smith Literary Award (British Council, 2013).

A film version of *Atonement* was released in 2007, directed by Joe Wright and a screenplay by Christopher Hampton also received a critical acclaim. In the following chapter, a reader will be introduced to the storyline. The narrative technique of the book will be examined afterwards.

3.2 Storyline

The major events occur one hot day in the summer 1935. A thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis has just finished her play called *The Trials of Arabella*. The play is to be performed as a welcome gift for her brother Leon who is coming that night. She lives at her family's country estate together with her parents. Their eldest daughter Cecilia has recently returned from Cambridge University for the summer holidays.

Briony is planning to engage her cousins into her play - a fifteen-year-old Lola and her brothers, nine-year-old twins Pierrot and Jackson. They have come to stay with the Tallis family 'not to witness their parents' divorce'.

But her cousin's attitude and the impossibility of total control over her play, leaves her frustrated and the play is not to be shown after all. Just then she witnesses from the nursery window a spat between her sister and Robbie at the fountain. Robbie, a son of their cleaning lady, also studies in Cambridge and his education is funded by Cecilia's

father. The two barely spoke to each other while at the university but now they are forced to confront the mutual attraction to each other.

Robbie decides to write her a love letter. He writes several drafts and then he entrusts the letter to Briony to hand it to her sister. Accidentally, he gives her the wrong version containing some explicit expressions. Briony reads the letter and classes Robbie as a sex maniac. Her view is only reinforced when she interrupts the couple making love in the library and interprets it as an assault.

Meanwhile, Leon finally arrives and brings along his rich and a rather dull friend Paul Marshall. That night during a dinner party the twin brothers run away. All the guests are split up into groups in order to search for the twins. During the hunt Lola is sexually assaulted in the grounds of the estate. Briony convinces everyone, including the police, that it was Robbie she saw at the crime scene.

At the end of 'Part One' Robbie is being taken away by the police. As the police car drives away his mother is left in desperate state.

The second part of the book moves forward five years. It depicts Robbie in the midst of war-torn France as he retreats to the coast of Dunkirk. He is accompanied by two Corporals, Nettle and Mace, whom he navigates. He has been badly injured in the side during an enemy attack and in which he has been cut off from his troop. However, he has not told to his companions about his injury. The reader learns from the series of retrospections and letters from Cecilia that she has become a trainee nurse and that she is estranged from her family. Robbie learns from her that Briony has also become a nurse and has contacted her by a letter.

The third part of the novel focuses on Briony and her training to become a nurse at St. Thomas' hospital. By this time, she is aware of the damage she has caused and she is

willing to do anything to make up her sins. One day she receives a letter from which she learns that her cousin Lola is getting married to Paul Marshall who has become a millionaire. Briony decides to attend the wedding in order to reveal the truth about the real rapist – Paul Marshall but ends only observing the ceremony as she is unable to intervene. After the wedding, she goes to see Cecilia to admit her guilt and state her willingness to do whatever it takes to atone. Robbie who is also in Cecilia's apartment instructs Briony about her actions to recant her testimony against him. She tries to express her regrets again but the apology is being taken blankly.

Although the third person narrative is being used in the third part, at the last page of the part, the initials BT are at the foot of the page.

In the final section called London 1999 we meet 77-year-old Briony Tallis, who has become a successful writer. She suffers from vascular dementia, which will gradually cause loss of memory and the ability to speak or write. She is to take necessary measures and end her career as a writer. Having finished her last novel, she admits that after writing many drafts, she decided to finish with a happy ending. The truth about her sister and her lover is that Robbie died of septicaemia on the beach at Dunkirk one day before the evacuation and Cecilia was killed during the bombing of London, three months after Robbie's death. On the final page Briony, the author of the book, concludes "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 unite them at the end. I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me" (McEwan, 2002, p. 372).

3.3 Narrator, point of view

Postmodernists distrust the notion of only one truth. This is clearly demonstrated through McEwan's writing by using multiple viewpoints. In this chapter, the narrative structure of the book is closely examined.

The idea that truth can be revealed from multiple viewing angles is embodied in 'The scene by the fountain', Part One, when Briony witnesses a seemingly strange encounter between her sister and Robbie from her bedroom window. It becomes a crucial point of the book and is in the following chapters interpreted from the point of view of Cecilia and subsequently by Robbie. In the scene Cecilia comes to the fountain in order to fill her vase. In spite of Cecilia's refusal, Robbie wants to help but accidentally causes damage to the vase and some fragments of the vase break off and fall in the basin of the fountain. Cecilia decides to dive in and find the missing pieces. Looking angrily, Cecilia marches back to the house. Briony misinterprets the whole situation as Robbie commanding her sister to strip down and being abusive towards her.

Atonement is, in many senses, Briony's story. Or so to speak, there is only one narrative voice, that later turns out to be Briony's.

3.4 Postmodernist features

Mainly for its postmodernist approach to reality, the novel has been marked as a postmodernist. Apart from the use of symbols that allows free interpretation, there are some other postmodernist features, which are analysed in this chapter.

3.4.1 The historical class issues

In *Atonement*, McEwan deals with some historical issues such as the social hierarchy in England before the war and the theme of World War Two.

It is claimed by Bentley (2005, p. 9) that “In Britain, these clear class divisions owed much to the legacy of the social problems of the 1930, imported in to the very different world that begun to emerge after the Second World War.”¹ McEwan is listed among those who pay attention to these issues. The theme of class is discussed in the following section.

The different social status between Robbie and Cecilia causes confusion at the beginning of the novel. Moreover, since her father has been subsidising Robbie’s education. Both of them feel a deep unease which affect their behaviour. Cecilia finds Robbie’s acting as a form of exaggerated deference. “He had a way of wrong-footing her whenever he could. Two day before he had rung the front doorbell – in itself odd, for he had always had the freedom of the house....Robbie made a great show of removing his boots which weren’t dirty at all, and then, as an afterthought, tiptoed with comic exaggeration across the wet floor. Everything he did was designed to distance her. He was play-acting the cleaning lady’s son come to the big house on errand” (McEwan, 2002, p. 27).

Due to his Cambridge education, Robbie possesses manners of an upper-class member, but ultimately these qualities give him no benefits as he comes from a working class background. As Halford (2012) observes despite the fact that McEwan provides number of hints referring to the Marshall’s perversity in Part One, the Tallises fail to recognise it. Although the Tallis family has known Robbie for many years, the doubts are

¹ The story begins in the summer 1935

casted on him, while Paul Marshall, the newcomer, is protected from any questioning. Their different positions in the social hierarchy cause that they are also treated differently. The chocolate millionaire's social status keeps him out of suspicion for many years. In the war he profits from distributing his chocolate bars to the soldiers. Furthermore, his chocolate bars called Amo make him a hero after war. McEwan draws a parallel between the two characters, as Halford (2012) points out, through Amo bar when Briony as a nurse describes what she witnesses with the coming wounded soldiers: "blood, oil, sand, mud, sea water, bullets, shrapnel, engine grease, or the smell of cordite, or damp sweaty battledress whose pockets contained rancid food along with the sodden crumbs of Amo bars" (McEwan, 2002, p. 304).

Another comparison is made by the viewing of the war. While for Paul Marshall, the war means only opportunity from which he can profit and subsequently, it makes him a very wealthy man, Robbie faces the harshest reality of war and eventually dies on the beach of Dunkirk.

As for the theme of the Second World War represented in the book, not only Briony experiences the horrors of the war. The whole Part Two is devoted to this topic with some detailed description of the situation at Dunkirk and Robbie's experiences as he retreats to the coast, hoping to be evacuated to Britain.

3.4.2 Self-reflexivity

Another typical postmodernist feature that is clearly represented in *Atonement* is metafiction, i.e. a fiction that constantly reminds the reader it is a fiction and also addresses the problems and possibilities of storytelling and narrative generally (Malcolm, 2002). As the reader reaches the end of the part three, on the foot of the page there are the

initials “BT” and “London 1999.” The following last section of the book with the same heading “London 1999”, reveals that the story is a Briony’s work of fiction (and the reader denotes that the initials stand for Briony Tallis). One of the central characters Briony Tallis who appears in the first two parts and whose points of view are present. However now, she is the first person’s narrator.

More precisely, as Mullan (2003) argues, McEwan’s *Atonement* is a case of metanarrative or “revelation withheld”. The technique is used to let the readers identify with the characters and create the illusion of narrative. Thus, McEwan intends to make the readers believe that the imaginary ending, Briony has created for Robbie and Cecilia, is real.

Although the true unveiling comes in the last section of the book, McEwan gives a reader several hints especially in the first part. The proleptic narration is also employed when Briony witnesses the scene by the fountain: “As she stood in the nursery waiting for her cousins’ return she sensed she could write a scene like the one by the fountain and she could include a hidden observer like herself. She could imagine herself hurrying down now to her bedroom, to a clean block of lined paper and her marbled, Bakelite fountain pen. She could see the simple sentences, the accumulating telepathic symbols, unfurling at the nib’s end. She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view;” (McEwan, 2002, p. 40).

A prolepsis is what Mullan (2003) calls the reader’s premature knowledge of eventualities or more precisely temporal prolepsis, as Mullan acknowledges, a term that has been coined by Genette.

According to Chalupský, the author achieved “the effect of a dissolved totality” and a sense of detachment through conveying different characters’ points of view (Chalupský 2006, p.7).

Although many critics have praised *Atonement* as a masterpiece, some reviewers have expressed some scepticism toward the final coda, which reveals that Briony, now a successful writer, has written the whole novel by herself, altering the ending to her own purposes.

In his critical work, Finney (2002) argues that the reserved voices are simply caused by misreading the novel. The reason for reviewers to dismiss the final section is that they “...read Part One as a strictly realist narration and fault McEwan for failing to live up to the realist expectations that he has aroused during the first half of the book.” To support this claim we can list number of examples when the author clues the reader. The book opens with almost mockery tone describing the melodrama that has been clumsily written by 13-year-old Briony. The point is as Finney (2002) observes that before we get to know Briony as a person, we learn about her over-active imagination:

“Six decades later she would describe how at the age of thirteen she had written her way through a whole history of literature, beginning with stories derived from the European tradition folk tales, through drama with simple moral intent, to arrive at an impartial psychological realism which she had discovered for herself, one special morning during a heat wave in 1935”

(McEwan, 2002, p. 41).

Additionally, Zalewski (2009) likens the structure of *Atonement* to some kind of psychological experiment. When the reader reaches the end of the book and finds out the whole truth they are more likely to refuse the ending. If that happens, then in McEwan's words, the experiment worked. The author comments on this: "I'm still often asked, 'What really happened?' "I don't tire of it, because I think that to ask that question of me means I succeeded in something. We can't retreat to the nineteenth century. We now have a narrative self-awareness that we can never escape, but we don't want to be crushed by that, either. 'Atonement' was my attempt to discuss where we stand" (The New Yorker, 2009).

3.4.3 Pastiche

The pastiche is a significant feature in McEwan's work and is also employed in *Atonement*. About his previous novels, McEwan had said that they are "a kind of pastiche of a certain style its origins were always slightly parodic" (Hamilton, p. 17).

At the beginning of the novel we read a quotation from *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen. An epigraph, in general, introduces to the atmosphere of the book. It also gives the reader a thought that he/she should bear in mind while reading the book. In the case of *Atonement* it has an additional purpose. "It serves as both a warning and guide to how to view this narrative" (Finney, 2002).

'Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English: that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social

and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland what ideas have you been admitting?' They had reached the end of the gallery; and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room (McEwan, 2002).

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is a coming-of-age story of the main protagonist, Catherine Morland. Austen in this novel uses a rather mocking tone as she makes a parody to the Gothic romances at that time. In this quoted extract, Catherine is being admonished by Henry Tilney for failing to distinguish the reality from the fiction. Clearly, the similarities can be identified. Firstly, an obvious connection to Briony whose excessive imagination leads to misunderstanding reality can be applied. The difference is that for Briony there is no Henry Tilney to warn her and at the end of the book we meet 77-year-old Briony, now a successful writer, who has purposely used fiction to alter the reality as a kind of redemption. Secondly, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* has been marked as one of the earliest examples of metafiction (Literary Minded, 2012).

Additionally, Finney (2002) points out McEwan uses purposely the name Tilney for the hotel into which the old Tallis house has been converted, acknowledging the influence.

Finally, both novels are coming-of-age stories. The so-called bildungsroman, Bentley writes, "becomes a popular form and the concerns of childhood and adolescence appear in the fiction of many authors of the 90s. McEwan is cited among those who engage with bildungsroman form (Bentley, 2005, p. 11).

Overall, the postmodernist features in the novel have been summarized. McEwan examines the issues that are typical of postmodernism, specifically historical issues such as the context of the social class system and the Second World War, pastiche and

intertextuality, and the relevance of truth. Last, but certainly not least the role of symbols in the novel which are discussed in the following chapter, should not be neglected.

3.5 Symbols in the novel

Throughout the novel, McEwan touches on several symbols. In this chapter the most significant ones have been chosen to be analysed in greater detail.

3.5.1 Writing

Writing is perhaps the novel's strongest theme. One of the most obvious examples is Briony's play, *The Trials of Arabella*. It serves as a demonstration of Briony's imagination but it also shows her tendency to have control over things. According to Reynolds and Noakes (2011) it represents Briony's fascination with romance and her need for moral order.

Briony spends her time in the company of adults but most of the time she is left alone. She uses writing as an escape from reality. Throughout the Part One, McEwan makes it evident that Briony craves to be noticed and praised. He writes "This was precisely why she loved plays, or hers at least, everyone would adore her" (McEwan, 2002, p. 11). As a young child she realizes the power of the writer to decide outcomes. This leads her to an erroneous accusation which ends up ruining the lives of the people around her. As she grows older she stops being so self-interested and her writing reflects her development. When her perspective changes, she writes her book in order to amend with herself and make up her wrongdoing. She finds writing the only possible way to atone. She later writes "Two Figures by a Fountain", in which her efforts are embodied.

3.5.2 Symbol of secret

A truth that is hidden to the reader is one of the central themes of the story. Together with Briony the reader uncovers the real sequence of events as the story progresses.

In his critical work Matthews (2007) points out that it is the form rather than its content that makes secret a secret, along with the statement he cites Maurice Blanchot “The stratagem of the secret is either to show itself, to make itself so visible that it is not seen (to disappear, that is, as a secret), or to hint that the secret is only secret where there is no secret, or no appearance of any secret.” Clearly, McEwan is aware of this quality of secret as he demonstrates it through the character of Briony and the awareness of it in the first chapters of the book when the events lead the main protagonist to her false accusation.

McEwan presents the nature of secret in the symbolic way to draw the reader into the story. For instance, the novel’s first chapter denotes that Briony’s fascination with storytelling origins in her “passion for secrets” (McEwan, 2002, p.5). In the following extract we can identify Briony’s obsession with secrets:

“In a prized varnished cabinet, a secret drawer was opened by pushing against the grain of a cleverly turned dovetail joint, and here she kept a diary locked by a clasp, and a notebook written in a code of her own invention.[...] An old tin petty cash box was hidden under a removable floorboard beneath her bed. In the box were treasures that dated back four years, to her ninth birthday when she began collecting: a mutant double acorn, fool’s gold, a rainmaking spell bought at a funfair, a squirrel’s skull as light as a leaf.”

As Matthews (2007) indicates it is all these objects that are hidden and kept by Briony share the promise of something greater. More precisely, something that has been stopped on their way to greater self. An acorn is only a pre-stadium of greater germination. Fool's gold represents a duplicate of a true gold, a rainmaking spell again only pretending its function and finally a squirrel's skull the reminiscence of a real, lively animal. "But hidden drawers, lockable diaries and cryptographic systems could not conceal from Briony the simple truth: she had no secrets" (McEwan, 2002, p. 5). It is the very attribute of these objects that indicates the nature of secret. Briony remarks that her secrets are not secret unless they possess the appeal of knowledge. It is an example of one's desire to have more excitement in life. The overactive imagination eventually leads precocious Briony to erroneous accusation.

3.5.3 Weather

The weather in *Atonement* matches the emotional and narrative tone of the story. The following chapter analyses the theme of weather and its role in the novel.

The heat hovers over the first part of the story and foreshadows the upcoming for many life-changing events. Also, one of the most climactic turning points of the story happens on the hottest day of the summer. The dinner party is thrown, though the guests feel nauseated at the thought of eating the roast dinner.

As Mullan (2003) argues the theme of weather has played its significant role in English literature. English writers have employed it number of times in the colonial literature: Forster's *Passage to India*, Conrad's *Africa* or in the novel *The Grass is singing* by Doris Lessing. Yet, the effect of an intense heat in a country that is not used to such things has different impacts on its inhabitants. It can be found in the works of English

writers since 19th century. Jane Austen uses the theme as one of the earliest in *Emma*. The role of weather as a symbol can be also found in McEwan's earlier novel *The Cement Garden* (Mullan, 2003).

“It was hot, ludicrously hot” (McEwan, 2002, p. 37). The novel characters make constant comments about the palpable heat and evidently, it affects everyone - from Briony's mother to their guest, a chocolate magnate, Paul Marshall.

3.5.4 Uncle Clam's Vase

Another significant subject is an antique vase. The property of the Tallis family which used to belong to their uncle who received it as a present for his actions in the First World War and it was now held by the family as an honour. The vase is broken, when Robbie and Cecilia fight over it by the fountain. The vase is broken as many other things that have been broken that day. Yet, as it is claimed by Finney (2003) the vase is still mended, only to be shattered a few years later during the Second World War - as well as the society to which the Tallis family belongs, symbolising the extinction of the old social order. “If it had survived the war, the reasoning went, then it could survive the Tallises” (McEwan, 2002, p. 23). Finney (2003) also remarks that “The vase is a fragile object that has miraculously survived two centuries of use (as has the structured society that the Tallises represent), that is directly identified with the family through Uncle Clem. Its fracturing and eventual destruction imaginistically anticipate those of the family and the pre-War society to which both belong.”

Additionally, Reynolds and Noakes (2011) draw attention to an island near the house of Tallis family which is mentioned in connection with the rape. “The bridge led to nothing more than an artificial island in an artificial lake. It had been there two

hundred years almost, and its detachment marked it out from the rest of the land, and it belonged to her more than to anyone else. She was the only one who ever came here.” It is suggested by Reynolds and Noakes that it symbolizes “Briony’s impulse to step out of reality into the artifice of the world of the imagination” (Reynolds and Noakes 2011, p. 143).

4 FILM ADAPTATION

In 2007 McEwan's novel was brought to the screen. The film was directed by Joe Wright with an adaptation by Christopher Hampton. The film was critically acclaimed, mainly praised for the strong central performances, fine cinematography and music by Dario Marianelli. The chapter analyses the film adaptation of the novel and examines the filmmakers' concept and their approaches to McEwan's metanarrative.

A film adaptation is somehow disadvantaged even before the actual film comes to light. Naturally, it is not possible to avoid critique of those who had had simply different vision of the whole concept. Adapting of a novel of such length is quite a challenge. A film has to condense and give up that inside feeling you get only when you read a book. On the other hand, a film can provide the visuals aspects so can feel being in immediate proximity of the story as nothing can.

4.1 The director and casting

Having made his debut as a film director in 2005 with a Jane Austen's classic "Pride and Prejudice", two years later Joe Wright took on another adaptation of a novel. Keira Knightley, who also starred in *Pride and Prejudice*, plays Cecilia Tallis. Originally, the Wright considered Keira Knightley for the role of eighteen-year-old Briony. However, according to her words, she couldn't identify herself with the character and for that reason, she has been chosen to play Briony's older sister. Robbie Turner is played by James McAvoy. For the role of thirteen-year-old Briony, Saoirse Ronan has been chosen, which has proved to be a great choice, as Ronan has become one of the youngest people

nominated for the Academy Award. At eighteen, Briony is played by Romola Garai and later in life, as an elderly author, by Vanessa Redgrave (IMDB, 2007).

4.2 Symbols in the film

Acknowledging McEwan's most profound theme, the cinematographs came up with the way to employ the symbolic meaning of the novel in a film. The audience experiences the audiovisual devices such as sound effects and visualization of the process of writing of Briony to evoke the novel's sense of metanarration (Vartalitis, 2013).

The languid opening scenes depicting the Tallis mansion on a hot summer day, as it is described by O'Hara (2008), give the powerful period atmosphere.

The heat that radiates from the screen matches the tension of an unsettling hothouse, bubbling under the surface and giving the notion that something is about to go terribly wrong. The colour that clearly dominates in the first part of the film is green. The production designer Sarah Greenwood likens the choice of this colour "to the height of summer feel, right on the edge of falling to rotteness" (Bowen, 2007).

Colours and visual themes metaphorically symbolize the postmodern issues of class antagonism, war and sexuality. For instance, in the scene when through Briony's point of view the viewer encounters Robbie Turner. Wearing an old, dirty shirt, he is putting on gloves as he talks, probably about to start working which contrasts with his upper-class accent.

Another observation would point to the use of allusion in the film. In the scene where Robbie is being driven away by the police car, Robbie's mother desperately roars "*Liars!*" Briony, who has been watching the scene, stares at her reflection in the window.

As the Mrs. Turner's voice can be heard in the dark, Briony stares unblinking at the window. The decoration on the stained glass displays a figure on a closer look, it says Matilda underneath. This alludes to a line from a famous children's poem by Hilaire Belloc that opens: "Matilda told such dreadful lies, it made one gap and stretch one's eyes." This element does not appear in the book and has been added by the filmmakers (IMDB, 2007).

In the novel, McEwan pays considerable attention to the development of the characters, especially the changes in Briony. Also, the character of Briony's mother, Emily Tallis and her old-fashioned way of thinking is in the book manifested number of times, as the reader is given insight into her perceptions. The film, on the other hand, focuses on scenes rather than character and so the film misses a great deal of symbolism that McEwan concentrates on. However, to an extent it is made up by other visual devices, as for example the locations that have been chosen for the film.

4.2.1 Location

The film begins at the Tallis estate. In the book it is described as a place "barely forty years old, bright, squat, lead-paned baronial Gothic" Greenwood, the production designer, has explained that she set two goals, she wanted to achieve. Firstly, the house needed to reveal the owner's class aspiration and secondly to set the atmosphere of tension. (Bowen, 2007).

In addition to the introducing the main character which as was mentioned before (see Chapter 3.4.2). From the audience's point of view that can be learnt from opening scene where the camera focuses on the doll house in Briony's bedroom. The second shot begins with the same view at the house, however, this time it is an actual house of the Tallis family. It has an implicit meaning from which the audience can learn that the main

character does not make a real difference from the world of fantasy and real world, which the audience realizes throughout the film.

For the second part of the book that is set in Dunkirk it was found the town of Redcar was found. To meet the McEwan's description it required a great amount of time studying the historical context of the Dunkirk retreat. As a part of her research, Greenwood studied the historical materials such as film footages, photographs taken by the Germans. She also visited the Imperial War Museum in London, where she did much of her research and which is also mentioned in the book (Bowen, 2007).

4.2.2 The role of music and sound effects in the film

Atonement won the Academy Award for Best Original Score and received six other nominations. The following paragraph analyses the role of music and sound effects in the film.

The film begins with the film's title and its setting "England, 1935" being loudly printed out by a manual typewriter. This serves as an introduction to the central theme – storytelling and its power and makes the spectator's mind aware of fact that they are about to experience a fiction. It can be also viewed as a simulation of the book's clues about Briony being the author and therefore as a sly trick that goes along with McEwan's prolepsis in the book. Typewriting sound effects can be also considered as a tribute to the book and its author. The non-diegetic sounds of typewriter mix with piano music, as Briony walks through the house and can be heard through the film and remain to be the score's most prominent aspect. Dario Marianelli's soundtrack accompanies emotive scenes by lush music, e.g. a scene in which Briony comforts a dying French soldier, pretending to be his girlfriend. As she walks away Debussy's *Clair de Lune* is being played (IMDB, 2007).

The constant use of the sound effects of a typewriter clues the viewer to the areas of fiction. It creates the atmosphere and most of all for the keeping the theme of writing. Thus, it remains true to the theme presented in the book.

5 KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BOOK AND THE NOVEL

In adapting the novel, the screenwriter, Christopher Hampton had to bear in mind the time constraints of the film and therefore condense the length of a nearly four hundred page book. Key differences between the film and the book are considered and the comparison is provided below.

Generally, Hampton's adaptation can be described as highly faithful and the specific dialogues are brought to the screen completely intact. The filmmakers have found the way to transform the McEwan's narrative trick in the final coda, making spectators question everything they have seen.

In the final sequence of the film Robbie and Cecilia walk on a beach on a bright sunny day. In the background the seaside cottage can be seen. Presumably, the element has been added to visualize their dream that will never be fulfilled.

Since the book is able to provide the train of thought that takes place in people's minds and is written from different points of view, in case of Briony's character, we are able to understand her motivations and actions better. Thus, in this sense the film relatively disfavours Briony. In the light of the statement, the scene, in which Robbie calls Briony over and asks her to deliver a note to Cecilia, can be demonstrated.

While in the film the scene amounts only Briony going around across the field in a single brief shot, the sequence in the book is being stretched out for several pages, describing Briony's rage at the failure in attempting to rehearse her play. She wreaks her anger by flaying the nettles and then in her self-pity she aimlessly wonders around waiting for some distraction when Robbie appears...

This also illustrates another crucial difference between the book and the film. Due to McEwan's lush style and complex structures the book is very dense. The film speaks with its striking images. Where there are long sentences in the book, there are longing glances, silent pauses, sparse dialogue in the film.

5.1 Comparison of the novel and film structure

The following paragraph focuses on the structure of the book and to what extent has been preserved in the film.

The book is divided into three main parts, with an epilogue at the end. Each part has a specific tone and structure. Part one consists of fourteen chapters and it is the longest part of the book. Taking place in the course of one single day, it focuses on description and the thought process of characters. The second part shifts over the five years, it depicts Robbie as he makes his way to Dunkirk, where the British forces are to be evacuated. Part Three deals with Briony's life as a nurse trainee, after she has realised the impact of her mistake and attempts to rectify her wrongdoing.

Unlike Part one, the two final parts are without chapters, only occasionally with headings and compare to the first section the other two chapters there are less inner-thought workings as both of the sections are more dynamic. In the status of final coda, London 1999, Briony as an omniscient narrator is revealed.

Like the Ian McEwan's novel, the film is divided into three parts, each defined by a different viewpoint, location and period of time. The opening half of *Atonement* is very much faithful to the novel. As for the second part, the noticeable break is also present in the film. The warm bright colours of the scenery of English summer have faded away and turned into greyish dim shades reflecting the harsh reality of war-worn countryside.

Compare to the second part, the first part feels almost dreamy. While in the book, McEwan pays attention to gruesome details, the film opts for a more emotional setting. In the film by Joe Wright (2007), the most memorable scene is likely to be the six-minute tracking shot of the beach at Dunkirk, where thousands of shattered troops await for their evacuation and in which the film makers forefront the sense of omniscient author. The camera follows Robbie along the beach as he witnesses the mobs of troops, the scenes of total havoc and despair: drunks spinning on the carousel, shipwrecks, cavalrymen shooting horses to deny the Germans the advancement, soldiers fighting, draining the place, searching for food and a place to hide. Yet it is the reflection in Robbie's face, to which the camera keeps turning, that makes the audience experience the horrific reality of war.

Joe Wright comments on making the scene: "It's all about capturing the light. I had faith that at a certain point we were going to get really good light that day and I'd almost chosen a location because of the direction of the light at evening. I wanted a magical, elegiac sense to that scene. It's a scene about wastefulness – of human life, of animal life, of machines, of industry, of everything... even Bibles were being thrown on the fire so the German's couldn't use them. So, we rehearsed all day and at 6pm we started shooting. I got three takes and on the third one the light was with us and it was magical" (Indie London, 2013).

However, in comparison with the book, the ending has been considerably altered and is likely to be the biggest discrepancy between the film and the novel. The film sets the ending as an interview with Briony. While promoting her new published book in a talk show, she makes confession about the truth ending. Contrary to the novel, where the

last section appears as a monologue, in which it is said that she had decided not to publish it while the Marshalls live for fear of litigation.

Moreover, multiperspectival narration is significantly less present. For an interview Joe Wright explains that "[he] ... wanted to get this sense of an omniscient author and her writing of the story you're watching" (Douglas, 2007).

For the reasons discussed above, I would recommend to read the book before viewing its film version. It is the opinion of the present writer that the multiple points of view provide the reader with a better understanding of individual character's motivations. The book provides the reader with plenty of details and allusions, whereas the scenes in the film occur quietly without explanations. Yet, the film adaptation remains true to Ian McEwan's novel. The film managed to retain the novel's themes of love, guilt, innocence, forgiveness and atonement.

CONCLUSION

The thesis concentrated on the use of symbolism in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* as well as in its film adaptation by Joe Wright.

The role of symbols in the context of postmodernism has been introduced. The second chapter dealt with the author and the development of his literary style. While the following chapter examined the presence of postmodernist features in the work, the third chapter analysed various symbols that are employed in the novel in greater detail.

The thesis offered an analytical insight into the thematic and symbolic levels of McEwan's *Atonement*. The both media have been compared and to find the main differences and the extent to which the symbolism used in the novel has been transformed into the film version.

Overall, the film is quite reflective of the book in terms of structure and switching between character developments. The symbolic meaning of the novel has been transformed into a film in a lesser extent. However, despite the fact that the film lacks the insight into the motives of the characters, it is highly compensated by the visual immediacy and makes a surprisingly faithful adaptation of the novel.

Instead of using word-to-word dialogues, the director chooses an alternative way to narrate the story. That is achieved mainly by the visual immediacy. The theme of writing has been transferred into a film with the typewriter sound effects. It was also suggested to read the novel before watching the film, as only this way McEwan's use of symbolism can be fully appreciated and understood on a deeper level.

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THESES

McEwan's distinguished style has become a topic of a number of theses. The thesis that deals with McEwan's literary style called Ian McEwan's Status as Postmodernist written Bc. Michaela Michlová at the Masaryk University of Brno, also discusses McEwan's status as postmodernist. However it is the aim of the whole thesis and it deals with the extent to which McEwan can be marked as postmodernist. It also mentions the role of the symbols, however it touches on it only marginally.

RESUMÉ

Bakalářská práce se zabývá interpretací literárního díla Ian McEwana Pokání a jeho komparací s filmovou adaptací. Zaměřuje se přitom především na roli symbolů v kontextu postmodernismu. Poskytuje analýzu románu, a to jednak z hlediska jeho nejvýraznějších postmodernistických rysů, tak symbolů samotných. Práce obsahuje také analýzu filmu Pokání a komparaci s literární předlohou.

ANOTATION

Jméno a příjmení:	Silvie Bednarská
Katedra:	Katedra anglického jazyka
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Josef Nevařil, Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2014

Název práce:	Symbolismus v románu Ian McEwana Pokání (srovnání knihy a filmové podoby)
Název v angličtině:	Symbolism in Ian McEwan's Atonement (Comparison of the novel and the film)
Anotace práce:	<p>Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá interpretací románu Pokání Iana McEwana a jeho komparací s filmovou podobou. Zaměřuje se přitom především na roli symbolů. Nejprve je představen život a dílo autora. Následující kapitoly poskytují analýzu nejvýraznějších postmodernistických rysů. Podrobná analýza symbolů sleduje jejich funkci v románu. Cílem komparace je především snaha analyzovat symboly v románu a jejich zobrazení ve filmové podobě.</p>
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Symbols, Ian McEwan, Atonement, postmodernist features, film adaptation, comparison
Anotace práce v angličtině:	<p>This thesis deals with interpretation of Ian McEwan's Atonement and its comparison with the film adaptation. It concentrates on the use of symbols, which are put into the context of postmodernism. The following chapter introduces the author's life, specifically the development of his literary style. It focuses on the postmodernist features of the novel and a detailed analysis of the symbols is provided afterwards. The outcome of this thesis is the analysis of both novel and film and the last chapter examines the key differences between both the media. It deals with the extent to which the film version reflects the symbolic levels of the novel.</p>
Rozsah práce:	46 s.
Jazyk práce:	angličtina

