UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

The Rebirth of the Author: The Use and Abuse of Authorship in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and *Sweet Tooth* (2012)

Cristina Arbués Caballé

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Linguistic, Literary, and Cultural Studies

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Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities

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Abstract

English

This work explores the use and abuse of authorship in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and *Sweet Tooth* (2012). Through an exploration of a variety of different theoretical fields, the study focuses on the ways in which McEwan produces two narratives which contradict the ideas posited by Roland Barthes in the pivotal "The Death of the Author" (1967). Barthes' text proclaims the death of subjectivity and in the process attempts to erase the concept of authorial intention in literary works of fiction. In turn, Barthes opts for the birth of another, heretofore ignored figure: that of the reader. British Novelist Ian McEwan, notwithstanding, presents two novels in which two fictional authors (Briony Tallis and Tom Haley) produce narratives that not only require the acknowledgement of their existence as authors, but also require the reader's attention, active participation and collaboration in a joint and collaborative act of creation. In this way, McEwan thus manages to prove that authors and authorial intention cannot be obliterated.

This study implies that the drive behind the fictional authors' actions is related to the intricate relationship that links traumatic experience and the use of metafiction in a text. For that reason, specific attention is placed on the exploration of authorship, reader-response and the inherent relationship between author and reader. The study also focuses on trauma studies to discern the effects of the traumatic occurrence on the psyche of two characters whose fragmented identities require a literary technique (the metafictional) in order to regain the power lost in the traumatic occurrence and hence impose their authority on their text as all-knowing and God-like author figures. Notwithstanding, it is argued that Ian McEwan vies for exploring new forms of authorship, redefining the theories extrapolated from the 1960s onwards and opting for a reconceptualised, collaborative effort that contemplates the figures of authors and readers as working together towards the creation of meaning. For all such reasons, the main theoretical basis the study draws from is the ideas of postmodernism, albeit these are questioned and repurposed, in an understanding that it is not McEwan's intention to comply with the limits established either traditionally or by postmodernism, but rather, that it is in his interest to push the boundaries of what is expected from a text (both traditionally and under postmodern terms).

The study draws from studies on authorship, focusing on the works of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and more contemporary thinkers such as David Lodge and Wayne C. Booth as well as dealing with studies on reader-response criticism, mainly through the lens of Jane P. Tompkins and Wolfgang Iser, theories later explored in *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* by exploring the nature of the authorial identities of its protagonists, along with the relationships established between reader and author (especially in *Sweet Tooth*). Furthermore, the study then turns to trauma studies, drawing from the theories of Sigmund Freud, Dominick LaCapra and Michael S. Roth, in an attempt at understanding the drive behind the inscribed author's intentions in the writing of their texts. Ultimately, by linking a detailed study of the trauma experienced by both inscribed authors to the need of the use of the metafictional artifice (understood under the lens of scholars Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh, amongst others), the study concludes that the techniques offered by postmodernism prove pivotal (and certainly successful) in dismantling precisely the notions of the "Death of the Author".

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Pere Arbués. I have written large portions of it in hospital waiting rooms, in hospital beds, in hospital cafeterias, waiting for trains, in post-its, postcards or pamphlets on the go… I have gone to McEwan's works to attempt to find the words to provide a eulogy for my father (ironically, I couldn't find them, don't tell McEwan), and I have also experienced writer's block, almost a whole year of it, as a result of grief (which ironically fits into all of the ideas to be found in the trauma section for this thesis). Mostly I want to acknowledge the man that read books I recommended begrudgingly and only when I bought them for him. Who never trusted my judgement for literature, even when I became a lecturer. A man that termed authors I loved as plain and boring. That often told his friends his daughter worked for an NGO. That when telling him I wanted to go into a masters, asked if the topic this time would be "el llenguatge dels mosquits a una jungla secreta, potser?", that couldn't even see a piece of postmodern art without rolling his eyes in such a way it made you laugh, but ultimately, a man that taught his daughters they could be whatever they wanted to be, however they wanted to be so. I would never have written the following pages without his teasing, his irony, his humour, his rhetoric. The last three years of his life my father became somebody else and seeing how the brain of one of the most intelligent and quick-witted people I have ever met was slowly overpowered by cancerous tumours, and how his brain kept fighting, refusing to let language go, finding his way around words and sentences, and fighting to be understood, only reinforced my belief in the importance of literature. He taught me to question things, daily. Without that, I would have never started to question words, texts, authors, or readership.

I cannot even begin to thank my mother, my sister, and my brother(in-law). Not only did they help me economically whenever I could not afford to go to a conference

or to pay for my PhD fees, but their pride in me is what has kept me going. Gràcies, mama per creure tant en mi, gràcies, Gibet per estar tant orgullosa de la teva germana, i també per donar-me unes nebodes tant meravelloses, a les que espero poder continuar transmetent l'amor per la literatura. Espero poder inspirar a una d'elles ni que sigui un 5% del que tú m'inspires diàriament.

I want to thank María, for having a conversation (and a coffee) with me that sparked the idea around the similarities between the novels I would end up appropriating and writing about. Brad, for celebrating with me the day I first enrolled for my PhD (and for warning me about my dangerous use of prepositions). Macarena, for not understanding postmodernism and forcing me to explain it to her on a weekly basis, for her care packages and her tortillas de patatas, for being my royal sister. All of my friends and colleagues for somehow knowing when to ask and when *not* to ask about the process of my work, and for disregarding all of my worries and faithfully believing there was no way I would not succeed, especially my peers in the English department, more so especially those *associades* struggling to write, teach and research without going insane. Sonia, and what I like to call her pep talks, where she warns me 'we are all shit', and we should just get along with it, along with Bill Phillips for his much appreciated feedback. Undoubtedly, and most importantly, the director of this work, Gemma, for possessing the magic to turn my mediocre ideas into little gems, for seeing me when I was an undergraduate student that wished to be invisible, and for her blind belief in me, allowing me to grow at my own pace, never doubting my potential.

I firmly believe David Lodge would happily fictionalise me into a character for one of his campus novels: the naive young PhD candidate, thinking literature can make a difference.

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INTRODUCTION

Rationale, Aims & Methodology

On my first encounter with *Sweet Tooth* (2012) I experienced an inevitable feeling of déjà vu. I was quite an ardent reader of Ian McEwan and was therefore used to his writing enough to expect different genres and themes to emerge in each of his new novels. What I was not expecting, however, was to notice that the text felt familiar aside from its written style. Reading *Sweet Tooth* made me immediately reconsider *Atonement* (2001) and already interested in postmodern ideals about the death of absolutism and subjectivity, I started to dig deeper into the fabric of McEwan's novels to understand what might have led him to produce two novels whose endings would use the same methods and be so reminiscent of one another. My research on McEwan began on an independent level, which was not connected to my academic work, so my exploration of McEwan's works and my research on postmodernism were performed in different areas of my life: one was personal and for pleasure (McEwan), the other was academic (postmodernism), and the more this process went on, the more obvious the connections between both became.

As an undergraduate I already had qualms with Roland Barthes' proclamation of the death of the author, despite my great interest in postmodernism, my strong belief in the fragmentation of individual and social identities, in the eradication and deconstruction of the Truth, I had a lot of trouble accepting Barthes' text, and it was through the works of McEwan (namely the two works explored in the following pages) that I reached the epiphany that not all authors might be dead and that Barthes' statements were something I could potentially attempt to refute. Certainly, an author that could make me experience such déjà vu in the reading act could not be left for dead,

perhaps his work needed to be explored pitted against new ideals of the death (and as I would like to suggest in this work, the rebirth) of the author.

Evidently, I am not the first person to attempt to refute Barthes' text, nor is McEwan the only author to endeavour on a quest to prove the intentionality of the author. In fact, as shall be stated below, Barthes' text is being refuted from a literary and sociologic perspective, whereas his intentions were clearly philosophical and rather abstract. Nevertheless, for what I have gathered the last six years, I could venture to say my research is unique in uniting both fronts and positioning them against each other. For example, McEwan has been explored under postmodern terms (see Shah, Quarrie, Robinson, Finney, O'Hara, Marsh, Han and Wang, Mitrić or Cormack) but not *against* them. Trauma and postmodernism are undeniably connected, yet trauma in McEwan's novels (mainly *Atonement*, to my knowledge no work has been conducted on *Sweet Tooth*) has been explored (see Finney, Courtney, Marsh, Sjöberg, Rohani & Pirnajmuddin, Pyrhönen, Crosthwaite, Kim & Cho, Schneider or Pitt), but not to suggest that traumatic events are what eventually lead to the rebirth of an authorial figure. Metafiction has been widely discussed (see Quarrie, Eobinson, Ciorogar, Savu Walker, Marsh, Han & Wang, Rohani & Pirnajmuddin & Akhavan, Albers & Caeners, Alghamdi, Ksiezopolska, Chalupský, O'Hara, Javad Habibi, Sjöberg or Dahlbäck) and the metafictional devices utilised by McEwan in both texts have been studied *and* connected, nevertheless, to my knowledge none of such explorations have attempted to provide a reading in which the reasoning and need for metafiction emerges from a self which needs to overcome a traumatic experience and shows that in some cases, when becoming an author, there is intention, and there is a need for a somewhat collective awareness of the authorial existence.

Despite the many changes the structure for this thesis has taken, and the many turns my research has experienced, there was always the idea of 'authors' and 'readers' as being key for my understanding of McEwan's work. Such preoccupation stems from my own experience reading McEwan. One of my biggest issues with the statement of the death of the author, an issue which Seán Burke highlights in *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (1992) is the lack of analysis regarding Barthes' infamous statement. As Burke points out, after Barthes' declaration, there was a somewhat general acceptance in the academic realm towards the ideal, one certainly linked to the inevitable death of man experienced under postmodern and philosophical conceptions of identity that led to an almost blind approval of the proclamation. As Burke puts it, Barthes' statements "resulted in 'The Death of the Author' becoming the centre of controversy" (Burke 21), however, they did not result in Barthes' text becoming

> the centre of a debate or discussion. On the one hand, its dictates have been accepted unreflectively, and recourse to Barthes will be used to 'argue' the death of the author without the arguments proposed in the seven pages of his essay being themselves held up to any critical scrutiny. On the other hand, and just as unfortunately, 'The Death of the Author' has seldom provoked more than derisory dismissal from its opponents. (Burke 21)

Ironically, we live in the age of the death of the author, despite the fact authors are currently far more accessible to readers than ever before, due to growing mass-media and social networking websites. In fact, "[t]heorists continue to reiterate the idea that the concept of the subject has come to its end, and cursorily implicate the author in the same finitude without asking who or what dies in the death of man." (Burke 104) Scholars, academics and researchers alike did not seem to be interested in knowing *where* such a declaration came from or where it *led*, but rather in exploring *how* such a statement may fit into the literary realm. Barthes' text, a pamphlet (which later on was

published in essay form and is no longer than ten pages long) did not stop to provide *examples* of the death of the author, it did not concern itself with providing an overview or a clear basis from which such a conclusion could be drawn. Granted, Barthes work is philosophical in nature, heavily grounded on linguistic ideals of language and individual identity and his intention is clearly that to create speculation. Burke asserts that the death of the author took "its place within a greater closure: that of the era of subjectivity itself" (Burke 105) and ironically, as pointed out by Burke, Barthes himself went on to somewhat refute his own theory in latter works (Burke 48–49), yet his statement remains one that has been accepted almost blindly by postmodern thought. I would argue that postmodern literary studies[1] tend to overlook the philosophical nature of Barthes' text and tend to ignore the fact that the death of the author should not be entirely taken for granted, but rather should be explored, understood and perhaps refuted. I would also argue that to rebut or redefine Barthes' statement it is necessary to turn the speculation into the text itself, and not necessarily within the confines of criticism. Consequently, the author, as well as the reader, should be observed analytically, and their roles within the text should be given a lengthier treatment. Wayne C. Booth posits that "[t]hough academic study of literature too often seems designed to make such fusions of spirit impossible, turning every "text" into a thoroughly distanced puzzle or enigma, the fact remains that even the impassive puzzle solver or symbol hunter or signifier chaser is to some degree caught up in patterns determined by the puzzle – the tale as told." (Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* 142) That is the reason why this study focuses on two different novels in such a detailed way, providing a very close inspection of each text, to attempt to see the ways in which a

[1] This is a rather generalising statement, considering that postmodernism *could* be considered to be a philosophical tendency as well, and its speculations heavily grounded on philosophical abstraction. What is being suggested is that postmodern literary studies, those that attempt to analyse and approach texts under the terms and guidelines of postmodern literary thought seem to overlook such philosophical and linguistic traits in Barthes' text.

literary author, rather than a literary critic, may or may not be dead, and how that can or cannot be perceived within literature itself, not outside it. Michael S. Roth also discusses that as criticism "became more and more established … its ironic techniques of unmasking seemed less radical, less amusing, and less relevant. For those now *trained* in this area, the question became how to connect a critique of representation and subjectivity with things that happen in the world. How to make it real?" (Roth 98–99) One of my main aims is to make such critique more real, and the way towards that, I consider, is by analysing two novels which deal with "ordinary" beings, and therefore "ordinary" authors, with "ordinary" preoccupations, and seeing how their thoughts and preoccupations fit into postmodern literary thought. In other words: does the 'theory' match the 'practice'?

For all such reasons, my intention and what follows in the next pages is an in-depth analysis of Barthes' proclamation of the death of the author. I take his pamphlet, analyse it and attempt to refute its contents by exploring McEwan's use of authorship. I do not delve into Barthes' complete oeuvre and I do not attempt to understand where his specific statement came from (although I do provide an overview on the state of authorship prior to Barthes' text, and I also attempt to show where it leads), given the fact that that has been done precisely by Burke, and it is a philosophical endeavour I am not equipped to partake in. Consequently, what I provide is an analysis of the death of the author from a strictly literary perspective, focusing mainly on the issue of authorial intention in two different texts, which is something that, as William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley proposed in their pivotal essay "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946), should not be taken into consideration. Nonetheless, given the fact that the death of the author *has* been widely accepted as the basis of postmodernism and continues to be an active understanding of how texts are to be approached, my main goal is to show that

not *all* authors are dead, that intention *does* matter, and that Barthes' preoccupation with the birth of the reader, and specially how it has been understood, going on to the emergence of reader-response criticism, does not necessarily need to be disregarded but rather incorporated into our understanding of postmodern ideals of authorship. My case studies on Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*, consequently, attempt to explore the rebirth of the author and to show that what McEwan does is perhaps not precisely to claim the existence of a God-like author figure, but an attempt at redefining the statement provided by Barthes.

This study draws from a variety of theoretical literary fields. For instance, I turn to the metafictional device (thus exploring postmodernism) as utilised by authors that *need* to hold the power over the intention of their texts, because they have experienced traumatic experiences (thus delving into trauma studies) where their power as both individuals and/or authors has been somewhat misplaced or removed. As will be exemplified in the following chapters, metafiction is used by McEwan on two different levels. He fleshes out two fictional characters that in becoming authors make use of metafiction in their manuscripts, and as a consequence of that, McEwan himself makes use of the same technique as real author of both novels. Consequently, McEwan not only explores authorship on the surface, but he also delves deeper into the fabric of the fictional narrative by presenting different forms of authorship. He refutes the ideals inherent in the intentional fallacy by producing characters which could be approached as biographic authors, where their life experience and context is pivotal for the understanding of their texts. Simultaneously, he produces a literary persona for himself, somewhat removed from the biographical fallacy[2], presented as an author which

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[2] Both the intentional fallacy and the biographical fallacy are terms used to describe the literary approach taken to analyse a text depending on the importance given to its authorship. The terms were put forward by New Criticism's views on literature. While the biographical fallacy is considered to be the kind of literary approach which takes into

requires the presence of a reader. Moreover, he shows and is accepting of the authors' limitations and their less than godly intentions, thus rebutting the death of the author, which, as famously known, paved the way for the birth of the reader.

Notwithstanding, the structure of the study might be slightly unconventional, as I have chosen to dedicate each chapter to a different critical perspective, rather than present its entire theoretical framework at the beginning of my work and then present the two case studies. As mentioned earlier, there is something quite striking about McEwan's use of metafiction compared to its use in contemporary British literature, and even though John Barth ironically refers to postmodern practices as "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967), it seems some of such postmodern practices, such as metafictional elements, are not to be exhausted any time soon. In fact, the metafictional is a device that has transcended into mainstream visual arts quite prominently in recent years, and novelists do not seem to have grown tired of using it either. In fact, metafiction is inherent in the connection made in both case studies I present, and originally, it was the main focus of this work. Nevertheless, in my intention to understand the use (and abuse) of metafiction in both novels, I had to inspect which reasons might have driven McEwan to make use of the technique. In such a quest, I drew the conclusion that a key aspect of both texts and their use of the metafictional device was the inscribed author's[3] (that is, the character-authors created by McEwan: Briony Tallis in *Atonement* and Tom Haley in *Sweet Tooth*) need to become an authoritative presence in the text, which in turn, stems from their encounter with trauma. Both texts, therefore, make use of the

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consideration the biographical details of an author in order to make sense of a text and to build and *locate* its meaning, the intentional fallacy focuses on the text itself, claiming contextual and biographical details should be irrelevant for the understanding and deciphering of a text, considering that the only important information should be found within the text itself.

[3] For the purposes of this work, I make use of the term 'inscribed author' or 'character-author'. Nevertheless, I understand 'inscribed author' as the same concept as 'implied' or 'fictional' author. I appropriate David Lodge's terminology for consistency's sake. Consequently, 'inscribed authors' are understood under the terms of what Lodge refers to in the distinction between an author that is built within a text (a fictional author) and the real author of the text.

metafictional apparatus in order to cope with a traumatic experience, possibly allowing both inscribed authors' novels to double as both trauma narratives and metafictional texts.

Using Barth's terminology, postmodernism studies and metafictional studies have been exhausted, a wide variety of long-form work as well as short-form studies have been conducted on the ideology and on the technique, and these are explored in Chapter Three, namely by delving into Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1989), and Linda Hutcheon's pivotal work on both *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989). Certainly, *Atonement* has been studied under the prism of postmodernism and the metafictional coda of the novel has been visited plenty of times by different scholars. In the case of *Sweet Tooth,* however, there is still a lack of critical material to draw from. To understand the nature of the two texts, and to understand the condition and roles of Briony Tallis and Tom Haley as inscribed (or fictional) authors, I draw from David Lodge and Wayne C Booth's theories on the nature of the author, the narrator, and the reader. The work of Gregory Currie is also pivotal in my understanding of the character's individual identities as authors inscribed within the text.

Originally, as just mentioned, I aimed for a more conventional approach, where the structure of this thesis was going to dedicate one chapter to the theoretical framework followed for this study, and then there would be two different chapters dedicated to each case study which would provide the textual evidence required to back up my arguments. Nevertheless, as can be observed, the following pages adopt a differing structure. Taking into consideration my preoccupation with issues of authorship and readership, I believed this specific piece of work needed a more reader-

friendly experience: it would not be beneficial for neither my arguments nor the reader to have this study open with a chapter that would occupy such a lengthy portion of my thesis. It was my reasoning that upon reaching the case studies, the reader would find themselves needing to revise the arguments provided in the first chapter. For that reason, the thesis is divided into three different chapters, each dealing with a different theoretical framework. All such theoretical fields intertwine and blend with each other in the texts, but my reasoning is that each is a consequence of the other, hence also why the order might be striking, for, instead of starting with a chapter on postmodernism, I have chosen to speak about postmodernism on the last chapter, as I understand postmodernism and its techniques (namely metafiction) are the consequence *and* the solution to the problems, complexities and perhaps contradictions explored in the first and second chapters. This way, I understand postmodernism to be both the originator and the solution to the problematic created by Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (1967) , which is fully explored in Chapter One.

Another perhaps unconventional approach, which partly stems from a wish to make the reading experience of this study more pleasurable, is the distribution of theoretical work in each Chapter. On the first section for each chapter, I fully delve into each theoretical perspective explored, briefly reviewing its history, and defining the terms under which the case studies have been analysed. Nevertheless, while *Atonement* is a text that is quite popular both for the general public and for the academic world, and while studies on the author, the reader and trauma, along with metafiction in the text *have* been conducted (albeit scarcely), there are barely any studies on *Sweet Tooth*, certainly not from a traumatic perspective. What this thesis aims to provide is a connection between the texts that while perhaps obvious to the reader and scholar, has not been explored in depth the way I have ventured to do. For that reason, specifically

in the sections dedicated to *Sweet Tooth*, most of the case study relies entirely on my own reading of the text, and on the theory provided on the first section of each chapter.

Thus, the introduction to this thesis focuses on the figure of Ian McEwan as author, a figure that will be randomly mentioned during the duration of the work, and that will finally be fully explored in depth during the concluding chapter. One of my aims is to show that McEwan's use of metafiction awards power to authors, and being the real author of both *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* my intention is to show how by being concerned with topics of narratology, authorship and reader-response, the novels he has produced require for an exploration of not only the author-characters he creates but ultimately an exploration of McEwan himself, as real author of both texts. Chapter One continues with different subsections which explore different theoretical fields: first, an exploration on studies on authorship mainly focusing on the approach taken by Roland Barthes in his declaration of the death of the author. An issue briefly explored in Chapter One, Section One is how Barthes' statement has been adapted and adopted by other thinkers and scholars alike, and as mentioned above, on the ways in which such statement has been unquestionably repurposed by literary criticism. Another author whose work is key for the development of the chapter is Michel Foucault, who contributed to Barthes' ideas by giving them a dimension Barthes' text lacked. Foucault, in his "What is an Author?" (1969) understands the importance of the public figure of the author, awarded with social discourses that cannot be ignored. (Foucault 107) While Foucault's approach is also analysed based on its contradictions within his oeuvre in Séan Burke's work, I instead consider Foucault's approach to be key for my understanding of Ian McEwan himself, and the use and intention he makes of metafiction - which will be exemplified throughout and specifically in the conclusion, when I provide my findings. Moreover, McEwan's authorial figure ends up gaining

relevance precisely because he is in possession of a literary oeuvre lengthy and powerful enough to become a discourse in itself.

After Barthes and Foucault's approaches to authorship have been considered, I turn to an exploration of the reader, and to the emergence of reader-response criticism, for which I have also researched into the fields of marginalia studies. My intention in also considering marginalia studies was in the clear linguistic nature of reader-response criticism, an approach I did not intend to take in my study, as I consider it a study to focus on matters of identity and sociology, even psychology, under postmodern terms of the understanding of the identity of the individual, rather than on deconstructionist matters. The work of Wolfgang Iser in *The Act of reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), undeniably pivotal in the reader-response field, is visited, nonetheless I mostly focus on the work of Jane P. Tompkins and Stanley E. Fish, whose approach to reader-response is more accessible for literary purposes. To link both author and reader figures, I explore the idea of the author-reader contract, a concept not fully developed by postmodern studies (or by any other field, surprisingly), delving into what links author and reader, the trust that can be established between author (or even addresser) and reader (or addressee) and the circumstances and grounds under which such trust may be breached.

After these subsections, in the case studies, I provide an exploration of the figure of the author (specifically the phenomenon of the God-like author figure) through Briony in *Atonement,* focusing on her intent to become such a powerful figure in her writing and authorship, to then focus on an exploration of the reader by analysing Serena's reading habits in *Sweet Tooth*, then delving into how her beliefs on reading and literature eventually showcase and build a God-like dimension in her vision of Tom. Further, through the analysis of the relationship between Serena and Tom in *Sweet*

Tooth, the author-reader contract is contemplated, along with the exploration of the relationship between authors, readers, and how texts need of both players to become 'complete'.

As mentioned above, work on Briony Tallis as an author has been conducted, and there are scholarly articles that attempt to understand Tom Haley's condition as author as well. What this study provides, however, is a deeper understanding on the link between the characters' authorial identities and their encounter with trauma. For that reason, once authorship, readership and the connections between author and reader have been contemplated, the study turns to trauma in Chapter Two. This is a decision taken as I consider both novels make a clear point to portray the traumatic occurrences experienced by the characters that eventually lead to their need to reinforce their authorial identities. The chapter opens with an exploration of trauma narratives, attempting to create a brief yet exhaustive account of their emergence in contemporary literature. Trauma studies stem from Sigmund Freud's concepts of mourning, melancholia and *Nachträglichkeit*, which are later developed by other scholars (mainly Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth). Freud's theories, along with their evolution in trauma studies, are the prism under which Briony and Tom's traumatic experiences are analysed from. There is also mention of the concept of scriptotherapy, coined by Suzette Henke in *Shattered Subjects*: *Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (1998), in the realisation that writing about the traumatic experience becomes a possibility not only for redemption but also for the overcoming of trauma for both character-authors. As just mentioned, the basis of trauma studies rests on Freud's understanding of the distinction between mourning and melancholia (which are redefined by LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) as 'working through' and 'acting out', respectively), concepts in which either the traumatised subject

becomes stuck in a process of never-ending revision of the traumatising experience, which inhibits the individual from moving on (which would be the case of melancholia or acting out) or the traumatised subject finds the paths towards an overcoming of the traumatising state (understood as mourning or working through).

For the case studies, therefore, I explore Briony's traumatic experiences in *Atonement* mostly under the prism of melancholia (or acting out), and Tom Haley's in *Sweet Tooth* under the impressions of mourning (or working through). I also delve into issues of narcissism, specifically for Briony, as it could be considered that a combination of her narcissistic personality, along with a thirst for scopophilia (a concept explored by Freud as well, and elaborated on by Laura Mulvey, albeit in relation to film studies) and Briony's failures in the narcissistic and scopophilic acts eventually lead to her traumatic state. For Tom Haley, instead, I turn to issues of revenge, considering his work a revenge narrative, a concept that I somewhat coin understanding it under the spectrum of what also concerns revenge porn. Tom's use of the revenge narrative is linked to his traumatic experience as well, given that in both cases, an emphasis is placed on the need for writing the traumatic experience and obtaining a visibility of the experience in the form of publication and the attention of an audience: to conquer his trauma and work through it, he needs to partake in a vengeful narratorial act. For such reasons, I consider that both inscribed authors participate in *scriptotherapeutical* acts to overcome their traumatic experiences, which in turn, allows them to reinforce their authorial identities.

Furthermore, to my knowledge, no work acknowledges the use of metafiction as a means of obtaining authorial power (if anything, most studies focusing on metafiction's attempt to prove the postmodern nature of the technique, which by definition rejects all absolutes, therefore asserting precisely the opposite). In my view,

however, the issue is far more complex, as with metafiction there is a rejection of absolutes indeed, but also an undeniable re-evaluation of the structure of the narratology of a text. For that reason, in Chapter Three, I discuss not only the importance and emergence of metafiction, framing it within a postmodern vision of literature, but I also analyse what drives the author to make use of metafictional procedures, in the cases at hand, mainly the intention to hold power over a text produced from traumatic experiences. Hence why metafiction, along with the literary movement it mainly emerges from, are explored last. My intention is to show the progression and reasoning behind the use of metafiction each author goes through, something that will be exemplified in each of the cases studied.

In this study, metafiction is mainly understood as a technique used in order to hold a power lost during the traumatic experience. To analyse and understand the use of metafiction, a similar system to the ones provided in the previous two chapters is used: first, a brief introduction to what is understood as postmodernism, mainly following the thought of Hutcheon, Lodge, Jameson and Lyotard, to then turn to metafiction, understood mainly through the pivotal work of Hutcheon (mentioned above) and Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984). There is also mention of intertextuality, understood under Julia Kristéva's exploration and Gérard Genette's approach, here approached as a feature that complements metafiction, one used by McEwan for specific purposes which allow the figure of his inscribed author, Tom Haley, to be traced back to McEwan himself. For the case studies, I delve into instances of metafiction in *Atonement*, mainly by tracing instances of the writing process in the text, and by exploring a few specific cases of intertextuality within the novel, and focus on the coda of the novel, where metafictional instances can be most blatantly perceived. For *Sweet Tooth,* I explore the ways in which

McEwan has repurposed his previous work (short stories published in his early collections of stories) to re-attribute it to his fictional character (and somewhat literary counterpart) Tom Haley.

Ultimately, my main purpose is to connect both texts in a way they have not been connected before: while the metafictional aspect and the connection between both pieces can be perceived by any reader slightly well versed in the works of Ian McEwan (as exemplified by my first reading of *Sweet Tooth*), the reasoning behind the purposes of each author in their use of metafiction has never been linked to their need to harness an authority that has been lost due to a set of traumatic experiences. In this way, not only do I explore the reasons that might lead authors to make use of the metafictional device, but I also explore the ways in which McEwan attempts to send a clear message which eventually antagonises postmodern ideals of the disintegration and disappearance of authorial intention. To put it another way, my idea is to attempt to find answers to some of the questions which Burke also asks regarding Barthes' death of the author: "Does the death of man necessarily imply the death of the author? Is the author simply a specific and regional instantiation of the philosophical *anthropos*? Of the subject of knowledge? Of the *cogito*? Of the logos? What sense of the author disappears in the death of man? Intratextual author? Extratextual author? Psychobiographical signified?". (Burke 104) My aim is to prove that indeed, not *all* authors are dead, certainly not Briony Tallis nor Tom Haley, and that, precisely because of the literary production of such inscribed authors, as well as their thirst to tell their stories and their ascension as authors of their narratives through the use of metafictional techniques, eventually Ian McEwan's authorship cannot be eradicated either. The issue is that, contrary to Wimsatt and Beardsley's views, McEwan ultimately shows that while they "thought to do away with tiresome speculation about what such and such poet meant by such and such a

poem on the grounds that what the poet meant is both unknowable and, in any case, irrelevant…" (Burke 138) authorial existence, intention, and meaning, in some cases, *can* be traced back to the author.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Hutcheon asserts that a poetics of postmodernism would be concerned with offering "provisional hypotheses, perceived overlappings of concern, here specifically with regards to the contradictions that [she perceives] as characterizing [of] postmodernism." (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 14) She suggests a method for reading literature *through* literature, and not as *continuous with* literary theory (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 14) and discusses the relationship between literature and literary theory through the complexity of the interaction and shared responses that result from such interaction, eventually linking it to Lyotard's thoughts on the creation of meaning:

> "A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for." (Lyotard as qtd in Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 81)

If postmodernism is concerned with the mixture of fiction and literary theory, the *ideal* postmodern text will contain both discourses: the fictional and the critical. Hutcheon goes on to name a few fiction authors that double as critics, but she makes it clear that the criticism they produce is not related to their own creation of meaning (through their own text) but to the analysis of other texts (Hutcheon, *A Poetics* 14). Ian McEwan, in opposition to what Hutcheon extrapolates, emerges as a figure that touches on both fields through his fiction, given that he produces his literary theory in his primary texts by making use of the techniques offered by postmodernism. My suggestion, as well, is that McEwan makes use of the codas in both novels and their blatant incorporation of metafiction, to claim narratological aspects of authorship and readership. Interestingly,

it would seem that McEwan's authorial and critical identities are ultimately different and separate entities: one which he has curated on his own, over the years (the author) and one which has emerged, rather inadvertently, through his texts (the critic).

In short, somewhat opposing Hutcheon's ideas regarding the impossibility of an author doubling as both creator and critic of their own text, McEwan creates rare genre form[4] as well as a new authorial figure that ascends at the end of the two novels that are to be explored at length. This new genre form happens to contain its own criticism, which is provided most prominently over the codas of his own texts: thus, McEwan, in his act of planting the seeds of several different ideas within his texts, eventually provides his own criticism, by openly commenting, recreating, and reconsidering the impact and nature of his fiction *within* his fiction. The ways in which McEwan provides the reader with his own criticism, however, do not imply he is leaving his work sealed. If only, what he does is to provide more questions to be answered. In this study, what will also be explored is how McEwan, with his use of the metafictional device, provides his texts with an added layer of literary criticism that not only presents an insight on the nature of literature, but also allows him to advocate for the figure of a different author, a role whose importance has been disputed, questioned, killed, and (somewhat ironically) proven impossible to eradicate since the 1960s.

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[4] Authors such as Laurence Sterne or John Fowles (in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) respectively), amongst others, do that as well, and quite blatantly, in their renown works. It is not being suggested McEwan is the only author to participate in such an endeavour, nor (most certainly) the first. Nevertheless, McEwan is amongst those who seem to distinctly attempt to contradict critical material doing so by focusing his attention on the death of the author itself.

1. CHAPTER ONE: AUTHORSHIP AND READERSHIP IN IAN MCEWAN

1.1 The Author

> "The effect of structuralism and post-structuralism on traditional literary studies might be compared to that of an earthquake followed by a tidal wave, for both undermined the idea, central to such studied, of the author as a substantial, historic entity, the unique and authenticating origin of the text, whose communicative intention, conscious or unconscious, intrinsic or extrinsic to the text itself, it was the business of the critic to elucidate." (Lodge *After Bahktin*: *Essays on Fiction and Criticism* 88)

1.1.1 Authorship in Literary Criticism: A Brief History

Ian McEwan creates novels inconspicuously concerned with the process of literary creation and interpretation, as well as with the figure of the author within contemporary society (and literature). As will be exemplified later on in this work, it is through the use of inscribed authors that McEwan establishes himself in a position as author long contradicted by literary criticism. By playing with the divide between inscribed and real authors, McEwan ultimately gives a renewed meaning to the figure of the author: he does not only attribute meaning and intention to the text (another idea long disputed by poststructuralist and postmodernist thought alike) but he also awards a renewed meaning to his own authorial identity.

In "Theories of Authorship and Intention in the Twentieth Century: An Overview" (2012), Dario Compagno chronicles the evolution of authorship and intention theories, concluding that the study of authorship and reader-response criticism over the last few decades is that which has ironically and ultimately provided meaning to the figure of the author. Compagno begins by pointing out that for the last century

"the author's intentions (…) [have] been plainly excluded by many philosophical and analytical disciplines" (38), which has resulted in the fact that "far from having disappeared, the author is today what has to be understood if we want to interpret texts." (Compagno 38) In his text, Compagno blatantly opposes the most influential work of the late 1960s regarding poststructuralist and postmodern criticism: Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (1967). My suggestion is that McEwan's approach to authorship mirrors Compagno's: McEwan's use of authorship inherently opposes Barthes' proclamation, turning, instead, to an approach reminiscent of that presented by Michel Foucault in his 1968's "What is an Author?". Barthes' text should not be seen in isolation, however: an intricate web of criticism came before and after his pivotal text.

Compagno divides the history of the study of authorship in different phases, three of which establish countering theoretic approaches to the matter: phase number one is the one composed of a "sharp divide between author and text" or, in other words, "between intentions and meaning." (Compagno 38) This phase is led by American New Criticism's William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, in their seminal work "The Intentional Fallacy" (1954). Compagno also makes reference to a similar train of thought led by Edmund Husserl in 1900, where there is "an essential distinction: the experiences of those who speak and write are not the same thing as the meaning of the words used." (Compagno 39) Wimsatt and Beardsley claim that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 468), they focus on the text and avoid biographical or contextual information from the author, mostly due to the belief that "[l]iterary value lays in language itself, and it can be reactivated at any moment by accurate formal analyses." (Compagno 39) Therefore, in phase one, authorial intention

is irrelevant, because that which endures from a text in society will always be its reception.

As noted, Husserl develops such ideology in 1900, taking a semiotic/linguistic approach, focusing on the importance of the ideal dimension of meaning. He highlights the need to understand the subjectivity created by experience that disables intended meaning to be ideal and simultaneously establishes the need to recognise that only a transcendental subject, as he defines it, is able to be an "ideal speaker, with a perfectly clear will to speak; [which] has no private experiences and intentions, but thinks only pure concepts."(Compagno 40) For Compagno's first phase of criticism, therefore, "intentions are private and contingent", they are "linked to feelings and to the contexts of utterance, but also impossible to communicate to others", because "meanings live in sentences and texts, and resist time." (Compagno 40) Nevertheless, this phase could be widely regarded as problematic, as, with the need for ridding texts of expressing meanings fixed by the authorial figure, the text is left to fend for itself. Catherine Belsey exposes the main issue with New Criticism by pointing out "the problem of meaning". She argues that "recent theorists, having rejected as inaccessible the author's intention as the guarantee of meaning, have constituted the reader as a new authority for the single and univocal meaning of the text. The New Critics firmly rejected both these possibilities and were left with the unsatisfactory concept of meaning existing 'on the page'." (17–8)

The second phase Compagno refers to is led by Roland Barthes, who radicalises New Criticism's ideas, and considers the text a space for "anarchical readings, rooted in linguistic[s], psychoanalysis and anthropology…" (Compagno 41) For Barthes, the ideal dimension of the text that Husserl attempted to find does not exist, in fact, it is impossible to achieve. He considers that a 'master of meaning' does not matter because

words only matter for the receiving end, and thus he schemes "the birth of the Reader" which "must be requited by the death of the Author." (Barthes 55) According to Barthes, "literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (Barthes 49) and so, intention is rendered as a phenomenon that need not be considered. The identity of the subject that has created a text is lost due to its neutrality, and a phase starts where "literary value lays (sic) in its potential to stimulate creative thoughts in the reader." (Compagno 41)

Barthes locates many layers in the narrative, and claims it is impossible to discern which is the voice readers actually hear. Is it the character's voice? Is it the author's voice as an author? The author's voice as a human being? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? In short, Compagno argues that Barthes looks for a meaning that is "ever-changing … removing all well define[d], organizing intentions." (Compagno 41) French philosopher Jacques Derrida has a similar, deconstructive approach to that of Barthes, and together, they compose this second phase. Both critics and philosophers attack the ideology put forward during Compagno's vision of phase one. Derrida breaks with the idea of the ideal subject by claiming that it is signs which establish meaning, but signs are established through an empirical use of language that makes it permanently subjective and biased, which prohibits the possibility for an ideal meaning or subject to exist. For Derrida, there are only private intentions, and it is unfeasible to grasp a concept such as 'pure thought'. That is to say, every word uttered and every word received have private intentions which makes it as impossible to produce an ideal text than to receive it (Compagno, 42):

> What was hidden in the individual - and above all to the individual - is not visible in texts. The result of writing is as messy as real thought (…) The critic follows traces and hints, reaching meanings and thoughts that could have been in the author. The most important thing is that the critic should never say s/he has found the only correct

> meaning. (...) There are no ideal and subjective meanings, and there is no ideal consciousness able to grasp them. (Compagno 42)

Phase two, therefore, dismantles any "stable core of meaning" (Compagno 43). "The Death of the Author", concurrently, places author and reader at different levels, elevating the reader's role, by creating a text that "is opened to an unlimited variety of interpretations." (Burke 43) In regards to that, for Seán Burke, intention can, indeed, be found *within* a text, notwithstanding, it should be taken as what it is, an intention, rather than a radical truth: "[i]ntention is to be recognized, and respected, but on the condition that we accept that its structures will not be fully and ideally homogeneous with what is said or written, that is not always and everywhere completely adequate to the communicative act." (Burke 140)

Michel Foucault, along with modern critics such as Wayne C. Booth, constitute the third stage in Compagno's exploration of the history of the study of authorship. In "What is an Author?" Foucault makes clear that "the author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name (…) shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable." (Foucault 107) For Foucault, there is author intention (or, as he calls it author-function), which is "the interface between a text and the system of other relevant texts in which it is produced." (Compagno 44) In other words, Foucault gives importance to what Julia Kristéva cemented as 'intertextuality'. The author is important, therefore, and cannot be disposed of, because it does have a function within the society and literature it inhabits, thus, *killing* it would "[deprive] the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse." (Foucault 118)

If the intentional fallacy kick-started a poststructuralist interest in the figure of the author, it was after Roland Barthes' infamous proclamation of the death of the author that the postmodern realm took the author as one of its main topics of study. After Wimsatt, Beardsley, Barthes, and Foucault, comes a long list of literary criticism with critics that have, throughout the years, reworked, reshaped, and redefined Barthes' pivotal text, attempting to establish what his sentencing represented for the future of literary criticism. Overall, I would argue that it is necessary to put together each of the emerging theories in the last half century to come to an informed conclusion over how the figure of a text is perceived in postmodern literature. In the case at hand, and as noted above, my suggestion is that McEwan clearly opposes Barthes' approach, as he ultimately vies for a joint author-reader collaboration that becomes indispensable in the creation of meaning.

1.1.2 Literary Criticism Approaches Authorship

1.1.2.1 Roland Barthes Kills the Author

It must be noted that Barthes' seminal work is one largely concerned with poststructuralist visions of linguistics, and that the text in itself has eventually and amusingly developed a life of its own, easily misinterpreted and possibly malleable to fit other purposes, such as the strictly literary or social. In this work, I purposefully overlook the linguistic and philosophical dimensions of Barthes' text to adapt his theories to a literary spectrum. Not only that, but it is also important to comprehend the hyperbolic and figurative contents of Barthes' text. As David Lodge asserts, it is illogical to realistically ascertain the literal death of the author, as words and texts need to be composed by a self, no matter the circumstances or the outcome. (Lodge, *After*

Bakhtin 144) Barthes himself declares that "linguistically, the author is nothing but the one who writes" (Barthes 51), which Lodge further clarifies by asserting that:

> "[a] literary text is an intentional act – it does not come into existence by accident. It is therefore entirely logical and natural to presume that every component of a literary text has or ought to have some kind of point or function or purpose. Of course, we must beware of presuming that there is only one kind of point, purpose, function." (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 144)

The fixation for the authoritarian author, imposing of an intention, came as an evolution from ancient oral narratives, which were "never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or reciter, whose "performance" (i.e., his mastery of the narrative code) can be admired, but never his 'genius'." (Barthes 49) Most interestingly, due to the shift in nature experienced by authorship during the time of the Romantics, the author became to be known "as an all-powerful creator of the text, which for this reason might be explained by investigating the life and thinking of the author" (Golban 216), Petru Golban defines this ideal as a "modern invention having its origin in the romantic view on art and literature." (Golban 216) Furthermore, Golban claims that it is precisely "[t]he romantic writers and philosophers" which "create a remarkable unity of the conceptions about the author and poetic imagination, including them into a larger domain of debates on poetry, language of poetry, origin and purpose of poetry, and act of artistic creation in general, as well as on nature and human spirit, reality and intuition, myth and religion, symbol and metaphor." (Golban 216)

This way, the author, as known until the 1960s (and arguably still today) is a "modern character, no doubt produced by our society as it emerged from the Middle Ages, inflicted by English empiricism, French rationalism, and the personal faith of the Reformation, thereby discovering the prestige of the individual…" (Barthes 49) Consequently, Barthes highlights the idea of the author as a *performer*: authors perform

and deliver, and precisely due to that, Barthes believes authors are not to be held responsible for the creation of meaning, but rather readers should be, as rightful members of the audience at the receiving end of the performance.

Immersed in a post-structuralist interest for the location of meaning, Barthes understands that the focus must be shifted to the deciphering of texts, rather than their creation. For him, "[n]o one (i.e., no "person") says it: its source, its voice is not the true site of writing, it is reading." (Barthes 54) This idea comes from a preoccupation with the devirtualization of the deciphering of meaning. Barthes is concerned with the passive approach granted to language and texts over the last century, which he believes makes it impossible for meaning to be penetrated: he observes that meaning has become information handed on a plate:

> ...once the Author is found, the text is "explained:" the critic has won; hence it is hardly surprising that historically, the Author's empire has been the Critic's as well, and also that (even new) criticism is today unsettled at the same time as the Author. In multiple writing, in effect, everything is to be disentangled, but nothing deciphered, structure can be followed, "threaded" (as we say of a run in a stocking) in all its reprises, all its stages, but there is no end to it, no bottom; the space of writing is to be traversed, not pierced; writing constantly posits meaning, but always in order to evaporate it: writing seeks a systematic exemption of meaning. (Barthes 53-4)

The loss of the possibility to create meaning is inherent in postmodern preoccupations, however, as there needs to be an inevitable questioning and reedification of social apparatuses, discourses and with that, political and cultural thought. To attribute the location of meaning to a single individual would be counterproductive in a postmodern society. For that reason, Barthes needs "a before and an after". While in the before "the Author is supposed to feed the book, i.e., he lives before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it…" in the after, the figure of the author should be understood as that of a "modern scriptor" which "is born at the same time as his text". This author "is not furnished with a being which precedes his writing, he is not the subject of which his book would be the

predicate; there is no time other than that of the speech-act, and every text is written eternally here and now." (Barthes 52)

Aware that the text is but "...a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original" (Barthes 53), Barthes proclaims the birth of the reader, urging literary critics to accept there needs to be a "[refusal] to assign to the text (and to the world-as-text) a "secret," i.e., an ultimate meaning" and thus "[liberate] an activity we may call countertheological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law." (Barthes 54) Nonetheless, as stated prior, it is vital to understand that Barthes' proclamations have to do with admitting that "[t]he point is not that the real author's comments are without interest but that they do not have absolute authority" (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 145), therefore Barthes does not intend his audience to believe in a world in which words are produced by ghostly apparitions. As mentioned above, it is paramount to acknowledge that "[t]he impulse behind [Barthes'] move was theoretically and politically inspired", given that, "focus[ing] on the text as a producer of its own meaning" not only "led to a rejection of any appeal to intentionality to validate the critic's response" but instead, to "a radical democratic urge against all forms of authority." (Limmer)

1.1.2.2 Michel Foucault Questions Authorship

A year after Barthes' manifesto, Foucault presents a text rather differing in tone. While Foucault does not clearly disagree with Barthes, he takes a more realistic (albeit dismaying) approach, in that he states the reality of the need for author figures in

society, whilst proclaiming the need for a reformulation of the questions being asked by critics and thinkers alike. In his ideal realm,

> [w]e would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? (Foucault 119–20)

Thus, Foucault is concerned with exploring the drives behind the existence of such literary and linguistic figures and discourses, and he sets off to explore such drives by deconstructing the writing and reading realm(s), ultimately analysing what is behind the literary, socio-cultural, and philosophical preoccupation with authorship and intention. Foucault does not necessarily agree that author intention should be accepted and upheld in the same regard as in previous centuries; in fact, his text does not oppose the intentional fallacy at all, quite the opposite, but instead of simply proclaiming the author's death, he goes deeper than Barthes and analyses the different layers within authorship and the work of art itself, consequently attributing power and intention where it is due. Ultimately, for Foucault, the focus should be in understanding that it does not make a difference "who is speaking", what makes a difference is acknowledging that those "speaking" and those "listening" (or rather, reading) continue to inhabit the literary world whether we like it or not, and that a redefinition of values, rather than their obliteration, might be more fitting.

He specifies that in the time he speaks "writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression. Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority" (Foucault 102) going as far as to express that writing has, in fact, "become linked to

sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life: it is now a voluntary effacement (...) since it is brought about in the writer's very existence." (Foucault 102) He believes that by "[u]sing all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality" which results in "the mark of the writer [being] reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing." (Foucault 102–03)

Nonetheless, Foucault seems critical of such a situation (as does McEwan, with the building of Briony Tallis and Tom Haley). In fact, if that were to be the case, "could we say that what [the author] wrote, said, left behind in [its] papers, or what has been collected of [its] remarks, could be called a "work"? (Foucault 103) The French philosopher laments the inexistence of a 'theory of the work', an absence he finds to be problematic (104). Because of that, he embarks on a mission to understand what constitutes a work, which he believes will be the root issue in understanding what constitutes an author's intention. He states "it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself. The word *work* and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality." (Foucault 104) With this, he inevitably links text to author, rather than text to reader, and although that is not what he envisions as an ideal situation, his approach proves to be more realistic to the demands of the time in which he produces his theories.

Foucault expresses "[i]t is not enough (…) to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared (…) [i]nstead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers." (105) He acknowledges the "proper name" of the author is one with descriptive qualities (105), and furthermore, due to its link towards works of art, the "author's name is not simply an element in a discourse (…) it

performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function" (Foucault 107, emphasis added), for that reason, discourse produced by authors "is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status." (Foucault 107)

Nevertheless, it is vital to understand, within Foucault's own ideological discourse, that "it has not always been the same types of texts which have required attribution to an author", in fact, some texts will "benefit of ownership" whereas others will not (Foucault 109). Furthermore, not all authors need their name to be attached to their texts, not all authors fight and resist their "death", the intention of writing (different to what should be understood as the intention of the text) varies. For Foucault, there might be cases in which the acknowledgement of authorship is necessary for an individual or for a society. My suggestion is that precisely out of such a divide emerges McEwan's 'theory' of authorship. For Tom Haley and Briony Tallis, inscribed authors that have undergone a traumatic experience (as will be exemplified below), their narratives demand the "attribution" Foucault makes reference to. McEwan himself, conversely, may not *demand* such 'attribution', but rather *claim* it. After all, as Foucault exemplifies, not only is there a space in society for authors which need their texts attributed to their 'proper names', there is also the existence of authors which give birth to discourses which have become an indispensable part of our social fabric (Foucault 114–15).

By delving into the discussion of what constitutes a work, and what constitutes its author (which are issues that are to eventually lead to conclusions regarding what constitutes intention), what Foucault is ultimately asserting is something also observed by Gregory Currie: "it is not any linguistic or semantic feature of the text that

determines its fictionality, nor is it anything to do with the reader's response. Rather, it has to do *with the kind of action the author performs* in producing the text." (G. Currie 12 emphasis added) Foucault thus describes the status of the author as 'limiting', he states that "the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work", rather, "he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction." (Foucault 118–19) With that, Foucault is not describing the figure of the author as any less problematic than the critics before him, he rather perceives the author as a villain, one that is "the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning." (Foucault 118–19) He seems as dismayed by this limitation as Barthes was, yet Foucault makes it clear that in describing a culture without the figure of the author, what he would be doing is to describe an ideology which "would be pure romanticism (…) to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a *necessary* constraining figure." (Foucault 119 emphasis added)

Ultimately, what Foucault is putting forward is the need to understand and acknowledge that while "since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive" that does not mean that the author cannot be seen as an ever-changing figure, and that "given the historical modifications that are taking place, it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form, complexity and even in existence." (Foucault 119) Above, it was mentioned that McEwan opposes Barthes' ideals in favour of Foucault's. My statement is specifically concerned with what has just been observed. McEwan's authorship, as will be put forward below, is not

as authoritative as that reacted against by the intentional fallacy, nor is it dead, as that of Barthes. Rather, it allows for a redefinition of its constancy and for an evaluation of the needs of each text. This never-ending re-evaluation, is also understood in linguistic terms, which inevitably continue to inform authorship and reader-response criticism. As Belsey puts it "[i]n reality texts do offer positions from which they are intelligible, but these positions are never single because they are always positions in specific discourses. It is language which provides the possibility of meaning, but because language is not static but perpetually in process…" (Belsey 19)

Consequently, the author becomes hybrid, in that it will not always be an authoritarian figure, limiting the text's meaning and imposing the author's intentions, but rather it will adopt a different identity and behavioural pattern depending on the needs provided by the story it is narrating. In the two cases discussed in this study, McEwan portrays authorial figures which require of the attribution of texts, but as mentioned above, he also allows for the intention of such texts to be created jointly, rather than only by a villainous figure.

1.1.2.3 Hyperaware Postmodern Alternatives

Foucault, in his disseminating of the author figure in contemporary culture, makes reference to different layers within the authorial identity, by stating that "[i]t would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker", asserting that "the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance." (Foucault 112) What Foucault is making reference to here, is what is later developed at length by postmodern literary critics with regards to the study of authorship and narratorship. Foucault is

differentiating between 'author', 'real writer' and 'fictitious speaker', which might be correlated to 'real author', 'implied/inscribed author' and 'narrator' in more contemporary terms. What follows after Foucault's text is a new tradition of discerning the different layers within the person of the author, understanding each layer might correspond to a different social and literary function.

Surprisingly, in a text published a few years before Barthes' and Foucault's, Booth muses on the nature of authorship, implying the existence of a fragmented identity within the writing persona: "[n]one of our terms for various aspects of the narrator is quite accurate" he states, "'[p]ersona,' 'mask', and 'narrator' are sometimes used, but they more commonly refer to the speaker in the work who is after all only one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be separated from him by large ironies." (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 73) He also stresses the importance of understanding the fluidity of the author-function, by pointing out that "regardless of how sincere an author may try to be, his different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms … the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works." (Booth, *The Rhetoric* 71)

Lodge continues Booth's tradition, summarising the need to acknowledge such a distinction a few decades later:

> The real author is the actual historic individual who produced the text … about whom we know or can discover quite a lot of information. The real reader is any individual who reads the text, each, like the real author, having his or her own unique history and a finite biological life. The implied author and the implied reader, however, live as long as the text lives. The implied author is the creative mind implied by the existence of the text to whose original activity we attribute the effects and values we, as readers, discover in it. (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 144)

Lodge attacks the intentional fallacy by declaring that it is a kind of criticism that "will take [the] question to the real author, either by questioning him directly, if he is alive and willing to answer, or by investigating his diaries, letters, reported conversation and so on, for evidence of what he intended" (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 144–45), which eventually becomes a mistake, as, "in moving from the author inscribed in the text to the real author" this type of criticism is risking understanding the intentions that may lie in a text (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 145). With time, a new distinction is created "between author and writer, by, among others, Glenn Kroft, for whom the author is a semiotic social and cultural entity, whereas the writer is the real owner of the writing practice..." (Golban 220–21) This distinction is inherent in Foucault's ideas, which urge the literary realm to understand the reality of the reading text.

What this exemplifies is the need to rescue the remains of the figure of the author, as well as the understanding that *intention*, as mentioned above, can be fluid and constant. As Gregory Currie argues, author intention does exist, in that "[t]he author may expect his intention to be recognised in a number of ways: by the manner of his writing, the nature of his story, or simply because he knows his work will be advertised and sold as fiction." (G. Currie 30) Author intention exists, therefore, because real authors are still responsible for the production of texts, however, "[t]he point is not that the real author's comments are without interest but that they do not have absolute authority." (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 145) It is time to start placing interest in the figure of "the author inscribed in the text", instead of the real author, to understand the functioning of postmodern literary and socio-political discourses within society. Sticking to the figure of the 'real author' would be counterproductive for literary theory's progress; a failure to understand the distinction between implied/inscribed authors and real authors (as Lodge puts it) or between the author and the real writer (as

Foucault does) leads to the risk of precisely, “committing what has been called the intentional fallacy…” again. (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 145–45)

Ultimately, a great variety of critics outside of the linguistic realm, such as Lodge, clearly antagonise Barthes’ proclamation. As Lodge indicates,

> Works of literature – in our era of civilization, at least – do not come into being by accident. They are intentional acts, produced by individual writers employing shared codes of signification according to a certain design, weighing and measuring the interrelation of part to part and parts to the developing whole, projecting the work against the anticipated response of a hypothetical reader. Without such control and design there would be no reason to write one sentence rather than another, or to arrange one’s sentences in any particular order. (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 158)

That is what Katherine Anne Limmer reiterates by stating something as obvious as the fact that critics and scholars alike continue to rely “on a single name” when referencing literary works, something other media, such as film production, does not: “the literary reference in its reliance on a single name insists on individual creativity and refuses to acknowledge historical and social specificities.” (Limmer) Nonetheless, Lodge also puts forward the importance of understanding that the existence of an author does not immediately and inevitably lead to the belief in fixed meaning and intention, nor to the eradication of the reader. While he disagrees with the intentional fallacy’s ideology that there exists a “model of communication according to which the writer conceives of a pre-verbal meaning, wraps it up in a package of story, character and trope, and leaves it about for a reader to find, who unwraps the package, throws away the wrapping, and extracts the original pre-verbal meaning”, he stresses the fact that “[t]he reader produces the meaning of a text by responding to its linguistic and discursive cues, by translating its words into his own words, which in their most formalized state constitute the critical text.” (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 145)

Critics after Barthes' verdict attempt to come to terms with the dimensions of his statements. Belsey also goes deeper within the layers of the literary text, by asserting that "the continued assumption that meaning is single, and the continued quest for a guarantee of this single meaning results in a conviction that the meaning of any text is timeless, universal and transhistorical." (Belsey 18) What is ultimately being put forward after Barthes' time, therefore, is the shifting of that which needs to be annihilated. It was never the author, but the idea that authorial intention was the only meaning available within the text. The text should no longer be "seen as a way of arriving at something anterior to it: the convictions of the author, or his or her experience as part of that society at that particular time." (Belsey 13) As a matter of fact, whichever *intention* exists, or, as Belsey refers to it, if works can have an 'unconscious', it "is constructed in the moment of its entry into literary form, in the gap between the ideological project and the specifically literary form. Thus the text is no more a transcendent unity than the human subject." (Belsey 107–08)

More contemporary approaches, consequently, albeit aware of the need to dismantle authoritarian discourses, approach the figure of the author and of authorial intention with an understanding of redefinition. Wolfgang Iser, for example, understands that within linguistics and literary analysis, "while the reader is seeking a consistent pattern in the text, he is also uncovering other impulses which cannot be immediately integrated or will even resist final integration. Thus the semantic possibilities of the text will always remain far richer than any configurative meaning formed while reading." (Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" 60) Stanley E. Fish, on the other hand, puts forward the idea that "[t]he objectivity of the text is an illusion", one that is dangerous in its persuasive nature, "because it is so physically convincing" (Fish 82). While authorial intention continues to be problematic

within postmodern studies and denying its complex nature would not only be delusional but counterproductive to our current society and literature, it is precisely through its study, and the amount of work produced surrounding its nature, that as scholars we should come to understand how necessary it is to deconstruct its nature and continue to do so.

1.1.3 Ian McEwan's Authors

In McEwan's works can be found the construction of an inscribed author, an author which "is that fictional character constructed within our make-believe whom we take to be telling us the story as known fact. Our reading is thus an exploration of the fictional author's belief structure." (G. Currie 76) The inscribed author is one that clearly has an intention, makes it known and demands it to be understood accordingly. Interestingly, it would seem upon facing the death of authorial intention, postmodern literature had to come up with new emerging figures, such as *inscribed* authors, or *unreliable* narrators alike, to be able to forestall the power that had hitherto been attributed to authorship, while still being capable of attributing meaning to their stories. Are postmodern authors resisting their death, or is it that authorial authority and intention are inherent in literature? Perhaps it is interesting to consider Limmer's assertion that "[t]he fact that the commonly accepted term for the originator of a literary text has the same root as the term authority should alert us immediately to the fact that it is not merely a description of the person deemed mostly responsible for producing the work." (Limmer)

Compagno mentions that in the intentional fallacy it is almost "useless for readers to connect texts with their producers' will, because will is never really expressed, or it is unknowable, or the meaning and value of writing is unrelated to it."

(Compagno 38) Postmodern authors, or most specifically, McEwan's authors, however, must be understood, they do have a will and they make it known. Because of that, "[u]nderstanding the fictional author is thus like understanding a real person; it's a matter of making the best overall sense we can of his behaviour…" (G. Currie 76). In Currie's view this "fictional author does not exist outside the fiction" (G. Currie 77) and it is only through the text that the author can be regarded and identified. This is what this study attempts to pursue: an exploration of the journey of two inscribed authors (and ultimately their real author) on obtaining intention.

The turn in McEwan's writing, and hence what opposes his oeuvre to the Death of the Author is that his inscribed authors need understanding, and understanding can only be provided by the presence of the other (in this case manifested in the figure of the reader). According to Golban "...there are contemporary critical and literary voices, among whom Ian McEwan who reaffirms the importance and omnipotence of the author against all emphases on textuality, the reader, and … cultural discourses..." (Golban 215) Consequently, it could be stated that McEwan's work becomes a reaction against ideologies established by postmodern literary criticism, as he acknowledges the power of the author (both inscribed and real) at the same time that he does not diminish the presence of the reader, highlighting what Golban refers as the "...vitality of authorship" which is simultaneously translated into "authorial omnipotence" (Golban 216). Moreover, McEwan gives power to the reader to create meaning, but such transposition of power does not remove it from the author. Where Barthes states that "[t]o assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, a close writing" (Barthes 53) McEwan balances the power over the text, acknowledging the need for a text to be read and deciphered without attempting to attribute full control to either side.

Ultimately, Barthes (perhaps inadvertently) demolished an established and authoritarian truth (that of the authority over a text) to in turn impose another established truth (by shifting the authority over a text to another player). Lodge highlights that

> [b]ehind [Barthes'] argument is a quite false antithesis between two models of interpretation, one of which we are told we must choose: either (A) the text contains a single meaning which the author intended and which it is the duty of the critic to establish, or (B) the text is a system capable of generating an infinite number of meanings when activated by the reader. (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 158)

Ironically, in the quest for the location of meaning, it is authors like McEwan, rather than Barthes, who take a more postmodern approach towards authority. This is achieved by refusing to allocate a single interpretation to a text, but rather by simultaneously granting the power to different figures and creating texts that can concurrently have an intended 'sealed' meaning, while requiring outer participation to generate the "infinite number of meanings" that can be "activated by the reader" (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 158).

Wolfgang Iser, in his seminal text *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response"* (1978) puts it thus: "The author of the text may, of course, exert plenty of influence on the reader's imagination - he has the whole panoply of narrative techniques at his disposal - but no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader's eyes", that is because, according to Iser, and possibly close to what McEwan understands regarding authorship, "[i]f he does, he will very quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating the reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realize the intentions of his text." (Iser 57) It is not in the interest of the postmodern (or rather, the contemporary) author to 'seal' a text, in fact, the interest resides in understanding the boundaries within such a text. As I intend to exemplify,

McEwan creates inscribed authors who need their authority to be acknowledged, as the texts they produce transcend the fictional.

In the two novels explored in this work, McEwan presents authors who are alive indeed, which do not entirely fit into the intentional fallacy either. McEwan's authors, rather, fit into the theories of Foucault, who believes that, albeit not ideally, the culture of the time in which a text is written in, as well as the edification of an author by such cultural discourses, are key to understanding the figures of authors and readers alike. McEwan creates authors who eventually become part of a sociocultural construction, as they demand their intention to be stated and understood, hence making vital both the act of creation as well as the act of reception.

Foucault refers to authors that, through sociocultural discourses, are given a name and an identity that imposes itself on the text in a way that they become unavoidable. Briony Tallis and Tom Haley present intention: they record stories that, by blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction and by providing such an intricate web of roles, become impossible to be consumed and then forgotten, as Barthes suggests. They create narratives that demand an extra effort in the post-reading phase, perhaps an act of re-reading of the text or a post-reading research process is accordingly necessary. By creating such an additional phase to the process of reading (one that is not always necessary for the reading act), not only the fictive authors, but also the readers of the text rise as co-authors with intention.

In 1967, Barthes asked "[w]ho speaks in this way?" (Barthes 49) In 1968, Foucault cited Samuel Beckett to reply by asking instead "What does it matter who is speaking?" (Foucault 101) Barthes mused "[w]e can never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neuter, that

composite, that obliquity into which our subject flees, the black-and-white where identity is lost…" (Barthes 49) Three and four decades later, McEwan replies back to both, playing with such 'origin'. He busies himself by exploring not how an author holds original power, or how the reader should be its rightful owner, but by documenting the ways in which both figures interact.

McEwan does not ask the hypothetical reader what constitutes a voice, or who is behind such a voice, McEwan assigns inscribed authors to such voices, as he assigns roles to his readers and to his inscribed authors' ideal readers. After that, he attempts to discern if any of these voices raises as the most prominent, eventually dismantling Barthes' ideals by both creating a balanced relationship between author and reader and by ultimately imposing himself, McEwan, as an ultimate authority in his texts. Subsequently, as will be exemplified throughout this study, McEwan shows a great command and understanding of his own literary texts and arguably holds the control for how these are received more prominently than most of his contemporaries. By assigning clearly specific roles to the different players within the text, in *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth,* McEwan questions the relationship between author and reader, as well as the drive behind such a union. To do so, he tests the existence of the author-reader contract by placing his texts and authors under the prism of postmodern techniques.

1.2. The Reader

> At its best, interest in the reader is entirely liberating, a rejection of authorial tyranny in favour of the participation of readers in the production of a plurality of meanings; at its worst, reader-theory merely constructs a new authority-figure as guarantor of a single meaning, a timeless, transcendent, highly trained model reader who cannot be wrong. (Belsey, 29)

1.2.1 Reader-Response Criticism: A Brief History

Emerging from the preoccupation with the authority over a text, reader-response criticism develops over the 1970s with the premise that "all texts are designed for an audience, and only become meaningful when they are read, viewed or listened to." (Willis 1) This premise stems from the fact "that attention to the text is not enough; attention to response is necessary. The atmosphere of this aim is pragmatic" and consequently, "textually oriented pedagogy [is now] conceived as, in one way or another, ineffective." (Bleich 138) Critics and philosophers alike, repudiating New Criticism's investment in the text as the sole carrier of meaning and intention, and henceforth understanding that "[w]hat we do when we read, however 'natural' it seems, presupposes a whole theoretical discourse, even if unspoken, about language and about meaning" (Belsey 4), turn their attention to the reception of works and to the act of reading. This new shift in criticism does not underestimate the fact that there might be as many interpretations of a text as there might be readers, as a matter of fact, "[a]lthough the description of the reader's experience may change with each reading of the text, and though the text may be said to consume itself or to disappear...", it is necessary to leave aside the "tradition of explication which takes the single text as the standard unit of interpretation." (Tompkins 206)

As Jane P. Tompkins argues, reader-response criticism could be considered to have begun to develop in "discussions of emotional response", mainly those effectuated in the 1920s and 1930s by Ivor Armstrong Richards, Denys Wyatt Harding, and Louise Rosemblatt (Tompkins x). My suggestion is that it could be speculated that reader-response criticism emerged slightly earlier, from what is considered to be one of the most influential essays in the emergence of literary-theory in Britain, that of "Tradition and the Individual Talent", published by T.S Eliot in 1919. Despite the fact Eliot barely mentions the reader in his pivotal essay, his theories regarding the need for the poet to erase itself as an individual and to understand the literary act as one of effacement (where one becomes part of a tradition of works that, in being created, modifies the past, present and future of literature (Eliot 37)), give way to the understanding that the importance, meaning and intention of texts cannot be exclusively placed on the authorial presence. After Eliot's assertion, which closely follows the intentional fallacy, a redefinition of the understanding of authority shifts towards the reader. As Gareth Reeves argues, Eliot's argument "gives legitimacy to the idea of the text as an object of perpetual reinterpretation. Reader-response and reception theories have elaborated on this approach", which accordingly leads "[e]very text [to become] the sum of all of its readings through time, and consequently there will never be a fixed reading, or a fixed order." (Reeves 114)

Eliot's theories regarding authorship do not blatantly erase the figure of the author in the creation of intention the way in which one could understand Barthes' speculations do, in fact, Eliot puts forward the need for poets and writers alike to understand writing as a mechanical process, based on hard-work and on an almost scientific approach to literature (Eliot 39). For Eliot, the writer is a 'catalyst' of emotions (Eliot 39), one that to produce work, must have undergone a clear study of

literary tradition and must possess a great understanding of all literary production (Eliot 39). In his essay, he does not give way for the reader to rise as owner of the creation of meaning, perhaps quite the contrary, but his establishment of the author as less than a genial figure (rooted in Romantic ideals of authorship, or what is termed the biographical fallacy) paves the way for reader-response to emerge as strongly as it does.

With time, as David Bleich argues, "... the response to a work of literature is isolated as an object of study and treated either as an independently analyzable item or as a member of a class of responses that is analyzed statistically" (Bleich 138), which in turns leads to "organized research tr[ying] to collect larger, more statistically significant groups of responses [being studied] with more complex mathematical techniques." (Bleich 142) Reader-response criticism, simultaneously, understands the nature of the reading act has shifted throughout the centuries, and as Tompkins argues, it is no longer large audiences that are at the receiving end, as would happen "in antiquity, on an oratorical model", rather, now it is smaller groups of individuals which are being considered as target audiences to be inspected (Tompkins 207).

This rearrangement in criticism takes place with the discernment that texts are produced to be received and therefore cannot be understood, as New Criticism did, as "an object, like a machine, whose parts can be analysed without reference...to the observer" (Rosenblatt as qtd in Willis 143) Meaning, intention and function, concepts inherent in the reading act, need to be considered in "reference to readers and/or reading." (Willis 143) Ika Willis further states that, as a society,

> ...we cannot study texts without thinking about reception. The first reason is the constructed nature of the texts, as something which is co-produced by an interpreter, or, really, a number of interpreters. The second is the non-existence of a fixed meaning for any statement or sign prior to an act of interpretation. The third is the dialogic nature of interpretation and the inextricability of the interpreter from the text. The fourth is the

> irreducibly polysemic nature of linguistic meaning, which can only be fixed or determined by appealing to extratextual authority. (144)

Henceforth, once the importance of reader reception has been established, a dissemination of the reader figure takes place (as did the figure of the author after Barthes' essay). With the understanding of the significance of the reader, different layers within such a figure are identified. Willis understands the reader as "not single but multiple". Just as books are "made up of many different languages, codes and references, each one decodable in different ways." (169) The reader, therefore, has "various cultural competences, affective orientations, technical skills, bodily habits, imaginative dispositions, all of which may vary from day to day, from reading to reading." (Willis 169) The endeavour taken by reader-response criticism, therefore, is not simple. In fact, I would argue it is far more complex than studies centred on disseminating the author figure. It is not only the intricacy ingrained within each individual's context which needs study, factors such as "other readers, genres, intertexts and interpretative norms which frame and filter the relation between reader and text" must also be taken into consideration. Ultimately, the reader, as the reader experience, is one "unrepeatable because it consists of a unique combination of multiple factors." (Willis 169)

1.2.2 The Birth of the Reader

Barthes makes an accurate proclamation of what the reader is, by stating that "...a text consists of multiple writings, proceeding from several cultures and entering into dialogue, into parody, into contestation; but there is a site where this multiplicity is collected, and this site is not the author, as has hitherto been claimed, but the reader" (Barthes 54). Indeed, an accumulation of meaning is found in the reader, not only in the

author, as the reader becomes the recipient of all information. Uncontestedly, the reader is the destination. Nevertheless, Barthes' referred destination is problematic because he considers it cannot be personal.

The reader, going back to oral narratives, has always been the element or player that needs to be *instructed* or *entertained*, to put it in two different categories. From Greek philosophers to Indian storytellers, to British balladists, the audience's reception has marked the following steps for both the story told and its storyteller: audience reception (and repetition) determines whether the story is maintained and resists the passing of time, or if it is buried and forgotten. In the ordeal of determining what gives importance and meaning to a text, what should be considered, consequently, is that without readers *consuming* literature, literature would not exist. Without individuals purchasing books as property, and claiming their ownership, literature would cease to exist. Therefore, despite the question of who holds the intentional power over a text (which, as it seems to be, is not one entity but a combination of many), it is irrefutable that while without a creator a text would not come to be, without a receptor, a text would not be able to continue to exist (physically) or be able to obtain meaning (metaphysically).

Additionally, a distinction between different kinds of readers needs to be made. In fact, literature is consumed by readers and critics alike and the issues that concern the metaphysical reader (so to speak) may not (and are usually not) the kind of issues that concern the strictly physical reader. As Lodge puts it, "[r]eaders outside of the academy ... continue to believe in the existence and importance of authors. This is one of several issues that have created a barrier of non-comprehension between academic and non-academic discussion of literature." (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 7) The exploration of the relationship between author and reader may differ depending on the kind of reader that

is consuming a work. Discerning which reader is involved in such an act of consumption might also shift the identity of the author that is producing such work. This is one of the ideas which gives way to the exploration of the author-reader contract, and how each player experiences the relationship with the other, which is to be developed in the next section.

Furthermore, Tompkins clarifies the distinction between "...the kinds of readers to whom a text can be addressed: the real reader (the person who holds the book in hand), the virtual reader (the kind of reader the author thinks he is writing for, whom he endows with certain qualities, capacities, and tastes), and the ideal reader (one who understands the text perfectly and approves its every nuance)" (Tompkins xii).[5] Interestingly, within the attempts of dissecting the reader figure, complications hitherto unexperienced regarding the dissemination of the author figure emerge. However valid (or invalid) the biographical fallacy might be, society continues to hold possession of far more information regarding the author figure than that of the reader, given the fact that authorship continues to hold a position in the public eye. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that in reader-response criticism, the reader's figure will inescapably be far more of a 'construct' than that of the author. This construct, the 'ideal' reader is understood as

> ...someone who is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up [,who] is in full possession of "the semantic knowledge that a mature… listener brings to his task of comprehension." this includes the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc. has *literary* competence. (Fish 86–7)

Fish mentions this kind of reader (which he terms the informed reader) is similar to "Wardhaugh's 'mature reader' or Milton's 'fit' reader" (Fish 86), and it should be

[5] The 'ideal' reader Tompkins refers to is somewhat in par with Umberto Eco's 'model' reader, a concept first mentioned in *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976) and later on developed in *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotic of Texts* (1979). See footnote 6 for further information on the 'model' reader.

understood as “neither an abstraction, nor an actual living reader, but a hybrid - a real reader ... who does everything within his power to make himself informed.” (Fish 87) The ideal reader is therefore necessary due to the impossibility to predict the behaviour of the real reader in a controlled environment. As Willis suggests,

> Real-life readers may be very different from the readers expected or addressed by texts, and may do unexpected or unpredictable things with texts. They may skim and skip (Benwell, Procter and Robinson 2011: 93), or reread obsessively, with fanatical attention to detail (Eco 1992); they may attribute texts to genres or even languages other than the ones the author seems to have intended (Waquet 2001 [1998]: 104-105); they may ignore their endings (Ahmed 2010: 88-89), insert new characters (Dobinson and Young 2000), cut them up and stick them in scrapbooks (Garvey 2013). (69)

However, that does not imply that the ideal reader and the real reader are worlds apart, one figure is obviously informed by the other. As Iser argues, “[n]o matter who or what he may be, the real reader is always offered a particular role to play, and it is this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader” (as qtd in Willis 73) In fact, as Lodge asserts, the real reader must participate in an effort to “become the implied reader” which is “not merely a matter of acquiring relevant historical information: it is also a synthesizing and interpretative effort.” (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 146) Making reference to Jonathan Culler, Lodge invokes a ‘literary competence’, one which Fish also subscribes to (see quote above), in the understanding of the reader figure. According to Lodge, this ‘literary competence’ concerns itself with “making connections, drawing inferences, forming and constantly modifying hypotheses, in order to produce the meaning of the text.” (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 146)

As Currie mentions, “readers, collectively and individually, do not make and unmake fiction. Fictional status is acquired by a work, not in the process of its reception but in the process of its making.” (G. Currie 11) While fictional status for a work may be obtained while it is in the process of being produced, it is only after it is consumed

that it will *acquire* (multiple) meaning(s). As the receptor of a fiction, the reader will consume and provide meaning for a text, but the process of providing meaning is not necessarily an easy one. As mentioned above, Barthes concludes that texts are multiple and are issued from a combination of cultures, dialogues and parodies only being untied by the reader. However, Barthes attributes the reader with characteristics that almost reach the superpower, far more enhanced than those of the ideal reader mentioned above. Ultimately, readers, just as writers, have a history, a biography, and a psychology they draw from, as well as their own passions, which cannot be ignored as key elements in the creation of meaning. As Wallace Martin suggests, "[t]he author is not the only source of meaning, nor is the reader the only interpreter (…) the writer is a reader and interpreter, just as the real reader, by posing and answering questions, becomes a writer or rewriter of the story. In other words, the entire communication model exists within each of its discrete parts." (Martin 169)

Currie also refers to the existence of "an informed reader, a reader who knows the relevant facts about the community in which the work was written. The informed reader, unlike the fictional author, is not a fictional entity." (G. Currie 79) However, he makes it clear that there is a difference between an informed and a real reader: "[a] real reader can be an informed reader, although not every real reader is." (G. Currie 79) Ultimately, it would seem that reader-response criticism's main aim is to discern the existence of the 'ideal' reader: a reader who is capable of comprehending the 'multiplicity' Barthes refers to, without bordering on the all-knowing God-like reader figure, and that is capable to do so through "[knowing] more than what [is] common knowledge in the community; (...) know[ing] what beliefs [are] to some degree or other prevalent, and to some degree or other acknowledged to be prevalent." (G. Currie 81)

What is interesting to acknowledge is the fact that once a text is put out in the open by its creator (who is alive and continues to exist), it is taken by its receptor and given meaning. The meaning that is attributed to a text will deeply depend on the assumptions the receptor makes during the reading act. Such assumptions will lead to the building of a system of beliefs that will allow the reader to interpret a text depending on their reading history and most probably their sociocultural background. The key points into building such a system of beliefs will be found within the text, and as readers, especially as readers that are informed but not all-knowing, a certain assumption regarding the origin of the story that is being read will be created. In *The Sense of an Ending* (1966), Frank Kermode discusses the occurrence of an inherent human "need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end" (Kermode 4), this need for both a beginning and an ending is undeniably connected to the need to understand the origin and destination of the text being read. Indeed, as the reader is building an individual system of beliefs for each text, "the text itself will be one of the things that gives [the reader] clues as to what kind of person [they] [are], and [their] view of the fictional author will change and deepen as we read more." (G. Currie 77) Notwithstanding, just as the author could never be ideal, and the author-function should be taken as an intention rather than an established and irrefutable truth, the reader will find clues within a text, but the text can and will "[provide] these clues only against a background of assumptions for which there might be no warrant in the text itself." (G. Currie 77) Readers create meaning through a structured, sometimes informed, system of assumptions, but the resulting meaning cannot be categorised as *ideal.*

To simplify matters, in this work I will mostly make reference to the terms *ideal* reader and *inscribed* reader (which would correspond to Tompkins' concept of the

virtual reader) so that it matches the ideology and terminology behind the inscribed author. Furthermore, I will also make use of the term *familiar* reader, which I would like to introduce as a hybrid between Fish's and Currie's *informed* reader and Tompkins' *real* reader. This term will be more easily exemplified when the reader figure is explored within McEwan's fiction, but my main aim is to make use of the term in relation to those readers that, showing their 'literary competence', are endowed with further responsibilities in their role within the reading act by the author itself and by the development of a higher understanding of the author's oeuvre.[6]

The *familiar* reader, therefore, is the reader that, as real reader, has read all the material published by a real author and is therefore knowledgeable when it comes to all production concerning a specific oeuvre. I am not referring to a level of knowledge acquisition similar to that of a specialist in the author or on a specific academic field, but rather a real reader which is familiar with the entire career of a real author, and which differs from other real readers in that their reading act is not one that is consequential, but rather self-aware: familiar readers follow a specific author's career, they purposefully await new publications and may even participate in acts of re-reading previously published material. They are readers, therefore, which are literate in the writer's recurrent techniques, their use of language, use of genre, and which, as familiar

[6] The familiar reader also resembles what Eco highlights when discussing the 'model' reader. A reader "who is capable of understanding the language, appreciating the style and interpreting the techniques used in the text" (Willis 71), in this case, as a consequence of their *familiarity* with the author figure itself. Nevertheless, Eco makes reference to the fact that a 'model' reader eventually acts and behaves according to the wishes of a 'model' author. As Joseph Francese points out, "Model Readers do not submit to the writer's authority but create what [Eco] calls a Model Author, and, ultimately, write their own text" based on what they expect the Model Author requires. In this way, "[w]hen Model Readers underwrite the illusion of the author's invisibility, they cease to read critically and absorb the ideology encoded in the text", one they have created based, as just mentioned, by "fashion[ing] their own texts by constructing a Model Author, who is a projection of the wishes and desires of the empirical reader." (Francese 161–62). Consequently, the model reader is not altogether the same as the 'familiar' reader I will make reference to, as in the novels explored, familiar readers do not endow the author with the features Eco considers model readers to attribute to model authors. The familiar reader does, however, resemble Eco's model reader in that they "first [seek] to appreciate the writer's craft", as McEwan's familiar readers will do in knowing his literary strategies, "then attempts to follow 'the strategy [the author] designed to enable a reader to explore […] endlessly' (46) the world created by the narrator." (Francese and Eco as qtd in Francese 166) Interestingly, as Lubomír Doležel, points out, Eco also mentions to a so-called 'sophisticated' reader, a term which could fit the concept of the 'familiar' reader, but as Doležel points out, in Eco this 'sophisticated' reader is not "made explicit [nor] related to the concept of the Model Reader." (Doležel 186).

readers, can anticipate plot development or, as is the case at hand, narrative techniques that might lead to plot 'twists'.

1.3.1.1 Marginalia

As mentioned above, the main constituents in the reading act are the originator of a text, the text itself, and the reader. In the process, other players are involved as well, such as editors, publishers or marketers. Having analysed the author figure at length and having explored what is expected from a reader by critics and philosophers alike, it is interesting to come to terms with what the reader experiences through the reading act. In this study, it is also intended to make the breach between critical reading and 'popular' reading obvious by acknowledging that the real reader is somehow alienated from most analyses executed. For that reason, a few of my theories on readership stem from studies on marginalia, which approaches the reading act from the perspective of the reader as *owner* of an object. As developed in the next section, I believe it is necessary to approach the author-reader relationship from a social and economic standpoint, which is usually overlooked in literary theory but is contemplated in marginalia.

Stephen Orgel in *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces* (2015), mentions that "we speak of *constructing* an argument, *building* a case. In this metaphor, readers have an instrumental function, because apprehending the work involves *reconstructing* the argument." (Orgel 6) Orgel speaks about the reader regarding marginalia, the study of the margin annotations that can be found in books. In marginalia the book is perceived as a public architectural object, one that can be used in terms of public exposure but also in terms of private ownership. The book is a space where meaning can be *seen*, where meaning has been ascribed to through the literal act

of inscribing information into it through centuries of reading. Concurrently, Orgel states that "the history of any particular book does not conclude with its publication" (Orgel 2), and while Orgel is focusing on "a particular aspect of this history of the book, an archaeology of the use of margins and other blank spaces, a sociology of reading and writing in relation to ownership" (Orgel 2), it is necessary to recognise the written text as more than a platform for an originator to express thoughts: the written text is also a space that is owned by the reader, not merely in a metaphorical or theoretical way. Marginalia makes use of the study of margin annotations to analyse the society reading a text as well as to understand how such texts can provide historical information outside of the written text itself. Furthermore, "such markings assume that the book is not simply a text; it is *a place and a property* (...) marks in books are often not about reading but about possession, and even this is not a simple matter." (Orgel 5 emphasis added)

Therefore, not only reader-response criticism claims for the focus to be turned into the reader, as so do other critical fields. Orgel makes the obvious point that "the work, even as architecture, is incomplete without the reader: books are intended to be read." (Orgel 6) In other words, despite the genius an author might hold, words will not be relevant until they are consumed, "just as the elixir in the vial has no efficacy unless you drink it", texts "must be allowed to reach readers." (Orgel 8) As Bleich argues, reader-response criticism not only concerns itself with the study of reader and author intention but sees "response as the outcome of a relationship or transaction between a reader and a text, where the text is considered a real object." (Bleich 138)

In a similar line of thought, marginalia studies understand that "[t]he book is given a voice by [its] owners." (Orgel 8) In fact, if anything can be obtained from marginalia studies is that "...however offensive we find the excisions, an outrage

committed on the body of the book, they are, like the shields themselves, part of the book's history, testifying to the changing notion of what kind of repository the book was, and what in it was valuable." (Orgel 11) Books have been used and considered as objects since their inception, and therefore, the reader's marks of possession have been a part of text reception since the foundation of the printing press.

Regarding a copy of *Carmina*, and the inscriptions written on the title page by Erasmus and Matinus Lipsius, Orgel reflects that

> [b]ooks are not absolutely dead things. Part of the modern confusion about the status of texts in the early modern period stems from our own idealization of the text, and of the transformations in the idea of the text effected by printing. We tend to assume that printing fixed the text, that the printed book was the work in its final form, and that one of the consequences of what is widely referred to now as "the print revolution" was the stabilization of texts. (Orgel 9)

Orgel here is referring to the print revolution, but his words could easily be equated to the fact that texts are ultimately fluid. Just as it has been established that there is no fixed meaning imposed by an author - as authors need a reader's understanding of their text; texts therefore become fluid as they are ultimately granted meaning by an uncontrollable subject (the mass of society, the reading individual, et cetera).

Here again a mention must be made to the act of consumption: without an author, there would not be a reader. Most interestingly, the reader would also not exist were it not for the publisher attached to the author, to the agent attached to the celebrity, to the warehouse attached to the book's distribution. The reader is certainly a destination, but as Orgel suggests, it simultaneously becomes a source. The act of consumption mentioned above is not only a culmination of different acts, but concomitantly the opening of another process, in which meaning continues to be created. The word 'continues' is where my focus is specifically placed: just as a text

cannot come to life without a scriptor, it cannot continue to hold a life, to hold *intention*, without its reader.

"Printing did, from very early in its history, claim precisely that special kind of authority for its texts; but the claim was largely unfounded (…) Early print culture was in fact a world of inaccurate, unauthorized texts..." (Orgel 9) In fact, Orgel goes on to reflect on the notion that before the printing revolution, it was readers who would create errata sheets, which was in itself an act of "perfect[ing books]" and "often add[ing] to their value" (Orgel 11), as marks in the text became indispensable in the understanding and recalibrating of such a value. The idea that what readers decide to mark in a text determines its value is also linked to the fact that reader response, joint as a group, is what ultimately determines what a text will mean for its society. Nevertheless, this concept clashes with postmodern criticism. Orgel puts it this way:

> When Edward Said says (…) that "reading and interpreting are routinely understood to occur in the form of misreading and misinterpreting," he is ironically describing a postmodern ideology in which reading is always partial, tendentious, individual; and any reading of the text will be at fault because when we read we find only what we are looking for. But do texts, in themselves, in the absence of a reader, have meanings? The charge of misinterpretation implies that there is a correct interpretation, but can there be a correct reading? (Orgel 11)

Indeed, can texts have meaning if they are without a reader? To that and other questions in regards to the intention of a text and whether it has a correct interpretation, marginalia studies understand that "[i]t is not that there are no answers to such questions, but the answers keep changing according to what we want literature to tell us and what we want out of reading" as a society (Orgel 14). To understand a text, and what its readership obtains from it, context regarding the reading act needs to be incorporated into the understanding of the reader. Because of that, recent reader-response criticism "views the print revolution as, in significant ways, a reading

revolution, a revolution not only of technology but also of dissemination and reception." (Orgel 2) In this way, the act of being active in the reading process, the act of understanding a text and therefore a book in terms of the acquisition of wealth, becomes a "peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, and object of public knowledge." (Wimssat and Beardsley as qtd in Golban 220)

1.2.3 Ian McEwan's Readers

Ian McEwan explores readership at two different levels as well, as he does authorship. It could be stated McEwan's focus is placed on the ideal reader (not *his* ideal reader, however, rather the inscribed author's ideal reader) and the real reader (in this case, understood as the real author's real reader). On another sublevel, McEwan also inevitably allows for the emergence of the familiar reader mentioned above, one that, with the growing knowledge of his literary career, will henceforward make informed decisions in its reading act of McEwan's future texts.

In all such cases, this can be perceived in the way in which McEwan makes the writing process obvious in his narratives. As Belsey argues, "[t]he object of deconstructing the text is to examine the process of its production - not the private experience of the individual author, but the mode of production, the materials and their arrangement in the work." (Belsey 104) McEwan is no stranger to the incorporation of metafictional artefacts into his texts in order to make the *process of production* obvious, hence, it could be argued that he participates in a deconstruction of his texts which involves authors and readers alike, along with all of the layers present within such figures. Belsey states the aim of this exercise in deconstruction is to "locate the point of contradiction within the text, the point at which it transgresses the limits within which it

is constructed [and] breaks free of the constraints imposed by its own realist form" (Belsey 104), that is to say, in his acts of deconstruction, what McEwan participates in is in a blurring of the boundaries between authorial and reading power.

This way, McEwan creates texts that is comparable to what Belsey refers to as being "composed of contradictions (...) no longer restricted to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading. Instead it becomes plural, open to re-reading, no longer an object for passive consumption but an object of work by the reader to produce meaning." (Belsey 104) McEwan's treatment of readership, as his treatment of authorship, allows for his texts to become joint creations by real, inscribed, and informed readers as well as real and inscribed authors alike. As will be exemplified below, McEwan produces texts in which the author holds *intention*, but one which, as suggested in the previous section, is in need of reader reinforcement. Without its reception, the author's intention, albeit existent, would be rendered futile. This is quite common and inherent in trauma narratives, which is another of the theoretical approaches appropriated in this study.

Nonetheless, McEwan's use of authorship continues to hold a unique trait, in that he proceeds to consciously position himself in the role of the real author, one that, despite giving voice and acknowledgement to the importance of reader-reception, seems to simultaneously reward his own figure with a force difficult to counterbalance. As argued above, not only does he make use of his earlier texts and grants them a new meaning years later; he also modifies his own narratives by turning them into a different mediatic experience (at present, the cinematic one[7]). The changes he produces in his narratives may be allocated to a different number of reasons: changing social contexts, desire to meet new audience's expectations, renewed views on narrative and content...

[7] See footnotes 48 and 49 for further information.

Either way, what is relevant is the revisiting of his narratives, which proves that the publication act is not an act of fixing the text, and that after the writing process comes a long process of reception, reworking and metamorphosing which is directed not only by readers and press, but also, I would argue, by the author itself. While McEwan acknowledges the need for an audience to receive and comprehend a text, he is also in utmost control of his literary career, to the point that he is now responsible for the adaptations made of his work[8]. Thus, McEwan is currently taking possession of every step into the public modification and analysis of his texts.

McEwan's reader, therefore, is not one which holds all power in the creation of meaning, as a familiar reader will soon learn that a text may be modified at a later date. McEwan's texts are therefore fluid, in that their meaning seems to never be fixed, they continue to be modified and adapted, by audiences, certainly, but most relevantly by the author itself. In McEwan's texts the familiar reader must become aware of the ephemerality of the meanings attributed to the narrative, and it must simultaneously understand its responsibilities as McEwan's reader, responsibilities also executed by McEwan himself. As Fish argues, in the reading act, familiar readers must grow to take a "temporary adoption of ... inappropriate strategies" which are in themselves "a response to the strategy of an author". Therefore, any "resulting mistakes [in the reading act] are part of the experience provided by that author's language, and therefore part of its meaning." (Fish 86) As Fish suggests, meaning, albeit provided by both players in the literary game, continues to fall more permanently on the author itself. That is to say, McEwan's familiar reader is one that is constantly under scrutiny and manipulation.

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[8] See the Conclusion along with footnote 43 for further information.

This would link McEwan's familiar reader to the figure of the inscribed reader as well, as will be exemplified below. Both inscribed authors created by McEwan, Briony Tallis and Tom Haley, will manipulate their inscribed readers throughout their narration, by testing their 'literary competence': in the case of Briony, her interaction resides more strongly with an 'ideal' reader, one she conceives of early on in her literary career, from that ideal reader, she will seek atonement. In the case of Tom, his interaction is placed with an 'inscribed', even somewhat 'familiar' reader, Serena, his new lover, from whom he will eventually seek co-authorship.

As authors writing from trauma, both Briony and Tom need their narratives to be received by a public. In both cases, not only is the reader necessary as an act of testimony, but it is also necessary because, as Iser argues regarding the reading act, "...by reading [the inscribed readers will] uncover the unformulated part of the text, and this very indeterminacy is the force that drives [them] to work out a configurative meaning while at the same time giving [them] the necessary degree of freedom to do so." (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 62) That is to say, in order to come to terms with their own trauma, both inscribed authors need the inscribed readers to "uncover" those "unformulated" parts of the text, the readers must become more actively involved in the reading experience. As Kathleen D'Angelo claims, regarding *Atonement*,

> [i]n his critique of the reader's role, McEwan presents an implicit argument about the ethical responsibility for readers of contemporary fiction. Readers hold the final power of interpretation, judgment, and atonement; to meet these aims, they must maintain a stance toward the text that involves both critical assessment and empathetic identification. (D'Angelo 89).

Furthermore, because these are inscribed authors creating trauma narratives, their texts are endowed with a specific purpose, a purpose which, as Currie states, must be deciphered by the reader:

> Our response to a work will depend not only on the structure of the story but upon the purpose we perceive that structure to have, upon our expectations about the way in which the story will develop as we read, and upon our perception of certain elements as having a certain kind of salience within the story. And our perception of these things depends crucially on assumptions we make about the author's intentions. The purpose of a work is, after all, the purpose it was intended to have. (G. Currie 118)

Further, as argued above, by placing himself as the real author of each narrative, McEwan also highlights the circumstance of the real reader. With his continuing participation and redefinition of his own literary creation, he renders the real reader, as well as the familiar one, with the realisation that McEwan does hold the power to possibly fix the meaning of a text, the question remains when or why that may happen. Ultimately, the reader is explored, and their role executed, in several different layers within each narrative and, in that way, McEwan creates a vision of readership that is just as plural and powerful as his vision of authorship is.

1.3 The Author-Reader Contract

1.3.1 From Pleasure to Consumerism

The so-called 'author-reader contract' is a concept that lacks a wide array of academic or critical space, but one that seems to be recognised by writers, critics, and readers alike. Such a contract stems from a bond of trust that unites both players: from the beginning of time, audiences have sought entertainment and have obtained it in the form of storytelling. Storytellers have sought exposure or eternal fame, turning to storytelling to achieve it. The issue lies in the trust invested by audiences towards their storytellers, as well as the belief coming from storytellers that their stories will be received by specific audiences. The thin line between reality and fiction has caused audiences to invest in fiction the same way they would endow their interest in real life events, that is to say, the passion and fanaticism behind the act of storytelling has marked the way in which audiences place trust into creators. As Jean-Paul Sartre highlights, in this relationship, which he calls a 'pact' "[t]here is then established a dialectical going-and-coming; when I read, I make demands; if my demands are met, what I am then reading provokes me to demand more of an author, which means to demand of the author that he demand more of me. And, vice versa, the author's demand is that I carry my demands to the highest pitch." (Sartre as qtd in Booth, *The Company We Keep* 200)

The figures of both, author and reader, have morphed through the years, but they continue to maintain most of the characteristics that defined them from the start. Patronage, for instance, has been a necessary and powerful event in British literature from medieval and Renaissance times. As Tompkins argues,

> ...virtually all English Renaissance literature is a literature of patronage. Consequently, its place within the socio-political system keeps literature in the Renaissance from being regarded either as a free-standing activity whose products have autonomous aesthetic

> value (the modernist view), or as a craft whose products, either moral or recreational, must contribute to the common good (the classical view)." (Tompkins 208)

A person with a higher economical standing would provide for another from a lower class standing, somebody (usually a man) with 'genius' to write and entertain them (or an audience). The concept of the patron in British literature evolved with the emergence of publication, when texts would then be commissioned by other figures within the literary realm, and the figure of the patron has not disappeared in its entirety:

> Arthur Marotti ... points out that whereas in a manuscript culture patrons to whom works were dedicated were "authorizers, protectors, even owners" of the works, in a print culture it was the reader, the purchaser of books, the client of the bookseller, not the enabler of the author, who became the patron, and patronage took on its modern sense of "custom given to a business" (OED 2e). (Orgel 24)

Not only that, as Willis states in *Reception*,

> [a]t the point where they reach readers, literary texts have always been co-produced by multiple individuals and institutions: texts are the result of 'a collaboration between the author and all those (amanuenses, proof-collectors, editors, publishers) who had an opportunity to alter that text' (Howard-Hill 2009: 15, summarizing McGann 1983). Far from being 'words on the page' which are simply given as the basis for the interpretative work of readers, those words are already the outcome of the interpretative judgements of editors and others, who decide on the 'best' version of the text. As McGann puts it, 'All editing is an act of interpretation' (McGann 1991: 22). (145)

Tompkins also comments on the fact that the moment in which authors begin to be "...described as heaven-sent, God-gifted, divinely inspired individuals, more sensitive, more passionate, more responsive to life than ordinary people, they are no longer the associates of powerful men" (Tompkins 217). The author hence begins to "write for a faceless, unpredictable public rather than for a small, highly influential elite". In fact, Tompkins mentions that there is "no longer any way for the poet to measure the impact of his work on an audience, since the author and his audience [a]re no longer personally known to each other." (Tompkins 218) I would venture to say that rather than author and reader being anonymous to each other, as Tompkins seems to suggest, what has

developed in the last few decades is a hybrid relationship between author and reader of *performed* familiarity.

Foucault made reference to all of the organisms that surrounded the emergence of an almost calculated public figure, and with the passing of time it can be understood that the modern author can no longer be a mere scriptor. This suggestion, reinforced precisely by the passage of time, comes from the fact that we inhabit an age where authorship is inextricably linked to celebrity culture, where the emergence of tabloids, social networking sites and twenty-four-hour news channels has affected the way human beings communicate with each other in daily life. The idea of patronage is certainly not synonymous with the current author-reader relationship, but its core remains a part of our society. Authors may not usually have official patrons anymore, but the relationship between author and reader can still be, and should continue to be, considered from the standpoint of provider and consumer, with the consideration that authors and readers now inhabit a space of radical capitalism.

Both the idea of patronage and the idea of consumerism allow the possibility to see that within the publication of a text, there is a certain element of aspiring to *please* the audience, an audience that seeks to obtain entertainment. Be it due to public exposure, to a wish to reform society, or to a wish to be able to make a profit out of it, the author wishes to obtain and maintain readers; the author that publishes a text wishes to be read, to be consumed. Martin puts it thus:

> Unlike plants and planets, stories and their writers know that readers are observing them. The knowledge that an observer is present can affect behavioral patterns; that is why social scientists often conceal their purposes from people who are used in experiments. The writer, knowing how readers respond and critic theorize, can take their propensities into account and try to control the way a text will be experienced. Thus the text may neutralize or co-opt the theories that would explain it. (Martin 175)

With that, we understand both the figure of author and reader in a slightly different light than what was mentioned in previous sections. Indeed, authors may or may not have intention, and readers may or may not be able to provide meaning, but such conundrum is unavoidably inherent in their condition as players within the production of the literary text. Accordingly, it is also necessary to explore authors and readers in their social roles within a capitalist society, and to understand authors and readers for the way in which they interact with each other.

In the case of the relationship established between authors and audiences, it is amusingly ironic that in the age of the death of the author, the author can have platforms such as social media to interact with their audiences in an immediate and convenient way, answering questions about their processes of creation, their characters, their favourite brands of coffee, or the ultimate intended meanings of their texts. As Lodge puts it, "[e]ven the modestly successful literary novelist today is expected to take part in marketing of his or her work by giving interviews, appearing on TV and radio, taking part in public readings, book signings, and other meet-the-author events" highlighting the fact that this concept of authorship mirrors Dickens's 'author-as-celebrity' " and the stresses and contradictions that go with it." (Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel* 120) Despite the death of the author, if only, what social networking media has accomplished is to re-establish and strengthen the bond between provider and consumer, to the point that the consumer now not only consumes but can also request contact and information in the blink of an eye. This goes back to Martin's assertion that reader-reception may contribute to the changing of behavioural patterns in authorship.

Iser believes such notions to be counter-productive, in fact, he goes as far as to assert that both author and reader should 'shut out' all kinds of individualism from the reading and writing acts:

> This process gives rise to a form of communication which, however, according to Poulet, is dependent on two conditions: the life-story of the author must be shut out of the work and the individual disposition of the reader must be shut out of the act of reading … the work itself must be thought of as a consciousness, because only in this way is there an adequate basis for the author-reader relationship - a relationship that can only come about through the negation of the author's own life-story and the reader's own disposition. (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 66)

However, it could be stated that, outside of the realm of linguistics and semiotics, Iser's is an unattainable scenario in current society and culture. As Fish argues, "[t]he availability of a book to the hand, its presence on a shelf, its listing in a library catalogue - all of these encourage us to think of it as a stationary object." (Fish 83) Stationary objects are produced and then consumed, being part of an economic (and socio-cultural) transaction. In fact, this economic exchange is obviously part of a larger industry, one that affects far more than mere individuals. Orgel maintains that "... even in the case of traditional publishing the centrality of the author is largely fictitious - as Roger Stoddard observes, authors do not write books: they produce texts (not always by writing) that get turned into books by scribes, editors, printers." (Orgel 26) In fact, in Orgel's study of marginalia, he stresses the importance to be given to novels as objects of wealth, and with that, the act of 'shutting out' any kind of individuality is rendered impossible.

Granted, immediate feedback between authors and readers is not a new occurrence. What is clear, nonetheless, is that there is indeed a relationship between author and reader. Be it inspired in patronage, or inspired in fanaticism or admiration, it is clear that just as authors wish to obtain something from their readers (their understanding, their consumption, their patronage, their faithful readership), so do readers when it comes to authors (their aesthetic abilities, the solace in their words, their wisdom, their entertainment): therefore, no matter what kind of relationship there might be between author and reader, there is always a wish for an active conversation between

both, where, be it in the act of requesting, the act of reviewing, or the act of purchasing, both parties communicate with each other in regards to the text that has been written and even those that are yet to come.

1.3.2 Trust and Reliability

Robert J. Tierney and Jill Lazansky, in a 1980 report titled "The Rights and Responsibilities of Readers and Writers: A Contractual Agreement" see this contract as stemming from Aristotle's notion "that effective persuasion requires the writer to establish a plausible ethos, or voice, create a desired attitude in the audience, and demonstrate the truth" (Tierney and Lazansky 607) which results in the fact that "authors have a responsibility to their audience - a responsibility which necessitates that written communication be relevant, sincere, and worth-while." (Tierney and Lazansky 607) In this process, Tierney and Lazansky do not take into consideration "The Death of the Author", broadcasted a few years prior, but they focus almost entirely on the importance of the role of the reader, as they acknowledge that "written language is not primarily a means of expressing one's own thoughts, but rather a means of directing others to construct similar thoughts from their own prior knowledge." (Tierney and Lazansky 607)

For Tierney and Lazansky, the author-reader contract, or as they call it, the contractual agreement between both parts, is bound by a "principle similar to that which operates in the context of conversation", that is to say, there is a "cooperative principle between speakers and listeners - a principle which entails that speakers should be informative, sincere, relevant, and perspicuous." (Tierney and Lazansky 607 in reference to Grice) However, Tierney and Lazansky do acknowledge the fact that in an

oral conversation, there is the existence of "non-verbal cues or turn-taking" (Tierney and Lazansky 607) whereas when it comes to the written act, there is a moment when it rests on the author's hands to blindly "predict the intentions and background of experience of the audience." (Tierney and Lazansky 607) Tierney and Lazansky's approach to the author differs from the approaches explored in the previous sections, because to them, the author writes for the reader, and must accommodate to the reader's needs: the author has a responsibility to be clear, unambiguous and must "establish a reader-writer interaction which sets up 'a coherent movement' toward a reasonable interpretation of communication." (Tierney and Lazansky 608)

According to this view, it would seem that the only player capable of breaching such agreement would be the author, however, what is once more being exemplified is that criticism imposes a set of expectations that are almost impossible to meet by either real authors or real readers. Tierney and Lazansky go on to assure that this contractual agreement is unspoken and injudiciously accepted: "... the author makes a contract with the reader and the reader makes a contract with the author. But this does not mean both agree to the same terms." (Tierney and Spiro as qtd in Tierney and Lazansky 608) This contract, therefore, would almost seem like an impossible act, where, in the process of reading, "a reader should assume that a writer communicates for a certain purpose(s) to a certain audience" whereas an author should provide a text that is "sufficiently robust to support a wide audience and diverse reader purposes" (Tierney and Lazansky 608)

As mentioned above, my suggestion is that the author-reader contract could be interpreted as something simpler: it does not need to involve such a number of assumptions coming from an unspoken communicative act between reader and author nor does it necessarily require involving such an amount of accommodations to the audiences' needs coming from the author, rather, it has to do with trust. The reader

trusts the author will tell a story in a straightforward way, and the author trusts the reader will trust them as storytellers without questioning the veracity of the words being laid out.

It is trust, therefore, that binds reader to author, just as trust binds author to reader. This bond of trust, or this unsigned and unspoken contract based on trust, can only be fractured when such trust is put to test. Notwithstanding, the issue of 'trust' inevitably depends on a variety of factors quite difficult to control: not every reader and not every author will have the same moral values or expectations, and therefore not the same level of trust. What can be ascertained, however, is the kind of factors that may lead to *mistrust*.

Postmodernism weakens the established guidelines within literary tradition. In fact, by experimenting with forms of narration, the balance of trust changes for the reader. It could be argued it is only in postmodernism where this balance has started to truly suffer, mainly because the ways in which such trust is tested have become more radical. To understand the author-reader contract, therefore, and to understand how it may be broken, we must understand what both author and reader intend when they participate in the act of 'make believe' within fiction. Currie considers that "[t]he idea of an author intending that the audience make believe [their] story is central to the explanation of what fiction is" (G. Currie 22), that is to say, from the beginning of the literary tradition, the crucial aspect within the act of storytelling is that to inflict an act of *pretence*. The teller of the story will *pretend* they are telling a real story, and the audience of the story will *pretend* to believe it. As Currie goes on, within this act of make-believe, the first subject responsible for it is the author, "[t]he author's intention that we take the attitude of make-believe to his story is part of what [Currie has] called the author's fictive intention" (G. Currie 22) however, it must be considered that there is

a barrier that is surpassed with the passing of time, which is the fact that fiction in itself is an act of make-believe, which creates a divide between truth and truth in fiction: "Being true in fiction is thus not a matter of being true in a certain place, or of a certain subject matter. Things that are true in London or true of Londoners are thereby true, but things true in fiction are not. Truth in fiction is one thing, truth another." (G. Currie 52)

To navigate the divide between truth in fiction and truth in the real world it is necessary to activate an act of make-believe. Currie suggests that,

> [c]oncerning possible worlds we have at least a few clear principles. If fictional truth is truth in a possible world, fictional worlds will have acquired some respectability. But fictional worlds, if there are any, cannot be assimilated to possible worlds. The few clear principles we have to regulate our thinking about possible worlds could not apply to fictional worlds. (G. Currie 54)

In creating fictional worlds and fictional truths, the distinction between inscribed and real authors accrues. It is the time for real authors to plant inscribed authors into their narratives, and thus also to establish the differences between one and the other, to allow for the differences between reality and fiction to be disseminated. In the distinction between truth and truth in fiction, it must be kept in mind that "…what is true in the fiction is what the teller believes. But it is important to realize that the teller is himself a fictional construct, not the real live author of the work, whose beliefs presumably bear little relation to what is true in the work." (G. Currie 75) It would seem, therefore, that the moment authors start to experiment and discern the differences between the real author of a text and the inscribed author of a text, the reader is forced to accept that there is a difference between the two roles which is indispensable to comprehend. The moment that difference is understood and assimilated is the moment when another obstacle appears: perhaps the fictional author is not being honest either.

Currie establishes that

> [a]s readers, our make-believe is that we are reading a narrative written by a reliable, historically situated agent (the fictional author) who wants to impart certain information. Historically situated as he is, the fictional author speaks to an audience of his own time and, most likely, of his own culture. He cannot, of course, tell us everything he knows that is relevant to his story (…) He can rely upon a shared background of assumptions, telling us only those things that derivate from or supplement that background, or those things that belong to background and that he feels a need to emphasize" (G. Currie 80)

which inevitably leads to the unreliability of the inscribed author, or as commonly known, the unreliable narrator. The concept of the unreliable narrator was coined and defined by Wayne C Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, in 1983, when he states "[f]or lack of better terms, I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (Booth, *The Rhetoric* 159) It is understood, consequently, that unreliable narrators narrate their stories from their own perceptions, and that they have their own reasons and purposes when doing so, which implies that their stories are being narrated from a need to expose an experience, rather than from a need to *please*. Booth also refers to the fact that this unreliability may be consciously or unconsciously effected in a text (159), which further complicates the reception of the text and the breaching of trust - again, trust here becomes a moral issue: if trust is broken unwillingly, unconsciously, by the fictional author, is this contract broken? Should a differentiation between a contract connecting inscribed readers and authors versus real readers and authors be taken into consideration? If the unreliability of an author is unconscious, is it therefore imposed by the real author, rather than the inscribed author? That would move the discussion to another plane, which once more, complicates the contract further.

Ultimately, what the figure of the unreliable narrator (or in McEwan's case, the figure of the inscribed author) does is to allow the real author of a text to experiment with its real readers, forcing them to become even more active in their roles, which would imply that any act of unreliability within a text is an act of breaching of trust. Whatever the reasons behind the use of an unreliable narrator or inscribed author, experimentation becomes an act of research concerning the implied contractual agreement between reader and author.

The unreliability of the narrator, therefore, forces the reader to become as active in a text, and to accommodate for a text as much as Tierney and Lazansky suggest authors need to accommodate for the reader. As Currie argues, "[t]he reader must decide, as his reading progresses, whether to put his faith in the explicit narrator. When we decide that the explicit narrator cannot be trusted we move to the level of an unobtrusive narrator who, by putting words in the mouth of the explicit narrator in a certain way, signals his scepticism about what the explicit narrator says." (G. Currie 124) The figure of the unreliable narrator establishes a new phase for the bond of trust for author-reader contracts. Readers must calibrate their trust when reading a text, just as authors did when postmodernism materialised. The notions of inscribed reader and author are not only experimented with, but almost eradicated in this process, and the real reader and the real author are the figures that are left standing, holding the authority over the text.

1.3.3 Authorial Dishonesty?

The issue of intertextuality is also relevant to the author-reader contract, this "set of relationships - to other literary works, to the cultural situation in which they are

produced, and to their readers" and authors (Martin 44) becomes crucial to understanding what binds reader and author once their bond of trust starts to be queried. However, it must be considered that although the roles of inscribed authors and readers might have been altered, the root of literature, the act of make-believe, fiction itself, remains unchanged: "[w]hen culture and literature change, the novel changes with them; but such readjustments leave the total configuration unaltered, like an algebraic formula that is used with different sets of variables." (Martin 44).

Whichever is the bond that unites author and reader, and however it might change over the years, what is relevant is that it will continue to exist, probably due to its special nature. The novel is "defined by the problematic relation it creates with its audience - not a community of listeners hearing a bard, or one seeing a drama, but a 'solitary, anonymous figure, scanning a bulk of printed pages…'" (Martin 45) which is what undeniably strengthens the special bond between reader and author. The author-reader contract is indeed an unspoken contract that unites two solitary acts: despite the possibility for interaction between both agents, it continues to be an isolated activity carried out individually. Willis describes such activity as being

> associated with a change in the conception of reading from a communal and social activity to a solitary, private and individual one. This change is reading technologies, practices and systems led to significant alterations in the physical layout of texts and libraries. It also enabled readers to have more intense private affective and physical experiences while reading, including sexual and religious ones. (135)

The process of reading is a social and public process, but before it becomes so, it is done in isolation by an individual. Both author and reader meet the public, but not before undergoing a private experience they are entirely responsible for, and so their relationship is equally private.

Timothy Bewes in “What is "Philosophical Honesty" in Postmodern Literature?” (2000) speaks about ‘honesty’ or rather, ‘dishonesty’ in the contemporary novel, he mentions that “Hemingway’s and Sartre’s works are “dishonest” because they have a moment, either a narrative development or a political idea, which they were always leading up to, which is retrospectively revealed to be the idea animating the text, but which the reader is excluded from until the moment of its revelation.” (Bewes 423) What Bewes is referring to is a form of metafiction, which in its functioning, is considered to be morally dishonest, because the author has been withholding a piece of information in order to obtain a reaction from the reader. By withholding information, the bond of trust between reader and author, where the reader will blindly believe in the author’s honesty towards the truth, is broken. However, interestingly, Bewes also considers most of what Tierney, Lazansky and even to a certain extent Barthes refer to in regards to the author as dishonest, as Bewes makes reference to a “second kind of literary dishonesty” which is “almost the reverse” of metafiction, which is when “the author, far from leading the reader by the nose in a cycle of manipulation, rather pursues the demands and desires of the reader, attempting to satisfy the reader’s latest whim”, which, in retrospect becomes an act of writing “reactively, for the market.” (Bewes 423)[9]

Bewes’ point of view links postmodern literature to the market and strengthens my stressing of the idea of the author and reader connection as that of consumer versus provider. On second thought, however, this allows the possibility to see that authors who make use of postmodern techniques (thus breaking the author-reader contract) may do so in order to experiment and comprehend the nature of the literary text, the writing

[9] Arguably, we cannot speak about dishonesty in literature, as we should attribute literature with a moral compass impossible to distribute. Nevertheless, here Bewes’ usage of the term is understood as that of authors who breach previously preestablished conventions with their readers.

and reading acts, even though that might breach the bond of trust between reader and author. Perhaps this breaching is, indeed, yet another way to break with established norms within the literary tradition and dismantle absolute truths. It is possible, therefore, that as Bewes mentions,

> [i]f the experimental novel is no longer possible and no longer exists, except as another pre-packaged literary genre, then starving oneself in a garret for the sake of a singular literary vision is no longer a viable lifestyle choice—that is to say, it becomes nothing other than one of a number of possible "lifestyle options." The most prevalent but acceptable form of literary "dishonesty" in postmodernity, therefore, is the market-led one. (426)

Interestingly, Bewes highlights the fact that the honesty and trust that drive text production is something which belongs to the past, and that it is now necessary to experiment with 'dishonesty', as that is one of the main characteristics of postmodernism. Ultimately, the breaching of the author-reader contractual agreement is therefore executed through the means of postmodern devices. With modernism gone, what remains is a disregard for 'honesty', and an in-depth exploration of the effects such 'honesty' had on the literary tradition:

> The question of the artistic "honesty" or "integrity" of a literary text is often seen as a modernist preoccupation. Postmodernism— certain strands of "postmodern" thinking, at least—refuse such questions on the grounds that they arise within an ideal of aesthetic autonomy that has been discredited as theoretically naive, even politically pernicious, an ideological embodiment of class and cultural domination. (Bewes 421)

Does the author-reader contract continue to exist? Has it ever existed in the first place? My intention is to provide information that shows that, indeed, in postmodern narratives, there is still an inevitable author-reader connection, and that postmodern texts are overly concerned with the relationships of trust established between both. In fact, as has been mentioned above, it is my intention to prove that in *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*, this author-reader contract is not only existent but vital.

1.4. The Creation of the Character: The God-Like Author Figure in *Atonement* (2001)

This chapter deals with the repercussions fiction has on real life events, focusing on the intended meaning of the text as one that has the power to affect reality. The first section of this chapter shortly introduces *Atonement* and describes the different themes and techniques used within it. The chapter focuses on analysing the ways in which Briony Tallis raises as a God-like author figure within the text, and how it is such ascension which creates a collision between fiction and reality. The way in which Briony is described and displayed, even from the first few pages of the novel, along with her presence as such a figure, is what ultimately allows for a blurring of the divide between reality and fiction. In short, ultimately, in *Atonement* "McEwan debates fiction and fact … *Atonement* is a study of before and after, cause and effect, crime and punishment" (Stovel).

1.4.1 *Atonement*: An Introduction

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* was published in 2001 to great critical acclaim. Still to this day, *Atonement* holds great popularity amongst McEwan's novels, having had a largely popular film adaptation which received clear critical acclaim as well, renewing the consumption of its literary counterpart. In short, the novel "is a fiction based on reality created by its protagonist in an attempt to atone, [which] foregrounds questions about how the historical novel creates a version of the past, and explores the narrative potential of this hybrid of history and fiction." (Alden 59) While the main

preoccupation of the novel is that of the study of the nature of fiction, there are many other elements at play in the novel which end up consuming the novel, in their blending with the understanding of what life and fiction represent and how these may (or may not) differ. In the novel, "Cormack concludes that throughout 'McEwan's novel the imagination is portrayed as dangerous, untrustworthy and originating in self-interest'. What is more, *Atonement* forms an attack on the imagination itself: 'Fiction is presented as a lie – a lie that, if believed, comforts, distorts and finally produces unethical action.'" (Groes 10 and Cormack as qtd in Groes) Nevertheless, the first part of the novel sets the scene and characters, introducing an intricate set of themes that unfolds throughout the narrative. As Natasha Alden points out, "In Part One, set in the 1930s, Briony's prose style is modelled on that of contemporary writers- Rosamond Lehmann (1901-1990) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) in particular – partly because Briony is influenced by them, and partly because *this modelling gives the prose a 'period' feel.*" (Alden 61 my emphasis) The most relevant topics explored deal with issues of social class and power as well as gender: the wealth of the Tallis family is explored through different short instances that end up populating the text[10]. All of such instances develop throughout the first part, which as will be exemplified below, allows for the novel to be an exploration on the modernist novel, as Briony, the inscribed author, seems to be playing with different narrative forms and genres during the duration of the novel as she attempts to understand her place in the world, specifically in connection to the other characters.

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[10] These come in different forms, such as the way some of the family's members treat their lower-class workers, how Robbie and his mother (coming from a lower class-standing) are addressed, how the cousins are brought in from the North in order to avoid living through a social scandal, and even through the way Paul Marshall is introduced - which indicates a certain attention towards how powerful and wealthy he is. Furthermore, even Cecilia and Robbie's (the characters that attempt to get rid of class distinction most blatantly throughout the text) assumptions that the real culprit of Lola's rape is Danny Hardman hint at class issues, as they seem to disregard the rest of guests of the fateful night during their revision of the events and private accusations due to their higher social status.

As just mentioned, the novel is inconspicuously concerned with the dangers of the imagination, and of the boundaries that may be broken if a divide between reality and fiction is not clearly established on someone's psyche. Long before the consequences of Briony's actions are explored in the novel, there is an incident that somewhat anticipates the repercussions of not understanding the reality/fictional divide. That is the case of the letter that Robbie sends Cecilia and is intercepted by Briony and consequently used as evidence against Robbie. Other than Briony's court statement, the only proof that is accepted in the indictment of Robbie as a rapist (the only piece of evidence directly mentioned in the text) is Robbie's private letter to Cecilia, which is taken as inculpatory - even after Cecilia claims it is not the product of a stalking obsession, but rather a personal letter, the product of an intimate relationship between the two young lovers. It is interesting that in a novel so preoccupied with the importance of the written word, a letter that is misinterpreted by a child goes on to be misinterpreted by the law, despite the opposing statements of the creator and the receiver of the letter itself. It is a small detail in the narrative, but one that is interesting, as it allows the reader to understand that in *Atonement*, written words and written artefacts will be given overt importance and meaning by several parties, but not necessarily the intended meaning they were expected to have by its originators.

Concurrently, this could also be interpreted as a commentary on the power of words once they are in the written page, above the importance of witnessed events or words spoken but not written down. The letter not only condemns Robbie to jail, and subsequently to the horrors of war: the letter also gives Briony a specific kind of power. She is its first reader, the first person to give meaning to it (despite it being a meaning which is different from Robbie's intention), and therefore she becomes its advertiser, deciding when and where it should be read again, and which social and almost political

repercussions it is to have. Briony takes someone else's words and makes them her own to the point that she condemns an innocent man. It is perhaps a warning tale from Ian McEwan, which should allow readers to realise that there is a peril in the free interpretation of texts, as well as in the incessant and naive connection of such interpretations with a figurative personality given to the authors of such texts.

Consequently, it could be argued Robbie becomes the first victim of Barthes' killing of the author, although McEwan is undoubtedly, simultaneously making a comment about both: the powers of giving the reader all of the power (such reader may be committing a grave mistake, as does Briony) as well as giving the author all of the power (it is, after all, Briony the one that commits such a mistake, and she consequently goes on to become a ruthless author).[11]

1.4.2 Briony Tallis

1.4.2.1 The Controlling Child

It is undeniable that one of the reasons that drives Briony Tallis to wrongfully accuse Robbie Turner of rape is her expansive imagination. Inevitably, however, there are many other factors at play in Briony's accusation: as a child that reads and creates stories and that at the age of thirteen already fancies herself an author, Briony has a thirst for fiction. From an early age, she fictionalises the events around her, attempting to understand the human beings in her life not as human beings, but as both,

[11] Interestingly, the novel makes a point to show that Briony's sentencing of Robbie is closely linked to the family's behaviour towards the incident (not to mention Cecilia's subsequent cutting off the family, which provokes a profound commentary towards social class structures, and it also results in a powerful commentary on war itself). In this way, Briony's ascension to authorship contains social class commentary while it allows for an exploration of the impact of fiction and the written world. This also takes place in *Sweet Tooth*, albeit in an opposing manner: Tom Haley, coming from a lower class, will rise to authorship due to external help to allow for his emancipation. Moreover, McEwan's emphasis on the family's social class in Atonement allows for a subtle exploration of the unfolding of the Second World War: how it affected individual familiar nucleuses as it shattered the social structure of the British Empire.

possibilities for creation and as fictional characters within an intricate narrative. Just as it happens with the casting of her play, *The Trials of Arabella*, Briony needs to assign fictional roles to the people that surround her, to complete the narrative that contains her life. For that reason, according to her knowledge of literary tropes and structures, she needs to fill the roles of the princess, the parent figure, and the villain, simultaneously in fiction and in life. As for the rest of characters, those she cannot yet comprehend, she assigns lesser roles to which she will go back and fully flesh in time.

The influence fiction has on the way Briony perceives life shapes her actions and consequently, upon realising she is part of a plot that could be linked to the stories she has been reading, she sees the possibility of developing her fictional realm. Thus, she decides to become actively involved in life so she can turn it into a fiction. Nora Foster Stovel, in a review for *Atonement*, describes the novel as "a Bildungsroman that explores the psyche of a 'young girl at the dawn of her selfhood' (312), an impressionable mind at the liminal stage of initiation into the adult world. One word drives her over the bridge from childhood innocence to adult passion." (Stovel) Briony's imagination, and her fixation with both stories and language is indeed what drives her transition from "childhood innocence to adult passion" (Stovel), and the first part of the novel is preoccupied with capturing such transition, as well as its consequences. It could, however, be argued that *Atonement* is a *Künstlerroman*, rather than a *Bildungsroman*, as Stovel suggests, given that, as mentioned above, from the very first pages of the novel until the very last, the main preoccupation of the text is to document Briony's development as an author, rather than just as an individual.

When Robbie gives her a letter to give to Cecilia, consequently, Briony assigns herself a bigger role than requested and decides to get involved into the situation. Restless due to her impending jump into adulthood and authorship, she cannot possibly

be a part of something she does not know: she must have full knowledge of the situation, reshaping in her active mind what every character in her life is thinking and doing, because she believes herself to be an omniscient narrator who must possess all of the information and knowledge that can be provided. In order to have access to such information, she creates and recreates the situations she experiences through her fiction. Briony's approach to authorship is the traditional literary approach that awards the author absolute authority over a text, as she is used to reading novels and tales that up until that point do not present an enhancement in the forms of experimentation. As will also be discussed further, this fact will shift throughout the narrative, as Briony starts experimenting with her style. Briony, however, takes her role as an author exceptionally seriously, but not only because of the literary influences she has had; there is something else that drives her authorship: her thirst for control, as well as the traumatic tint of the experiences she goes through.

As mentioned previously, Part One of the novel focuses greatly on establishing the themes that will be widely explored throughout the narrative, yet what is relevant for this study is to understand how Briony, as fictive author, introduces and represents herself during this first stages of the novel. Interestingly, this is done in the very first chapter of Part One. Before analysing the text in full, a few key issues must be stated: the way in which *Atonement* is built is through the creation of a third-person narrator. That is to say, the narrative layer of *Atonement* is composed of Ian McEwan as real author of the published text, Briony Tallis as inscribed author and intradiegetic first-person narrator of the text, and an additional omniscient, third-person, extradiegetic narrator, used by Briony acting as inscribed author, to narrate the story. The text, therefore, through the use of a metafictional device, has one more added layer as well as one more player than the usual, non-postmodern novel where the text would be

presented through an author versus narrator combination, instead of a real author versus inscribed author versus narrator coalition. The reason why that is relevant for the introduction of Briony into the story is because Briony is the one that is guiding her narrator into her introduction, description, and establishment as character, so the first few pages of the novel contain information that is not only vital for the plot of the story in itself, but also vital for the understanding of the metafictional nature of the text. An aspect which, consequently, becomes key for understanding how authorship is presented and perceived within the novel.

Interestingly, the way Briony is described during the first few pages is the description chosen after six different drafts of the same story. The descriptions provided by Briony, on second readings, become clues to the narratological development of the text. Most importantly, to understand Briony, it is necessary for the reader to understand that in *Atonement*, fiction has as much importance as reality itself. As Andrea Sonia Vartalitis suggests, in its preoccupation with fiction, "*Atonement* symbolises the postmodern condition, according to which all discourses attempting to make sense of life and the world share the fragile ontological status of fiction texts." (Vartalitis 2856) That is to say, Briony, inscribed author of the text, also considers herself part of a narrative layer in which she is a character, and her description of herself, in the first few pages, is key to understanding both, her presence as an inscribed author and her presence as a fictional character.

The novel starts by discussing Briony's first play, *The Trials of Arabella*, "for which Briony ha[s] designed the posters, programmes and tickets, constructed the sales booth out of a folding screen tipped on its side, and lined the collection box in red crêpe paper" and which has been "written (...) in a two-day tempest of composition, causing

her to miss a breakfast and a lunch" (McEwan 3)[12]: the introduction to the writing of the play describes Briony as having power over every single step of both the writing process and the production (and even post-production) stages of her text. This way, Briony is presented as a God-like author figure from the start. At this stage she is both presented in control of everything surrounding her text, but also as a figure that is possessed by a "tempest of composition" hinting at her writing being a form of genius that cannot (and should not) be controlled or contained.

At this point, Briony is also responsible for choosing her audience, deciding on her ideal readers: first, her mother, who reads "the seven pages of *The Trials of Arabella* in her bedroom, at her dressing table, with the *author's* arm around her shoulder" (4, emphasis added), but most importantly, her brother, Leon, for whom Briony fantasises her writing career will have a specifically relevant effect: first, he will be "overheard boasting to a group of friends: Yes, my younger sister, Briony Tallis *the writer*, you must surely have heard of her", but specifically, it will "celebrate his return, provoke his admiration and guide him away from his careless succession of girlfriends, towards the right form of wife … the one who would sweetly request Briony's services as a bridesmaid" (4, emphasis added). With her carefully picked readers (notice she does not seem to pick Cecilia as a reader), Briony already seeks admiration from an audience, but most importantly she already has the aim to manipulate it through her storytelling.

Briony's thirst for authorship could easily be ridden out as the daydreaming of a child for a future career, nevertheless, being in possession of knowledge of what is to come both for Briony and the rest of characters, the way Briony's authorship is introduced becomes eerily relevant. The moment her mother describes the seven-page

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[12] In this section, as only *Atonement* is being discussed, and to avoid repetition, all references for the novel will consist of the page number henceforward.

play as 'stupendous', Briony already knows the word will be "quoted on the poster which [is] to be on an easel in the entrance hall by the ticket booth" (4): Briony seems to have a cunning thirst for establishing her identity as an author, even at the age of thirteen. As previously mentioned, her insistence on the intended reception of her work proves that "[t]he result [of her fiction] is a work that seems to position itself in direct conversation with literary tradition." (D'Angelo 94)

She sets herself in the page by exposing herself as author and manipulator - one of the first clues that should guide readers into acknowledging the unreliability she is to display. Consequently, McEwan establishes an author that differs from that of Barthes' from the beginning of the narrative, but which seems quite similar to that of Foucault's: what enfolds in the novel is only an explanation as to why authors continue to uphold authority over the text. Briony, just as "the romantic write[r] (...) is a person apart, an individual whose imagination and sensibility make him be different from the other, and the text expresses the author, his inside, subjectivity and self-consciousness" (Golban 218): Briony is described as "one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so", whose room is a "shrine to her controlling demon" her toy animals "all facing one way - towards their owner", her "straight-backed dolls (…) under strict instructions not to touch the walls", her "various thumb-sized figures (…) suggested by their even ranks and spacing a citizen's army awaiting orders" (5). Establishing her surroundings as worshipping ploys to her persona, Briony's world is at her command. The text portrays her as an extremely controlling child, "her wish for a harmonious, organised world [denying] her the reckless possibilities of wrongdoing" as "[m]ayhem and destruction [are] too chaotic for her tastes" (5). Furthermore, such a need to have everything under control will undeniably also manifest in what she requires from her texts.

Her control is also recreated in the way she becomes secretive about her writing: she has a “passion for secrets” and “a notebook written in a code of her own invention” (5). Her first venture into writing shows her that “the imagination itself [is] a source of secrets: once she [has] begun a story, no one [can] be told” (6), at first this is attributed to a certain shame in expecting the audience to assume her words will be attributed to her and not her *narrators*, which undeniably becomes yet another clue, in which the reasons for her choice, as inscribed author, of a third-person omniscient narrator for this story become clear. She believes that “[s]elf-exposure [is] inevitable the moment she describe[s] a character’s weakness” as “the reader [is] bound to speculate that she [is] describing herself” (6). The conclusion she reaches at this stage is that to obtain the authority she seeks she must get through the writing stage and achieve publication, and in such an act of publication, of course, to be in control of every detail, even, as mentioned above, her intended audience:

> What other authority could she have? Only when a story was finished, all fates resolved and the whole matter sealed off at both ends so it resembles, at least in this one respect, every other finished story in the world, could she feel immune, and ready to punch holes in the margins, bind the chapters with pieces of string, paint or draw the cover, and take the finished work to show to her mother, or her father, when he was home. (6)

1.4.2.2 The Need for Specific Reader Reception

From the beginning of the novel, it also becomes clear that the author within Briony is almost a performed identity on its own, as she is described as performing for her family, and surprising “her parents and older sister [by hearing] their quiet girl perform so boldly, making big gestures with her free arm, arching her eyebrows…” (6) Not only that, but her authorial identity also continues to be described as that which cannot be contained: when she inhabits her role as author, even as a child, she is “unapologetically demanding [of] her family’s total attention as she cast[s] her narrative spell.” (7) The

fact that she cannot control the reception of her work, as it happens to her with Cecilia, (who in Briony's mind ridicules her by placing "each bound story catalogued and placed on the library shelves, between Rabindranath Tagore and Quintus Tertullian" (7)) does not stop her, in fact, every time her writing endeavour is crossed with something she cannot control, she emerges stronger. When Lola Quincey, one of her cousins, attempts to take possession of *The Trials of Arabella* by giving it her own meanings and intentions (as yet another, perhaps not ideal, reader), she takes "the play from Lola and sa[ys] in a voice that [is] constricted and more high-pitched than usual, 'If you're Arabella, then I'll be the director, thank you very much, and I'll read the prologue'", creating a "shift in the balance of power" (15) which ultimately proves that Lola's attempt at giving meaning to the text is revoked, quite radically, by its rightful authority.

In this portion of the text, this "shift in the balance of power" takes place because Briony believes she is the only person that can perform the role of Arabella, and she is "not playing Arabella because she wrote the play, she [is] taking the part because no other possibility ha[s] crossed her mind, because that [is] how Leon [is] to see her, because she *[is]* Arabella" (13). This incident shows how difficult it is for Briony, at this stage of her writing career, to distinguish between the roles inscribed within the literary text, as well as to distinguish between reality and fiction. Despite her wishes not to be confused as narrator or character, she seems to already know her texts are to be an extension of herself and her life. In her secretiveness, and in her thirst for control, she finds possibility and "pleasures [in] miniaturisation. A world [can] be made in five pages, and one that [is] more pleasing than a model farm (...) The pages of a recently finished story [seem] to vibrate in her hand with all the life they [contain]. Her passion for tidiness [is] also satisfied, for an unruly world [can] be made just so." (7) In

point of fact, Lola's attempts at being involved with the text are further destroyed, quite literally, when Briony later pretends the nettles she is slashing are actually her cousin.

The first descriptions of Briony are unmistakably crucial to understanding how she rises as a God-like author figure toward the end of the text. As Golban puts forward the idea that the "[a]uthor is God, the one that decides the destinies in real life, and an all-powerful creator of the narrative world, in both cases emerging the destructive power of imagination" (224): Briony is presented as someone who needs complete possession over a text, this is achieved through the display of her need for control as well as her need to appoint audiences and to be present in every step in the act of the literary production. She is also described as a child that takes on a different identity whenever she is possessed by her writing genius, implying a divide in her identity from an early age that ultimately attributes her a stronger personality which rises whenever she is writing or performing. The text also highlights the fact that every time another character attempts to give a different meaning than expected to Briony's creations, she diminishes it, raising even higher as an authorial presence within her own text. The short incident with Lola is a great example (which also paves the way for what comes next) of how Briony is capable of taking a situation where she loses control by repossessing it and strengthening her identity as an author. In the case of Lola, Briony understands the divide between character and author, and leaves behind the character, inhabiting the figure of 'director' of the play, which allows for a better use of her controlling genius. In the case of Cecilia, she doubts her sister's intentions but accepts the placement in the library shelf either way, not allowing a non-ideal reader to temper with her intention.

It has been established, therefore, that from the beginning of the narrative Briony is presented as an all-knowing, all-controlling character that translates such traits of her

personality into her authorial identity. It is clear, as well, that she needs full possession of every step into the creation of her texts. As Golban argues, this need is what will eventually allow an imposing of a fictional reality:

> The point is that Briony, in her role as a fictional author, 'does want to act on reality, or prove the power of the reality of the fiction over the contingency and disorder of what people call the real world' (Vlad, 2005: 291), but what emerges to be the 'true fiction' is actually false, because Robbie is innocent, but the author is omnipotent and her storyline, built on the individual and personal way of perceiving and thinking the reality, is that kind of narrative which does not only act upon reality but takes the place of reality. (Golban 224)

What is clear is that there is a link between her thirst for power as a child and her evolution towards a fully-fledged (adult and God-like) author figure and her need to take possession of reality through fiction. The events that take place in the Tallis' home and its surroundings, that is to say, the rape of Lola by Paul Marshall and Briony's subsequent accusation of Robbie, not only change the planned future for the entire family, but also inadvertently involve the Tallises in the war on a personal level. Briony experiences different moments of trauma, therefore, and along with her inability to accept or process events she does not comprehend, these expand her thirst for authority. As Katrin Dahlbäck mentions in her Bachelor's Degree project, "Fictional and Metafictional Strategies in Ian McEwan's Novel *Atonement* (2001) and its Screen Adaptation (2007)", Briony's "imagination, and her love for secrets and fictionalizing, are the cause of the tragedy that follows" (Dahlbäck 1–2), that is to say, her thirst for fiction and control is what triggers the events to come, and those, at the same time, continue to trigger and to enable her identity as an author. It is as though both elements feed and reinforce each other, and in a way, "[t]he stories [Briony] writes as a child thus function as to foreshadowing future events; Briony is to create a world which in its essence is entirely based on her wild imagination and her longing for a secret of her own." (Dahlbäck 1)

The Briony described at the beginning of the text, one thirsty for control and fiction, will start to act on her authority a few chapters into the narrative. The child who needs control over a seven-page text, that hopes it will gain her the favours of an imaginary sister-in-law and that hopes it will reshape the family structure through its performance, is the child that also allows herself to believe that by attributing a crime to the wrong person, she can continue to hold the lives of the characters around her as her own. Dahlbäck mentions that Briony "entangles life and fiction in a way that makes it impossible for her to separate the two for the rest of the life. Briony will be forever trapped in a world in which the differences between fiction and reality are hardly noticeable", because of her need (or tendency) to attribute fictional patterns to reality, "[s]he manages to blur the line between fiction and reality, in her mind, almost completely." (Dahlbäck 7)

The decisions Briony takes in order to serve her 'genius' continue to affect the people around her, concurrently continuing to feed her need for control. Consequently, as Dahlbäck claims,

> Briony's actions, her testimony, could be stated to have changed the lives of her characters, thus making her power status that of a writer controlling her fictional world or even that of a "unique" (76) god in charge of its creation. Briony is thus in charge of her characters and the events that unfold within her novel, all according to the purpose Briony feels that they should serve. (Dahlbäck 6)

1.4.2.3 The Rise of the Authorial Identity

As the narrative progresses, before Briony is to experience the moment which will redefine her life, there are a few instances in which she muses about her writing talent that juxtapose with her coming to terms with her personal identity. These instances work in the text to understand what her reaction will be a few passages later: before

witnessing an adult exchange she cannot understand, she seems to be thirsty for an event that will trigger her authorship further, as the incident with the play rehearsals has left her feeling dissatisfied and frustrated with the act of creation. The impossibility of coordinating all performers, along with the realisation that each reader may have a different interpretation of her text, make her realise the literature she needs to write is a literature in which she is in full control. She "raise[s] one hand and flexe[s] its fingers and wonder[s], as she had sometimes before, how this thing, this machine for gripping, this fleshy spider on the end of her arm, came to be hers, entirely at her command" (35), at this point, Briony is wondering about what drives her writing, whether it is herself or that which surrounds her: "[D]id it have some little life of its own? She bent her finger and straightened it" (35), but as just mentioned, she is simultaneously looking for an opportunity to rise: "if she could only find herself at the crest, she thought, she might find the secret of herself, that part of her that was really in charge" (35).

In reality, her quest is simple and not all that different from most of humanity's: Briony wants to know and understand herself, but what is slightly different is the concept that she is a thirteen-year-old with such a wish, and that not finding the answers she is looking for over a frustrating day drives her to commit a crime that will only tie her to a life-long identity as an author. David K. O'Hara writes, "[o]ver the course of McEwan's perspective-shifting narrative, we find characters, again and again, realizing that they are bounded by otherness, by other minds with their own plans, their own interiorities, their own ways of perceiving the world" (O'Hara "Mimesis and the Imaginable Other: Metafictional Narrative Ethics in the Novels of Ian McEwan."): McEwan combines Briony's musings about herself with her inevitable building of an identity as an author; she wonders about how unique she truly is ("[a] second thought always follows the first, one mystery bred another: was everyone else really as alive as

she was? For example, did her sister really matter to herself, was she as valuable to herself as Briony was? Was being Cecilia just as vivid an affair as being Briony?" (36)), and the thought she might not be so "offend[s] her sense of order, she kn[ows] it [is] overwhelmingly probable that everyone else ha[s] thoughts like her. She kn[ows] this, but only in a rather arid way" (36), quickly reaching the conclusion that the only way to ascertain her uniqueness is through her writing.

Briony knows the "simplest way to [impress] Leon would [be] to write him a story and put it in his hands herself, and watch as he read it" (37), and not only that, she is also particularly interested in the control she can obtrude and protrude from such a writing: "[t]he title lettering, the illustrated cover, the pages *bound*" (37) - interestingly, she also believes that once a story is "bound" it is unchangeable, it is controlled, kept and therefore unmodifiable, which means her power cannot be questioned or doubted. She connects her musings about her own identity to musings about the genre she must be writing, linking her existence to literature at the root level. She chooses her career path considering which literary genre will allow for a greater opportunity at manipulation. As Vartalitis mentions, "[w]riting is shown (...) in close association with the deepest human feelings. In an undefined relationship of cause-effect, one is seen bringing about the other; human experience of the world becomes text, and text becomes human experience." (Vartalitis 2858)

In this moment of redefinition, Briony feels "the attraction of the neat, limited and controllable form she had left behind when she decided to write a play" (37), and she is aware that what should follow is another kind of literary genre, one that is "direct and simple, allowing nothing to come between herself and her reader" (37), she has no time for "intermediaries with their private ambitions and incompetence, no pressure of time, no limits on resources" (37), she is under the impression that "in a story you only

had to wish, you only had to write it down and you could have the world" (37). Therefore, it could be concluded that Briony writes to understand and possess a specific knowledge of both herself and the moment she inhabits. Indeed, writing, in *Atonement,* is undeniably tied to existence.

Undeniably, the concerns marking Briony on the day that is described during the first part of the novel are connected in an intricate way. Her wish to grasp herself in a way she has not done before is granted by the possibility that fiction affords her: she sees that she could not only understand herself, but also the world, if she were to write stories. The reason why playwriting fails her is because the playwright is but a player in the process of creation, and there are other figures that, during the execution of meaning over the play text, become just as relevantly powerful as the writer. In order to fully convince herself of the necessary switch from drama to fiction, Briony reflects on the way language works once it is produced by a creator and expected to be understood by a receptor. Similar to Jacques Derrida's ideas on deconstruction and post-structuralism, Briony's thoughts on language communication have to do with the "inking" of "symbols onto a page" and she states the way in which she believes linguistic and literary meaning transmission works:

> By means of inking symbols onto a page, she was able to send thoughts and feelings from her mind to the reader's. It was a magical process, so commonplace that no one stopped to wonder at it. Reading a sentence and understanding it were the same thing, as with the crooking of a finger, nothing lay between them. There was no gap during which the symbols were unravelled. You saw the word castle, and it was there, seen from some distance, with woods in high summer spread before it, the air bluish and soft with smoke rising from the blacksmith's forge, and a cobbled road twisting away into the green shade… (37)

Briony's ideas are slightly off, however; she does not seem to consider that, while in a story there might not be an extra-intermediary, the reading process is not as magical and immediate as she makes it out to be: reading a sentence is not the same as understanding

it, the reader has a world and an understanding of their own, and, most importantly, not everybody will imagine the exact same castle once the symbol is invoked, let alone a castle imagined surrounded with the amount of flourishing details Briony refers to. However, what should be taken from such a passage is what her *intention* when writing will be. Furthermore, her reasons for choosing to write stories over plays situate her writing and her authorial persona in a literary limbo, where she is not necessarily adhering herself to any specific literary current. While Briony seems intricately interested in modernism, and her writing draws greatly from it, especially during the first part of the novel (along with what is implied of the writing she does but is not portrayed in the novel itself), it would seem her ideas are postmodern from the start. As O'Hara mentions, "[w]here modernism, for McHale, foregrounded questions such as how the self can understand the world, postmodernism focuses on questions of how to construct or define a world as well as one's being in that world." (O'Hara, "Mimesis and the Imaginable Other") Briony undeniably shows an interest in understanding herself and her condition through fiction, as well as that of others. Consequently, Briony's condition is postmodern, rather than modern.

Almost immediately after her considerations regarding writing, she finally witnesses the scene at the fountain between her sister and Robbie. From the start, the scene is described as hardly comprehensible to Briony, but what is interesting is not how she experiences the scene in itself, but rather her immediate reaction to it: aware that the scene would have happened regardless of her presence there, she nonetheless chooses to filter it through her literary prism from the start, inclined to reshape the events so they match her literary expectations. To begin with, she resists the temptation to demand an explanation from Cecilia, even though she is aware that an explanation might as well clarify her confusion. Withal, she chooses to give free reign to her

fabulations: she "resist[s] because she want[s] to chase in solitude the faint thrill of possibility" (40). In fact, she needs the solitude that comes with the writing act, to be able to plan her rewriting of the scene. From that moment onwards, she knows the scene at the fountain is what can define her in the way she has been seeking the whole morning; she feels "elusive excitement" and perceives it as the "prospect she was coming close to defining, at least emotionally. The definition would refine itself over the years" (40).

What is even more relevant is the thrill behind the decision to immediately put the experience into words ("she may have experienced nothing more than impatience to begin writing again" (40)), Briony's way of dealing with her life, her way of analysing and repossessing moments, is only through her writing: she cannot allow for others to interfere in her process of creation. The moment she witnesses a scene she does not understand, therefore, a scene that she perceives as threatening, instead of continuing watching, or instead of going and seeking the advice from either her sister or another adult, she immediately envisions her desk set-up for the writing task, a desk with a "clean block of lined paper and her marbled, Bakelite fountain pen". From there, "the simple sentences, the accumulating telepathic symbols, [unfurl] at the nib's end." (40)

It is only minutes after seeing the scene that Briony goes as far as to structure her first version of the story, the same she will be submitting to *Horizon* in Part Three of the novel (281). She knows she will "write the scene three times over, from three points of view." (40) This is a decision she takes despite her lack of interest in speaking to Cecilia or Robbie about it, already aware that the three points of view will only be her own, voiding Cecilia and Robbie of a voice and turning them into puppets for her directing. Aware that what she is about to embark on is erasing the truth of two different people, she chooses to fictionalise such truth so it can be played with and can become

malleable. The reasons behind Briony's decision to erase Cecilia and Robbie's truth from her story are rather simple: Briony knows that the story she must tell is more pressing: she feels a liberation in knowing she will be writing about "separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds [a]re equally alive" (40).

Briony believes that by matching the scene she has just witnessed to her recent concerns, she will move further away from fairy tales and playwriting. She is concerned with being able to reiterate her thoughts regarding which genre she should be focusing on, and she believes "only in a story c[an] you enter these different minds and show how they ha[ve] an equal value" (40). In a way, this is only a means for her to write about her own concerns, erasing the reality behind the situation at the fountain itself, even though she does seem aware that there might be a more interesting story to tell. Briony is only interested in tweaking reality so it fits her need for fiction, consequently, from the beginning of her career as author, she is already modifying the reality behind a situation by witnessing but not understanding. She has begun "to understand that experience is subjective, and that her task as a writer will be to enter other minds." (Margaronis 141)

As Finney suggests, "[n]arration is an act of interpretation. Interpretation opens the possibility of misinterpretation, of what Jacques Lacan terms méconnaissance or mis-recognition on the part of the ego, 'the illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself'" (Finney 79), with her first official writing act as an author, Briony feels "she bec[omes] recognisably herself" and that "some kind of revelation" has "occurred" (41) but what becomes more striking is her attitude toward it: not only does she resist the urge to go and seek the truth by choosing her fiction over it, she is fully aware "[t]he truth ha[s] become as ghostly as invention" (41), and she is completely accepting of the fact that her "sense of obligation, as well as her instinct for order, [a]re powerful" and so

"she must complete what she ha[s] initiated" (41). Once an idea is developed in Briony's mind, it must be seen through, and that is inevitably what creates the intention behind her authorship. From her very first steps in writing, Briony cannot create texts that will be given meaning by others, because what she wants is to write stories that show only one moral: hers. As Margaronis argues, "[t]he making of fiction, *Atonement* seems to imply, is inherently self-serving, inherently corrupting of 'the truth'."(Margaronis 144) For Briony, the creation of fiction is the primary goal, and the rest, truth, is secondary.

As mentioned previously, the episodes that attempt to flicker Briony's control only work to make her stronger: Lola's attitude towards *The Trials of Arabella* reinforces Briony's desire to leave playwriting behind and to take full control of her creations. Ian McEwan, once again, juxtaposes a moment of redefinition with a moment of trauma: when Briony is attempting to accept her terrible mistake of having thought about playwriting, Robbie comes around and hands her a letter to Cecilia. At this point, Briony finds herself slashing at nettles, which is hard to do "for long without a story imposing itself" (73). Suddenly, the nettles become an embodiment of Lola, who "whimper[s] for mercy" as "the singing arc of a three-foot switch cut[s] her down at the knees and sen[ds] her worthless torso flying" (74). While the scene in itself is innocent enough - a child is playing in nature to release the tension of a tiring day - Briony feels a specific satisfaction in the destructive action, which turns the scene into a metaphor: she is not simply slashing nettles, but destroying the obstacle to her success, just as she is destroying the self that did not realise drama was not the right genre. Briony cannot deal with chaos, and so, "play writing itself bec[omes] a nettle … several in fact; the shallowness, the wasted time, the messiness of other minds, the hopelessness of pretending - in the garden of the arts, [play writing] [is] a weed and ha[s] to die." (74)

This episode in and of itself is defined as an act of "self-purification", as she plants "her feet firmly in the grass, she dispose[s] of her old self year by year in thirteen strokes" (74), and it is at this point, well before Robbie's letter is even handed to her, or before she is further traumatised by the reading of a taboo word, the witnessing of a sexual act in a library or the witnessing of a rape, that Briony begins to fully rise as an author. Leaving playwriting behind and embracing storytelling after destroying her dissatisfying and uncontrollable audience, Briony is already "a grand master, lost to the intricacies of her art." (75)

Briony feels her small flirtation with playwriting is something that made her lose "her godly power of creation" (76) but the realisation that it is so reinforces her belief that she has been "driven to push beyond her limits to assuage the roaring crowd, and to be the best, and, most importantly, unique" (76). She notices that "of course, it had all been her - by her and about her, and now she [is] back in the world, not one she c[an] make but the one that ha[s] made her, and she fe[els] herself shrinking under the early evening" (76). The world that made her must be accepted, but also reshaped after her experiences. She realises that what she will draw from for her writing will be her life experience; not new fiction, but a reworking of her life, a life she has not made, but that has made her. She chooses, at this moment, to take the experiences that happen to her to reshape them, manipulate them into fictionality, manipulate creation, therefore, and ultimately, consciously manipulate truth. This is what Elias considers 'ontological mimesis',

> postmodern Realism might be understood as *mimesis* with an ontological dominant. In postmodern Realism, the world has become textualized. [It] records the multiple worlds/texts within contemporary culture and recognizes the *inability* to evaluate society's conflicting values; it mimics the multiple selves of characters (or more accurately, the self as a subject within textualized culture) and recognizes the problem

> of articulating an essential Self in this social context. (Elias as qtd in O'Hara "Mimesis and the Imaginable Other")

Briony's process of mimesis, of attempting to capture life and mirror it in her texts, as well as her life, is undeniably ontological, and it is ultimately problematic as it negates her ability to articulate her true self, unless she tweaks such mimesis simultaneously reshaping it into that which will allow her to recognize herself and others in society.

Mimesis is also the reason why there is a great use of foreshadowing, or even deferral techniques used by McEwan during the first part of the novel. At times, it would seem Briony is herself invoking the events that keep taking place throughout the duration of the day. At this stage, having risen as an author, she decides to await by "the bridge, calm and obstinate, until events, real events, not her own fantasies, r[i]se to her challenge" (77). From then on, all events in her life will be treated as possibilities for fiction, rather than as events to be experienced as a human being. She chooses to continue her transition into adulthood ("the very complexity of her feeling confirmed Briony in her view that she was entering an arena of adult emotion" (113)) by only inhabiting her role as author, rather than as child. For instance, while she is aware interfering in other people's lives and issues is considered to be morally wrong, she defends her reading of the letter because it is "essential", it is "right" (113) for her to know everything. Once she has decided to inhabit her authorial identity, every single act that comes afterwards, morally acceptable or not, criminal or innocent, is based on her need to recalibrate real-life events so they can be transformed into fiction: "she needed to be alone to consider Robbie afresh, and to frame the opening paragraph of a story shot through with real life" (113).

Briony's right to fiction is so clear to herself that she reads the "note standing shamelessly in the centre of the entrance hall" (114) and what follows is close to a

detailed account of how she struggles to produce a story out of the incident. What is relevant to understanding Briony as a God-like author figure, however, is the way her writing process is described. At this point of the narrative, Briony has already witnessed the scene at the fountain, decided playwriting was not satisfactory (or controlling) enough, decided she is to be a fiction writer, and then decided that her identity, her genius, gives her the permission to read private correspondence in the name of fiction. Every new event after the fountain scene reinforces her identity as an author, and every new event seems to shift her morality even further. However, she does not think to consider the lack of morality in reading a private letter, just as she will not consider she is accusing the wrong man of rape, because she believes that the letter has given an extra turn to the screw: "[b]ut how to do justice to the changes that had made her into a real writer at last, and to her chaotic swarm of impressions, and to the disgust and fascination she felt? Order must be imposed" (115). Writing allows her to impose order, and to attribute meaning to those experiences she cannot seem to understand. When Briony sits down to write after reading the letter, she does not know much about what she wants to write, however "the urge to be writing [is] stronger than any notion she ha[s] of what she might write" (115). She only knows that, as a writer, she must exert control and that Robbie is "the incarnation of evil" (115). With those two thoughts in mind, she moves forward through her process of creation.

It is interesting to look at Robbie's redefinition in the hands of Briony, because her accusation of Robbie marks the path of the novel, but it is also the clearest example of how Briony chooses to fictionalise the characters that surround her, so as to take possession of them and to create fiction out of reality in a way that creates a dubious relationship between what is a fact and what is not. In the case of Cecilia, attributing actions and thoughts to her persona is what works for Briony, but in the case of Robbie,

there needs to be a redefinition of his persona to continue to be able to fictionalise (and therefore understand) him. Upon deciding that Robbie has, all along, been the "incarnation of evil" (115), Briony questions her objectivity in the matter. Nonetheless, she tells herself there needs to be subjectivity in her writing, because although "[t]here must be some lofty, god-like place from which all people could be judged alike, not pitted against each other … noisily jostling together in all their glorious imperfection", that objective space is not for her: "[i]f such a place exist[s], she [i]s not worthy of it. She c[an] never forgive Robbie his disgusting mind." (115) Margaronis mentions it is the impact of unknown language which affects her, "[i]t is words that first topple her from the 'god-like place' – the word 'cunt' on the page, the word 'maniac' on her cousin Lola's lips", and most importantly, it is the reaction that "these words stir in her that she reads Cecilia and Robbie's love-making as rape. Her excitement expresses itself as a sensual desire to write" (Margaronis 144).

Robbie is made evil because Briony cannot understand him nor the language he uses, so she needs to redefine him into something she can understand and control and therefore write about. At the same time, as Briony fleshes out her fictional characters and continues to structure her texts, she slowly produces answers for the questions posed by postmodern literary criticism. A hundred pages into *Atonement*, the reader has already witnessed Briony decide on a specific genre, a specific relationship with the audience, a certain connection between narrator and author, and most importantly, a peculiar commitment to fiction above truth - one that is exemplified, in the case of Robbie's portrayal, by simply allowing herself to be subjective in the description of an event. The audience accompanies Briony through her development as an author: in a matter of pages, she goes from a child with a fanciful imagination, to overseeing a whole narrative.

To demonstrate Robbie's fictionalised characteristics, Briony shares her story with Lola. The act of sharing her narrative is relevant, because with such an act, it becomes more than an act of creation: the moment narratives are shared they acquire new meaning and, in this case specifically, an audience. Still shocked by the powerful impact a single taboo word can have on the mind, she explains to Lola the contents of the letter. Note that rather than showing the letter to her cousin, Briony explains it to her, spelling the shocking word backwards for her, which works in two different ways: first, in this act of communication Briony (as addresser) establishes an added layer in between the reader (Lola, the addressee) and the narrative by adding an extra player (herself as a narrator) and thus manipulating Lola's understanding of the letter. It is likely that Lola might have been just as shocked as Briony to read those words, but Briony's elaborate explanation of the contents of the letter, along with the backwards spelling, predisposes the audience (in this case, Lola) to understand the calamity of it. Lola's reaction is, therefore, almost set up to be as "gratifying" as Briony intends it to be (119), and, thankfully for Briony, Lola ratifies Briony's narrative by indeed concluding that Robbie is a "maniac" (119).

It is a combination of both, Lola's acceptance of the narrative (rather than a dismissive attitude towards it, as she had with *The Trials of Arabella*) and the fact that Briony can build a successful narrative that can be believed and elaborated on, which gives her the satisfaction and success she needs to continue her creation. At this stage, she is building her first fictional character to her heart's content, and she seems to be successful at it. As per her audience's reaction, Briony feels that once things are labelled, once people and experiences have definitions, once situations have narratives attached to them, they can be fully understood. She acknowledges that once "his condition [is] named she fe[el]s a certain consolation" (119). At this point, Briony is

already aware that truth is but an optative element in the process of creation, as Vartalitis mentions, "[p]ost-structuralists had shifted the focus from the signified over the signifier, and, rendering meaning independent and detached from structures, argued that meaning was a linguistic construction, and so were truth and reality." (Vartalitis 2856) The meaning Briony intends to give to her narrative, therefore, is constructed and inspired by the use of language, and she understands that language is key in the transmission of meaning, just as truth is not. She can play (and manipulate) with both, and in doing so, she will obtain what she desires.

1.4.2.4 The Blurring of Reality and Fiction

From then on, Briony no longer has moments of doubt. She knows she has left childhood behind and has embraced adulthood through her authorship. She has finally "become a participant in the drama of life beyond the nursery. All she ha[s] to do now [is] discover the stories, not just the subjects, but a way of unfolding them, that [will] do justice to her new knowledge" (160). The knowledge and reassurance in herself are what lead her to continue to shape and flesh the fictional character of Robbie, so that when she witnesses a rape, she has no issue in becoming a participant, she experiences no reticence in unfolding the drama herself. Going back to the idea of mimesis as found in *Atonement*, the concept "functions as 'invention' in the original sense of that term: *invire* means both to discover *and* to create, that is, to disclose what is already there in light of what is not yet (but is potentially). It is the power, in short, to recreate actual worlds as possible worlds" (Kearney as qtd in O'Hara, "Mimesis and the Imaginable Other"). When Briony attends to Lola after she has been raped, Briony shows no empathy or concern for her older cousin, she only has one thing in mind: her story. She

now knows within the realms of her imagination she can produce narratives and discourses that mirror reality in their possibility, and so she turns them into replacements of reality itself.

Later, when faced with something as fictionally enticing as a sexual attack, the first and most important question to be asked is not regarding Lola's well-being, but about the authorship of the rape itself: Briony insists on asking Lola who it was, she does not even wait for Lola to be allowed the space to communicate (just as she previously did with Cecilia at the fountain), because too "many seconds [pass] - thirty? Forty-five? - and [she] c[a]n no longer hold herself back. Everything connect[s]. It [is] her own discovery. It [i]s her story, the one that was writing itself around her" (166). During the following few passages, there is a continuous back and forth between Lola and Briony, where Briony asks for Lola's reassurance, but gives it herself, and where Lola attempts to question or refute Briony's statements, but instead ends up reinforcing them. When Lola says, "I couldn't say for sure", Briony replies with "Well, I can. And I will" (167), Briony, the master of words and the master of stories cannot be uncertain, and she cannot be kept quiet. She can say things, and she will say them: "[i]f her poor cousin [is] not able to command the truth, then she w[ill] do it for her. *I can. And I will*." (168). For Briony's narrative to continue to take shape, and for her to rise once more as an authoritative author, "Lola [is] required only to remain silent about the truth, banish it and forget it entirely, and persuade herself not of some contrary tale, but simple her own uncertainty. She couldn't see, his hand was over her eyes, she was terrified, she couldn't say for sure." (168) In lieu of such uncertainty, the person that is never uncertain, the figure that is always in control of chaos emerges higher, "to help her at every stage", because "everything fit[s]; the terrible present fulfill[s] the recent past …

the affair [is] too consistent, too symmetrical to be anything other than what she sa[ys] it [i]s." (168)

Once the accusation has been made, and the perfect audience has been found, Briony's story settles into her surroundings in an astounding way. It is more than a simple act of storytelling or an act of mere entertainment, Briony's fabulation becomes almost a social discourse, built by the narrative, which is settled through its repetition to different audiences. Her accusation, which she describes as her crime, is "founded in common sense. The truth [has] instructed her eyes", and so when she starts to repeat, "over and again, I saw him, she mean[s] it, and [is] perfectly honest, as well as passionate." (169) From there on, she is forced to repeat the story not only to herself and Lola but to other audiences, binding the narrative further through its constant repetition: "[s]he [i]s asked again and again, and as she repeat[s] herself, the burden of consistency [i]s pressed upon her. What she ha[s] said she must say again. Minor deviations [earn] her little frowns on wise brows, or a degree of frostiness and withdrawal of sympathy." (169) Thus, the repetition of the story settles her narrative, but it also allows for a further glimpse into the reception her work will obtain: "She bec[omes] anxious to please, and learn[s] quickly that the minor alterations she might have added [will] disrupt the process that she herself [has] set in train." (169)

During the process of creation, she also realises she has "trapped herself, she [has] marched into the labyrinth of her own construction, and [is] too young, too awestruck, too keen to please, to insist on making her own way back." (170) This is the point in which there is no return for Briony, where "[her] anthropic self-reference, which desires to create stories so as to order inherently chaotic experience as well as to legitimate her own, burgeoning genius, ultimately leads to her fictive criminality, to her

egregious and family-divorcing lie for which she spends her (literary) life trying to atone.” (Shah 43)

That which is also being described at this point is the moment in which a text has already been written and reaches the publication stages. The fear Briony feels, the feeling of entrapment (more so than of regret), is a form of mirroring of the moment in which the intention of the author will meet both the expectations and the interpretations of the reader. The dread she feels towards its repetition, as well as the self-questioning she goes through, equals the process the author will go through upon reception and criticism.

1.4.2.5 Readership

Notwithstanding, Briony’s moments of self-questioning do not last long and Briony is immediately possessed by a feeling of love towards her audience, a feeling, no doubt, triggered by the fact that her creation has indeed been listened to and accepted. She feels “a weight lifting from her and a warm submissive feeling spread[ing] from her stomach to her limbs. It [is] like love, a sudden love for this watchful man who st[ands] unquestioningly for the cause of goodness … who [is] backed by all the human powers and wisdom that exis[t].” (174) Briony feels gratitude for her audience because the investment in her confession, the act of trust that is put in motion towards her as an authoritative figure, gives her fiction a chance to grow. With the relationship between writer and reader created, what *Atonement* now endeavours on is on the understanding of the nature of truth. As Shah continues to argue, “McEwan masterfully convinces that, at the heart of all fiction rests a lie, whose roots of falsification are found less in malice than in the misperception and fictive copings of anthropic reference.” (Shah 44) Once

again, the novel makes obvious the fact that Briony's (and consequently, an author's) act of deception is indeed a conscious act, but that the intention behind it is not malignant, it is simply an act of accepting and understanding the nature of fiction, along with its rules.

Briony's manuscript's intended audience is difficult to define. From the beginning of the text, her small narratives, her tales that do not come to publication or fruition are met with different audiences - mainly in the form of her close relatives. As the text progresses, however, and as Briony rises as the author of the story the reader has been reading all along, a question that also arises is who the text is meant to be addressed to: who is Briony's ideal reader? While she has carefully chosen who to tell each of her small narratives to (*The Trials of Arabella* is mainly directed at Leon, although her mother, her sister and the cousins get to read it as well; Robbie's creation is mainly confided in Lola, but also the doctors and prosecutors that come to see the case), the audience that is receiving her most important work is actually at another narrative layer. That audience is no longer fictional, but real. Consequently, the real readers of the novel become the audience of her grand narrative. However, it seems there is more to process than that. Briony does switch from the fictive reader to the real reader, although the barrier between a fictive author (such as Briony) and a real author (which in this case would be McEwan himself) is tested by being put into question. As Margaronis argues, "Briony, of course, is not really the writer of *Atonement*: her choice is set before us as a kind of parable about the limits of authorial altruism, a reminder that no novelist is a saint. Still, one could say that Briony's decision is aesthetic and self-serving." (Margaronis 158)

Furthermore, while the text is indeed addressed to a real audience, the title of the text hints at a specific intention towards it. *Atonement,* however, becomes a

contradiction, because Briony would be seeking for an atonement that she is ultimately aware she cannot obtain. Instead, 'atonement' here becomes an apology, or perhaps an *attempt* at atoning. As Finney mentions,

> [i]s Briony's work of fiction an evasion or an act of atonement or both? What exactly does she mean when she says that atonement "was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point" (p. 351)? Is she implicitly recognizing the contradiction at the heart of her narrative — the impossibility of avoiding constructing false fictions around others at the same time as one is required to enter imaginatively into their lives? Or is McEwan suggesting that the attempt is all we can ask for, an attempt that is bound to fail, but that can come closer to or stray further from the reality of others? (Finney 82)

It would seem that Briony's intended audience is, indeed, Cecilia and Robbie, but she is well aware that none of them will ever read her words or get to experience the consequences of the publication act, and so the question remains. While the act of publication works as a form of apology, or as a form of atonement for her own actions, the text in itself continues to have an audience that is not visible (i.e the real reader). It seems that her narrative's aim, or the aim it seems to acquire by being titled so, is contradictory. In fact, it is possible that the only real audience, the intended audience for the text, is none other than Briony, and that the sole purpose of the narrative, the atonement being sought, can only come from its author. This issue will be explored in the following chapter, as Briony's need for publication can be linked to a need to overcome her traumatic experiences, nevertheless, considering how invested and how dictatorial Briony becomes throughout the creation of her narrative, the manuscript would seem the perfect token, the perfect evidence to the perfect narratorial crime. If Briony's main goal as a human being is to understand herself, *Atonement* becomes an attempt at understanding and reinforcing her authorship, rather than an attempt at seeking forgiveness.

1.4.3 Repercussions on the Rise of the Authorial Identity

Part Two of the novel is exclusively focused on Robbie's experiences at war, and consequently, Briony's "personality is far less evident" in the text, because she has taken on her author's voice, and "precise detail", along with a specific objectivity and realism in the narrative, will work to give the second section a "sense of authenticity" (Margaronis 145). Part Two, therefore, focuses greatly on Robbie's life during war, and consequently, on his relationship with Cecilia through letters and literature, which allows Briony (or is it McEwan?) to continue to create a subtle commentary on the nature of fiction. There is a specific passage towards the end of Part Two that presents a commentary on both, the nature of Briony's authorship and the nature of Postmodernism as both a literary technique and a condition. Upon considering what could be done to change his situation, Robbie understands the only person that holds the power over it is Briony. Almost five years into her accusation, Robbie having been through jail and war, he is still at Briony's command. He would need her to re-evaluate, edit her words, as well as to make an official statement changing her allegations, proving that the control she exerted on the people around her years ago is something that continues to shape their real lives:

> Briony would change her evidence, she would rewrite the past so that the guilty became the innocent. But what was guilt these days? It was cheap. Everyone was guilty, and no one was. No one would be redeemed by a change of evidence, for there weren't enough people, enough paper and pens, enough patience and peace, to take down the statements of all the witnesses and gather in the facts. The witnesses were guilty too. All day we've witnessed each other's crime. You killed no one today? But how many did you leave to die? (261)

This passage works on several different levels: to begin with, there is a certain, subtle postmodern commentary showing the disillusionment Robbie feels that is to spread

throughout society.[13] Everybody is guilty of something, and Robbie's comment regarding the need for witnesses to change statements and evidence becomes a commentary that goes beyond Briony's statements and accusations: it is a commentary that goes to the root of the society he knows will emerge once the process of destruction he is a part of (that is to say, World War Two) is over, just as postmodernism in literature will have the need to start focusing on several points of view at once, and will need to start focusing on the idea that guilt, just as truth, is "cheap these days". Robbie's commentary, therefore, is not only about Briony, but about realising that the seed of mistrust and disaffection has been planted into society. Absolutes have been broken - due to war, everybody is both guilty and innocent, and, as he muses towards the end of the passage, the lines between one social role and another have also been blurred: guilt and innocence cannot be judged by one person alone anymore, or by what one believes. By commenting on the fact that war makes both perpetrator and bystander culprits, Robbie is commenting on Briony's crime as well: whereas she made the accusation, there was a whole system that supported her actions. A legal and social process was put in motion. Briony uttered the words, but those were received by an eager audience that also condemned Robbie. From the commissioners to the judges, to Mr and Mrs Tallis, Briony was no longer the only agent behind the narrative, because by believing it and backing it, the other fictive characters continued to reinforce and give it meaning. Robbie is therefore aware that once an idea is put in motion - be it in terms of war, or in terms of a narrative, the system that is unfurled is so large that there will never be "enough people, enough paper and pens, enough patience and peace" (261) to take down evidence and attempt to uncover the truth once more. Nevertheless, Briony's

[13] Postmodernism will be discussed fully in Chapter Three, nevertheless, as Briony's developing identity is affected by this shift in the narrative, as her somewhat loss of identity during Part Two will allow for a strengthening of her God-like authorial figure towards the end of the novel, and as her life and individual identity are mirroring of her life as author, it is interesting to also consider it in this section. For a more specific analysis of postmodernism, see Chapter Three.

power remains unquestioned, as she was the originator of the narrative and discourse that has taken hold of Robbie's life and society.

1.5.3.1 Use of Genre

Many critics have argued that *Atonement* follows a structure in which Briony is experimenting with different literary genres. If we go back to reflecting on how invested Briony was in playwriting, we could link that to the Elizabethan era and the rise of drama. After that, Briony goes through a modernist streak which is developed, as mentioned above, through the latter parts of Part One and especially through Part Two, with Robbie's continuous stream of consciousness and her impressionistic descriptions of both spaces and events. Robbie's comment at the end of Part Two, therefore, would pose a statement towards the end of modernism and the need for a new literary genre to emerge that can reflect on the changes being experienced by a society deeply affected by the war.

Robbie's passage, therefore, could be what marks in the narrative structure a shift from modernism to postmodernism. The novel works in a way that becomes both chronologic in the time chronicled within the novel (postmodernism is marked as having its beginning after World War Two) and the literary time (the second part of the novel ends with modernism, so that postmodernism can kick off). It is in Part Three where postmodernist elements will be made obvious for the narrative, mostly in terms of structure. Part One, divided in several different chapters, mainly focalises the narrative through Cecilia and Briony but also focuses on a wide range of different characters, almost Victorian, with clear Austenesc turns (further imposed by the epigraph that opens the novel itself) but extremely reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's writing as well, with an ensemble of characters that lose their importance in the

following parts, as it so happens in modernist novels such as Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* or Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. As Golban mentions, "*Atonement* is a text having multiple intertextual references, such as Virginia Woolf and William Shakespeare, the novels *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson and *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen, *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy and *The Golden Bowl* by Henry James." (Golban 222)

Part Two focuses only on Robbie, and is focalised through his experiences, moving further into the modernism that Briony would be trying to emulate, being an avid Woolf fan. D'Angelo compares *Atonement* to Woolf's *Jacob's Room* as well but finds "Atonement differs from *Jacob's Room* in that Briony extends the narrative in a way that Woolf does not: she enters Robbie's consciousness to present his own thoughts and emotions and takes Robbie directly to the war front, resisting representation only in the final moments of his life." (D'Angelo 97) It seems logical that after going through a playwriting and fairy-tale phase, Briony moves onto the literary movement that is taking place at the moment of her writing, which is modernism. Modernism, at this stage of her development, allows her to start experimenting with writing about something other than herself, and as D'Angelo exemplifies, that implies both: being able to get into the mind of her subject (leaving her own self behind), and being able to conduct research on topics other than her own experiences. Part Two, therefore, other than providing a necessary story that allows her to expand on her construction of Robbie, also allows her to grow as an author, not to mention that it begins her process of attempting atonement, as it depicts the reality of Robbie's situation, from his (fictionalised) point of view, somewhat giving him a voice previously denied to him.[14]

[14]Ana-Karina Schneider muses on the feminist nature of *Atonement* by concluding that "[l]ike most of McEwan's mature novels, *Atonement* could easily qualify as a feminist text due to his empathetic rendering not only of a woman's consciousness, but also, for the most part of the book, of a universe that is typically female, whether it is the country estate of an affluent family, or a war-time hospital. Perhaps more importantly, it is feminist in the attitudes it displays towards patriarchy as it pits the domestic and healing province of feminine dominance against the aggressive male world of politics and war." (Schneider 67) She also states that "unlike any other McEwan novel, *Atonement*

During Part Three of the novel, clearly inspired by Woolf, Briony produces *Two Figures by a Fountain*, which will be discussed within the text in quite a detailed way and critiqued for being too similar to Woolf but lacking in genius. This discussion, however, no longer comes from Briony herself or the people that surround her, as at this stage Briony has found access to other readers. The novella is read and received by *Horizon*, and the commentary on Briony's writing, in this part, comes entirely from what should be assumed to be an external, unbiased, and objective source. Briony's new readers are also a hint at her growth as an author. If in Part One her readers were almost hand-picked and consisted mainly of close relatives, in Part Three she has jumped to a wider audience, one she cannot control. This jump into uncertainty certainly shows a process of maturing for Briony as an author.

In this case, along with Robbie's passage on the nature of guilt and innocence, postmodernism is both a structural and content presence. Briony is a training nurse under the wings of Sister Drummond, and, during this time, her clear and defined identity seems to be obliterated due to the restrictions of the job and of war. As Alden suggests, she experiences a "stripping away of identity" (Alden 63), while she imagines "a ghostly parallel life in which she was at Girton, reading Milton" she realises she has

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purports to tell the story exclusively from a feminine point of view: even the section detailing Robbie Turner's wartime experiences, we learn from the coda, is the result of grownup Briony's rigorous and painstaking documenting of the Dunkirk evacuation." (Schneider 67) Consequently, Robbie's point of view in Part Two of the novel can be otherwise interpreted than it is done by myself, he is 'given a voice', but on closer inspection of the novel, the reader knows that voice is still Briony's. This is a rather interesting topic in the exploration of McEwan's narratorial voices, as issues of gender also arise in *Sweet Tooth*, when the same quandary is encountered as Serena is also void of a voice, in this case by a male narrator. See Ksiezopolska's *Turning Tables: Enchantment, Entrapment, and Empowerment in McEwan's Sweet Tooth*, where she explores in depth the instance of female narrators posing as male characters and male narrators posing as female characters. Interestingly, it would seem in either case, the act of having a narrator pose as a character using their voice is ultimately approached in terms of gender. *Sweet Tooth* tends to be perceived from the point of view that a female character is rendered voiceless, as a simplistic account of the female mind by a man too concerned with how female subjects are described within literature. Notwithstanding, a narrator also voids several characters of their own voices in *Atonement* but that is not perceived from sexist grounds: that might be due to the feminine nature of the narration of the text, as exemplified by Schneider, but it might also lead to conclusions regarding the conclusions that can be drawn depending on which reader is the one judging *Sweet Tooth*. A first-time reader of McEwan might be unaware of *Atonement* and might be outraged by Serena's fictionalisation. A reader familiar with McEwan's work, however, might understand he is not deliberately voiding Serena of a voice in a sexist endeavour, but rather commenting on the tendency of male authors to narrate through 'bland' female voices. Some of these issues, especially concerning Tom's fictionalisation of Serena, will be exemplified and approached throughout this study.

"[i]n fact, narrowed her life to a relationship with a woman fifteen years older who assume[s] a power over her greater than that of a mother over an infant." (275) Unable to write, unable to be herself and exert her power over other people, her own self has been lost.

To begin with, she is stripped of her own name and blurred with the rest of the nurses. As Schneider points out, she "is partially depersonalised as Nurse Tallis … yet resists it, stubbornly insisting on her Christian name twice" (Schneider 80). When she goes "up to the sister to point out courteously that a mistake ha[s] been made with her name badge. She was B. Tallis, not, as it said on the little rectangular brooch, N. Tallis" (275), she is humiliated in front of the rest of the nurses, who are naturally aware that they all have the same initial. What is more, the uniforms the nurses wear "erod[e] identity, and the daily attention required - ironing pleats, pinning hats, straightening seams, shoe polishing, especially the heels - beg[in] a process by which other concerns [are] slowly excluded." (276) At this stage Briony feels that "[the nurses'] previous lives [are] becoming indistinct. Their minds ha[ve] emptied to some extent, their defences [are] down, so that they [are] easily persuaded of the absolute authority of the ward sister." (276) Briony and the nurses become "vacated minds" to the sister (276), which inevitably affects Briony's sense of self. Without her name (the importance of her name), and without her writing, Briony gets lost in the job, and loses sense of her individuality. Nevertheless, "unless she is addressed professionally, she remains Briony to the narrator throughout – a token of unfailing empathy." (Schneider 80)

However, she gets through it, because there is still an element of discipline and order that is reminiscent of her younger self: she abandons "herself to a life of strictures, rules, obedience, housework, and a constant fear of disapproval." (276) Briony is kept in check by the demanding job description and ward sister, which only teaches her all

the more about discipline and resilience when it comes to her future writing. While "she ha[s] no identity beyond her badge" (276), that does not stop her from writing in secret. Although at the hospital she is not Briony Tallis but N. Tallis, exemplifying the need for postmodern subjects to embrace the fragmentary nature of their identities, she continues nursing her authorship in her spare time. As a matter of fact, her time in the hospital, as Alden suggests, shocks her "into adulthood." (Alden 68) It is perhaps during her time as a nurse that Briony understands what her authorship represents to herself (that is to say, everything), unlike most authors these days, as Booth suggests, who "do not seem to talk about themselves in the terms that Goethe" did, which is by considering their "career as the creation of a *self*." (Booth *The Company We Keep* 129)

As per the cyclical nature of the novel, it seems Briony's time at the hospital and the temporary erasing of her identity would mirror the moment in which she slashes nettles in Part One. What she observed to be an eradicating of her childhood, slashing a nettle for each of her years as a child and developing into what she considered a rebirth of herself as a young adult, is recreated once more in Part Three: with the obliteration of her identity, herself as a young adult is also eradicated, and the moment allows for a rebirth as a full, complete author, something that is explored as the novel moves on to Part Four, the Coda. It would seem, therefore, that to Briony these transitions from one stage of life into another are almost excruciating, and that rather than perceiving them as transitions, she sees them as deaths and rebirths, as shifting identities rather than evolving.

With each new rebirth, a different genre or style of writing must be left behind. If in Part One her main concern was with abandoning playwriting, in Part Three it is with severing ties with modernism. Both moments of redefinition (or rebirth) also come from external commentary on her writing. What in Part One were the opinions of Lola,

in Part Three are the opinions of *Horizon*'s editor, Cyril Connolly. Briony does not seem to receive criticism well, but receiving it, as mentioned previously, forces her to re-evaluate her writing and to make career-changing choices. Schneider considers that "the novel raises the issue of the ethics of producing representations and foregrounds the formative function of narratives in identity negotiation." (Schneider 65) It seems that with each of her rebirths, propelled by encounters with different readers, Briony enters such a state of identity 'negotiation', as the inspection of her narrative and oeuvre is what makes her recalibrate her identity and move towards different, or rather more reinforced, paths.

As mentioned previously, therefore, during her time in training, Briony continues writing, albeit in hiding. She is aware she must carry through her identity as a nurse for the public, but her sense of order helps her continue to keep up with her identity as an author overnight. That is why "[i]n the drawer of her bedside locker, she [keeps] a foolscap notebook with marbled cardboard covers. Taped to the spine [i]s a length of string on the end of which [i]s a pencil." (280) The insistence in describing the tools used for her writing becomes an interesting metaphor: while at home she was writing from a fountain pen, denoting a certain finalising touch to her plays, now that she is writing and rewriting her work, now that she must expect for a publisher's or an audience's reception, she works with a pencil.

In fact, what she writes during her time at the hospital is a form of research for her future publication. Her time at hospital gives her the perfect opportunity to understand war from a first-person perspective, which will allow her to write the story of her sister and her lover in greater detail. Even becoming a nurse is a form of research, as she is attempting to place herself in her sister's footsteps – note that Briony goes into

nursing only because her sister did, not out of vocation or due to a sense of responsibility towards society.

The journal she keeps documents her life at the hospital from the first day of training. This journal "consist[s] of artistic manifestations, trivial complaints, character sketches and simple accounts of her day which increasingly shad[e] off into fantasy", and while "she rarely read[s] back over what she ha[s] written", "she like[s] to flip the filled pages" (280) because that allows her to reinforce her identity as an author, and ensure that it is not being lost in the day to day routines of her job: "[h]ere, behind the name badge and uniform, [is] her true self, secretly hoarded, quietly accumulating" (280). After all, it seems that despite having been attempted to erode her identity through uniforms and a loss of her name and background, she has not "lost that childhood pleasure in seeing pages covered in her own handwriting" (280).

Assuring her authorial identity remains intact, therefore, she continues to write in her process of research. She fictionalises the circumstances and human beings around her, given that changing the names of the patients makes it "easier to transform the circumstances and invent" (280), aware that she is "under no obligation to the truth" (280) because this stage of writing is merely for herself. "This [is] the only place she [can] be free" (280), and the only place where she can continue what she started five years prior. Despite what is taking place around her, the pleasures of her days reside in the ways in which "she buil[ds] little stories … around the people on the ward" (280), convincing herself to be one of the greats, "a kind of medical Chaucer" (280). Withal, she knows that her journal writing has the ability to actually "preserv[e] her dignity: she might look and behave like and live the life of a trainee nurse, but she [is] really an important writer in disguise" (280).

Through her time at the hospital, the process of sending her first short story to *Horizon*, is described. The process resembles her childish storms of composition, as she is said to have "typed out her final draft with her forefingers (…) all week for more than eight hours a day, until her back and neck ached, and ragged curls of unfurling ampersands swam across her vision." (281) A few years later, with subject matters that are more adult and with a clearer vision of her creation, Briony continues to write her stories in moments of inspiration, prompted by an urgency to finish what she has started. The pleasure she obtains out of the writing act is so powerful she cannot put it to rest. "She [can] hardly remember a greater pleasure than at the end, when she squar[es] off the completed pile of pages - one hundred and three! - and fe[el]s at the tips of her raw fingers the weight of her creation." (281) The pleasure described, once more, is brought on by the act of creation, the act of producing something that makes her undeniably herself, that allows her to be reminded of her uniqueness: "[a]ll her own. No one else could have written it." (281).

The story sent to *Horizon*, as mentioned previously, is modelled after modernist ideals, and that is observed by the fact that what "excite[s] her about her achievement [is] its design, the pure geometry and the defining uncertainty which reflect[s], she [thinks], modern sensibility" (281), the story is one that does not have "clear answers", in an age where "characters and plots" are also over (281). She moves forward by no longer believing in characters, as they are

> quaint devices that belon[g] to the nineteenth century. The very concept of character [i]s founded on errors that modern psychology ha[s] exposed. Plots too [a]re like rusted machinery whose wheels would no longer turn. A modern novelist could no more write characters and plots than a modern composer could a Mozart symphony. It [i]s thought, perception, sensations that interes[t] her, the conscious mind as a river through time, and how to represent its onward roll (281)

Reading Woolf's *The Waves* three times makes Briony realise about the power of reading, just as of the power of writing. She knows that what is coming for literature is nothing other than a radical change of the rules: "[t]he novel of the future would be unlike anything in the past" (282), she says. Reading Woolf, she understands that "a great transformation [is] being worked in human nature itself, and (…) only fiction, a new kind of fiction, c[an] capture the essence of the change." (282) Through this new literary reality, she can actually become as powerful as to be able "[t]o enter a mind and show it at work, or being worked on, and to do this within a symmetrical design - this would be an artistic triumph" (282). Through this decision, she is also able to reclaim her full authorial identity, as, pages later, when speaking to a wounded French soldier, she finally mutters "'It's not Tallis. You should call me Briony…'" (310).

As the narrative begins to draw to a close, Briony finally reencounters Cecilia and Robbie. A few pages after reading the encounter, however, the reader will learn this part was all a fabulation coming from Briony's mind. In the conversation between Briony, Cecilia and Robbie, Briony shows remorse for having affected Cecilia and Robbie's life, but she does not seem to show any remorse for her thirst for power and creation. When Cecilia tells her "If you were lying then, why should a court believe you now? There are no new facts, and you're an unreliable witness" (336), Briony acknowledges that while her sister's "confirmation of her crime [i]s terrible to her" she finds the "perspective unfamiliar" (336). Briony does not believe she has lied: to her, fiction is within the realms of reality, because it is the only way she can understand her own life. "Weak, stupid, confused, cowardly, evasive - she ha[s] hated herself for everything she ha[s] been, but she ha[s] never thought of herself as a liar." (336)

As Margaronis mentions, *Atonement* "deliberately betrays its readers to make the modernist point that all fiction – indeed, all writing – is a kind of betrayal" (Margaronis

148). Briony does not feel ashamed of her actions in the past, the fact she is writing this story is enough evidence of that. The act of lying resides at the root of fiction, and the only goal Briony aspires to is to precisely write fiction, which means she never considers her betrayal to the truth as damaging. She feels pride in her act of writing and creation, in fact, the only events she does regret are the consequences of her inculpation of Robbie.

It takes Briony quite a few minutes to be able to mention that in reality, the narrative Robbie and Cecilia have built surrounding the rape is also just a fiction, as they have attributed the rape to Danny Hardman. The revelation to them is of course shocking, a shock that is analysed by Briony (albeit not in terms of how they must adjust their own morality within their narrative), Briony "trie[s] to imagine the adjustments that each would be making" upon finding out, "[y]ears of seeing it a certain way. And yet, however startling, it [is] only a detail. Nothing essential [is] changed by it. Nothing in her own role." (346) Granted, what is changed by such a revelation is indeed important, as there is a difference between the inculpation of Hardman or Marshall. Marshall, as Briony knows, is immune due to his power in society and due to his recent marriage to Lola, but what Briony is worrying about is the power she obtained from the fictional act. To her, once again, the responsibility is not to the truth (that is to say, the 'who did it') but to the story (none of the other players would have fit Briony's narrative at that point, only Robbie could). After the exchange, Briony continues to fail to appreciate the effects her authorial identity have on the people surrounding her. She understands what she did caused trouble, but she cannot see it as something that was morally wrong.

1.4.4 The Final Rising to Authorship

The third part of the novel finishes with the now infamous signature, "BT London 1999" (349) and gives way to the coda of the novel, where the narrative person changes to the first person, and the reader finally gets to read Briony's voice directly. As Finney states,

> [t]he status of the coda, "London, 1999," is uncertain. The novel appears to end with the end of Part Three signed by "BT London, 1999" (p. 330). The coda that follows is unsigned and could be taken as a diary confession or extraneous commentary on the novel proper. This concluding section of the book is both open-ended and dark. In the penultimate paragraph, Briony opens up the possibility of a further revision when she plays with the idea of writing a new draft that would finally allow the two lovers to forgive her. (Finney 81)[15]

The coda, the novel's very last chapter, mirrors the beginning of the first chapter, first by being a description of a day in Briony's life, but most importantly by giving a quick description of the room where Briony has been conducting the process of writing. After describing the state it is in and the organising she is doing around it, she admits "I've always liked to make a tidy finish" (353), which links back to the way her 'controlling demon' was described at the beginning of the narrative. Later, she goes on to say she "still feel[s] [her]self to be exactly the same person [she has] always been." (356) Indeed, it would seem while Briony has experienced an evolution as an author, she has not evolved as a human being. This part of the novel works to expose, once more, Briony's process of creation. She explains her research process, including where she conducted it and who she contacted to do so. She goes as far as to explain the details she modified from her narrative, but while she is doing so, she simultaneously admits she is aware the names and places she modified are the least of her crimes. For example, she states she merged the three different hospitals she worked at during the duration of the

[15] However dubious and uncertain, the main purpose of the coda is to allow Briony to rise, once more, as a God-like author figure. An expanded analysis on the nature of the coda will be exerted in Chapter Three under the prism of the metafictional device.

war into one, believing that to be "[a] convenient distortion, and the least of [her] offences against veracity" (356), this is the first time during the whole of the narrative where she directly acknowledges she has toyed with truth. However, just as when speaking to the ghostly versions of Cecilia and Robbie, she never shows any remorse.

By exposing her process of research, she is simultaneously exposing her process as a creator and showing how she has dictated truth during the last few years. Briony writes the coda the day she finds out she has vascular dementia, which seems to indicate the diagnosis and prognosis of her illness also marks the end of her writing career. Schneider puts it thus: "...the coda announces one final, healing violence: Briony's pharmakon-like authorship of lies and imaginative fables is put an end to by the compensatory brutality of a degenerative disease that is ruining her memory and capacity for using language." (Schneider 81) Aware that her use of language will only decrease from then onwards, she seems willing to accept she will not write again. Finney, as quoted above, believes she is toying with the idea of a revision of the text, but Briony reiterates once and again how the manuscript she has just finalised is the end-product of her literary career. It seems, therefore, that along with her diagnosis, Briony is putting an end to her writing, and most importantly, she is marking this day, her birthday (and the day she goes back to her family home), as the day in which her manuscript, her lifelong revision of her story, becomes fixed in time.

One of the ways that is exemplified is through her visit to the Imperial War Museum library in Lambeth, where she will start her confrontation with her past by seeing Lord and Lady Marshall on the steps (the concept of confrontation will go on for the rest of the day, as she will have to face her childhood home [where the story has unfurled] along with the play, *The Trials of Arabella,* that she abandoned in a fit of rage): she donates to the archive a "dozen long letters" from a Mr. Nettle (359), who she

has been consulting regarding Dunkirk. She makes a point to highlight the fact that these letters are not the first she has given to the archive, which is an indication that she has used real-life correspondence between Cecilia and Robbie as research (359). After that, she needs to put an end to her time in the museum: "I returned the books I had been using to the front desk, and threw away various scraps of paper. The workspace was cleared of all traces of me" (360).[16] After the writing is done, she needs to reach further closure from her writing, a closure she will not be able to obtain through publication.

Briony continues to note the relationship between veracity and fiction when she muses on the nature of Mr. Nettles' letters as well. While she appreciates the details he chooses to correct for accuracy in her narrative, she says these are a mere "pointillist approach to verisimilitude, the correction of detail that cumulatively gives such satisfaction" (359), and feels that, "[l]ike policemen in a search team, we go on hands and knees and crawl our way towards the truth" (359). However, she finds that amusing, given the fact that had she "really cared so much about facts, [she] should have written a different kind of book." (360) Nevertheless, the finishing of this manuscript will not mirror the way in which she completed her first play at the beginning of the text. While finishing her play and attempting to execute it culminated in a moment of redefinition and allowed her to move towards a different genre and style, in this case, "[her] work [is] done. There [will] be no further drafts." (360)

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[16] Sections like these in the novel, along with moments such as Robbie and Cecilia's sexual encounter in the library, or in Serena and Tom's first kiss in a second-hand bookshop, imply an element of yet another genre in the narrative, that which Suzanne Keen explores in *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction.* Romances of the archive "have scenes taking place in libraries or in other structures housing collections of papers and books; they feature the plot action of 'doing research' in documents. They designate a character or characters at least temporarily as archival researchers, as questers in the archive. They unabashedly interpret the past through its material traces; they build on a foundation of 'documentarism,' answering the postmodern critique of history with invented records full of hard facts." (Keen 3) Along with the fact that these kinds of texts clearly emerge from a Post-Imperial preoccupation, it could be argued McEwan is subtly participating in the genre as well.

The last chapter does not only work as a confession, which will be analysed below, it works, as previously mentioned, as a way to achieving closure for Briony. She is on a literal "journey into the country, a dinner in [her] honour, a renewal of family bonds" (361) but she is also on an emotional journey which allows her to reach the atonement she seeks for herself, and the peace she needs once the writing process is done. That is why this section also works to further prove to the reader, as well as to Briony herself, that her literary persona has grown to be as powerful as she intended it to be when she was a child. During the dinner in her honour, "[e]very second person want[s] to tell [her] something kind about [her] books. A groups of enchanting teenagers t[ell] [her] how they [are] studying [her] books at school" (366): she is going over her literary career, almost chronologically (as she is about to witness a performance of *The Trials of Arabella*), but other than that there is an oddly finalising mood to her tale as well, as the way she has cleared out the traces of her writing paraphernalia also match with the changes done to the house itself. The Tallis home, now turned into a hotel, has lost all the traces of the family history, significantly, even, "all the books [are] gone from the library, and all the shelves too" (366): the return to the family home consequently allows Briony to realise that it is only in her manuscript where the family's history will be able to be kept alive.

The treatment of the performance of *The Trials of Arabella*, along with its resurfacing at the end of the narrative, works to cyclically tie the whole narrative together and remind the reader about the descriptions and importance given to Briony's genius on the first pages of the text. It also works to show the reader how successful Briony has become as an author, poignantly highlighting her experience as a God-like author figure. Upon hearing the last few words of the play, she thinks *The Trials of Arabella* was "not [her] best", but remarks how "the whole room, except for Leon,

Pierrot and [her]self, r[i]se for the applause" (368). After that, Briony addresses the whole party, and tries "to evoke that hot summer of nineteen thirty-five, when the cousins came down from the north", and she goes on to explain "that it was entirely [her] fault the rehearsals fell apart, because halfway through [she] had decided to become a novelist" (369). It seems quite telling that, in a birthday party, the main focus of the night is to go over her career as a writer, it certainly shows that her identity as a human being is mainly based on her work as a writer, given that no other information is provided about what is discussed or done during that night. When she goes back to her room, tired of being "the object of so much attention", she finds the time to think "about [her] last novel, the one that should have been [her] first. The earliest version, January 1940, the latest, March 1999, and in between, half a dozen different drafts. The second draft, June 1947, the third… who cares to know? [Her] fifty-nine-year assignment is over." (369)

It appears this is the day when not only does she get the chance to review her literary career, but also to put an end to the novel that has taken her fifty-nine-years to write. It is also interesting that she describes it as an 'assignment', as 'assignment' implies a duty and responsibility, but not to the truth: to her fiction. She mentions it later herself, saying "[she has] regarded it as her duty to disguise nothing - the names, the places, the exact circumstances" and most importantly, that she "put it all there as a matter of historical record." (369) However contradictory that is, there is a tint of truth to her statement: the research she seems to have conducted is exhaustive, and the documenting of the war process is concise, detailed and exact. She has also been truthful in her description of the path she took in fabricating her confession, and what drove her to do so. Dahlbäck mentions that "once she realizes the consequences of "her crime" (156), this is, however, the tool she chooses to use in her attempt to rewrite

history. It is therefore not up to her to say when the story comes to an end; reality has written it for her and her only chance for redemption is to replace this ending with a fictional one" (Dahlbäck 7), however, it could continue to be argued that where she has committed a fraud to veracity is in the telling of the story between Robbie and Cecilia.

The only responsibility she feels is towards the lovers, and that is made entirely clear in her narratological confession: "[t]here was a crime. But there were also the lovers. Lovers and their happy ends have been on my mind all night long" (370), the only reason for her confession is probably the existence of such lovers. She finds herself back at the beginning of her writing career and must acknowledge that which kick-started it: "[i]t occurs to me that I have not travelled very far after all, since I wrote my little play. Or rather, I've made a huge digression and doubled back to my starting place" (370). She then confesses that "it is only in this last version that [her] lovers end well, standing side by side on a South London pavement as [she] walks away. All the preceding drafts were pitiless." (370) The explanation she gives is simple, and it precisely implies the pity she is referring to, pity being a keyword to understanding the way in which Briony's authorial identity is built, because "now [she] can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, [she] tried to persuade [her] reader" of the truth. After all, "what sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism? I couldn't do it to them." (371)

Her confession brings up several issues: issues of where the divide between reality and fiction is (if the reader reads and believes a specific history, does one alteration invalidate the veracity of the whole narrative fabric?), issues of authorial intention (in this case, the reader has no choice to attempt to decode the meaning of the

narrative, the reader must follow and understand the author's intention, because not only has reality been modified to fit fictional expectations, the author is literally spelling out the intention of the narrative for the reader to read), and on a lesser level, a need to run away from any literary genre that does not fit her (done with playwriting, done with realism and even with modernism, it seems only postmodernism can accommodate such a modification and juxtaposition of reality and fiction). Her admission also implies one of the pieces of knowledge that continues to make her the most powerful player over her text, which is, as she says, "[w]hen [she is] dead, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, [they] will only exist as [her] inventions." (371) With the act of publication not only will her story be told, but she will commit a further act in modifying reality. The moment her manuscript is published, the truth about Robbie and Cecilia's fate and their love will become entirely Briony's responsibility, under her fabrication. With the act of publication, "the lovers [will] survive and flourish. As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of [her] final draft, then [her] spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love." (371) Telling the story of the two lovers, despite the betrayal to veracity which that entails, shows a growth on Briony's part, she "...seeks to retell their story with the compassion and understanding that she lacked as a thirteen-year-old girl. In turning "Two Figures by a Fountain" into Atonement, in exchanging the primacy of the authorial ego for an empathetic projection into the feelings of others, Briony is abandoning the imaginary for the symbolic order." (Finney 81)

Briony paints the situation as though in her duty to fiction she is also paining herself. Her language use hints at the idea that it is not her own intention but rather fiction's itself. As she has proven during the narrative, she has the tendency to assume what others would benefit from, prioritising her fiction. Just as she voids Cecilia, Lola

and Robbie of a voice, she also voids the reader of one, because as she will go on to say, she is God. For Briony, the act of creating fiction equals the act of creating reality, and the issue is that she is successful at it, because despite how deceitful she might be in her means, at the end of the day, her story is the only one that will be remembered, and further, it will only be able to be remembered by the reading act itself:

> The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, for novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all (371).

After proclaiming that the author is so mighty it does not even need God's consent, she goes on to say her narrative crime was "a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair" (372), that she gave her lovers (and consequently, her readers) happiness, and it is only then that she can rest ("[b]ut now I must sleep." (372))

In conclusion, throughout the course of the novel, Briony's identity is described as controlling, dictatorial, all-mighty, and her power builds up through her different acts of creating fiction, acts that culminate into her own intrusion into the narrative, to reclaim such power and recognition for herself. Her final soliloquy to the reader not only confirms everything that has been described in either a blatant or a subtle way, but it also claims a space for the author into the narrative that is clear and cunning, a thirst for authority and authorship that is to be inevitably accepted by a confused and dislocated reader. What is also interesting is the fact that she is, in fact, successful in her endeavour, that her thirst for authorship never becomes a delusion of grandeur, that what she sets out to reclaim when she is thirteen, she achieves when she is seventy-seven, and that the novel she intends to produce, one in which she slightly modifies reality in order to contain it within her fiction, ends up having such a powerful impact

that it reverses the terms of fiction and ends up having the power to dictate reality. Briony is therefore a self-made God, both in the page and in real life, someone able to affect other people's lives, both in and outside of the written page.

1.5 The Creation of Character: The God-Like Author Figure in *Sweet Tooth* (2012)

1.5.1 *Sweet Tooth:* An Introduction

Published a decade after *Atonement*, *Sweet Tooth* (2012) is McEwan's twelfth novel. The novel is only his second which contains a main character who becomes an author, as well as the use of the metafictional device. As has been mentioned above, by being the only novels of his complete works featuring main characters as authors, the texts are inevitably linked. In fact, by including a metafictional adjunct at the end of each, the novels concurrently become an almost collaborative exercise on the exploration of fiction.

At their root, *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* are linked by a preoccupation with fiction, one not merely pointed out, but explored in depth. The plot, characters, settings, and main intent of each novel differ, but at the core of each is the relationship shared between individual and fictional work. McEwan portrays characters whose relationship with literature drive them to behave in unexpected ways, whose traumatic experiences push them into reinforcing their authorial identities, characters who build their personal, affectional, and emotional relationships through the discussion of literary works. Furthermore, the characters portrayed push the boundaries between reality and fiction through the writing and reading of literature. In short, he produces texts which, despite focusing on a variety of different genres, ranging from history to romance to social and gender issues, are mutually sustained by an exploration of the role of fiction in daily life. Nevertheless, at the surface, the differences between *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* are obvious: whilst *Atonement* explores a wide variety of themes against the backdrop of World War Two, *Sweet Tooth* focuses on the Cold War and the issue of communism.

Whereas *Atonement* pays specific attention to issues of class, *Sweet Tooth* relies heavily on issues of gender. *Sweet Tooth* concerns itself greatly, as well, on socio-political issues, as Serena penetrates the world of MI5. As a matter of fact, it is through the prism of her figure as a woman inside of the department that McEwan explores the gender barrier in the workplace during the 1970s. As Walker states, in *Sweet Tooth*, "[r]ather than asserting his own direct authority over the text, McEwan uses tropes of romance and espionage to interrogate the conjunction of power and masculinity on which his authorship – and the cultural-political divide, largely speaking – is predicated." (Walker 496)

After being recruited for MI5 by Tony Canning, her far older, married lover, Serena is made part of a secret literary operation called Sweet Tooth, where writers are inadvertently enlisted to counteract the social debate on communism through fiction. Tired of writers that depict dystopian dim and not-so-distant futures, the organisation seeks to allow writers that seem to have a preoccupation with the reformation of society to write 'freely'. Serena is recruited due to the fact that she fits the profile that is being looked for: she works for MI5 and she is an avid reader. The novel also makes it a point to highlight that her looks and womanly manners are key for her recruitment, assuming she can be an asset to the operation because of her gender and sex. Naturally, or perhaps coincidentally, Serena develops a relationship with the writer she is meant to recruit. The development of their relationship is chronicled in full, simultaneously presenting an interesting dynamic between Tom (author) and Serena (reader). Not only do they become sexually involved, Tom also inevitably exerts a power over Serena through helping her navigate different texts, which is not the only time Serena is shaped by a male, as her relationship with Canning is built on the same dynamic. It would almost seem like Serena is always a character being created by an older, more experienced

male, which in the text is mainly exposed by showing her behavioural patterns as a reader.

Ironically, the fact that Serena rejects the idea of metafiction as a reader is a fact that permeates the narrative. She states she considers the device to represent a breach in the author-reader contract. The metafictional twist displayed at the end of the text, however, takes a darker turn in *Sweet Tooth* than it does in *Atonement*. The reader is not only made aware that McEwan has once more made use of the postmodernist technique to explore the fictional realm: the reader is also made aware that all issues of gender have been explored through a male's vision and voice. With the metafictional twist, it is revealed that Serena is not the rightful first-person narrator it was believed, but rather, what has been read is Tom Haley's vision of Serena, thus voiding her of a voice and speaking through her. Ultimately, at the end of the narrative, as will be exemplified in the sections below, the reader is left to accept that the only version of Serena that is known is a characterisation, perhaps a caricature, of a dubiously real character. As will be exemplified in Chapter Two, *Sweet Tooth* can be considered a 'revenge narrative', in that Tom, in his thirst for vengeance, attacks Serena through the path he believes might hurt her most: by taking and abusing her voice to create his narrative.

1.5.2 The Reader and the Author

1.5.2.1 Serena, the Reader

As mentioned previously, the novel sets out with a first-person narrative unfolding from Serena's perspective. The first seventeen years of her life are chronicled in the first few paragraphs of the novel. The narratorial voice claims that "almost forty years ago I was sent on a secret mission for the British security service", after "having disgraced myself

and ruined my lover." (1)[17] The first few pages are reproduced with very concise and precise language, something that can be attributed to the fact that, as made aware later on in the text, these are words written by Tom Haley, who, impersonating Serena's voice, might still be growing familiar with his performance at this stage of the narrative. The information provided regarding the first few years of Serena's life is therefore brief and vague. She specifies she "won't waste much time on [her] childhood and teenage years", explains she is "the daughter of an Anglican bishop", and her home "was genial, polished, orderly, book-filled." (1) What is more, her adolescence is erased from her existence as a character, as "nothing strange or terrible happened to [her] during her first eighteen years" (2). However, and quite fittingly, Serena is clearly defined by her sexuality early on in the narrative. She "lost [her] virginity in [her] first term, several times over it seemed, the general style being so wordless and clumsy, and had a pleasant succession of boyfriends, six or seven or eight over the nine terms, depending on your definitions of carnality." (6)

Most importantly for the issue at hand, she is clearly described as an avid reader: she "enjoy[s] reading novels. [She goes] fast - [she] [can] get through two or three a week" (2) but instead of going for an English degree, she decides to go for mathematics, as she is "a freak of nature - a girl who happen[s] to have a talent for" it (2). She attributes her decision to the influence of her mother, who says that it is her "duty as a woman to go to Cambridge to study maths" (4), something Serena seems to question, and even does begrudgingly but that nevertheless does not deter her. This inclination for reading shows that "[i]f Briony functions as a metaphor of the development of a writer, Serena embodies that of a reader [in] *Sweet Tooth*…" (Chalupský 109) She proclaims that "thanks to [her] mother, [she] was studying the wrong subject, but [she] didn't stop

[17] In this section, as only *Sweet Tooth* is referenced, and to avoid repetition, all references for the novel will consist of the page number henceforward.

reading" (6): she fully describes her reading habits to the reader, admitting it "is not a digression" in the narrative, but rather something necessary, as "[t]hose books delivered [her] to [her] career in intelligence" (7). This way, the reader finds out that Serena's main format choice is the novel, as she "never read[s] much poetry or any plays" (6), she describes reading as her "way of not thinking about maths. More than that (…) it [is her] *way of not thinking*" (6, emphasis added). Reading, therefore, is presented as a means of escapism, something Serena does not do seeking nurturing or professionalism but rather evasion. She admits she is a fast reader, saying she can "take in a block of text or a whole paragraph in one visual gulp", which is only a "matter of letting [her] eyes and thoughts go soft, like wax, to take the impression fresh off the page" (6).

It seems, therefore, that Serena does not like reading if it involves an intellectually challenging engagement with the text. As Chalupský points out,

> …as a reader she knows very well what she likes and can be extraordinarily stubborn in standing up for it. She is *an uninformed, fast-reading literary consumer*, reading solely for pleasure and so all she needs is an interesting story about love, happy endings and female characters with whom she could identify, and she deems the other aspects of the books, such as the authorship, reputation, genre, theme and style of negligible importance. (Chalupský 109 emphasis added)

Serena does not seem to fit into the concept of the 'ideal' or even 'informed' reader, however, as will be exemplified, she might be Tom's ideal reader alright. She admits to not "bother[ing] much with themes or felicitous phrases and [to] skipp[ing] fine descriptions of weather, landscapes and interiors" (7), because what she is looking for are "characters [she can] believe in, and [she] want[s] to be made curious about what [i]s to happen to them" (7). She is clearly interested in a mimetic experience of reading. She also mentions she "prefer[s] people to be falling in and out of love", and although it is "vulgar to want it" she "like[s] someone to say 'Marry me' by the end" (7). Last, but not least, she mentions she reads "anything [she sees] laying around. Pulp fiction, great

literature and everything in between" (7). As a matter of fact, she gives "the same rough treatment" (7) to all texts.

Serena's reading habits are peculiar, as "[s]he reads quickly and voraciously, but in a way that is almost sacrilegious to an orthodox scholar." (Alghamdi 97) it also seems quite uncommon for an individual to enjoy such a variety of different themes and to be able to disregard subject matters and genres so carelessly yet with stern determination during the process of selection. As she makes the reader aware, she treats reading as an activity to which she does not need to invest any thought or effort. This is something she attributes to being a "girl with untutored tastes", "an empty mind, ripe for a takeover" (8). It would seem, therefore, that Serena is depicted as a woman that needs guidance. A guidance that will soon enough allow her to redirect her reading towards the intellectual realm.

Chalupský also points out that she can consequently "be taken as a parody of what may mistakenly be considered as an open-minded, unbiased postmodern reader" but that, "her credulous, headlong, selective and self-projective reading is in fact inconsistent with the postmodernist distrust of a narrative authority and its emphasis on the reader's active collaboration in producing meaning by carefully looking for disguised details and connections." (Chalupský 109) Serena makes clear that those capable of producing literary works she enjoys are to be regarded as 'Gods'. She says her heart is "always with [her] first love", Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (10). Interestingly, it is due to more than his intellect or his writing ability: "[t]he forehead that rose like an Orthodox dome, the hillbilly pastor's wedge of beard, the grim" are also taken into consideration, along with his "gulag-conferred authority, his stubborn immunity to politicians. Even his religious convictions" (10). "He was God", she says, "[w]ho could match him? Who could deny him his Nobel Prize?" (10) She continues to mix her

intellectual pull towards Solzhenitsyn towards his physical appearance: "[g]azing at his photograph, I wanted to be his lover. I would have served him as my mother did my father. Box his socks? I would have knelt to wash his feet. With my tongue!" (10). As hinted at earlier in the text, perhaps it has to do with the kind of nuclear family she grew up in, during the 1950s, but it is clear Serena is attracted to male role figures she can admire and who can help her find her way to navigate the world she lives in while she begrudges her mother's guidance. However, she seems to look for role figures she can serve in life as well as in the bedroom. Her greatest concern regarding her relationship with Jeremy Mott is that she "want[s] to help him" in bed, and she is "genuinely curious" about his inability to reach orgasm with her, because she is "troubled by the thought that [she] might be failing him" (13) - a sexual behavioural pattern that is to follow her for the rest of her chronicled (fictional) life.

1.5.2.1.1 Serena's Adaptable Identity

When Serena first meets Tony Canning (who has "chaired a commission on historical sites, [has] sat on various advisory boards" is a "trustee of the British Museum and ha[s] written a highly regarded book about the Congress of Vienna" (13)) she naturally aims to "please, to give the right answers, to be interesting" (15), even though she admits to having "no particular views on the subject[s]" being discussed (15). When describing the scene, she wonders whether her looks have anything to do with her impending recruitment for MI5, understanding her intellect is not what leads her to being recruited but rather the possibility that because of her physical appearance, she can be trained towards a career in intelligence. She says it was "unusual for a woman to be approached in that much-described, time-honoured way. And though it [is] strictly true that Tony

Canning ended up recruiting [her] for MI5, his motives were complicated and he had no official sanction" (16-17). Serena insists on her beauty, saying "I can say it and get it out of the way. I really was pretty. More than that. As Jeremy once wrote in a rare effusive letter, I was 'actually rather gorgeous.' (17) Serena continuously points out her beauty and shows a recurrent concern for physical appearance. Whenever she encounters a new character, she makes it a point to describe them physically, paying special attention to their clothing and its aesthetic qualities. Whether that is a personality trait of the real version of Serena Frome or the way in which Tom Haley decides to stereotypically represent his fictionalised version of the female character, is up for discussion. In fact, "[e]ven the elevated greybeards on the fifth floor, whom [she] never m[eets] and rarely [sees] in [her] brief period of service, [have] no idea why [she's] been sent to them" (17), indicating that Canning's idea for recruiting Serena has to do not with her intellectual assets, but with the possibility to be able to reshape her into whatever is needed. Ksiezopolska points out she "[grows] slightly more sophisticated in her reading habits, after her affair with [Canning]: she begins to appreciate descriptions as well as plots and characters." (Ksiezopolska 418) Serena is portrayed as having a chameleonic nature for all her lovers, and all her roles - not merely in MI5, or as a romantic and sexual partner, but also as a reader.

This way, Serena likes Tony best when "he [is] back in his clothes, with his fine parting restored … settling [her] in an armchair, deftly drawing the cork from a Pinot Grigio, directing [her] reading" (23), she mentions "when exams were over Tony said he was taking charge of [her] reading. Enough novels!" (25) because Tony is, in fact, "appalled by [her] ignorance of what he call[s] '[their] island story'" and Serena, naturally, "submit[s] to the tutelage" (25). As Chalupský points out, therefore, "[h]er short but intense affair with Tony opens completely new horizons to her. By making her

read newspapers and historical books, then think about them, discuss their contents and express her opinions on current issues he introduces her to a world which differs from her previous existence in all respects." (Chalupský 104) She begins reading on historical events according to Tony's considerations, she is "required to read up on the Congress of Vienna of 1815" and while she originally "impress[es] him with [her] speed-reading" she then "disappoint[s] him" as she cannot "answer his questions clearly, [she isn't] retaining information" (25). A similar episode takes place the day she and Tom Haley meet for the second time. As they stand "in a corner of a basement of a second-hand bookshop in St Martin's Court, with an old hardback Collected Thomas opened by Tom for [her] at the right page" she "[o]bediently" reads the poem Haley wants her to read. (206) However, Tom proclaims she "can't have read it in three seconds" and requires she "[t]ake it slowly.'" (206) Directed by Tom, she reads the poem one more time, and another, until he proclaims "[t]here's nothing wrong with [her] memory" but what she needs is to "remember the feelings." (207) Both situations mirror each other in that in both, Tony and Tom, attempt to improve Serena's reading, not only in her technique but also in her choice of subject matter. In both cases, she develops a sexual relationship with the person guiding her reading, showing that "…while the Cecilia of the 1930s is a progressive woman with independent if not feminist ideas and opinions, the Serena of the 1970s, the heyday of the second-wave feminist movement, is rather a passive creature easily suggestible by others' strong personalities, confident and worldly men above all." (Chalupský 108)

Furthermore, the relationships Serena builds with the men that guide her reading also allow McEwan to experiment with the idea that there is a tint of the erotic in the way Serena approaches language, literature, and guidance. Hutcheon asserts this eroticism is something inherent in the literary relationship between text and reader:

> [a]ll fictional texts attempt to tantalize, to seduce the reader. As Roland Barthes has suggested in both *S/Z* and the more recent *Le Plaisir du texte*, they also seek to escape the desired possession. The essentially erotic relationship of text and reader or of writer and reader is one of the overtly thematized subjects of John Barth's *Chimera*. But the erotic model can be actualized covertly as well. The act of reading becomes both literally sensual and metaphorically sexual in its process of uniting "all the polarities" in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* 33)

In this case, McEwan also extrapolates it to the author of a text and its reader. In the instance regarding Tom, right after he guides her reading of the poem, he "t[akes] the book from [her] hands as [they kiss]" (207) after which Serena is immediately invaded by thoughts concerning Tom's relation to his own fictional characters, remembering "that when Neil Carder kissed the mannequin for the very first time, her lips were hard and cool from a lifetime of trusting no one" (207), which prompts her to make her "lips go soft" (207), modifying both her reading and her sexual behaviours for her preconceived idea of Tom. This is an eroticism reminiscent of her time with Tony, although with Tony she indicates that his approach towards sex becomes too self-involved for her liking. (22-23)

As her affair with Canning progresses, she mentions she is orally examined on the texts she is reading "during walks in the woods, and over glasses of wine after the suppers he cook[s]." (26) As Walker suggests, "[u]nder Tony's tutelage, her cold warrior instincts are refined not by reading novels but by reading the *Times* every day, in addition to works by Winston Churchill and G. M. Trevelyan. Resenting Tony's persistence in being her teacher, rather than solely her lover, Serena takes pride in what she discovers on her own about "our island story"" (Walker 498) Therefore, her time with Tony successfully indoctrinates her into reading non-fiction in an analytic way, realising the newspapers' "prose resembl[e] a chess problem. So [she is] hooked." (26)

Serena is then recruited for MI5 after an interview arranged by Canning, which she claims to accept because "[a] chance ha[s] come [her] way and [she is] taking it.

Tony want[s] it so [she] wants it and [she] ha[s] little else going on" (28, emphasis added). In fact, the weekends leading up to her interview (interestingly, her time with Tom Haley is also restricted to weekends, once more mirroring both relationship patterns), feel like "an extended tutorial in how to live, how and what to eat and drink, how to read newspapers and hold up [her] end of an argument and how to 'gut' a book." (30) Later, during her interview for MI5, she fabricates a self "derived entirely from [her] summer with him" (40) that will please the organisation. Tony's tutelage, one conducted mainly through analytical reading and drinking fine wine, allows her to notice she "ha[s] never in [her] life been so clever as during that interview", because she realises she now can "give [her] ignorance on any matter a certain shine. [Her] voice [is] Tony's." (41) In fact, after Tony puts an end to their relationship, she says she feels "emptied out, [she has] no idea what [she is] supposed to be doing or where [she] should go" (43). As Walker points out,

> [i]t is only fitting that Tony's last name, Canning, conjures the adjective "cunning" and that he continues to haunt Serena even after he vanishes mysteriously from her life, for the power dynamic of their relationship anticipates the problematic of deception threading through the rest of the narrative. In *Sweet Tooth*, duplicity operates at several levels—state, personal, political, sexual, and textual—as a way of emphasizing the interconnectedness of ethical challenges to all of these realms. (Walker 499)

Tony will continue to 'haunt' her throughout the entire narrative, as his story with MI5 intertwines with Serena's,[18] but also because she continues to be affected by their time together. Consequently, she chooses the job Canning has carefully manufactured her for because she wants to "have order and purpose in [her] life and some independence" (45), interestingly aware accepting the job could be perceived as a masochist decision given that, "as a rejected lover [she deserves] no more than to be an office skivvy" but still there is "something pleasantly tragic about" it (45).

[18] See Ksiezopolska for a more detailed analysis of Tony's trajectory in the novel.

In the episodes described above, Serena displays an eagerness to be indoctrinated. From an early age she has found that her identity was marked by external events to herself, be it in the behaviours she adopted from her home environment, the decisions taken for her by her family, or the decisions taken for her as she starts getting involved in personal interrelationships. She is depicted as seeing reading and literature to have become her form of escapism from a world in which she does not entirely fit in, and thus she has been consuming all sorts of literary material as a means of obtaining hurried answers to understand the world, as a direct path to be pleased in her need to understand herself. It is not being suggested Serena lives literature the way Briony does, or even the same way Robbie and Cecilia do, in fact, McEwan creates characters that experience language and literature in strikingly different ways, showing an individuality to the reading experience. However, it is interesting that Serena, who considers authors to have the ability to become Gods, as she does with Solzhenitsyn, allows the men that guide her reading habits to also guide her identity. Due to the fact she does not have a clearly defined identity, she will shift and adapt to the needs others present for her, just as she is drawn to encounter beings that have a wish to shape her. Canning wants to create an MI5 agent and sees something in her that would propel her to be shaped into one. Haley sees malleability in Serena, the possibility to shape her life and identity into that of a fictional character. While Canning might do so out of a paternal need, to show her the ropes of the world and of professional opportunity, Haley does it through a violent narratorial act.[19]

[19] The issue of gender is here rather quite interesting as well. It is inevitable to notice Serena is a female always being shaped by men, albeit she does show predilection for Shirley for a brief period of time, she tends to form bonds with men she considers to be superior to her, just as her favourite novelists tend to be older men. In this way, it could be argued that in *Sweet Tooth*, "[McEwan] illustrates traditional male and female gender roles and unequal relationships and, by presenting extreme male attitudes of control, domination and exploitation toward women, he criticizes the patriarchal ideologies created and encouraged by contemporary society." (Buzarina-Tihenea 59)

Serena unquestioningly follows their guidelines precisely because as male role figures that have read in different ways than she has, she believes they are more equipped for guiding her than she is herself. To Serena, both Canning and Haley can be perceived as Gods, as they are capable of creation (Canning in the non-fictional, socio-political realm and Haley in the fictional one). Interestingly, it would seem that Serena does not allow for identifying her identity as intrinsically postmodern and fragmented, composed of many different sources simultaneously. Serena's identity seems to be built chronologically, easily disregarding what has shaped her in the past to focus on what (or whom) is guiding her in the present. While Tony continues to be a figure she goes back to in her mind, she recognises that at some point Tom is the one that occupies that space for her, later stating, in fact, "[o]nce I would have asked myself what Tony would have done. No use now." (313) Thus, the moment in which Serena becomes entangled with someone new, the past role models expire.

One of the reasons Canning might have wanted to recruit Serena, or saw something in her that had potential, is exemplified when Serena describes her work environment. Discussing her co-worker Shirley Shilling, she states "[s]ome girls were snobbish about Shirley, but none of us was as worldly and cool" (51), she describes all of the other girls (a group within which she includes herself) as "presentable at court to Queen Elizabeth as debutantes"... "[a] few [are] the daughters or nieces of serving or retired officers", "[t]wo-thirds of [them] ha[ve] degrees from older universities." (51) Coincidentally, all of them speak "in identical tones, [they are] socially confident", "there [is] always a trace of an apology in [their] style, a polite impulse to defer, especially when one of the senior officers, one of the ex-colonial types, [comes] through" (51). Shirley however stands out because she is "unapologetically loud and, being in no mood to marry, look[s] at everyone in the eye", she also "laugh[s]

boisterously at her own anecdotes" and, of course, Serena believes "[it] may have helped her, not to have been threateningly beautiful" (51). Serena therefore describes the rest of women workers as replicas built from the same mould, their manners and composure originating in their social background, and they all seem to have been recruited (except for Shirley) due to their conservative family background, adequate educational context, and looks. These are women, therefore, eroded of an identity, perfect for reshaping to fit the needs and remodelling of the intelligence service.

Furthermore, one of the things that attracts Serena to Shirley is the fact that she writes, but interestingly, Serena's interest in her never mirrors her interest for Tony or Tom. She mentions she finds "the notebook she carr[ies] with her always" to be exotic, "a childish pink plastic-covered thing with a short pencil tucked into the spine", where she writes "tiny stories about stories" or "just thoughts" (52). Serena is drawn to writers, because she considers they have an inner knowledge and understanding of the world (as well as an ability to create) she does not possess but wants to be privy to. When she attempts to start a conversation with Shirley regarding reading, Shirley does not entirely participate, only "listen[s] politely, even intently" but "never offer[s] an opinion of her own", which leads Serena to deduce that she either does not do "any reading at all" or, alternatively, she is "protecting a big secret" (52). Serena consequently proves to be impressionable when it comes to people capable of committing the writing act, something she tried her hand at college, writing for '?*Quis*?', but that somewhat failed the moment she started to be "earnest" (10-11) in her attempt at sticking to a mimetic act of writing, of reproducing reality to the page. Serena understands in writing there should be a secretive approach towards life, a language of codes, one that because she cannot reproduce, she admires from afar.

Under Shirley's wing, Serena seems to also adapt to her tastes ("I surprised myself by developing a passing taste for this racy, unpretentious music" (54)) but of course, Serena is "content to be mute at [Shirley's] side as she [takes] over" (54), proving Serena needs constant guidance from somebody else to fulfil her identity, especially if that someone is capable of producing and writing words in secret codes into a notebook or turn them into a story. It is also interesting to consider that later in the novel, once Serena has already been guided by Tom and has become his reader, as she encounters Shirley again, she is no longer influenced by her charm. When Shirley is telling her about her writing, Serena is no longer mesmerised or interested in her, in fact, she keeps focusing on how much Shirley has changed physically, rather than attempting to read her work or to have a conversation about her writing, as she did before (299, 340). This is perhaps because, just as it happens with Tony, by the time Shirley becomes an author, Serena has already found her ideal author (Tom) and consequently has no need to invest her time in any other kind of literature. She does not need to be shaped, as she is being shaped by Tom, and therefore Shirley no longer holds the same spell over her.

When Serena receives a letter from Jeremy Mott letting her know Canning has passed away, she feels frustrated at there not being a "posthumous letter, explaining, remembering something between [them], saying goodbye, acknowledging [her], giving [her] something to live with" (58), aware that letters, language that is written down and sealed, equal a cementing of facts. It hurts her not to have anything that can continue to guide her, something she can cling to. Through Serena, the idea that in texts there is truth, just as that in texts there is identity, is exemplified. After Tony's death, she attempts to find any trace of her that has been put down in writing, an indication that

she *exists*. This is an idea that repeats itself in the text when Serena will (consciously) become fictional through Tom's writing.

When Tony passes away, looking for traces of herself, she first goes to "Holborn public library, where back issues of *The Times* [a]re kept, and look[s] up the obituary. Idiotically, [she] skim[s] it, scanning it for [her] name", she says that "Tony ha[d] chosen [her] profession for [her], lent [her] his woods, ceps, opinions, worldliness. But [she] ha[s] no proof, no tokens, no photograph of him, no letters, not even a scrap of a note" (60). The only thing she keeps from her time with Tony, other than her memories, is a "carelessly donated bookmark" (60). Serena believes identity can only be ascertained and verified when it is put down in writing, hence why she looks for any trace of her in published material or unofficial documents such as scraps of paper.[20] Perhaps because of that, Haley will know how to make her happy eventually, by writing her down entirely, by creating a narrative that is only about her. He will do so in order to allow Serena to know she exists, although she might only exist through textual representation.

In MI5, her attentions turn briefly to Max Greatorex, who sparks her interest because when he sits in front of her, she can distinguish "the visible page of his notebook covered in dense loopy writing." (63) She admits he reminds her "of Jeremy and, less comfortably, of some of the undergraduate mathematicians at Cambridge, the ones who had humiliated [her] in tutorials." (63) As she surveys the way he is dressed, she notices he is "writing in brown ink" and concludes "that too would have to change." (64) As her attentions are turned to Max, she feels that "[w]hen [she isn't] with him, when [she is] out in the evening with Shirley, [she feels] incomplete and restless", and

[20] See footnote 16.

while she admits she has “a taste for a certain ill-dressed, old-fashioned kind of man (Tony [doesn’t] count), big-boned and thin and awkwardly intelligent” (67), it is obvious that Serena needs to have someone in her life at all times that will allow her to learn, to understand the world through the other. She is incapable of understanding the world through herself. Not only that, but Serena also tends to put all her efforts into attracting men that seem to not show the same amount of reciprocal attention towards her. When she asks Max if he wants to kiss her, he replies with “[n]ot particularly” (68) and as he “dr[aws] away, [she] trie[s] to pull him back towards [her], but he resist[s]” (69). This tendency Serena shows might be mirroring the way in which readers invest more in authors than authors do onto their readers. That is to say, the author being a public figure, it becomes known to the reader in a way that cannot match the anonymity the reader enjoys. The reader is more invested because it inevitably knows more about the author, and by knowing more, even by projecting more onto the author, the reader easily becomes rejected and disappointed, as expectations are hard to match.

1.5.2.1.2 Serena and the Dislike for the Postmodern

As Serena waits for the Sweet Tooth operation to come through (a project she does not find on her own, but which is handed to her by Max, who goes as far as to “put in a good word for [her]” (72)), the reader is once more made privy to her reading habits, habits now under no supervision other than her own, after having been under the carefully constructed influence of Tony Canning. She says she keeps “up the reading in the same old style, three or four books a week”, at this point in her life, however, on “mostly modern stuff in paperbacks [she buys] from charity and second-hand shops in the High Street” (75). Once more, her peculiarly agile reading style is made reference

to, to the point that "[a]nyone watching [her] might have thought [she] was consulting a reference book" (75), which, as Alghamdi points out, points at the fact that "Serena is an anomaly, being a prodigious reader but not a scholar of literature, and this distinction is deliberate and vital." (Alghamdi 97) Now that Tony is out of the way, and Serena is in charge of her reading, she admits to doing so because she "suppose[s] [she is], in [her] mindless way, looking for something, a version of [her]self, a heroine [she] could slip inside as one might a pair of favourite old shoes." (75) She points out "it [is] her best self [she] want[s], not the girl hunched in the evenings in her junk-shop chair over a cracked spine paperback, but a fast young woman pulling open the passenger door of a sports car, leaning over to receive her lover's kiss" (75-6). Through her reading habits, Serena slightly resembles Briony in that she gradually begins to understand herself through fiction, and although she does not seem to commit any crime towards the truth or towards society (as Briony does due to her involvement with literature), she does commit a moral crime towards Haley, one she also executes in the name of fiction.

The way she behaves towards the male figures in her life is similar to the way she behaves as a reader - no doubt Serena is portrayed as a passive reader. As mentioned earlier, she shows no interest for the kind of reading she does, as long as it allows her to skip the parts she deems boring, to consequently be able to freely focus on what she can engage with in a non-intellectual way. She admits to disliking metafictional tricks, because those involve a reader engagement with the text she is not comfortable or willing to exert. In a way, Serena is portrayed as someone unaware of being shaped by literature, despite the obvious influence it has on her, and the obvious 'correction' she goes through under the writers in her life. As Alghamdi suggests, "Serena's indiscriminate reading and her ideological neutrality (…) mimics the position of the reader who is truly innocent of any influence stemming from the author's

identity, background or political stance." It is possible, therefore, that as Alghamdi asserts, Serena before Tom is a representation of "what all readers would be if the author were truly able to die." (Alghamdi 98) Nevertheless, in *Sweet Tooth* the author is not dead, and McEwan portrays an author-reader relationship in which the reader is forced to encounter metafiction despite their wish not to. Serena is forced, by Tom, not only to enjoy literature, analysing it to a higher degree, but to become a part of it, ultimately providing the message that passive readers are also part of a fabric in which active reading (that is to say, analytical reading), is key to the understanding of a text, and most importantly, key to the active engagement within literature and its nature.

Before being recruited for the Sweet Tooth operation, Serena understands she is now consciously looking for a version of herself in fiction, an alter ego that "sometimes … shimmer[s] fleetingly between the lines", "float[s] towards [her] like a friendly ghost from the pages of Doris Lessing, or Margaret Drabble or Iris Murdoch" (76), however, none of these ghosts or alter egos seem to be perfectly adequate, and as she points out, they easily disappear: "their versions [are] too educated to be [her]" (76). The only solution she can think of, the only thought that would be satisfactory enough, is for her to have in her "hands a novel about a girl in a Camden bedsit who occupi[es] a lowly position in MI5 and [is] without a man" (76). "As it turns out, the novel we are given fulfils precisely Serena's requirements: characters we can believe in, falling in and out of love and occasionally trying their hand at something else. And before the final curtain, there is a very fitting marriage proposal." (Ksiezopolska 418) The novel Serena fantasises about is the novel a real reader might be holding in their hands, and thanks to Tom Haley's metafictional twist, a novel Serena might be holding in her hands as well. Despite the fact there is a catch in Tom's fulfilling of Serena's expectations, he does provide her with her own fictionalised version through text, and therefore bestows upon

her a way to understand herself through narrative, finally grasping an alter ego long enough so it does not disappear. In this way, it could be stated that "McEwan implies, authors should not seek to exert such power over the characters they invent (…) Throughout McEwan's work, a weariness of an extreme form of (human) control indirectly reflects an anxiety about authorship itself more precisely about authorial manipulation." (Walker 499) It could be argued having Serena acknowledge several times during the narrative metafiction is a literary technique she abhors, the means through which Tom attempts to allow Serena to reach such personal fulfilment might not be what she had in mind when she hoped to be fictionally immortalised, which inevitably might be linked to the vengeful nature of Tom's approach towards his writing.

Serena "crave[s] a form of naive realism" and as such, she pays "special attention" to any form of veracity she can find in a text that will allow further identification or empathy (76). She looks for streets, items of clothing, "real public people" and with that she thinks "she ha[s] a measure, [she can] gauge the quality of the writing by its accuracy, by the extent to which it align[s] with [her] own impressions" (76). It would seem Serena does not understand the difference between truth and truth in fiction referred to by Currie above. Serena looks for truth in fiction and therefore she is not "impressed by those writers (…) who infiltrat[e] their own pages as part of the cast, determined to remind the poor reader that all the characters and even themselves [are] pure inventions and that there [is] a difference between fiction and life" (76).

She is sure the only people in "danger of confusing the two" are writers themselves (76). McEwan here is once more incorporating criticism into his fictional artefact by commenting on the nature of the reading process which is inconspicuously influenced by the use of metafiction. It would almost seem like McEwan is in fact

reacting to the criticism and backlash he got from specific readers from *Atonement,* who believed the twist at the end of the novel broke the author-reader contract.[21] McEwan depicts Serena as

> believ[ing] that writers [are] paid to pretend, and where appropriate[,] should make use of the real world, the one we all [share], to give plausibility to whatever they ha[ve] made up. So, no tricksy haggling over the limits of their art, no showing disloyalty to the reader by appearing to cross and recross in disguise the borders of the imaginary. No room in the books [she] like[s] for the double agent. (77)

Serena's firm belief in this breach between author and reader trust comes from the way in which she idolises writers and literature, from her approach to the written, published text discussed above. For someone that turns to literature in a quest towards the truth, encountering this kind of fictional realm in which authors can modify reality at their will and make the process of fiction obvious to the reader, metafiction becomes a disservice. However, McEwan is here providing Serena with an inner contradiction. Because not only is it necessary to make use of such metafictional techniques to obtain the kind of identification she so seeks (as Haley ultimately perceives and executes), but it seems to be inherently contradictory to consider authors as Gods while they are considered to be "paid to pretend" (77). There is a conflict at the root of Serena's beliefs on authorship. 'Gods' cannot be paid to behave as humans want them to. If authors are God-like, the reader should not have the kind of power Serena wants to obtain from reading.

Furthermore, Serena identifies herself with an older generation of readers. She distrusts authors like Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Julio Cortázar or William Gaddis (ironically, all male) and claims to be "like people of [her] parents' generation who not only dislik[e] the taste and smell of garlic, but distrus[t] all those

[21] In interview with Antonio Lozano for the Spanish release of *Sweet Tooth* (presented by the publishing house Anagrama in the Jaume Fuster library in Barcelona in 2013), McEwan claimed to have received dozens of angry letters over the years in regards to the plot-twist ending of *Atonement.*

who consum[e] it." (77). Serena does not believe in postmodern identities, because postmodernity is equipped with self-awareness and hyper knowledge, whereas she is not even aware of what her own identity is composed of. In this way, the novel "seems to apostrophize the reader of the novel as someone who, despite all the sophistication and awareness of postmodern techniques in literature, will still lust after the sweetness of the conventional happy ending." (Ksiezopolska 418)

1.5.2.1.3 Visualising the Reading Act

The reading process is not only presented through the understanding of Serena's habits when it comes to choosing novels, or how curiously fast she reads, it is also represented through the physical act of reading. Whereas in *Atonement* there are several moments in which a character sits down to write[22], in *Sweet Tooth* the reader mostly witnesses characters in the act of reading and learning. Once more, this could be key to the understanding of what connects both novels. Whereas McEwan utilised *Atonement* to explore authorship in full, in *Sweet Tooth* he incorporates the exploration of the nature of readership. Whilst in *Atonement* his interest was invested entirely on the author and its preoccupation with the reader's response, indicating a tendency to allow for the figure of the author to rise as the most powerful figure within the literary act, in *Sweet Tooth*, he revises his previous theories regarding authorship, this time incorporating the key aspect of the author-reader relation, focusing on the specific effect the reception of metafictional techniques shall have on the reading act. Thus, as mentioned above, McEwan manages to incorporate issues of criticism within his novels, producing his

[22] Mostly, this chapter has covered the ways in which Briony does so, but it is also interesting to see Robbie's process of creating the letter he writes for Cecilia.

theory and views on not only postmodern criticism but also on authorship and reader-response criticism.

As mentioned above, the physical act of reading is also questioned in the narrative. Not only does the reader know what kind of material Serena usually reads, or how often she does so, the reader is also made aware of where she purchases her novels (usually in second-hand bookshops), or that she usually reads in an armchair for hours at a time. She is also taught, by Canning and Haley, to treat books with the care their value deserves. For instance, upon finding out she leaves "books lying around open and face down" (77) which ruins their spine, Canning urges her to use a bookmark (and gifts her one, as previously mentioned, becoming the only piece of memorabilia she has from her late lover), Alghamdi points out this is a reflection which shows "it is clear that even the act of reading (and leaving books open at the spine) tampers with the innocent reaction of the next reader; this is the meaning behind Professor's gift to Serena of a bookmark, a device with which the neutrality of the text might be protected." (Alghamdi 98) Notwithstanding, Serena has no regard for neutrality, as she treats her books physically just as she treats them intellectually: she consumes them, handling them as disposable objects in which she attempts to find information that seems elusive. She does not have bookshelves, her books are "in piles against the wall, divided between the read and the unread" (79), a further indication that she shows no interest in the emotional or even economic value of the objects she consumes. However, just as Tony can amend her careless and superficial reading habits, he also manages to improve the way in which she physically treats the objects she has purchased, allowing her to understand there is more to the reading act than an irrelevant release of temporary pleasure and instant transmission of inconsequential information. Serena, thus, with time understands that just as writers, readers have "superstitions and little rituals" (78).

Most interestingly, Serena will learn about the issue further when Tom is able to continue to shape her reading habits, by forcing her to understand the book he eventually writes about her life cannot be disposed of in the same way she usually disposes of books. In fact, in the coda of the novel, as Tom goes over his motives behind the writing of *Sweet Tooth*, he will also exemplify to Serena the arduous process of research and what it represents to write a novel, forcing her to acknowledge the amount of work that goes beyond the creation of fiction, and hence to understand it is not fitting for her, a reader, to be careless when it comes to understanding the importance of books, be it physically or emotionally.

Once again, the text creates a complicated boundary between reality and fiction in that character and author meet, but in this case the character is also the reader, adding another complex layer to the blend. Tom behaves as the God-like author figure that Serena seeks from authors, providing her the touch of veracity she is on the lookout for from texts. Notwithstanding, Serena can only exist, and only does exist, through Tom's narrative. In the text, her conception is depicted thus: "[i]n a sense, this was when the story began, at the point at which I entered the office and had my mission explained." (100) Not only is it suggested that her existence can only be tied to Tom's, in the meeting with Sweet Tooth, she feels to be speaking differently, acknowledging she is using phrases she has never used beforehand. Just as Tony shaped her behaviour and she spoke through his voice during her first interview for MI5, the presence of Tom in the narrative, (re)writing her past, also allows her to become somebody else. This someone other might be understood in different forms: it might be that the someone she becomes eventually, through Tom's writing, is actually a faithful representation of who Serena really is, or it may, alternatively, be that she has accepted to be Tom's fictional

version because it mimics her own self, or she might even accept Tom's version because she is incapable of creating a self on her own.[23]

1.5.2.2 Tom Haley, the Author

1.5.2.2.1 Tom and Authorial Intention

The first information provided to the reader regarding Tom Haley[24] is that Thomas Haley, "or T. H. Haley as he prefers it in print" holds a "Degree in English at the University of Sussex" where he "got a first (…) studied for an MA in international relations under Peter Calvocoressi [and is] now doing a doctorate in literature" (109) on "The Faerie Queene" by Edmund Spenser (212). Haley is appealing for the Sweet Tooth operation as he has had short stories in *Encounter*, the *Paris Review*, the *New American Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and the *Transatlantic Review* published along with 'some' journalism which the team refers to as difficult "to track down" (111). Tom has had work rejected from Penguin, the *New Yorker,* and the *London Magazine*, as well as from *Esquire* (111). All in all, Tom is presented as a promising young writer at the very beginning of his literary career. This links *Sweet Tooth* to *Atonement* in that, while the

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[23] See Ksiezopolska for a more in-depth exploration of such a conundrum. For instance, she states that "[e]ven though we may have come to like Serena and even – against our better judgement – sympathize with her, when she finally disappears into the already read by us pages of the novel, which closes in on itself, elegantly twisting to bite its tail, we feel disoriented but pleased. Perhaps we even admit that there was always something slightly unsteady, unconvincing about Serena." (Ksiezopolska 418)

[24] The main purpose of this section is to explore Tom Haley from a rather complex standpoint, which is through the eyes of Serena and how she perceives him. This endeavour becomes complicated as, in reality, Tom Haley is the disguised narrator of the story, which would mean that he is actually describing himself through what he considers to be Serena's thoughts. As in the end of the narrative Haley presents himself as the narrator of the story, it is then made obvious Serena Frome is not a first-person intradiegetic narrator, but rather a fictionalisation. Despite the complexity of the issue, my analysis allows to uncover a rather narcissistic upheaval coming from Haley, one where, it is utterly unclear which impressions would belong to the real Serena (the one who actively communicated such impressions to Haley), and which are meant to be entirely fictionalised for Haley's own amusement. The use of metafiction, in this case, plants doubt into the events that have been narrated. This is due to the fact that at the end of the novel Tom proposes Serena to rewrite the novel together, but it is never made clear in the text which parts may have been rewritten and which may have not. For that reason, in possible acts of re-reading, the reader may possibly become aware that there is no other option but to surrender and accept Serena as an unreliable narrator, perchance even ignoring the knowledge that Haley is the inscribed author of the narrative.

reader does not get to see any of Tom's background, it does get a glimpse at the beginning stages of Tom's career as an author. In fact, McEwan fills the voids that were not alluded to for Briony, focusing in this case on Tom's rise as an author and the process of getting work published for the first time, something altogether overlooked in *Atonement*. In *Atonement*, in fact, what the reader obtains is a panoramic view of Briony's authorship, from her thirst to become one in the first few chapters, to her first rejection for *Horizon,* to Briony as a fully-fledged and (re)known author at the very end of her career. With Tom, McEwan fills in the blanks of the publishing and writing processes by providing information on the arduous process of writing a first novella and getting it published. Thence, the reader knows nothing about Tom's childhood or his elder years, but it gets to know almost everything about the way in which he comes to encounter public life as an author.

Through the act of highlighting the work of the Foundation (the false organisation behind the Sweet Tooth operation) McEwan provides a further commentary on what is behind authorial intent. While he does not suggest Tom to be ideologically or politically affected by Serena or MI5, he does delve into the world of organisations such as Sweet Tooth, the goal of which is to cultivate writers by approaching them at the beginning of their careers and providing financial support when they need it most (107). The organisation is aware that "it's not straightforward to deduce an author's views from his novels" (108) which prompts them to look for specific profiles of writers, encouraging "the right people" (108), but continuing to be aware that it is a slow-burn process which may take years to provide any kind of result (108). What Sweet Tooth does, therefore, is to provide a more comfortable environment for writers to be able to write at leisure, choosing writers the MI5 believes might be

suitable for their ideological needs, even though they may not be influencing their ideas directly.

It is pointed out that the reason Tom is still to get his work published is because he has mostly written short stories, which makes it difficult for an author to establish itself within a specific literary circle: "[s]hort stories don't sell. Publishers usually do these [short story] collections as a favour to their well-established authors. [Tom] needs to write something longer (…) a novel takes a while and it's hard to do when you've got a full-time job." (112) The modus operandi of the Sweet Tooth operation is to attempt to modify an author's context and economic background knowing a change in their situation (as well as their writing habits) may affect creative outcome. McEwan, rather than delving into political and ideological matters, provides commentary on the nature of authorship: in this case, who would be responsible for authorial intent? Is it the mind of the author alone? Perhaps not: issues of privilege in class, gender, race, historical and sociocultural backgrounds, and most importantly, a comfortable economic writing environment are also key in the process of creation. Elements which might not be discussed and certainly not considered in *Atonement*, where authorial *drive* and *inspiration* are the only forces that seem to matter, are explored at leisure in *Sweet Tooth*. The Sweet Tooth operation, therefore, works as a commentary on old forms of patronage, perhaps even an indication that patronage is not lost but alive and kicking, yet not to be openly recognised. For that reason, the fact the Sweet Tooth operation is a spying enterprise is even more ironic. Nonetheless, during the experience of being Sweet Tooth's 'patronee' Haley finds himself in situations of doubt, as will be exemplified below: he experiences writer's block, doubts he is taking the right path, and even considers returning to academic writing (260). His authorship differs widely from

Briony's, even if it resembles it, because his economic background affects him in ways Briony never has to worry about.

During the first Sweet Tooth meeting Serena attends, one of the agents asks: "[a]re we expecting to have at least a little influence over what any of these people write?" (112), to which Peter Nutting, the leader of the operation, replies: it "would never work. [They] have to trust in [their] choices and hope Haley and the rest turn out well and become, you know, important. This is a slow-burn thing (…) as for the stuff itself, *they have to feel free*" (112-3, emphasis added). Walker highlights that "*Sweet Tooth* pursues the ethical and political stakes of covert authorship by drawing attention to the ideological pressures, disguised as freedom, that the British intelligence agency Military Intelligence, Department 5 (MI5) exerts on the writer it recruits through the propaganda scheme codenamed "Sweet Tooth.""'(Walker 495) These authors are expected, by MI5 and Sweet Tooth, to feel *free*, without questioning the origin of their income, to feel they are not being influenced by any external forces in their creative needs, but rather handpicked due to their genius. McEwan herein presents an idea of *performed* freedom experienced by the author as a public figure. This false freedom is a key issue highlighted from Tom's authorship, one that might become traumatic, as will be explored below.

In reality, Tom is not free to write whatever he pleases, because he writes under social circumstances he would never have achieved had Sweet Tooth not intervened.[25]

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[25] It is also interesting to note, following the train of thought from the previous footnote, that Tom's intentions are never quite clear. The reader may observe the descriptions of Tom provided by the Sweet Tooth operatives and Serena's first impressions of him as both author and person, as well as the version presented by himself in the Coda of the novel. As Ksiezopolska states, the "Tom that is seen through "Serena's" eyes is quite different from the Tom who is revealed to us through his final letter to Serena. Throughout the narrative, the readers were convinced that Tom was highly likable, humorous, and intelligent companion, gentle and considerate lover who is yet highly competent in sexual matters, and also a brilliant, innovative, and sophisticated writer. This highly flattering image is contradicted by what we learn from him at the end." (Ksiezopolska 421) The fact the reader is given indications of his personality in this last chapter is interesting (and easily contrasting of *Atonement*) in that, at the beginning of the novel, Tom is introduced as a full-fledged author, the public figure referred to by Foucault, based on his literary

As Walker further points out, “[t]o some extent then, McEwan’s novel establishes a parallel between writing as a cultural and political act and intelligence operations such as “Sweet Tooth” so as to suggest that writing too can be driven a will to power.” (Walker 495) Not only that, the creative outcome of his time under the operation leads to his writing about the operation itself, triggering a conundrum in that Tom ends up exposing the Sweet Tooth operation and somewhat benefitting from it - further than if he had continued to write in this performed freedom. Ultimately, Tom becomes a published, powerful author *because* of the existence of the foundation, despite his reservations towards it. Showing that, precisely due to the economic gain as well as the inspirational gain he obtains from his encounter with MI5, he has been able to produce literature he would have been otherwise unable to produce.

Tom’s authorial intent evolves throughout the narrative. Clearly influenced by the Foundation, as just exposed, his rebellion is one which also involves personal revenge towards his lover. For that reason, despite the impact of the operation, Tom’s finished product, his published manuscript, is not one which is dictated by MI5 (albeit it would have been impossible without its presence) but one in which he aims to achieve a very specific end-result. Therefore, the novel, in its exploration of the effects of the Sweet Tooth operation, explores “…literature’s potential function of shaping public opinion when used, or abused, for political and ideological purposes.” (Chalupský)

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persona and public achievements, whereas at the end of the novel, the reader understands the person behind the public self, becoming privy to the private side of his identity, one not only driven by revenge. Tom’s rising as a diluted form of God-like author will be explored both in the last section of Chapter Two and the last section of Chapter Three.

1.5.2.3 Tom, Serena, and the Author-Reader Connection

Tom and Serena's relationship develops through text. Easily comparable to Robbie and Cecilia's relationship (in that it almost originates by a discussion of literature and develops through text and letters, where their one sexual intercourse act takes place in a library), Tom and Serena first communicate through letters, but Serena is already familiar with Tom by the time that happens. She has already created an idea of who he is through his literature, attributing him with the personality traits of his characters, assuming his demeanour because of his writing style and bestowing him with a specific authorial intention because of the subject matters his literature is composed of. This way, not only is their emotional and sexual relationship dissected throughout the narrative, but their relationship concurrently emerges as a metaphor for the chronicling of the process in which Serena *becomes* Tom's ideal reader and character. In point of fact, Serena sees the process of getting acquainted with Tom's writing as the moment in which her "dream ha[s] come true - [she] is studying English, not maths", she describes "settl[ing] [her]self into [her] armchair, angl[ing her] new reading lamp and t[aking] up [her] bookmark fetish." (115) She also has "a pencil at the ready, as though preparing for a tutorial" (115), then, she points out she remembers "those first hours with his fiction as among the happiest in [her] time at Five" as all of her "needs beyond the sexual m[eet] and merg[e]: [she is] reading (…) for a higher purpose that [gives] her professional pride" (116).

The formatting and structure used by McEwan in the moments in which Serena becomes acquainted with Tom's work will be explored in Chapter Three, as the use of metafiction is key to understanding the connection between the process of reading and writing, along with the connection established between Thomas H. Haley and Ian

McEwan itself, but what is interesting to address at this point is the way in which Serena approaches the work emotionally. She lets the reader know how she *feels* during the reading experience as well as how she *connects* characters and situations to her own history (for instance by immediately and "naturally" "project[ing her] father into the role" of the Bishop in Haley's 'This is Love' (117)).

Serena guides the real reader through her own reading of Tom's texts, by creating a mixture of paraphrasing, summarising, direct citing and incorporating of her own thoughts, all blended into the same text, adopting a unique form of narrative. She goes as far as to proclaim to be mesmerised by an asterisk and attempting to understand its function within the text (120). Most importantly, it is her musings as a *reader* that define what her relationship with Tom will be. She is completely at his mercy: connecting a character to her father, she becomes attached to the story, creating her own assumptions on what should happen next and being surprised when it does (or does not). She reiterates she is "the basest of readers. All [she] want[s] [is her] own world, and [her]self in it, given back to [her] in artful shapes and accessible form" (121). She admires Tom because from her very first contact with his language and narrative, she is given what she expects as a reader: a form of mimesis and identification with the text that transcends to the personal. This is part of the author-reader contract, one Serena blindly participates in. Jean-Paul Sartre calls this 'a pact', in that "reading is a pact of generosity between author and reader. Each one trusts the other; each one counts on the other, demands of the other as much as he demands of himself". (Sartre as qtd in Booth, *The Company We Keep* 200) When she begins reading Tom, she immediately trusts him and his writing, perhaps precisely due to the pull she feels towards his characters, one of which reminds her of both Max and Tony, as she declares that while staring "[i]nto the asterisk. Haley ha[s] got under [her] skin", she feels "violated by him, and homesick

and curious, all at once" (121). She considers that the character she feels attracted to, the one reminiscent of her past lovers, is a "necessary" kind of man, "clever, amoral, inventive, destructive (...) single-minded, selfish, emotionally cool, coolly attractive" (121), and she prefers this kind of man to the "love of Jesus" (121). Without this kind of 'necessary' men, she considers the whole world "would still be living in mud huts, waiting to invent the wheel" (121), and while she is aware those are barely feminist thoughts, she feels no shame in her attraction towards these men, going as far as wondering if Tom Haley, because of his ability for language, is also one of them. What is interesting from this excerpt is to understand Serena's approach to Tom is highly reminiscent of all her relationships until the moment, in that by only reading one of his short stories, she already positions him to a God-like level. The pull she feels towards 'these kind of men' (as she refers to them), is almost one informed by their likeness to that of God, hence why she attributes human and civilised progress to their existence. That is why, upon her first reading of 'This is Love', Serena finds that despite her attempts at grabbing a pen and trying to approach her reading act in an analytical and overall professional fashion, she cannot make a single remark about the text (121).

Interestingly, there is a layer of identification between Serena and the female character described in the first short story. Jean Alise, the character within the story, is "profoundly" affected by the speech she hears Edmund give, it has an "even devastating" effect on her (122). "She loves its message and understands its truth, she loves the poetry and is powerfully drawn to the man who speaks it. She stays up all that night wondering what to do. She doesn't actually want to, but she's falling in love" (122). Upon finishing the story, she proclaims Tom "seem[s] too worldly, too knowing" because he knows "what it [is] to love a destructive woman afflicted by mood storms" as much as he knows that "the wealthy stoc[k] their moats with carp and the

downtrodden k[eep] their stuff in supermarket trolleys" (126). However, the most interesting part about Serena's self-identification is that she attributes Tom's writing to "memory" rather than "invention" (126). Serena has grave issues differentiating between author and narrator, because she feels that if this story is indeed a 'memory', she feels "belittled or outclassed", she even asks herself if she is jealous of the affair she has read about (126) and compares the reading of the story to "a peculiar form of wilful narrative sadism" (127).

Plagued by thoughts involving her first meeting with Tom, she understands new depths of the reading process, perhaps aware her confusion between author and narrator might be heightened with the impending meeting of the author itself: "I had been inside a stranger's mind. Vulgar curiosity made me wonder if every sentence confirmed or denied or masked a secret intention. I felt closer to Tom Haley than I would if he'd been a colleague in the Registry these past nine months…" (127), however, she is aware of the fact she is facing her own impression of the reading act and the connection it creates between author and reader. She acknowledges she does not fully know what drives her to assume the identification between author and narrator, stating she needs "an instrument, some measuring device, the narrative equivalent of movable compass points with which to gauge the distance between Haley and Edmund Alfredus" (127) because there is a plethora of possibilities for interpretation. As she notes, "[t]he author may have been keeping his own demons at arm's length. Perhaps Alfredus (…) represented the kind of person Haley feared he could become (…) Haley might be a prig, even a religious prig, or he could be a man with many fears." (127) Serena, therefore, and thanks to Tom's narrative, begins to incorporate issues of literary criticism into her reading acts. While she has already declared her distrust for metafictional tricks and she has proclaimed authors should be regarded as Gods, now she understands there needs to

be a way towards distinguishing the differences between the author's own thoughts and personality and their narrator's, but she does not yet seem to grasp authors may write from memory, from invention, about themselves and their fears, or those of others, but they might as well write about something completely removed from themselves. Serena's approach to authorship, as mentioned earlier, is therefore disturbingly non-postmodern.

Before her first meeting with Tom, Serena is already familiar with two of his short stories. Their first communication, however, takes place in the form of a letter, one Serena must write but that must be vetted by many different Sweet Tooth officials. She states her draft is "submitted to Max, who ma[kes] alterations to this as well as [her] second attempt, and when at last a third [is] passed on to Peter Nutting and to Benjamin Trescott, [she] wait[s] almost three weeks for their notes" which are "incorporated" before "Max put[s] in some final touches, and [she posts] the fifth and final version five weeks after [her] first." (157) This process highly contrasts with the response sent by Tom Haley himself, "scrawled at a slant on a lined sheet torn from a notepad" which looks "deliberately insouciant." (157) The two approaches to writing collide, therefore, in that one is premeditated, edited, and revised ad nauseum, whereas the other is purposefully careless, indicating different approaches to a goal, as well as different intentions in the writing act. Be that as it may, the letters also provide the differing approaches to the meeting: while Serena follows protocol, her writing comes from a calculated interest that has already originated within her towards Haley. Tom, however, needs to play his cards right and clearly has nothing to prove.

Serena confesses to be nervous about their first meeting, "because in the past weeks [she] ha[s] *become intimate* with [her] own private version of Haley, [she has] read his thoughts on sex and deceit, pride and failure" (160, emphasis added), and goes

as far as saying they are "on terms already", terms she knows are "about to be reformed or destroyed" as "[w]hatever he [is] in reality w[ill] be a surprise and probably a disappointment" (160). Serena is therefore aware she has created a 'version' of Haley in her mind, yet she continues to believe in such a version, she believes there is a connection between them because she has had access to his *fiction*.

Tom is described as physically awkward and very feminine looking, "girlishly slender, with narrow wrists" and hands "smaller and softer than" Serena's (162). His physical appearance makes Serena wonder if she has "missed a transsexual element in the stories", and she says, "there he was, twin brother, smug vicar, smart rising Labour MP, lonely millionaire in love with an inanimate object" (162). Once more there is no possibility for Serena to differentiate between author and narrator, assuming all characters he writes about must have a piece of him, or compose him in some way, hence her transsexuality comment as well - she assumes an author pours every aspect of their identity into their writing and seems certainly shocked not to have seen any indication regarding his feminine appearance in his texts. Interestingly, she feels "confused by him" (162), as by his physical appearance it seems to be very difficult to be able to obtain more identity markers from him. She is also confused because, believing she has explored his mind prior to the encounter, his physical appearance is dislocating as it does not coincide with what she had envisioned. She also mentions that his voice, contrasting with his "delicate frame" is "deep, without regional accent, classless" (162), therefore, there is no context or social background she can attribute him with. Ironically, the lack of information provided by his accent, clothes or general physical appearance almost forces Serena to attribute him with fictional traits. Tom seems to represent a blank canvas in which any of his characters could eventually fit.

In this case, therefore, it is Serena who assumes and attributes Tom with an authorial identity that pervades above anything else. She seems incapable of seeing him for anything other than his writing. Interestingly, when she first speaks to him, she fantasises and assumes everything she says and does is being examined by Tom as "useful for a later fiction." (163) After that, their relationship and their connection as reader and author moves fast, Serena puts emphasis on moments in which a brief look into each other's eyes becomes uncomfortable, confusing, even electrifying: "[h]aving read him, knowing too well one corner of his mind, I found it hard to look him in the eye for long" (165), then "our eyes met again and I forced myself to hold on (…) [b]ut there was hesitancy in his gaze, he was about to look away, and this time the power had passed on me" (166), eventually leading to her telling him she believes his stories to be "utterly brilliant" which makes him flinch "as though someone ha[s] poked him in the chest, in the heart, and he [gives] a little gasp" (166). Aware she has "revealed his hunger for affirmation, praise, anything [she] might give. [She] guess[es] that nothing matter[s] more to him" and wonders "[h]ow could he have known if he was any good until someone confirmed it?" (167). What is being alluded to in this section is the idea that both Tom and Serena are creating a connection between author and reader while reinforcing the theory that an author needs a reader's perspective to fulfil their goal. In these sections of the novel, where the roles of Serena and Tom as reader and author are accentuated, it is interesting to position oneself from the perspective that what is transmitted in these pages is actually a joint theory, by Tom and Serena as the co-authors they eventually become, on the relationship established between reader and author. Just as Tom has found his ideal reader, Serena knows she has found her ideal author. From the beginning of their relationship both are aware they need each other in the game of fiction, and that somewhat, despite some of the discrepancies they have

regarding the techniques that should be explored (or not) within literature, their approach to authorial *intent* and its subsequent *reader-response* is one and the same: while the author is God-like, it needs a reader's perspective to fulfil its intentions.

In their first meeting, their connection already transcends to the erotic, when Tom "takes [her] fingers in his palm and stroke[s] them with his thumb, just one slow pass" (171) which Serena considers to be indicative of something more. Even though she realises something "may or may not have started" (172) between them, she already considers she "should have stayed and built on it, left with a little more", she becomes "bothered by the memory of the skin between the shirt buttons, the pale hair" and her first instinct is to take up "one of his stories to re-read" (172). Interestingly, therefore, the spark between Tom and Serena, as later corroborated, is something mutual from the get-go, and while the reader cannot know Tom's perspective, Serena seems to be drawn to him due to his writing, as she connects his physical appearance and the moment in which he caressed her hand with an act of re-reading.

After that, almost wordlessly, their connection as author and reader is cemented, as Tom writes Serena another letter, one she inspects with excitement, "pull[ing] the envelope apart like a child on Christmas Day", which, starting with "Dear Serena" already becomes "right", "more than right" (200). Tom, perhaps also aware their connection is real, this time uses a "fountain pen" (200), something that, as Serena notes, gives him a more authoritative attitude, as he wants "to impose a condition" (200). In the letter, later reproduced in the text, Tom asserts her "appreciative remarks meant a lot to [him], more than [he] can say in a note like this" (201) and not just that, he seems to have realised of the importance of the reader upon meeting her, as he says having her input would represent not "writing into a void" anymore, something he

considers “important if [he’s] starting out on a novel” (201), indicating he is aware of how much he needs her presence.

After that, Tom and Serena become a joint entity of sorts. Not only does Serena feel she has “helped bring freedom to a genuine artist”, but she also considers herself some sort of “great patro[n] of the Renaissance” (210), and Tom sees she is “a reader, and not just an empty-headed girl who care[s] nothing for poetry” (214). They go as far as to have some sort of negotiation into what is acceptable and what is not within their dynamic, once more arguing over whether metafiction, or “tricks” as Serena refers to it, are acceptable or not. Serena says she does not “like tricks, [she] like[s] life as [she knows] it recreated on the page” whereas Tom considers that “it [is not] possible to recreate life on the page without tricks.” (214)

As their relationship progresses, Serena continues to find it difficult to differentiate between her lover, the author, and the persona he adopts when he behaves as a narrator, or in other words, when he is performing his role as writer. As mentioned above, it is through Serena that the idea of Tom as an all-knowing, God-like author figure is perpetuated. She cannot “banish the thought that he [is] quietly recording [their] lovemaking for future use, that he [is] making mental notes, creating and adjusting phrases to his liking, looking out for the detail that r[ises] above the ordinary” (217). Serena cannot see beyond Tom’s authorship, ignoring, and never fully incorporating the possibility he might be anything other than an author. In fact, Serena “add[s] to [her] torments by fantasising about him reaching for a notebook and pencil from his jacket as soon as [they] are finished” having sex (217).

The reader-author connection between them is explored further and tested the moment in which Serena reads new material by Tom after having grown familiar with

his writing style (and after having established a personal relationship with him). His first novella, 'From the Somerset Levels', is "the incarnation of the ghost that [is] haunting every headline", it "depresses" Serena, because it is "…dark, (…) entirely without hope…" (228), but also because she now perceives Tom's writing differently: there is "something modish in this pessimism, it [is] merely an aesthetic, a literary mask or attitude". Moreover, Serena feels it "[isn't] really Tom, or it [is] only in the smallest part of him, and therefore it [is] insincere" (228), Serena, who has known Tom for a very brief period of time, feels entitled to his writing, she feels she knows him and his writing enough, after reading a few short stories, to know what to expect from him.

Once more this leads to the understanding of Serena as a reader which believes she is capable of knowing the 'real' author by reading the 'inscribed' author's words, someone who cannot quite differentiate between author and narrator, and someone who believes an author's identity can be discerned from their production of fiction, hence subscribing to God-like author conceptions of authorship. However, Serena is aware that as his reader, she is now "the bride who [cannot] run away" (229) and whereas he might "prove incapable of fulfilling the moment of his earliest promise", "[i]f his best work [is] already behind him" (229), Serena knows she must "stick by him, or with him, and not only out of self-interest" because she "believe[s] in him" and a "couple of weak short stories [are] not going to dislodge [her] conviction that he [is] an original voice, a brilliant mind - and [her] wonderful lover." (229) Nevertheless, she is doubtlessly disappointed. This is because Tom has somewhat breached the author-reader contract in producing something that operates outside of the pre-established rules imposed from his first stories. Iser considers that

> "author and reader are to share the game of the imagination, and indeed, the game will not work if the text sets out to be anything more than a set of governing rules. The reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive, i.e., when the text allows the reader's willingness to participate, play. There are, of course, limits to the

> reader's willingness to participate, and these will be exceeded if the text makes things too clear or, on the other hand, too obscure: boredom and overstrain represent the two poles of tolerance, and in either case the reader is likely to opt out of the game." (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 108)

Serena and Tom, up until this point were sharing this 'game of the imagination', however, in this specific case, Tom seems to have withdrawn from Serena's reader expectations. Interestingly, however, their author-reader contract, their 'pact', is far stronger than anticipated, as Serena's connection with Tom has transcended into something different, as with resolve, instead of withdrawing from this 'pact', she describes him as her "project", her "case", her "mission" and acknowledges that "[h]is art, [her] work and [their] affair [are] one", if one fails, so does the other, and if they are instead to "flourish" (229), so they will do together. Even though Tom's story shocks Serena, mostly due to its contradictory nature to what was expected by Sweet Tooth, she believes she has learned something from her time reading Tom: she now describes herself as a "good reader", one that is also "convinced [he is] making a mistake" (229). Furthermore, later on, Serena *learns* to like the novel ("I'd never liked From the Somerset Levels but I liked it now" (296)) defending it in front of Max and the Foundation (294, 332). The fact that Serena decides to stay with Tom is obviously linked to her feelings for him, but it may also be related to Wright Morris' conception of the author-reader contract, in which

> "the reader each writer wants is part and parcel of the novel's conception. His special presence is evoked in the style and texture of each line. What we call style is the explicit inclusion of some readers in, and all other readers out. For all those included in, the writer is beside himself to delight and charm to his own persuasions. Above all, he wants to *hold* them … against their desire to escape. If he so manages a pact is formed…. In this pact writer and reader are committed not to crack-thoughts, crack-downs or crack-ups, but a show of how things are in a fiction based on mutual respect." (Morris as qtd in Booth, *The Company We Keep* 157)

In this case, Tom has achieved to create such a pact with Serena in the past due to his past narratives, and so she decides to stick with him despite her disappointment because

she is tied to him by both, her emotional connection with him and the unspoken literary bond that has formed between them.

In her role as reader, Serena conjointly becomes co-creator of Tom's fiction. Not only is she a key player as a character, in the novel that eventually becomes *Sweet Tooth*, but she also performs the role of co-creator as a reader by giving meaning to Tom's texts. On a specific occasion she goes as far as *editing* his work. After explaining to him a maths problem, one Tom has great difficulty grasping the logic of (237-8), he feels inspired enough to incorporate it into a story. The story, 'Probable Adultery', allows Serena to understand, at a "stroke that it [i]s flawed, built on specious assumptions, unworkable parallels, hopeless mathematics." (243) In short, Tom has not "understood [her] or the problem at all", however, she considers his excitement and "ambition" to be "magnificent - to dramatise and give ethical dimension to a line of mathematics" (243). Given the situation, Serena, empowered through her role as a reader, realises she cannot "simply tell Tom that his story [doesn't] work. The obligation [is] on [her] to come up with a solution." (245) Thus, Serena sits "by [her] typewriter and t[akes] Tom's story from [her] handbag" and "[a]s [she threads] in a fresh sheet of paper [she] fe[els] a stirring of pleasure, and then, as [she] start[s] to type, even excitement" (245), because she has the answer to fixing Tom's story, and not only that, as she finds herself in "full flow" she continues to rewrite Tom's story and what she considers to be its "other loose ends." (246) In total, Serena says to work on the story for about "forty minutes and ha[s] three pages of notes to send." (246) This act allows her to go to bed "happier than [she's] been all week" (246), aware her role as a reader can also provide her with the power of creation.

She goes as far as to mention that she is "beginning to grasp something about invention. As a reader, a speed-reader, [she] took it for granted, it was a process [she]

never troubled [her]self with" (247), now, however, thanks to her relationship with Tom, she is becoming the kind of reader that is capable of creating their own meaning out of a fiction. She has come a long way from the days in which Tony Canning had to guide her reading and tell her how to interpret texts, even a long way from her first meeting Tom, where he had to help her understand the mission of poetry. She now believes she has "the measure of the artifice" (247). Serena does not consider herself a creator, however, she simply has understood an author's need for a reader, its need for public insight and interpretation. In fact, she states that if Tom "incorporate[s] [her] suggestions, then it would surely be his own" (247-8).

When Tom has to hand in the manuscript for 'From the Somerset Levels' (dedicated to Serena, as she later finds out), he asks her to carry the package, and despite her reservations towards the story, she holds the "grim chronicle securely against [her] chest as [she] would [her] - [their] - baby" (257), once more indicating that as author and reader they are jointly responsible for the outcome of the story. Reader and author, author and character, now walk hand in hand, reassured in their roles in the literary process. While Tom's perspective is not documented, Serena has completely assumed her role as both reader and character at this point, positioning Tom to the point of the God-like author figure, the only author capable of writing literature for her, the only author capable of writing the literature she has been looking for, the one that shapes her (both as a character and a reader) giving meaning to her existence. On Christmas Eve, precisely, she sits down for more than half an hour and "worships" him, their "times together", "his strong yet childlike body" (272), their "growing fondness, his work" but most importantly now, how she "might help" (273). She goes as far as thinking about the "freedom [she has] brought into his life" (273), and once more, coincidentally, she decides to put down her feelings in a "lyrical, passionate letter"

(273) to communicate to him, through words, what *his* words are capable of accomplishing.

Their sexual dynamics are affected, subject to the creative stage of inspiration Tom is in, as well as the stage of creative connection Serena feels towards him. Once Tom proclaims he is "different!" because he has had "this amazing idea" (283), struck by the Gods of inspiration, and Serena is reassured in the power of her role as reader because they have recently found out Tom Maschler is interested in publishing his work, their lovemaking becomes more intense. They are "the strangers who kn[o]w exactly what to do. Tom ha[s] an air of yearning tenderness about him that dissolve[s] [her]. It [is] almost like sorrow." (283) In this specific sexual encounter between them, Serena feels Tom is like a "child [she] would possess and cherish and never let out of [her] sight", a sensation of "enclosing and possessing him" which is "almost like pain, as though all the best feelings [she's] ever had [are] gathered to an unbearable sharp point" (284). Serena, as Tom's ideal reader, is aware that "he [is] now entirely [hers] and always [will] be, whether he want[s] it or not" (284), and, because of having Tom as her ideal author, she feels "weightless, empty" but most importantly, "fearless" (284).

From this point onward, Tom and Serena could be considered co-authors. While Tom is the one that does the writing, the one whose name is on the cover of his stories, Serena is always backstage, providing notes and information. There seems to be no step in the process of creation in which she is not present. After Tom's involvement with the MI5 is exposed to the press, and before his connection to Serena is also made public, both write his statement to the Press Association in a collaborative effort to protect his writing. "I need you to help me draft it" (322), he says, seemingly oblivious to the possibility she might have known the Foundation was funded by MI5. Serena sits "at

the typewriter and put[s] in a clean sheet, and [they] wor[k] on a draft", when she is done, she "read[s] it back to him" and there they discuss whether it is a good idea to mention "at no point ha[s] [he] ever had any communication from or contact with any member of MI5" (322), of course, Serena's motives for him not including that sentence are subjected, as she is, to a truth Tom is unaware of, but this brief interaction between them shows Tom is willing to allow Serena to be his right hand and co-creator, not only when it comes to his fiction, but also to his establishment as a public persona. In his eyes, there is "nothing but trust" (322). Reassured in their connection as a team, they urgently "make love", this time Tom being "more frenetic, or ecstatic, than ever, so much so that [she doesn't] dare tease him about it" (324). A few pages later, Serena (and the reader) will learn this new drive towards their sexual act also has to do with the power Tom feels in writing *Sweet Tooth*, in his newfound ability to 'allow' life to happen, to then put it down to writing (a thrill familiar to Briony's). Serena, alternatively, ponders: "which one of [them] [is] doomed, or more doomed (...) Which of [them will] be disgraced?" (324) perhaps not fully grasping, as she mentioned earlier on in the narrative, they will either flourish or fail together.

Soon before Tom reveals to Serena his new project is in fact based on their time together, Serena experiences a moment of epiphany, perhaps her very own moment of being. It seems that for the first time during the narrative, she is acutely aware of the fact that she has had no say on the building of her own identity. She says, "I experienced again the vague longing and frustration that came with the idea that I was living the wrong sort of life. I hadn't chosen it for myself. It was all down to chance. If I hadn't met Jeremy, and therefore Tony, I wouldn't be in this mess, travelling at speed towards some kind of disaster I didn't dare contemplate." (345) Interestingly, this excerpt comes right before Serena makes it to Tom's apartment, where the traces of

their relationship have been removed: the books that were usually scattered around the living room are now “in tidy piles”, the duvet that was “usually in a tangle on the floor” is now “smoothly in place” (346-7). Ironically, Serena’s only moment of self-awareness happens the moment before she is handed her identity in the form of a manuscript.

1.5.3 The Author and the Reader: The Spoken Contract

The last chapter of the novel is a letter addressed to Serena, in which Tom explains his version of events and provides Serena with an envelope containing the manuscript of the novel he has been obsessively working on. Through the chapter, readers “realize that the story we are reading is that very thing that Serena desires, in the manner of a mirror that would root her more firmly in the manufactured world (...) we realize that she was never there at all, much like the happy couple in Atonement.” (Alghamdi 94) During this chapter, Tom confesses to having known Serena was an MI5 agent for quite a while, omitting his awareness from her to be able to write it down and turn it into a story. He goes on to explain the reasons behind his hiding it from her at first, going over the moment in which he found out, the inception of the idea, his (somewhat sloppy) research process, the writing process and going as far as to mention that what at first was a story told from his perspective, only made sense the moment he decided to write it in her voice.

As Tom enumerates the events he has hidden from Serena the previous months, he makes it clear he “suppose[s] [he] was cleaning up for [him]self. [He’s] bringing this episode to an end, and there’s always a degree of oblivion in tidiness.” (348) He proclaims he “had to clean the decks before [he] could write this letter, and perhaps (do[es] [he] dare say this to [her]?) with all this scrubbing [he] was erasing [her], [her]

as [she was].” (348) What Tom has done before allowing Serena to find out the truth through the letter incorporated as the last chapter, is to go through a process of rebirth, the rebirth of his authorship. That way, he also wishes for a new start with Serena, in which they can become the joint entity they were merely *performing* to be before. Later on in the chapter, he explains to her that after finding out she had been deceiving him, he checked into a hotel room, drank a few glasses of Scotch and “woke some hours later into total darkness - the curtains in that room were thick - and entered one of those moments of untroubled but total amnesia. [He] could feel a comfortable bed around [him], but who and where [he] was lay beyond [his] grasp. It lasted only a few seconds, this episode of pure existence, the mental equivalent of the blank page.” (355) This ‘untroubled but total amnesia’, could be connected to LaCapra’s interpretation of trauma, in that “[t]o blur the distinction between, or to conflate, absence and loss may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the posttraumatic, which create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling.” (LaCapra 46) Thus, this compelling power leads Tom to experiencing the aftermath as a moment of “pure existence”, one that allows him to see the path that lays ahead. This “brief cleansing amnesia” has actually “delivered [him] into common sense”, as he comprehends he is “a novelist without a novel, and now luck ha[s] tossed [his] way a tasty bone, the bare outline of a useful story.” (355) Tom has grasped, in this brief, traumatic yet ecstatic experience, that what he looks for is to continue inhabiting this moment of “pure existence” through writing her and their story. Furthermore, he goes over the entire process of research and writing, letting her know that the thought of a new phase in their relationship “thrilled [him]. [He] almost passed out”, as it “multiplied [his] pleasures, to know that [he] could retreat to the typewriter to describe the moment, from [her] point

of view." (359) The task at hand was, in his words, to "reconstruct [him]self through the prism of [her] consciousness." (359) Thus, to reconstruct himself through the prism of a God-like authorial figure, emerging victorious.

The last chapter of the novel is rich in content and can be analysed from many different standpoints, in this section, however, what will be explored is the dynamic between Tom and Serena, one that Tom has decided to consciously embrace. As the chapter progresses, he explains how he turned her into a fictional character, simultaneously, however, he asks for her approval to move forward in doing so. First, he describes what followed his moment of pure existence, which was "silence, discretion, patient watching, and writing. Events would decide the plot. The characters were readymade. I would invent nothing, only record. I'd watch you at work. I too could be a spy." (356) He was able to "f[ind] [his] notebook and fi[ll] it in two hours. [He] merely had to tell the story as [he] saw it, from the moment [she] came to [his] office at the university, to [his] rendezvous with Greatorex - and beyond" (356), just as Briony does, Tom seems to decide that he needs to surrender and accept life's events will continue to take place around him, and that the only way to produce a good narrative is to let such occurrences happen as he writes them, turning them into fiction afterwards.

As Tom explains how he found his (or rather, her) voice for this specific project, as will be exemplified below, he comes to terms with him finding his position within postmodernism. Thus, Tom comprehends the only way forward is by providing an unreliable narrator figure for his narrative, including a metafictional twist into his novel, aware only such techniques can allow his narrative to cease to provide "no resistance or difficulty or spring, no surprises" (357). Coincidentally, this exercise on finding Serena's voice represents a break with the past. To write this new narrative, Tom must

surge as a different author, one that holds power in a different way. Hence, the moment of rebirth described above, one that not only applies to himself but also to Serena. In the quotation cited above, it is interesting to note that he breaks the letter he was going to send her, signifying he is breaking with his past narrative, letting the past go, to submerge himself into a new literary endeavour.

Tom also admits to having been waiting for Serena, his reader, his character, for far longer than he realised, admitting that past characters within his narrative were perhaps "a rehearsal for [her] before [he] knew of [her] existence. And [he doesn't] deny the common root is [him]" (360). This may be due to the fact that in the communitive act there is a need for a specific "willingness of the participants to engage in a linguistic action [which] must be proportionate to the degree in which the *situation* or context of the action is defined." (Iser 56 *The Act of Reading*) Tom has been waiting a long time, as he states, for this opportunity, because he seems aware that as an author, "[i]f these conditions are not fulfilled, or if the definitions are too vague or inaccurate, the utterance will run the risk of remaining empty and so failing to achieve its ultimate goal, which is 'to effect the transaction.'" (Iser 56 and Austin as qtd in Iser 56) However, his encounter for Serena provides the perfect situation, the perfect pact. Whether Tom writes Serena out of a need for creative power, or a need of revenge, is something to be discussed in a later chapter, nonetheless, what is relevant here is the drive with which Tom is assured in his role as creator in the case of Serena. It seems writing her is the only moment of real creation he has undergone, hence why he refers to it as an episode of "pure existence". He narrates the moments of research he executed: visiting her sister, and getting "what [he] had come for - [her] childhood and teenage years" (362), then visiting Jeremy Mott, with whom he has an evening which "spe[eds] along beautifully and [he thinks] it was money well spent when [he] pick[ed

up] the bill at the Old Waverley Hotel" (363) (perhaps implying he goes as far in his role as author as to sleep with Mott to obtain information). Nevertheless, Serena remains his main source of information: "[i]t was you who were my principal source. There was, of course, everything that I saw for myself. And then the small cast among whom I wandered in January. That leaves an island of experience, an important fraction of the whole, that was you alone, you with your thoughts, and sometimes you invisible to yourself". (363) It is interesting he mentions an "invisible" version of Serena, one only visible to him, one he ultimately decides to write down. Then again, this enterprise makes him "reckless and obsessed" (365).

Tom is aware he has found a source of information and inspiration that provides him with a power unbeknownst to him until the moment: a power that allows him to dictate Serena's identity. He disregards the sources of information that he deems irrelevant, depicting the part of her he presumes to be invisible to her, "hav[ing] her read the [press] story on the train" (366). Ultimately, by allowing these events to take place around him, what Tom is doing is moulding Serena's future. By not warning her, by allowing Max to get so enraged and jealous he "thr[ows] [them] to the dogs" (361), not only is Tom narrating the more interesting story, but he is also modifying the course of events in life, to redefine Serena as a character, thus dictating her fate. He is aware once her picture is on the press (a picture taken due to his orchestration, as he has them go on a stroll when he knows they are being followed), she has "no chance of surviving", he tries to make it better by adding that she "appear[s] stunning in the photographs, [he] was told", appealing to Serena's vanity, yet nonetheless, aware she will "be looking for a job" (366).

Tom is, however, coming to the end of his previous authorial existence, fishing for the next one, where he will be able to fully inhabit his authority. To Serena, he says

"the sun is setting on this decaying affair, and the moon and stars are too" (366), because of that, he must be explicit in his telling of how he came to possess her through fiction. He insists "it wasn't anger that set me writing the pages in the parcel in front of [her]. But there was always an element of tit for tat … [She] lied to [him], [he] spied on [her]" (368), Tom proves unaware that what he is doing is far graver than spying or lying, he is actually eradicating her identity and providing her with a fictional one of his choice.

Tom claims that with this writing act, he "really believed that [he] could wrap the matter up between the covers of a book and write [her] out of [his] system and say goodbye", after all, the process of writing her was quite exhausting, albeit "delicious" (368). He

> had to go to Cambridge to get [her] terrible degree, make love in a Suffolk cottage to a kind old toad, live in [her] Camden bedsit, suffer a bereavement, wash [her] hair and iron [her] skirts for work and suffer the morning Tube journey, experience [her] urge for independence as well as the bonds that held [her] to [her] parents and ma[k]e [her] cry against [her] father's chest. [He] had to taste [her] loneliness, inhabit [her] insecurity, [her] longing for praise from superiors, [her] unsisterliness, [her] minor impulses of snobbery, ignorance and vanity, [her] minimal social conscience, moments of self-pity, and orthodoxy in most matters. And do all [that] without ignoring [her] cleverness, beauty and tenderness, [her] love of sex and fun, [her] wry humor and sweet protective instincts. (369)

In doing so, in "living inside [her]", he is able to see himself "clearly: [his] material greed and status hunger, [his] single-mindedness bordering on autism. Then [his] ludicrous vanity, sexual, sartorial, above all aesthetic - why else make [her] linger interminable over [his] stories?" (369). Consequently, it could be said that by writing Serena, by inhabiting his fictional characters, Tom comes to inhabit himself, adopting his authorial identity, the only one that seems to matter. Only through his writing act is he able to redefine himself.

Tom uses his moment of rebirth to include Serena in the balance, as he now understands his authorship is only possible because of her. "Wouldn't you like to do the same for me?" he asks. "What I'm working my way towards is a declaration of love and a marriage proposal. Didn't you once confide to me your old-fashioned view that this was how a novel should end, with a 'Marry me'? With your permission I'd like to publish one day this book on the kitchen table." (369). Tom's plan is to rework the first draft of this novel, *Sweet Tooth*, with Serena's help. This time, however, they must do it in collaboration, working hand in hand to achieve the perfect text.

There is, however, a contradiction within the end of *Sweet Tooth* in that in his violent narratorial act, Tom continues to take possession of Serena, as he has done it deliberately in a way to deprive her of a say in her identity. In this way, Serena might be said to experience something similar to the death of the author, in that she experiences a death of her own subject. Nevertheless, this death of the subject,

> is not a simple or clean death. In retrospect, Serena seems to speak directly to readers when she decries narrative "tricks" as violations of the unspoken contract between author and reader. The death of Serena becomes, then, a sort of battle between her voice and the one that emerges, for through her destruction, we also witness the emergence of a new subject, the fictional author, intruding upon and cannibalizing the story. (Alghamdi 94)

Tom has written her in the simplest of terms, without consulting her, and only focusing on a specific portion of her life, which has to do with her relationships with men and her work, not worrying to dig deeper into any other parts of her identity. Nonetheless, he still gives her the opportunity to decide if this narrative will make it out into the public or not. The conundrum is that despite knowing she has agreed to the publication of the manuscript; it seems impossible to ascertain what stage in the editing process the manuscript the reader reads is in. It seems impossible to discern whether Serena and

Tom have indeed worked at the manuscript together, or if what the reader is reading is the first draft of the novel, or even possibly another one.[26]

Consequently, as will be explored below, McEwan uses and produces metafiction to destabilise truth in the text. At the end of the narrative, despite Tom's indications and explanation of his process of creation, the reader is left with questions that require a never-ending process of re-reading. That inevitably indicates that, despite Tom's claims that he needs Serena (or, the reader) he is still the God-like author figure that decides what the intention of his novel is going to be. In this case, the novel continues to create doubt in the audience, making it impossible for them to determine the real meaning behind the text (unless they turn to the real author for answers), creating a confusing and complex reading act.

Tom explains to Serena that the text she will read after finishing reading the letter is "hardly an apologia, more an indictment of us both, which would surely *bind* us further" (369, emphasis added). This is Tom's way of acknowledging the need for a relationship between author and reader, a bond that ties them indicating there can be no literature unless there is a link between both roles. Tom goes on to expose the problems him and Serena might face before publication (369-70) but he acknowledges that the new drafts to be produced will be a joint collaboration with Serena: they have "[a] few decades (…) for [her] to correct [his] presumptions on [her] solitude, to tell [him] about the rest of [her] secret work and what really happened between [her] and Max, and time to insert those paddings of the backward glance: in those days, back then, these were the years of…" (370). Most importantly, Tom assures her there is "[n]o need to worry,

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[26] Despite the puzzling nature of the coda, it is interesting to note McEwan himself, in *The Guardian Books Podcast,* stated that the version the real reader reads is one already including Serena's revisions, so it is meant to be the 'final' draft of the story, written by Tom and revised by Serena with the incorporation of any changes she might have deemed necessary. (Armitstead and McEwan)

[he]'ll add nothing without [her] say-so" as they "won't be rushing into print." (370) Tom seems adamant on giving Serena a choice, his intent is to continue to work on the story further with Serena, not on his own, once more proving he is aware of the need of the figure of the reader for an effective writing process.

Tom is also aware that he cannot continue to act without having Serena's consent, aware that it is her validation which has allowed him to thrive and rise as God-like author, aware his narcissism continues to need her reassurance. That is why he assures her that if her "answer is a fatal no, well, [he's] made no carbon, this is the only copy and [she] can throw it to the flames", however, if she "still love[s] [him] and [her] answer is yes, then [their] collaboration begins and this letter, with [her] consent, will be Sweet Tooth's final chapter." (370) Consequently, by agreeing to Tom's proposal, Serena is agreeing to becoming the fictional character Tom has written. Her voice, for the foreseeable future, will be narrated *through* Tom's words. She is therefore surrendering and actively choosing to become a fictional artefact that is operated by Tom. For that reason, it is interesting that Tom equates agreeing to becoming a character with her continued love for him. Tom seems to be aware that most of what draws them together is their connection as author and reader/character, rather than as individuals.

Interestingly, Tom requests to have the letter be the very last chapter of *Sweet Tooth*. Despite his claims and wishes to have Serena as his collaborator, he needs to contain his power as the sole author of the narrative, letting the readers know that the inception of the story was his, letting them know about his process of research, about the trauma of finding out he was being deceived, as well as letting them know how Serena behaved, and most importantly, letting them know Serena has accepted to being a fictional character.

What is most interesting about the treatment of authorship in *Sweet Tooth* is McEwan's ultimate lesson that an author needs a reader to both create and publish work. While Tom and Serena behave within the narrative as clear representations of the figures of the author and the reader, this exchange between them in the last chapter works to provide a further afterthought on the nature of publishing. If the Sweet Tooth operation could be considered a tyrannical attempt from government organisations as well as publishing houses on dictating how writers should be producing their work, Tom's offer to Serena seems to be indicating towards an unspoken agreement between authors and readers: as long as the reader continues to purchase and accept to play the postmodern game, the author will continue to produce it.

It is certainly mystifying that despite Serena's reservations against postmodernism, she ultimately surrenders to its highest of tricks. The novels she has been describing as her ideal novels are not similar at all to the novel that ends up confining her to fiction. Despite her scepticism towards metafictional 'tricks', she condones Tom's use of the technique in the one novel ultimately bringing her to life. Either Serena has also understood the need for postmodernist techniques to discuss the issues at hand, or she has accepted that as a reader, there is nothing she can do to impede Tom from making use of it, as he is the one that ultimately rises as the God-like author figure she proclaimed him to be the day she met him.

2. CHAPTER TWO: TRAUMA AND ITS LINKS WITH AUTHORSHIP

2. 1 Trauma Narratives and their Involvement with Authorship

> Writing trauma is a metaphor in that writing indicates some distance from trauma (even when the experience of writing is itself intimately bound up with trauma), and there is no such thing as writing trauma itself if only because trauma, while at times related to particular events, cannot be localized in terms of a discrete, dated experience.
>
> (LaCapra 186)

2.1.1 Brief history of Trauma Studies

Bárbara Arizti considers the "postmodern unfolds between the evocation of traumas past, mainly the Second World War, and the anticipation of a disaster yet-to-come..." (Arizti 238) It is this condition, one where "...terror could strike again and affect one or one's people" at any moment (Arizti 238) which defines both the postmodern and the traumatological era(s). For that reason, "...postmodern fiction and the trauma novel are products of the same historical conditions", as they are contemporary to the world after the Second World War (Granofsky 11–12). In fact, as Ronald Granofsky points out, if postmodernism can be defined as "the "defamiliarization" of modernism, then the trauma novel may be thought of as its refamiliarization in an age of traumatic alienation." (Granofsky 12–13)

Postmodern Studies and Trauma Studies, albeit easily relatable and sharing a great deal, should be understood as different movements. It could be argued the interest for the traumatic experience stems from the same set of events and for the analysis and understanding of the same society as the postmodern novel. In fact, trauma novels tend to follow and adhere to postmodern techniques, mostly due to the need to experiment with narrative to be able to represent the self that is dealing with the traumatic

experience. However, the focus of the trauma novel is clearly placed elsewhere: where in the postmodern the cornerstone is the questioning of systematic truth (in whichever discourse or form that might take), in the traumatological, the centre of attention is placed on the individual or collective traumatic experience. For that reason, as Laurie Vickroy points out, "[t]rauma narratives are often concerned with human-made traumatic situations and are implicit critiques of the ways social, economic, and political structures can create and perpetuate trauma." (Vickroy 4)

Granofsky considers that "the contemporary individual is faced with a crisis in image-making and thereby in his or her ability to understand and ultimately to function in the world." (Granofsky 111) Robert Jay Lifton makes reference to a specific "psychic numbing (...) a form of desensitization (...) an incapacity to feel or to confront certain kinds of experience, due to the blocking or absence of inner forms of imagery that can connect with such experience." (Lifton as qtd in Granofsky 111). In a world where numbing and desensitisation are the norm, it would be "misguided to see trauma as a purely psychological or individual phenomenon" (LaCapra xi); trauma must therefore be understood as inherent in the collective experience, being related to all sorts of other disciplines, ultimately presenting "an acute instance of (...) a cross-disciplinary problem, for it falls within the compass of no single genre or discipline, and how one should approach it in a given genre or discipline is an essentially contested question." (LaCapra 204–204)

Furthermore, Avril Horner points out that the trauma novel has "flourished since 1980", identifying it as a "fairly recent phenomenon that seems to play to our collective sense of feeling beleaguered, endangered and isolated as modern subjects." (Horner 35) While the idea of 'trauma' was originally and "mainly associated with extremely unusual events, it has now become a powerful and complex paradigm that infiltrates

contemporary history, literature, culture and critical theory." (Nadal and Calvo 2) Most trauma studies scholars, therefore, consider the emergence of the trauma novel as an inevitable consequence of historical events, not in the sense that historical events have performed and imposed the traumatic experience (which they certainly have) but in the sense that the occurrence of the horrors of World War Two have rendered the modern individual maimed by a generalised fear of probable upcoming traumatic events, and a widespread predisposition to becoming fragmented subjects, deeply disturbed by uncontrollable external stimuli.

Interestingly, as Hal Foster argues, early conceptions of "postmodernism evoked this first, ecstatic structure of feeling, sometimes in analogy with schizophrenia. Indeed, for Fredric Jameson[,] the primary symptom of postmodernism was a schizophrenic breakdown in language and time that provoked a compensatory investment in image and space." (Foster 121) This leads to the idea that trauma studies are inevitably linked to postmodern thought, as trauma theory inconspicuously focuses both on similar content and on a stylistic repertoire which displays "schizophrenic breakdown[s]" in language and time. Nevertheless, from the 1980s onwards, with the emergence of the trauma novel, it would seem that a "melancholic structure of feeling has dominated." (Foster 121)[27]

It is difficult to ascertain if both *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* could ultimately be labelled as trauma novels. Notwithstanding, trauma studies are used and repurposed in this analysis due to the fact that the main characters portrayed and explored in the texts are subjects severely conditioned by trauma, to the point that coping with it becomes not only one of the main drives behind their narrative writing, but also one of the ways in

[27] Michael S. Roth also reflects on the emergence of trauma as connected to that of postmodernism: "The concept of trauma gained academic currency in the intellectual atmosphere of postmodernism and antifoundationalism (…) By the late 1980s it had become commonplace to ask the postmodern historian whether all representations of the Shoah were equally valid. The ethical turn in postmodernism has been an attempt to respond to this question without relying on some new epistemological foundation. As an event that destroys cognitive and emotional foundations, trauma has been a key concept in this ethical turn." (Roth xxiii)

which both Briony Tallis and Tom Haley's authorship is construed. It is also quite inevitable to link both novels to the traumatological field, especially given the fact that as novels written in a postmodern age, as mentioned above, the subjects at hand are at a crossroads when exploring and developing their fragmented selves and ideas. Arguably, their use of postmodern techniques in the retelling of their stories ultimately also strengthens (or rather indicates) the idea of the metafictional device as a necessity, as it is a means of coping with the loss of power suffered during the traumatic experience.

As pointed out by Granofsky,

> In the trauma novel, unassimilable reality throws the individual character back upon his or her elemental nature. With identity under severe stress, the character regresses to seek the security necessary to survive. The traumatic state, however, also places the self and the world in a totally different light, since the normal categories of knowledge assimilation are disrupted. (Granofsky 19)

The trauma novel, or a novel that deals with trauma in a postmodern field, is one where there is an inevitable redefinition of the world as previously known, as well as a need to assimilate the disrupted self through the means of narrative writing. This need to understand the self through narrative is oddly reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's preoccupation with the performance of the 'talking cure', something which is not coincidental given that trauma studies, as will be highlighted below, directly derive from Freud's pivotal works.

2.1.2 Understanding Trauma, Defining Trauma

It could be argued that the trauma novel has an inherent "...postmodern preoccupation with the unavailability of the past, or to be more precise, the troubled relation between past and present in terms of memory, trauma, and representation." (Vanyova Kostova 174) As mentioned previously, as both types of narratives stem from the same society, their similarities are undeniable. Nevertheless, trauma narratives originate from the need

to narrate the traumatic experience, and that is an articulation that needs to take place, as "...trauma haunts the traumatised person's existence, making the past present, disrupting chronology and mental balance" (Martínez-Alfaro 180).

The concept and ideology behind the term 'trauma' has morphed recently precisely due to postmodern influences and preoccupations. Nonetheless, its original conception (that of a physical wound or injury) remains relevant as it can be understood as a wound that occurs within the psyche of a being after experiencing an event one is not yet ready to experience, or as an event that renders the self in an unprecedented state. In trauma studies, to be precise, trauma is understood as an experience that cannot be formulated into language (be it because it is too new for the self, or too difficult to process) and therefore, in any case, it should be understood as having a different reach for each individual undergoing it. Horner points out that precisely due to the fact that each individual is equipped to dealing with different experiences in different ways, it is difficult to precisely define the true nature of trauma as "[w]e are thus faced with a spectrum of meaning in which the word "trauma" signifies, at one end, an experience beyond articulation and outside the boundaries of normal experience and, at the other end, an aspect of "normality" itself." (Horner 37)

As Horner points out, in fact, with time, trauma has ceased to be understood to "indicate a clinical condition" but rather it is now positioned in a "cultural/historical sense (…) to suggest a collective psychological response to a cataclysmic disaster or a profoundly terrifying event." (Horner 35) As just mentioned, however, precisely because "[i]n our global world, individuals are both well informed and highly fragile subjects…" (Horner 35) trauma has developed in a way that the subjectivity of the subject experiencing it may lead to any event difficult to grasp or understand to become traumatic. In fact, "...many cultural critics have argued that even ordinary experiences

of life within late modernity can become cumulatively traumatic" (Horner 35), to the point that "... in popular culture the word "trauma" is now bandied about with impunity almost as if it endows the modern subject with a mark of authenticity." (Horner 37)

The trauma novel emerges, quite interestingly, sharing a great deal of features with the traumatic experience itself. Similarly to postmodern thought, and its repercussions on postmodern literary techniques, as Nadal and Calvo argue, "[i]n a variety of manners, trauma fiction mimics the structure of trauma: it portrays the undecidability of the traumatic and, therefore, remains suspended." (Nadal and Calvo 8) For that reason, trauma narratives tend to be experimental (or rather *unconventional*) in form, in an attempt to match the experience that cannot be processed inside of the realms of 'normality'. Characters that are subjects of trauma find in narrativisation a window of possibilities to be able to explore the traumatic experience. In fact, most trauma narratives can be understood as tools used by trauma victims, whether consciously or unconsciously, to overcome the traumatic experience and to recover the self that has been lost. As Vickroy suggest,

> Traumatic experience can produce a sometimes indelible effect on the human psyche that can change the nature of an individual's memory, self-recognition, and relational life. Despite the human capacity to survive and adapt, traumatic experience can alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present. (Vickroy 11–12)

As will also be highlighted below, when discussing scriptotherapy, in writing about the traumatic experience, therefore, the subject can come to terms with the past and to be able to understand the wound in itself. This wound, one Cathy Caruth refers to as "crying out" which "addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth as qtd in Amfreville 154) can only be understood and assimilated with time. The truth of the unrecoverable past, consequently, is assimilated belatedly, it has "a delayed appearance" and for that reason it "cannot be linked only to

what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language." (Caruth as qtd in Amfreville 154) For that reason, it becomes necessary for the trauma victim or survivor to find new forms of redefining the language used, in order to be able to articulate an experience that has no previous reference in the psyche. Vickroy suggests that "...for healing to take place, survivors must find ways to tell their stories and to receive some social acknowledgement if not acceptance." (Vickroy 19) It is therefore the act of writing, one where trauma can be reformulated through a new communicative act, which allows for an experience to be understood anew. As Vickroy points out, the existence and presence of an audience is also key in the processing of trauma. Not only is the trauma experience being retold in an attempt to redefine the language attached to personal experience, but it is also vital that others understand the redefinition of language that is taking place. In fact, as Roth suggests, such forms of telling may also lead to new forms of understanding and redefining trauma and consequently, "[t]he paradoxes of perception and retelling should lead to another way of treating one another." (Roth 100)

As will be exemplified when discussing the cases of Briony Tallis and Tom Haley, the reader's feedback becomes indispensable to the accepting and processing of the traumatic experience, a concept that clearly clashes with the possibility that meaning is only created by the reader. For that reason, trauma narratives clearly contradict one of the bases of postmodern literary criticism, in that, for the writer narrativising trauma, authorial intention is not only preferable, but indispensable. In fact, "...trauma narrativists enlist their readers to become witnesses to these kind of stories through the unconventional narrative translations of traumatic experience and memory that give them a different kind of access to the past than conventional framework." (Vickroy 20) It is interesting Vickroy uses the term 'enlist' as it clearly suggests that there is a request

being made from the author to the reader which indicates that the reader becomes necessary in the creation of meaning, notwithstanding, it is not the same kind of reader Barthes refers to, but rather a reader that must accept authorial intention and give its green-light, or its audience in return.

Furthermore, it is in the act of writing about the trauma and sharing such an experience that the trauma victim can reconnect with either itself or with a society that has hitherto been insufficient. Vickroy puts forward the idea that "[t]rauma often involves a radical sense of disconnection and isolation as bonds are broken and relationships and personal safety are put into question. Survivors feel, often justifiably, abandoned or alienated because of their differences with others." (Vickroy 23) This disconnection with reality, one which usually leads to the fragmentation of the self, is one that is heavily resisted by victims of trauma. In fact, they tend to "attempt to create or maintain a sense of agency and order and reject fragmentation" (Vickroy 24), which is yet another of the reasons why it seems undeniable that trauma fiction presents a somewhat radically different approach to authorship and narratology than postmodern fiction does.

In the cases of both *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*, therefore, the traumatised selves are "bound up closely with awareness of mortality and the fear of breakdown or death", something common in the "connection between trauma and identity" (Vickroy 26), this is the case that leads both inscribed authors in the narratives to go against the death of the author themselves, thus connecting trauma thought and postmodern thought once more. The traumatic events Tom and Briony go through, the awareness of their 'mortality', at times have to do with their awareness of their possible mortality as authors, rather than individual subjects. This has to do with the fact that their identities are inconspicuously interlinked to their authorship (as discussed above), and so it does

become a matter of life and death of their whole being. Moreover, in both cases, and as it will continue to be further exemplified throughout this chapter, as trauma "...may be defined as a *painful experience which defies assimilation and demands accommodation*" (Granofsky 9) both texts show how the authors attempt to *accommodate* their experiences to their writing. Granofsky also points out that unfortunately, "[t]here is no guarantee that the accommodation will be successful" (Granofsky 9) notwithstanding, it could be argued that both Briony and Tom *are* successful in their accommodation and even, especially in the case of Tom, in his assimilation of their traumatic experiences through text.

2.1.2.1 Mourning, Melancholia and *Nachträglichkeit*

As briefly mentioned above, the emergence of trauma studies can be undeniably linked to Sigmund Freud's early writings. His development of psychoanalysis and his consequent influence on the analysis of the mind, not only deeply influenced modernist (and therefore postmodern) thought and literature, it also unwittingly kick-started the expansion of the literary theory current at hand. There are two different sets of concepts which are held responsible for the emergence (and structure) of trauma studies, which later develop into trauma theory. For that reason, Freud's ideas could be considered the inception of the field itself. These concepts are Freud's examination of the differences between mourning and melancholia, and the coining of *Nachträglichkeit* (usually translated as 'afterwardness', 'deferred action' or 'belatedness').

In *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud describes mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on", adding that "although mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never

occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer it to medical treatment" (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 243–44). Alternatively, melancholia is perceived as a "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 244).

In other words, mourning is understood as a natural process which every individual will eventually experience, one that can be ignited by any kind of loss (and which, in this study, shall be understood as the loss of 'power', either over a specific object/individual or over the self), whereas melancholia is understood as mourning that takes an unrecoverable path, where the individual gets stuck in the past coming before the so-called loss and becomes incapable of understanding either the event or the circumstances that have led to the occurrence in itself. As Herrero understands it, "[i]n the case of melancholia, the traumatised subject remains trapped in a compulsive search for the beloved object and re-enactment of the original trauma" whereas in the event of mourning, "the subject is able to specify and gain some distance from her/his traumatic loss." (Herrero 106–07)

What Freud terms 'mourning' and 'melancholia' takes on different forms in trauma studies. LaCapra refers to both terms as processes, one as 'acting out' (melancholia) and the other as 'working through' (mourning), whereas Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis, Volume I* (1994) instead refer to the terms as processes of either "incorporation" (mourning, working through) or "introjection" (melancholia, acting out). For Kernel and Torok, incorporation is understood as "the refusal to acknowledge to full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognised as such, would effectively transform us" (Abraham and

Torok 127), whereas introjection is recognised as the moment in which the individual is allowed “to refashion itself, channel the new account, pain, desires, and thus accommodate them within her/his situation” (Herrero 106).

Thereby, it should be understood there are two different processes that emerge from a traumatic experience: in mourning there is an inherent “conscious nature (…) [that] facilitates the process of withdrawing the libido’s attachment to that object” while in melancholia, there exists a “strong unconscious fixation between the ego and the lost object” which “turns this process into a rather more complex and pathological condition (…) often deriv[ing] into identification and love-hate ambivalence” (Herrero 106). As will be exemplified below, in *Atonement*, Briony experiences melancholia, as she becomes unconsciously fixated on the traumatic loss of her innocence, acting out her trauma several times in her writing, thus undergoing a clear process of introjection. Conversely, in *Sweet Tooth,* Tom experiences mourning, in that he is capable of consciously working through his trauma, also through the use of writing, by incorporating the traumatic experiences into his consciousness as well as those individuals responsible for perpetuating the trauma into his life.

The other concept to consider is that of *Nachträglichkeit* (initially explored by Freud in "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" of 1895, which went unpublished, and later on further developed in his *Case Histories II* (1913). This deferral of action occurs “where the first moment of trauma is grasped through a later, secondary moment that only retroactively generates traumatic force in an odd time after time…” (Luckhurst 60) This way, a subject may not grasp the intricacies of their trauma until they experience a second moment of trauma, which provokes in them the need to re-evaluate their life experience and identity, and to inevitably relive the original experience, perhaps incorporating it for the first time. As Nadal and Calvo mention, the concept

“encompasses past, present and future and undermines the distinction among them” (Nadal and Calvo 4), which becomes crucial for the functions of both melancholia and mourning. In the case of melancholia it may reinforce the recurrent repetition of the original trauma and the consequent ambivalence towards the possibility of moving forward, and in the case of mourning, it may become the epiphanic happenstance that allows the subject to understand the self enough to be capable of moving forward.

At the centre of trauma studies lies the idea that the deferral of the traumatic event signifies that it “is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth as qtd in Pellicer-Ortín 76). In fact, “[t]o be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth as qtd in Pellicer-Ortín 76) This belatedness may be understood as an unconscious coping mechanism which gives time to the subject to be able to gather the necessary tools to cope with the understanding of the traumatic event, by providing a ‘period of latency’ which ultimately becomes key in the processing of the traumatic state. Nevertheless, LaCapra identifies that if trauma can be understood as a “disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered.” (LaCapra 41) LaCapra goes on to discuss the problematic arising due to this period of latency, as it further complicates the narrativisation of trauma, which as will be stated below, becomes indispensable in the reproduction of the traumatic event, and at times may lead to an overcoming of the traumatic state. Quite interestingly as well, it may be in the specific moment of writing when this belatedness may be most powerful, given that, as Paul Crosthwaite suggests, “[i]t is in these posttraumatic repetitions that the real that was missed at the time of the trauma belatedly manifests itself” (Crosthwaite, 59)

thus writing should be understood as part of the 'belated' mechanism which may be said to pave the way for a clearer understanding of the traumatic state.

In any such instances, the traumatic state is recognised as a process undergone by trauma victims, which can be also perceived, as Caruth puts it, as a "response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience…" (Caruth as qtd in Herrero 100). In that way, the traumatic experience is a way in which time is either stopped, or perhaps more specifically elongated, and the traumatised subject is positioned in a state of limbo, trapped between two different moments yet inhabiting both at the same time, two moments that due to belatedness, see how "the second of which retrospectively determines the meaning of the first" (Forster as qtd in Herrero 100).

2.1.2.2 Acting Out versus Working Through

In the highly influential *Writing History, Writing Trauma,* Dominick LaCapra concerns himself with analysing the way in which trauma has been narrativised throughout literary history (focusing specifically in Holocaust testimonies, a clear concern for trauma studies), and claims his exploration of "historical representation and understanding" is informed not only by psychoanalysis, but also "historical analysis as well as sociocultural and political critique", which he considers pivotal in the study of trauma "and its aftereffects in culture and in people (LaCapra cxxix). Notwithstanding, in his exploration of historical and communal traumatic experience, LaCapra puts forward a theory of trauma that centres on two different concepts: those of 'acting out' and 'working through'. These, as mentioned above, are clear reworkings of Freud's

‘mourning’ and ‘melancholia’, nevertheless LaCapra redefines them as emotional processes rather than emotional states or conditions.

According to LaCapra, in traumatic situations, the “self overflows itself or is carried away and becomes involved in other selves, with an uncanny pattern of relating that is typically repeated in a compulsive way.” (LaCapra xvi) Trauma, thus, paralyses the growth of the individual, forcing it to re-evaluate the self, and in most cases, igniting a constant repetition of events which may have no limit. The individual gets stuck in the traumatic experience, at times not fully comprehending the repercussions of it, needing to translate itself into behaviours and patterns that are ultimately harmful for the development of their identity. In some cases, the occurrence of another traumatic experience, which leads to the ‘afterwardness’ referred to above, is what allows the subject to become aware of the effects of the first traumatic experience, hence prompting a belated understanding of the self and the consequences of the events heretofore buried in the psyche. LaCapra attributes such occurrence to the fact that “[t]hose traumatized by extreme events, as well as those empathizing with them, may resist working through because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it”(LaCapra 22). This fidelity to trauma is, I would argue, a fidelity to a past self, one which is known and consolidated before experiencing a fragmentation inherent in the occurrence of traumatic events.

In fact, LaCapra himself identifies the similarities between both sets of concepts:

> I have argued elsewhere that mourning might be seen as a form of working through, and melancholia as a form of acting out. Freud, in comparing melancholia with mourning, saw melancholia as characteristic of an arrested process in which the depressed, self-berating, and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object. Mourning brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life which allows one to begin again.” (LaCapra 65–66)

In that, when the self experiences trauma or grief, one can either work through the trauma or grief (mourning), or the self can, alternatively, get stuck in a past that has no possibility to evolve by acting out (melancholia).

LaCapra defines 'acting out', this so-called paralysis of the self after the traumatic experience, by stating that it "...may be the melancholic sentiment that, in working through the past in a manner that enables survival or a reengagement in life, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past." (LaCapra 22) These subjects therefore get stuck in a past stage, unable to move forward, and hence are forced to revise their traumatic experience repeatedly, in acts of acting the traumatic experience out. This might manifest in different forms: either the subject finds itself repeating the same actions revolving the traumatic experience, inadvertently seeks out experiences which will eventually lead to a repetition of the traumatic event, or, as is the case with Briony, for example, find themselves revisiting the traumatic experience (in this case, through writing), unconsciously attempting to make sense of the event. LaCapra mentions these types of repetitions are ultimately forms of coming to terms with the breakage of the self, and these involve "various combinations, more or less subtle variations, and hybridized forms of acting out and working through." (LaCapra 36)

For the traumatised subject stuck in an unrecoverable past, living in a state of melancholia, "the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed" (LaCapra 70). As is also relevant for the understanding of both Tom and Briony's actions, LaCapra points out that this experience may contribute to a lack of "ethically responsible behaviour" but ultimately asserts that acting out should be seen as a possible elementary step in the "condition of working through", given the fact that

“[p]ossession by the past may never be fully overcome or transcended, and working through may at best enable some distance or critical perspective that is acquired with extreme difficulty and not achieved once and for all.” (LaCapra 70) As will be exemplified below, Briony seems to be stuck in a repetitive acting out of her traumatic experience, one that, as LaCapra mentions, “haunts or possesses the self” and which may not be “adequately symbolized or accessible in language, at least in any critically mediated, controlled, self-reflexive manner” (LaCapra 89–90), as it so happens to subjects experiencing melancholia. Nonetheless, Briony seems to eventually ‘work through’ her experience, or at least attempt to, through her act of writing and publishing, which is precisely another of the activities explored by trauma studies as somewhat indispensable in the understanding and dealing with the traumatic experience and self.

On any occasion, however, the residue of the traumatic memory is also maintained. LaCapra once more reworks one of Freud’s concepts, indicating that in any traumatic experience, a memory of

> the event somehow registers and may actually be relived in the present, at times in a compulsively repetitive manner. It may not be subject to controlled, conscious recall. But it returns in nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety attacks, and other forms of intrusively repetitive behaviour characteristic of an all-compelling frame. Traumatic memory (at least in Freud’s account) may involve belated temporality and a period of latency between a real or fantasized early event and a later one that somehow recalls it and triggers renewed repression or foreclosure and intrusive behaviour. But when the past is uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no difference between it and the present. (LaCapra 89)

Alternatively, working through is understood as the attempt to leave the traumatic experience behind, moving on into a future which accepts the traumatic event and incorporates it into the self. In this instance, as LaCapra points out, “the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future” (LaCapra 143), unlike those participating in ‘acting out’, which seem incapable of differentiating the past from the present or even acknowledging the possibility of a future. LaCapra makes an effort to specify that in an ‘ethical’ sense, the act of “working

through does not mean avoidance, harmonization, simply forgetting the past, or submerging oneself in the present. It means coming to terms with the trauma, including its details, and critically engaging the tendency to act out the past and even to recognize why it may be necessary and even in certain respects desirable or at least compelling." (LaCapra 144) In the process of working through, therefore, the self is capable of incorporating the past experience, sooner or later, thus avoiding a somewhat never-ending cycle of repetition which prohibits it from understanding the full extent of the traumatic occurrence and thus overcome or acknowledge the effects experienced by the self. This process, nonetheless, should not be considered as final, as with any emotional state, it is "subject to remission" but in this instance, it is capable of "counteract[ing] the compulsively repetitive, full reliving of the traumatizing past." (LaCapra 91)

Concurrently, the act of working through may also involve instances of acting out, as LaCapra acknowledges the presence of moments in which, this working through "involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation." (LaCapra 42) Ultimately, however, both occurrences should not be regarded as all that different. Both stem from an inability to initially deal with a situation one is not ready for, with something that is far too removed from one's conscious understanding to be able to reach it, from a lack of control that incapacitates the self and shatters it. Therefore, both concepts should not be seen as so different, but rather as "intimately related parts of a process" (LaCapra 143).

In the case of working through, the process can be observed within *Sweet Tooth*. Tom Haley, unlike Briony Tallis, merely hints at one retelling of his traumatic experience, and otherwise seems to indicate he has a special ability to move through traumatic experiences, fully aware of their significance, wherefrom he speedily moves

into the future. It is due to his ability of working through that he manages to then not only openly accept the traumatic event, but also its perpetrator(s) and thus he is able to incorporate them to his *self* and his narrative, without the need to either act out or fragment his past self.

As others before (and after) him, LaCapra puts forward the idea for the need to narrativise the traumatic experience as a means of escaping a past now tainted. Nevertheless, and quite remarkably, especially for the study at hand, in the process of writing there exists the notion of fictionalisation, which can be problematic in the revival of experiences that can reignite the traumatic experience. LaCapra states that writing in connection to trauma is ultimately, "often seen in terms of enacting it, which may at times be equated with acting out (or playing) it out in performative discourse or artistic practice." (LaCapra 186–87) Not only that, the act of writing trauma to work through it (which will be analysed below as understood within the precepts of 'scriptotherapy') needs to be understood for its fictionalisation. LaCapra mentions that "...narrativization is closest to fictionalisation in the sense of a dubious departure from, or distortion of, historical reality" (LaCapra 15–16). This may have positive or negative effects for the traumatised individual, as, with writing that contains far too much fictionalisation, the act of working through might not be as effective as with those not straying as far from reality. What is being suggested here is that the acts of trauma which are recreated in personal writing, such as letters, diary entries or essays might be more effective as a 'cure' and a possibility for 'working through' than for those individuals that choose to narritivise their trauma into a novelistic format. Nevertheless, any form of (literary) verbalisation, just as Freud's ideas with the 'talking cure', "remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible" (Geoffrey Hartman as qtd in Nadal and Calvo 7) Eventually, LaCapra highlights the idea that any

kind of deconstruction of the experience, which in reality is a form of verbalisation, will "variably engage processes of acting out and working through." (LaCapra 68)

Ultimately, it would seem narrativisation, or writing about the traumatic experience, become the perfect vessel towards understanding the traumatic experience itself. Interestingly, it is known that Freud showed investment in the exploration of the human mind through the means of literature. As Caruth points out "[i]f Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing", in fact, the dichotomy between knowing and not knowing is where "the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet." (Caruth as qtd in LaCapra 182) That is to say, literature becomes the ideal artefact for the exploration of the human mind, as it is capable of capturing the spaces in between knowing and not knowing, simultaneously making use of the tools made available by the never-ending exploratory nature of postmodernism. This way, changes in traditional narrative structure allow the writer to play with form in a way that might mirror the chaotic, fragmentary, and non-chronological nature of coping with a traumatic event.

2.1.2.3 Scriptotherapy

Another author to expressly show concern with the need to use writing as a means of dealing with trauma is Suzette A. Henke, which, as Pellicer-Ortín mentions, "coined the term "scriptotherapy" to designate the type of life writing that responds to the need 'of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment.'" (Pellicer-Ortín 76 and Henke as qtd in Pellicer-Ortín) It is unclear if Henke's exploration and coinage of the concept comes directly informed from LaCapra's theories (although it is likely). As Pellecir-Ortín mentions, Henke extrapolates an idea of writing in terms of being able to "act out" and "work through"

trauma through writing, using semi-identical concepts to LaCapra. In both cases, the trauma experienced must be dealt with by authors which can only achieve a relative calm and comfort once their trauma has been experienced anew and therefore redefined by the means and in the form of writing.

Henke's claim comes from a questioning of the "role of the analyst" and whether "he or she [is] truly necessary", as well as from the realisation that the "therapeutic power of psychoanalysis reside[s] more in the experience of "rememory" and reenactment than in the scene of transference posited by Freud…" (Henke vii) Henke draws from social psychologist James Pennebaker, who, in *Opening Up* asks "is the talking necessary for the talking cure to cure?" (Pennebaker as qtd in Henke xi), in fact, Henke argues that "the very process of articulating painful experiences, especially in written form, can itself prove therapeutic" (Henke xi) because the act of "[w]riting about the thoughts and feelings associated with traumas (…) forces individuals to bring together the many facets of overwhelmingly complicated events." (Pennebaker as qtd in Henke xi)

Henke defines scriptotherapy as "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (Henke xii), arguing that "the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing and begin to alleviate persistent symptoms of numbing, dysphoria, and uncontrollable flashbacks" which are caused by repressed trauma. (Henke xii) Furthermore, she highlights the importance of fictionalising the self as a subject in the writing process (Henke xiv), specifically in autobiography, which could be argued to be a genre used by McEwan in both *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth.* This fictionalisation takes place because "[t]he human subject is always already split and divided, a subjectivity 'which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly

being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak.'" (Henke xiv and Weedon as qtd in Henke) In writing, however, the self can find a form of cohesion because autobiography offers "the potential to be, a powerful form of scriptotherapy (…) [it] has always offered the tantalizing possibility of reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically inflected by language, history, and social imbrication." (Henke xv)

This is possible due to the fact that in the act of writing the author can reconstruct its own split self and turn it into a "newly revised subject", obtaining "an empowered position of political agency in the world" hitherto unattainable due to the damage caused by the traumatic experience. (Henke xv–xvi) While Henke specifically focuses on female writing and autobiography, as was just mentioned both *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* could be considered to include main characters which partake in acts of autobiographical writing. What both Briony Tallis and Tom Haley do through their narratives, ones which coincidentally heavily rely on the fictionalisation of real-life events and people, is to "attempt to fashion an enabling discourse of testimony and self-revelation, to establish a sense of agency" (Henke xvi), something that without the act of scriptotherapy would be rendered impossible. Interestingly, scriptotherapy inevitably takes place through language: the relationship between the trauma and the language used in order to cope with it is thus explored in the text. This allusion to the use of language can be linked to the way in which Granofsky defines language as a "bearer" of "imagery", and as other bearers of imagery, it becomes "the prime vehicl[e] for the transmission of collective trauma." Furthermore, "language in general can help infuse individual identity with a community sense of self where the recovery of unity is bought at the price of self-definition." (Granofsky 74) Briony's use of language to cope with her traumatic experiences, therefore, becomes an act of self-determinism.

In Michael S. Roth's *Memory, Trauma and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012), he states that there is an inherent contradiction at the core of trauma writing, in that

> [t]he intensity which makes forgetting impossible also makes any specific form of recollection seem inadequate. The traumatic event is too terrible for words, too horrifying to be integrated into our schemes for making sense of the world. Yet any representation of the trauma may have to rely on words and will be limited by the very schemes that were initially overwhelmed. A "successful" representation (a representation that others understand) of trauma will necessarily seem like trivialization, or worse, like betrayal. The intensity of a trauma is what defies understanding, and so a representation that someone else understands seems to indicate that event wasn't as intense as it seemed to be. No direct speech is possible. (Roth 210)

The issue of writing trauma is explored by a few trauma critics (such as Henke, LaCapra or Roth itself) as not only a complex endeavour but one that needs of different forms of communication and retelling of the experience than any conventional narrative may afford to provide. The event is considered as almost impossible to put into words, and yet what most of these critics also agree on is that distance and specific uses of genre are some of the solutions to the possible articulation of the traumatic experience. Roth describes the "modern concept of trauma" as one that "both demands representation and refuses to be represented [as t]he intensity of the occurrence seems to make it impossible to remember or to forget", this is due to the fact that, as mentioned above, as pointed out by Freud, the traumatic occurrence is "unfinished", which leads to the "individual … not really experience[ing] the event as it happens. This may be why victims often describe themselves as spectators of their own trauma." (Roth 210) For Roth, it is precisely in the nature of trauma that the need to represent it emerges. Because it was experienced out of time, it needs to be represented again, and as mentioned earlier, that can either be in real-life behavioural patterns, repeating themselves or re-emerging time and again, as forms of attempted understanding, or, in turn, through textual representation. Ultimately "the occurrence was too intense to be forgotten; it requires some form of re-presentation" (Roth 210) and it seems to be

proven that either oral or textual representation are the most powerful forms of coming to terms with this out-of-time-ness.

Henke, for instance, envisions autobiographical writing as a form of rebirth (Henke, 116), which is vital to understanding McEwan's endeavour. In his depiction of characters which in their encounter with trauma need to establish their identity afresh, writing provides the possibility for rebirth, where in the narrativisation of their life experiences, both characters regain control of their fragmented identities and emerge as victorious (and most importantly, whole) authors. This is possible because, as Henke suggests, "[i]n any autobiographical text, the narrator plays both analyst and analysand in a discursive drama of self-revelation" a self-revelation made possible due to "the sense of agency to the hitherto fragmented self, now recast as the protagonist of his or her life drama". It is in the act of writing, their "artistic replication of a coherent subject-position" that they are capable of "generat[ing] a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency" (Henke xvi) thus proving that in the case of both Tom and Briony, authorship is obtained through the means of acting out (Briony) or working through (Tom) trauma through the means of writing.

2.1.2.3.1 Revenge Narratives

A term that will be employed in this study, specifically in regard to *Sweet Tooth* and Tom Haley, is that of the 'revenge narrative', this term is used as a hybrid of sorts. There is no definition for the kind of genre that is attempting to be discussed. Whereas the revenge tragedy play, traced back to the Greek tradition, is a known genre which records the acts of vindication conducted by a protagonist against an antagonist that has harmed them, what *Sweet Tooth* does is to mix the trauma novel with the intent of

revenge against an individual through the use of metafiction. The term ‘revenge narrative’, therefore, is coined by myself in an attempt to define the type of literary text created by Tom in response to the trauma inflicted on him. The term largely draws from the idea of ‘revenge porn’ in that the narrative that Tom puts forward is one that contains the intimate details of his sentimental and sexual relationship with Serena Frome. While ‘revenge porn’ is a term that has become growingly popular and mostly employed regarding actions performed on the internet, the reason why I choose to equate the terms is due to the delicate nature of the details shared within the vengeful act of writing (and therefore 'sharing' with a public).

Jenna K. Stokes states “[r]evenge porn can originate in a few ways: (1) non-consensual photography or video recording (…) , (2) consensual photography or video recording that is later stolen (…), and (3) consensual photography or video recording that is intentionally transmitted to an individual.” (Stokes 929) Furthermore, Mary Anne Franks defines non-consensual pornography as “the distribution of sexually graphic images of individuals without their consent”, further indicating that not only such acts are morally questionable, but that “[t]he law should also recognize that consent to being depicted in a sexually explicit manner to one’s intimate partner is not consent to having that depiction exposed to the world at large.” (Franks 3) As mentioned above, descriptions of revenge porn do not match *Sweet Tooth*, as not only is the novel a textual (rather than visual) representation, but the nature of what Tom Haley describes within the narrative could in no way be construed as pornographic. Nonetheless, as Franks states, revenge porn is understood as “transform[ing] unwilling individuals into sexual entertainment for strangers” and non-consensual pornography tends to be put forward into public domain by “vengeful ex-partner[s] or malicious hacker[s which] can upload an explicit image of a victim to a website where thousands of people can view it

and hundreds of other websites can share it." (Franks 4) In this instance, *Sweet Tooth* becomes an ambiguously non-consensual sharing of intimate information which may alter the public image of Serena, in the hands of her vengeful (ex?) partner, Tom. What is more, the repercussions of sharing this information may lead to frequent "threat[s] with sexual assault, stalk[ing], harrass[ment or] fir[ing] from jobs" (Franks 4), one of which is surely to affect Serena (as she is undeniably discharged from her position for MI5). Franks also states that "[w]hile non-consensual pornography can affect both male and female individuals, empirical evidence indicates that the majority of victims are women and girls, and that women and girls face more serious consequences as a result of their victimization", and not only that, but revenge porn "often plays a role in intimate partner violence, with abusers using the threat of disclosure as a way to keep their partners from leaving or reporting their abuse to law enforcements" (Franks 4). Once more, while what is being described is an extreme that is not reached or portrayed in *Sweet Tooth*, all such elements are consequences to the actions ignited by Tom's narrative. Not only does he use Serena's personal and intimate image for his fictional account, revealing aspects of their intimate relationship (along with events and encounters of her previous sexual history), he uses his narrative to ensure she will not continue to hold the same employment, and he holds his narrative as leverage for the intricacies of their relationship. Granted, as will be exemplified below, the fact that the narrative has been published and is being read by the real reader indicates that Serena seems to have consented to its publication, which makes the narrative form differ even more widely from revenge porn; nonetheless, the intent in the act of writing itself, as will also be exemplified below, could allow for an understanding of the text as a form of

revenge narrative. In fact, Tom himself admits his writing is what he turns to instead of turning violent after finding out about Serena's "secret" intentions. [28]

2.1.3 Ian McEwan's and Traumatised Authors

As will be explored below, trauma is one of the key triggers in the building of the authorial identity of McEwan's inscribed authors. In fact, trauma is a key feature in McEwan's oeuvre, as most (if not all) of his narratives deal with traumatic events to a larger or lesser degree.

Briefly reviewing only his long-form work, one can see its presence in *The Cement Garden* (1978), where a group of young siblings are faced with orphanhood; in *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), where a young couple faces the eventual torturous interactions with another couple in a foreign country; in *The Child in Time* (1987), where a married couple has to move through life after the disappearance of their young child; in *The Innocent* (1990), where not only socio-political traumatic occurrences may be considered to take place, but eventually its protagonist commits a murder in an act of somewhat self-defence which proves inevitably traumatic; in *Black Dogs* (1992), where a young man narrates a specific confrontation with violent dogs which took place and inadvertently changed the course of the lives of his parents in law; in *Enduring Love* (1997), where a balloon accident becomes the unravelling of the main characters involved; in *Saturday* (2005), where the influence of the War on Terror affects different individuals on a specific day in London, leading to a tense and certainly traumatising

[28] Mary Anne Franks ponders on the nature of non-consensual pornography, indicating that it "is also used by traffickers and pimps to trap unwilling individuals in the sex trade. Like other forms of abuse that are disproportionately aimed at women (for example, sexual harassment, rape, and intimate partner violence), non-consensual pornography violates legal and social commitments to gender equality as well as causing devastating harm to individual victims." (Franks 4) Tom's revenge narrative does cause individual harm to Serena, and readers may, or may not, as exemplified above, understand Serena has consented to the narrative.

confrontation; in *On Chesil Beach* (2007), which becomes a veiled commentary on sexual repression and abuse; and even in *Nutshell* (2016) which explores trauma at the womb.

Notwithstanding, it is exclusively in *Sweet Tooth* and *Atonement* where McEwan deals with traumatised *authors* rather than traumatised subjects or traumatic events alone. It is my belief that both novels are not only linked in their exploration of authorship, narrative or metafiction. In fact, the three themes are inextricably linked in their exploration of traumatic events. These traumatic events, experienced by both inscribed authors, are those which consolidate (if not entirely construct) their authorial identities, and such identities become originators of narratives ultimately in need of metafictional devices — precisely so they can fully capture the magnitude of the traumatic occurrence.

Trauma is not only used to reinforce authorship in McEwan's novels. Actually, in every instance, it functions as a possibility to strengthen an individual's identity, as a moment of epiphany or redefinition, or as a starting point or crossroads in the understanding of the true self. For that reason, in the case of *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* trauma becomes all the more interesting, because it is not only utilised as an exploration of identity and how it is built, covered and recovered, but also as the analysis of one of the means in which authorship is built similarly to any kind of individual identity, rather than a simple personality trait or profession. Vickroy points out traumatic situations usually "involve a confrontation with death" and specifies such occurrence might present itself in the forms of "imminent danger, as in a war or a concentration camp, but it can also involve situations of *subjective death*: loss of a loved one, numbing, or *having one's identity disregarded or effaced*" (Vickroy 223 emphasis added), which is the case for both Briony and Tom, experiencing the disregard and effacement of their

identities. Both characters, therefore, will perform respective "[a]ttempts at self-creation, establishing some provisional identity through symbolization and fantasy" which Vickroy considers key in traumatic experiences as "symbolic forms of resisting one's annihilation as a subject" (Vickroy 223).

As will be exemplified in the subsequent chapters below, each character will establish a different strategy to control situations where they have lost the power over their own sense of self (as Woods indicates, "[t]rauma, in McEwan's work, inaugurates a loss of innocence" (Woods)) which Vickroy describes as a behaviour which "even if illusionary, serve[s] the same purpose." (Vickroy 223) Consequently, in both *Sweet Tooth* and *Atonement*, as this study attempts to prove, it is due to trauma that the authorial presence manifests as strongly as it does, dealing with ideals regarding the loss of power. In both cases, the writing of the narratives explored in this study becomes a process in which both authors "incorporat[e] aspects of abuse into a pleasurable context" (Vickroy 156). This is due to the need to repossess a sense of control, one which "even if it is self-abusing or ineffectual, is necessary to building a perception of an integrated identity" (Vickroy 156). In fact, in the aftermath of the traumatic experience, "[t]he ego must avoid feelings of total helplessness, or a sense of self will disappear" (Vickroy 156). This idea can be related to LaCapra's notion that trauma can sometimes become a 'founding' trauma, in that, the "crisis or catastrophe that disorients and harms the collectivity or the individual may miraculously become the origin or renewed origin of the myth" (LaCapra xii), the idea of 'myth' here is being repurposed as the origin of a renewed being. Trauma ultimately "exert[s] its power as a structuring and shaping force even in those cases in which it is not truly known to survivors, or even when silenced memories are not recognised" (Martínez-Alfaro 186–87). For that reason, trauma, for both Briony and Tom, becomes the foundation of an authorial

identity, one which, consciously or not, shapes and structures their future beings, beings that emerge as authors in order to battle the traumatic experience.

2.2 The Creation of the Author: Narcissism, Scopophilia and Trauma in *Atonement*

In this section, the reasons behind Briony's drive towards authorship will be discerned, attempting to explore the idea that a combination of narcissism and trauma (both co-dependent attributes to Briony's personality) feeds her desire and thirst for writing and, ultimately, for publication.

Briony is first introduced in the novel as a thirteen-year-old on the brink of young adulthood. As explored in the previous chapter, most of the first part of the narrative focuses on connecting her need for growth and transitioning into the next stage of her life with the realisation that such transition is linked to her writing approach. What Briony experiences during the first part of the novel is the trauma of understanding that with each new stage of life, parts of her younger self must be left behind. However, the trauma of growing up is aggravated by several different experiences where she witnesses events she is not ready to be a spectator of. Most of these traumatic experiences seem to affect her because they will affect how she perceives her core being and also because she becomes witness to moments she does not understand and does not have the tools to adequately process. As Daniela Pitt argues in "The Representation of Trauma in Ian McEwan's Atonement and Saturday" (2009), McEwan, "[b]y positioning his protagonists in acts of trauma ... provides the scope for moral growth with a view that a morally questioned existence, through self-investigation and self determination, is a possibility." (Pitt 56)

As discussed previously, Briony is described as a child that needs control, which inevitably also translates to her understanding of the world. To Briony, the inability to understand resembles the inability to hold agency over a situation, which can become traumatising. As Granofsky mentions, "[t]he primary vehicle for the plot in the trauma

novel is the search for an integrated, stable identity in the modernist sense" (Granofsky 18). In each of the events that will be exemplified below, Briony therefore experiences a loss of control over the understanding of a situation that becomes traumatic, and from each instance, a stable, authorial identity is reinforced. This is possible since Briony has overcome every obstacle in her life since infancy through the prism of fictional accounts.

The fact Briony does not have a specific text or understanding (based on literature) of the situations she is a bystander of[29] means she is not equipped to cope with such events the ways others could or would. For that reason, she turns to writing. This, as exemplified above, is a common feature for trauma texts. Granofsky mentions that in novels that deal with trauma, "we see a portrayal of the quest for identity in the face of a brutal assault on the sense of self. The novelist often depicts the quest by what [he calls] the structure of "trauma response," which may be broken down into three interdependent "stages": "fragmentation," "regression," and "reunification."" (Granofsky 18) This trauma response can be observed within *Atonement* through the use of scriptotherapy. Pellecir-Ortín puts emphasis on the fact that this type of "[l]ife writing becomes, then, a useful tool for the reconstruction of the self after a traumatic process" (Pellicer-Ortín 76). In the case of Briony, the usage of scriptotherapy becomes an undeniably "successful techniqu[e,] enabling the author-narrator to create a healing narrative capable of restoring the fragmented self to a position of psychological agency" (Pellicer-Ortín 84).

[29] As a child, she is self-absorbed in fairy-tales, and while the text never directly references the texts she reads - only the texts she writes, it could be assumed she has not read adult material.

2.2.1 Narcissism and Scopophilia

2.2.1.1 Briony's Narcissism

Narcissism is a condition which rightly describes Briony's identity: From the beginning of the narrative and throughout, her interest in imposing herself as an authority, which leads to a God-Like understanding of authorship, can be distinctly related to having a streak of narcissism in her personality. Briony, from a young age, requires the attention from those around her, to the point that she ends up imposing her wishes and needs above anything or anyone else's, as has been discussed in the previous section. Not only that, Briony displays a love and attention to herself which relegates the rest of the world to a secondary position: Her needs go first, her narrative goes first, her pleasure goes first. Her narcissism is what inevitably feeds her thirst for being the only authority over her texts, but it also affects the way she reacts to traumatic situations, which is why both could be considered co-dependent approaches to dealing with the events that surround her. Her 'condition' is not rare, however, as in the original conception of narcissism conducted by Freud, as will be exemplified below, narcissism and melancholia are inextricably linked, and both could be considered to be states or processes Briony navigates from a young age.

Narcissism is considered a personality disorder, widely explored and popularised through psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud through his "On Narcissism: An Introduction" from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. A term originally coined by "Paul Näcke in 1899" used "to denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated—who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction." (Freud, "On Narcissism" 73) The concept derives from Greek Mythology, where Narcissus fatefully and fatally fell in love with his own image. The theory that has been developed through

psychoanalysis and sociology through the years is not altogether that different from the original myth: Narcissus was so immersed in his own image that it became impossible for him to function within society. The current narcissist, different from the myth and from the original Freudian principle, functions in society, but does so in a deluded state of grandeur, obtaining pleasure and gratification through manipulation and adulation. Notwithstanding, while the current narcissist functions within society, it is unable to create healthy and empathic emotional links with other social beings, which affects its emotional, professional, and personal life.[30] The modern narcissist, therefore, strikingly resembles Freud's, as the attention that should be directed at others is only directed at oneself, or only momentarily directed at others so it can result in a pleasurable experience for the self. Freud puts it as follows: "[t]he libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism." (Freud, "On Narcissism" 75)

[30] A more modern and somewhat social understanding of narcissism can also be applied to Briony's behaviour. Sandy Hotchkiss, clinician, and author, lists the 'seven deadly sins of narcissism': First, narcissists display shamelessness: a lack of shame is certainly something that Briony is guilty of, as she never repents from her mistakes on her path towards authorship and she never steps back from her decisions, as they all lead to her ultimate goal. As explored widely in the section below, if only, what she does do is gloat about the end result. Second, narcissists demonstrate a belief in their perfection: Briony admits to her mistakes once, in her final, fictional conversation with Cecilia and Robbie, but during the rest of her narrative, the belief she displays in herself and her mind, the ruthless intent on becoming an author and the refusal to accept criticism to her oeuvre, show a certain tendency towards believing everything she does is correct. Third, narcissists tend to show arrogance, which is linked to both the belief they display in their perfection and their shamelessness towards it. Briony certainly shows arrogance towards the rest of the characters, especially when it comes to her authorial identity, and given the fact that there is barely a trace of her that is not entirely related to her authorial self, it is almost impossible to discern how she would behave in a traditional-identity setting. At the coda of the text, especially, she shows an arrogance towards the reader when she assumes she knows what would benefit her readership, proving she believes she knows what the best way to behave is. Fourth, narcissists display envy, especially by putting down other people's achievements: Briony exhibits jealousy for Lola, and, observed from Robbie's point of view during part two of the novel, even perhaps for Cecilia. There are no clear traces of her putting down other people's achievements, however, because the text is almost exclusively dedicated to contemplating hers. Fifth, narcissists tend to feel entitled: Briony expects everybody around her, especially during part one of the novel and the coda, but also during her conversation with her sister and Robbie during part four, to put down their own interests and pay attention to her. Everybody must read her texts, or perform her texts, and understand them as she has conceived them, giving praise for them. If they show differing opinions, if they do not pay her the attention she demands, she does whatever it takes to get the attention she believes she is entitled to have. Sixth comes exploitation: Briony uses everybody around her to turn them into a narrative, to suit her creative needs, and if they do not play along (by being themselves or having motives she does not contemplate) she disregards their voices and experiences at her will and convenience. And last, but certainly not least, according to Hotchkiss, narcissists participate in negative boundaries, that is to say, they sustain the belief that the other is an extension of themselves. As mentioned above, Briony uses others as ploys for her narrative creation, so they are only important to her in that they can serve the purpose of a good story. The only person she seems to show any pity or remorse for is Cecilia, but only because she does not anticipate the dire consequences her actions will have on her sister's life. As noted previously, she never shows remorse for her violent acts of writing. While Briony does not meet all the previously listed criteria in full or necessarily in an equal and balanced way, the fact that she meets all of them to some extent shows how narcissistic her personality is. (Mandal)

Being mesmerised by one's own image directly relates to the idea of scopophilia: there is a certain pleasure in looking at animate or inanimate objects, just as there is pleasure to be found in the act of being watched. Slightly different from the concept of voyeurism, and closely related to Jacques Lacan's theory of the gaze, where the pleasure is obtained by watching others, scopophilia is more concerned with the act of *seeing* in itself. As will be exemplified below, Briony fits into all such categories.

What the psychoanalytic approach to both narcissism and melancholia explores is the idea of a "contained, unit-self whose known contours signal [the] possession of secure borders" that is to say, Freud is "most evidently concerned to describe the structure of ego-formation" (Sheils and Walsh 3) and how the shattering or incapability of such a formation affects the individual. (Sheils and Walsh 3) What both narcissism and melancholia interact with is

> the difficulty of drawing lines between the self and the world: the narcissist who declares 'I am the world, and the world is me' obliterates the very distinction; the melancholic, famously in Freud's formulation, expresses a worldly impoverishment as a self-destitution, object-loss is transformed into ego-loss: 'In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself'. (Sheils and Walsh 2)

This so-called ego-loss is what motivates the behavioural patterns the narcissistic or melancholic (often connected attributes in an individual) being participates in. Interestingly, especially for Briony's case, this ego-loss tends to be subjected to childhood events, as Freud connects it to "an intriguing inability, in human subjects, to mourn 'the lost narcissism of [their] childhood in which [they were their] own ideal.'" (Bonnigal-Katz 145 and Freud as qtd in Bonnigal-Katz) This takes place because the individual is "not willing to forgo the *narcissistic perfection of his childhood.*" (Freud as qtd in Bonnigal-Katz 145, emphasis added) Freud suggests this to be inherent in the being, something "inherent in infantile narcissism" which is related to "a primary form of state of the ego", and precisely because of that, it "can never be relinquished by the

human psyche … because it is constitutive of the ego itself, permissing, as it were, its very formation." (Bonnigal-Katz 145) The individual experiencing this detachment, as it so happens to Briony, ends up inhabiting melancholia (or has melancholic tendencies) because, as has been stated previously, melancholia is related to the loss of a cherished object (which in this case, is the narcissistic, ideal self).

Briony's narcissism and melancholia, therefore, are inevitably connected to her construed sense of authorship, which leads to the understanding that Briony's narcissism is what marks the "controlling demon" she is described to be, her need to have things the way she aspires them to be, her wish to be an author (what better way to be blindly and constantly praised than to be a public, influential figure? One that is ensured to make her be admired and remembered, one that allows her words to be the utmost authority?) and eventually her success as one. This narcissism both stems and is reinforcing of her traumatic experiences, and it is translated into an irrevocable need to become an author. As Vickroy puts it, trauma survivors "survive by learning to love unique aspects of themselves, though their own needs impede developing a capacity to love or trust others; their narcissism also involves a greater need to be loved than to love in turn." (Vickroy 115) The unique part of Briony's self that she learns to love and reinforce, therefore, is the one awarded to her through the act of writing.

2.2.1.2 Briony's Scopophilia

As previously mentioned, Briony's narcissism specifically manifests in the form of scopophilia, from the pleasure she either obtains from witnessing different people and events, or by being witnessed by others. It is also rather interesting to note that the

moments which cause a trauma in Briony's psyche occur while she is witnessing something. As posited by Freud,

> 'It follows that the preliminary stage of the scopophilic drive, in which the subject's own body is the object of the scopophilia, must be classed under narcissism, and that we must describe it as a narcissistic formation' (Freud 1915: 131-132). The emergence of the ego could thus be said to coincide with this 'preliminary stage of the scopophilic drive', suggesting that primary narcissism be a primordial vicissitude of the scopic drive via a 'turning around upon the subject's own self. (Bonnigal-Katz 147)

In these cases, the act of observance, one which would usually provide Briony with pleasure, fails her, as it forces her to question her assumed knowledge. This means that in the failure of her scopic drives, her ego-formation is also altered. This eventually leads to traumatising situations for Briony, as she is incapable of understanding why her ego-formation is being hindered, however, simultaneously, it also eventually leads to the development of quite an attempted all-powerful and God-like ego-formation.

What follows is an exploration of the idea of scopophilia in relation to Briony, approached from Laura Mulvey's theories exposed in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1999)[31]: Mulvey remarks "[t]here are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at" (Mulvey 835), she highlights "Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. (…) [Freud] associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling curious gaze" (Mulvey 835). Needless to say, the pleasure Briony feels from looking at others is inevitably linked to her desire to objectify them, and by 'objectify', what is meant is her desire to turn them into objects for her narratives. Concurrently, in Briony's objectification of her subjects there is an element of sexuality,

[31] While Mulvey focuses on scopophilia and the male gaze adhering to film theory, her thesis is nonetheless developed from Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* and here repurposed as it serves as a useful approach to understanding a theory on the gaze which simultaneously interacts with narcissistic rituals, which in Briony's case, is quite fitting.

that is possibly caused by the fact that in McEwan's work there tends to be the exploration of the seductive relationship between text and reader and consequently author and reader. What in *Sweet Tooth* manifests through Tom and Serena's consummation of their desire for each other is exemplified in *Atonement* through Briony's narcissism and blatant scopophilic tendencies. Briony also feels desire for the written page, and she feels pleasure in her own writing. Her relationship with her ideal reader is also imagined, carefully crafted, and given the fact that her reader is, in a way, essentially herself,[32] indicates that the relationship between author and reader in this case is within the author itself. The pleasure in looking, therefore, is a pleasure that she shares and executes purely for her own enjoyment, and consequently, the pleasure she obtains from writing is strictly narcissistic.

As Mulvey mentions, "[r]ecognition is thus overlaid with mis-recognition: the image recognised is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject which, re-introjected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others" (Mulvey 836): Briony's act of looking is indeed rooted in a need for recognition. As mentioned in the first section for this chapter, at the beginning of the novel Briony is in a quest to understand herself, for that reason, she requires being recognised (both socially and personally) as an author. Additionally, as John Berger states, "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (Berger 8), which places Briony's looking acts towards the creation of a fictional realm. As Mulvey states, the act of recognition would be understanding the other as a reflection of the self, however, in doing so, there is a moment in which Briony becomes alienated from her objectified subjects, as she fails to identify the other in the act of recognition.

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[32] This idea shall be explored below, most interestingly however, it is Briony's thirst to prove her expertise in writing which is greater than her thirst for sharing her story with the world. Hence why stating that the pleasure she obtains from her writing and consumption of fiction is purely personal is not all that far-fetched.

This moment of awareness, as Mulvey suggests, becomes, in fact, a moment of misrecognition. This can be observed in *Atonement* especially during the scene at the fountain, in which, shocked by her looking act, Briony becomes fixated with the behaviour of Cecilia and Robbie. Given the fact that their behavioural performance is unbeknownst to her, she elevates it to the realm of fiction. In this instance, therefore, the failure in recognition and the consequent failure in the scopophilic act, ignites the traumatic experience to become thus.

Mulvey describes 'moments of looking' in cinema, but as mentioned, these could be translated to text as "structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego" (Mulvey 836). Briony is indeed fascinated with the looking act, in fact she becomes so throughout the narrative, when she is trying to come to terms with what it must feel like to be or recognise 'oneself'. In her thirst for understanding herself, she turns to others for comparison, and in those moments, she experiences such "temporary loss of ego", becoming lost in the writing act. This loss provokes her ego to become simultaneously reinforced and lost in pleasure. It could be argued such moments are inevitably linked to her narcissism as her acts of looking are not based on anything other than an attempt at understanding herself and developing herself further, and thus "the constitution of [her] ego, comes from identification with the image seen." (Mulvey 837)

Another aspect to take into consideration is how the act of looking relates to exercising power, linking scopophilic acts to the imposition of power. As a matter of fact, throughout the narrative, Briony as a character is usually depicted as usually looking at somebody or something, rather than being looked at, which would imply that she only obtains pleasure while being active (rather than passive) in the action of observance. Hence, it could be concluded that she needs to be (or feel) in control of her

actions, rather than abiding for actions to be imposed on her. If that equation is tampered with it eventually constitutes suffering, and perhaps in due course, a shattering of the self. Consequently, scopophilia is concurrently inevitably linked to suffering. As Freud points out, it is necessary to understand that scopophilic "symptoms involve *suffering*, and [they] almost invariably [dominate] a part of the [subject]'s social behaviour"(Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" 166)

2.2.2 Briony's Trauma

2.2.2.1 Failure in the Scopophilic Act: The Fountain Scene

Mentioned above is the illustrious fountain scene, where in the act of looking, Briony first feels a confusion in the scopophilic act, and which also leads to her first traumatic experience. The fountain scene is first narrated by what seems to be an extradiegetic third person narrator. This is a choice made by McEwan which seems significant, as the scene is detailed in full before the reader is to see it through Briony's fanciful mind. As James Woods mentions, McEwan partakes in a "manipulation of surprise (…) He writes very distinguished prose, but is fond of a kind of thrillerish defamiliarisation, in which he lulls the reader into thinking one thing while preparing something else." (Woods) Thus, the fountain scene is eventually narrated from different perspectives, and in a new chapter now focalised through Briony's consciousness, the scene takes another shape. Vickroy suggests this break in narrative structure is common in trauma narratives, as it allows them to "incorporate (...) different forms and levels of awareness", this way the "[w]riters (...) creat[e] a number of narrative strategies to represent a conflicted or incomplete relation to memory, including textual gaps (both in the page layout and content), repetition, breaks in linear time, shifting viewpoints, and a focus on visual images and affective states." (Vickroy 29) In the retelling of the incident, Briony is at

the nursery, looking through its "wide-open windows" (38). The fact she observes this incident through a window adds further significance, as it indicates the openness awarded to the interpretation of the events taking place: a window may represent the possibility for escape, but also the possibility for interpretation. It takes her "some seconds before she register[s]" (38) what is taking place, and as soon as she sees it, she begins to adapt it to the fictions she has been writing until the moment: it is "a scene that could easily have accommodated, in the distance at least, a medieval castle" (38), it is a scene that Briony, from the beginning, attempts to fit into her literary standards, those she portrays in *The Trials of Arabella*, albeit in prose.

At first, in her attempt to understand the scene, she immediately assumes Robbie's "formal" way of standing ("feet apart, head held back") points at a "proposal of marriage" (38), which means that from a distance, through the open-wide windows of the possibility for interpretation, what is happening "fit[s] well" into a tale "she herself [could have] written" before (38). However, the scene soon begins to shape itself into the incomprehensible, as Robbie "imperiously raise[s] his hand now, as though issuing a command which Cecilia dare[s] not disobey" (38). This image breaks the literary stereotypes known by Briony, where males are meant to be either villains or knights and cannot hold the complexity of being both. Where, in a proposal of marriage, there should not be a tint of command. She becomes confused, she cannot comprehend what is taking place in the far distance: "What strange power did he have over her[?]" (38) she wonders. The confusion she experiences becomes thus that she considers stopping watching the scene altogether, an indication that she refuses to look at things unless they are both pleasurable and controllable. Her interpretation of Robbie's power over her sister becomes one of shame, "[s]he should shut her eyes (…) and spare herself the sight of her sister's shame. But that [is] impossible, because there [are] further

surprises" (38-39). As Freud points out, "[t]he force which opposes scopophilia but which may be overridden by it (…) is *shame*" (Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" 157). What follows is a further complication to her misunderstanding of the situation: Cecilia proceeds to take her clothes off, in a twist of events that renders the use of scopophilia ironic. Usually, in the act of looking and obtaining pleasure out of it, the pleasure attributed to looking tends to be considered to have an erotic nature. However, in this case, it is the inclusion of erotic elements which generates further incomprehension and reluctance on Briony's part.

A repetition of this failed scopophilic act, one significantly experienced through a window as well, is reproduced after Briony has already experienced two further traumatic events. She "move[s] to the window on her left as she c[o]mes right up to the house, in order to be clear of Emily's sight line" (161), in this case, the window once more provides a further layer to the narrative Briony is attempting to create, but it also provides indulgence in the looking act, almost as though aware of the fact that looking at things has begun to produce more distress than reward, she must give in to one last attempt at the scopophilic act. Not just that, the moment allows an additional glimpse into Briony's narcissistic personality when, in looking at her mother through the window, she muses on what would be the repercussions of her mother's death, but not in regard to her mother's passing as an individual, but in regards to how that would affect her popularity amongst her tending and comforting friends (161).

Briony's lack of comprehension of the fountain scene is also conditioned by its structure, or the lack of one thereof. She considers it to be "illogical", as the sequence, Robbie's command and Cecilia's submergence into the water in itself, "should have preceded the marriage proposal." (39) Upon accepting she does not understand the scene she is witnessing, she decides to simply continue to look. She feels privileged in

her act of looking, knowing she is privy to "access across the years to adult behaviour, to rites and conventions she kn[ows] nothing about, as yet." (39) As Finney mentions, "[h]er misinterpretation of the adult symbolic world is the product of her childhood reading habits in which she read herself as "Her Majesty the Ego," to misquote Freud." (Finney 79) Nonetheless, the episode, as explored in the previous section, becomes a moment of infinite creation, as she believes she is stepping into adulthood through her act of looking and consequent writing. Briony's stepping into adulthood is in fact an act of acceptance towards the fact that there are things in life she cannot understand, things in life she yet cannot attribute to any prior literary knowledge, and things in life she has no control over.

Interestingly, she has no evidence of the traumatic experience, as it will reside solely in her mind: "the wet patch on the ground where Cecilia ha[s] got out of the pond [i]s the only evidence that anything ha[s] happened at all" (39). One of the reasons that drive Briony to writing is precisely the need for evidence. In trauma studies, narratives written out of a traumatic experience are also considered to be testimony literature. In this instance, Briony is both a victim and a bystander of the traumatic experience, because there is an abstract aspect to the experience in itself. No action is inflicted upon her, she is not a part of the experience but a witness to something she cannot understand, because she is not equipped to understand it at such a young age. Trauma is therefore experienced through her need and thirst for watching, through her scopophilic nature, which links both conditions beyond separation. The act of watching does not achieve the anticipated pleasure, which ensues in even more trauma. What is more, the fact there is no other evidence of the traumatic experience drives Briony to the act of writing. As Il-Yeong Kim and Yoon Jung Cho argue, writing after a traumatic experience can have a "function of liberating traumatic victims from isolation because

to tell/write one's traumatic experiences is to share one's feelings with others"(280), Briony however is unable to share her experience with other beings, her only means to understanding the world is through the written page, hence why she turns to the written act immediately, to obtain pleasure and perhaps knowledge out of it. However, that does not disqualify the sharing experience, the writing act continues to possess healing powers, because in "transmitting one's traumatic events to the other, testimony can be an effective means of curing one's psychological wound." (Kim and Cho 280) In fact, if only, the sharing act creates a further desire for information, which as Pitt argues, in McEwan can be perceived as a "compulsive quest for knowledge. It creates a dynamism in which traumatic experience is transformed into an insatiable desire for knowledge" (Pitt 69) in this case, from Briony's part.

Foster describes trauma as an "...experience that is not experienced, at least not punctually, that comes too early or too late..." (Foster 123). Therefore, as an experience that is not fully experienced given its untimeliness, Briony's witnessing act of the fountain scene proves traumatic. As Kim and Cho argue, the act of witnessing is key to understanding how she later develops into an author, "Briony writing assumes grave importance because it represents and embodies her trauma and traumatic experiences, while functioning as a witness and testimony to her traumatic experience which is essential to traumatic awakening" (Kim and Cho 278).

After experiencing traumatic events, Briony becomes dissociated from her ordinary identity and rationality. Following this loss, she proceeds to experience moments of redefinition. Briony cannot be a child anymore, she must become what she already had in her mind to become: an author, especially given the fact that, as Granofsky mentions, one of the only ways "for the individual to re-enter the process of maturation (...) is to reconcile the traumatic experience with whatever else he or she

knows of life" (Granofsky 110), which in Briony's case is narrative. Trauma novels "deal with uncommon crisis" he goes on to mention, "which, indeed, represent threats to growth" (Granofsky 111). Nevertheless, the moments experienced, which have led to such epiphany, must not be left behind. As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue, "[f]or traumatic memory to lose its power as a fragment and symptom and for it to be integrated into memory, a form of narrative reconstruction or re externalization has to occur." (Felman and Laub as qtd in Vickroy 11)

Observing the scene from afar, Briony does not altogether understand what has happened. As mentioned previously, this is due to the fact that she is witnessing two adults interacting with each other - adulthood being a complex and confusing phase she is yet to understand the complexity of. This situation becomes traumatic mostly due to a lack of understanding, but also because due to her lack of recognition, she cannot draw pleasure from it. Her immediate reaction after the scene has ended and Cecilia and Robbie have gone their separate ways, is to acknowledge that this scene is "not a fairy tale" but "the real, the adult world", and therefore "there may [be] no precise form of words" (40). However, her reaction afterwards is that of introspection in the form of writing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this moment is the one that sets her authorial identity in motion, as her first reaction is to covet a moment alone where she can start inking everything down. She has already developed a structure, narrative voice and genre by the time she gets to her fountain pen. Writing will hereafter not only become a form of building Briony's identity, but it will also become a form of solace for her trauma. Writing is what allows Briony to deal with her traumas, which are the moments in which she lacks understanding of a situation, and so, writing becomes scriptotherapy. This scriptotherapy becomes a form of symbolising the experience by reshaping it immediately into another code. In this case, scriptotherapy becomes a

"[s]ymbolic fragmentation [which] allows for a relatively safe reenactment of the traumatic event, a repetition that leads, in turn, to increased conceptual awareness and emotional control." (Granofsky 119)

This first moment of trauma is inevitably exacerbated by what comes next, she herself identifies the moment at the fountain as a moment in which she becomes "recognisably herself" (41), indicating that the trauma experienced is to shape the rest of her life. This traumatic moment is also quite interesting to analyse, as she realises that it is not something she can grasp, but rather something composed of a metaphysical nature that can only be revisited through the means of the unreliability of memory. Briony is aware "there [is] nothing left of the dumb show by the fountain beyond what survive[s] in memory, in three separate and overlapping memories" (41).

The narrative does not focus on Briony as a trauma survivor. Nonetheless, the trauma experienced is subdued in the other literary layers contained within the novel. Later in the narrative, Briony is described as having "vanished into an intact inner world of which the writing was no more than the visible surface" (68), an armour or, as McEwan puts it, an impenetrable "protective crust" (68). Briony is here going through the process of introspection mentioned before, the fact that she has developed an armour around her has to do with what she has witnessed, which leads her to attempt to protect herself by submerging entirely into her writing. An immersion into an imaginary realm in which she is the one who is in power, where there are no external events that can maim her by showing her everything she is yet to come to understand. From then onward, as Finney highlights, Briony becomes "the prime example of the way art shapes her life as much as she shapes that life into her art. From the start, her powerful imagination works to confuse the real with the fictive." (Finney 78)

Briony's mother muses that from the fountain episode on, "her daughter [is] always off and away in her mind, grappling with some unspoken, self-imposed problem" (68), this is an indication that she is looking for answers regarding what happened in front of her, as well as devising the ways to come to terms with it. As her mother points out, Briony is re-inventing the "weary, self-evident world" in her mind (68). As mentioned in the previous section, after she witnesses the episode at the fountain scene, and after her encounter with Lola regarding the role assignment in *The Trials of Arabella*, Briony goes to find time of her own, slashing nettles in the field near the Tallis' home. Her act of "playing the nettles" becomes an act of "self-purification" (74). Because of that, it can be understood that when Briony encounters trauma, instead of blocking it, she rapidly takes to scriptotherapy. While it seems evident that the moments of trauma she experiences are something she cannot deal with, and something that will accompany her for the rest of her life in different instances of 'acting out', it is also interesting that, unlike most victims of trauma, she quickly clings to something that will allow her to express herself, despite the fact she might be doing it unconsciously. Briony might be unaware she is dealing with a traumatic experience, but she begins the reconstruction of her self the moment the traumatic experience takes place, which might differ from other trauma narratives, in which the subject might take years or even decades to begin such a process. As mentioned in the previous section, she has the urge to put everything she has seen into words, and to tweak them, fiddle with them, going over a never-ending process of repetition. This might be Briony's attempt at integrating her trauma. As Roth suggests, "[t]he "need" for integration stems from the claims that the traumatic past can still make on one in the present." (Roth 82) By acting out, in this case, Briony is not only reliving the traumatic experience and finding herself stuck in a melancholic state, but she is also attempting to grasp herself, and what she has

experienced, with her writing. Roth also suggests that “[i]f a trauma is unforgettable, this is, paradoxically, because it cannot be remembered, cannot be recounted…” (Roth 83) which in this case might be the reason why Briony spends her entirely life attempting to recount the experiences of the day. Her trauma cannot be recounted, it cannot be remembered properly for decades, hence why she will continue to participate in acting-it-out through writing, through the several drafts she writes of her novel.

Pitt argues that in the process of acting a trauma out, it is recreated repeatedly by its victims, in an attempt at dealing with, processing and letting it go. She says, “[t]here is a tendency (...) for a compulsive repetition of violence in the form of nightmares, actions and imitation which disables the victim to gain distance from the original moment of horror. Violence and horror subsequently become normative codes of behaviour replacing any former pre-traumatic behaviour.” (Pitt 25) Briony imitates her ‘moments of horror’ by committing what in here will be referred to as violent narratorial acts, that is due to the fact that trauma “must be acted out compulsively or reconstructed after the fact, almost analytically” (Foster 123). Moreover, the process of writing seems to be the most fitting option to deal with trauma for Briony, as it demands a constant and relentless process of researching, drafting, writing, and editing, thus turning the process into an almost never-ending exploration of a single experience: a form of psychoanalysis in itself.

2.2.2.2 *Nachträglichkeit* in the Written Word

Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, or belatedness, as mentioned above, is the occurrence in which an original trauma is brought to the surface by a second moment of trauma, which awakens the original occurrence into the conscious level. This “involves unfinishedness and repetition”, as given the fact that trauma survivors experience their

moments of trauma in an untimely manner, these will be required to "confront the primary shock over and over again." (Nadal and Calvo 3) That second moment of trauma for Briony takes place a few hours after the fountain scene, something that does not seem to be contemplated in Freud's original theory, as usually the moments of trauma tend to be separated by years or perhaps decades, rather than hours. Similar to what Pitt argues regarding the need to repeat the traumatic experience in different forms and structures, what this repetition implies is that it "fixate[s] the patient to her/his trauma" (Nadal and Calvo 3), thus "induc[ing] a ghostly relationship with the past that results in hauntedness, 'stasis and entrapment'" (Lifton as qtd in Nadal and Calvo 3). For that reason, after the fountain scene, "[it is] difficult to come back. Come back, her sister used to whisper when she woke her from a bad dream." (76)

Despite the realisation it is now almost impossible to go back to her young self - the realisation that the moment at the fountain has marked a before and an after, Briony's reaction is to understand that now she is "forced by international rivalry to compete at the highest level among the world's finest and to accept the challenges that c[o]me with pre-eminence in her field" (76), Briony, instead of surrendering to the moment of incomprehension, is "driven to push beyond her limits to assuage the roaring crowd, and to be the best, and, most importantly, unique" (76). The moment thus described is one where the world that made her must be accepted and reformed after the traumatic experience. Briony now understands she does not merely need a new fiction, but a reworking of her own life, where she is not a playwright but an all-knowing God-like author. In this new narrative she envisages writing, she sees that "of course, it had all been her - by her and about her" (77), and after the traumatic event, her epiphany allows her to understand that she is now "back in the world, not one she could make, but the one that had made her" (77). What this moment represents is the realisation that

despite her controlling demon, life has still happened around her, that despite her thirst and active attempts at understanding and controlling everything, something she was unable to decipher happened nonetheless, and for that reason, she decides to redefine her own power, and, as mentioned in the previous section, write about the life that happens around her, fictionalising it at her will, rather than about anything else. She decides to "simply wait on the bridge, calm and obstinate, until events, real events, not her own fantasies, r[i]se to her challenge, and dispe[ll] her insignificance". (77)

As mentioned previously, belatedness is ignited by a second moment of trauma. This moment takes place through another form of witnessing, but most interestingly, a form of gazing that is inevitably linked to the written word. Once again demonstrating that for Briony every act of trauma, just as every act of fiction, takes place through narrative. The second instance of trauma is the moment in which Briony reads Robbie's letter addressed to Cecilia, a letter he writes several drafts of, the draft he eventually gives to Briony (to give to Cecilia) being the wrong one (94). Interestingly, as each chapter of the first part of the novel is focalised through a different character, the reader does not see the contents of the letter through Briony's eyes (as will be exemplified promptly, she is incapable of recreating that language) but through Robbie's experience. Just as it happens with the fountain scene, McEwan's fractured narratological structure is especially effective in this case, as it allows the reader to be able to experience the moments of trauma from two different stand points. Due to the use of a third person ploy narrator, therefore, McEwan allows the reader to understand events Briony is incapable of reproducing, adding an extra narrative layer to create distance between the traumatic event and Briony as inscribed author. As Brian Finney mentions, while "Briony is a child who becomes involved in an adult sexual relationship that she is ill equipped to understand (...) [t]he narrator, however, has all the experience and

understanding of a lifetime." This way, through the use of a ploy third person narrator, "McEwan draws attention to a continuous tension between the narrative and its narration." (Finney 72)

In chapter eight, amongst many other drafts for his letter to Cecilia, Robbie writes "[i]n my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long." (86) The fact that the letter is reproduced in the text using another character as a focalising point is indicative of how shocking the language it contains is for a Briony aged thirteen. Portions of the letter are reproduced amongst segments of other drafts, showing that in *Atonement* the writing act is "dramatically forwarded" and showing of a "tension in the construction of meanings" between "form and content" (Vartalitis 2857). This is possible because the narrative in this chapter is focalised through Robbie and Cecilia, whereas, later on, in chapter ten, when Briony has the urge to "rip the letter from its envelope" and "read it in the hall" by "[a] savage and thoughtless curiosity" (113) not only can the contents of the letter not be reproduced, as the chapter is focalised through Briony, and this is language she is a foreign to, but the most offensive word is made culprit of her shock.

The scopophilic act is also present during this second event. Briony, aware she should not be reading (let alone opening) someone else's private correspondence, believes that in spite of the guilt she feels about doing it, it is something "right" and "essential" for her to do, as she needs "to know everything" (113); a thirst for knowledge this time suggestive of her need to find pleasure in the looking act. As mentioned previously, this second moment of trauma takes place through reading, but reading is inevitably conducted through *looking* at the written page. This segment of the narrative is written by combining Briony's feelings upon reading the letter (as well as her immediate correlation of the contents of such a letter) to the need for continuing to

form a narrative in her mind. Hence, while her moment of trauma is being narrated, so are described the ways in which she believes this event will inevitably change the story she started planning after the fountain scene. What produces shock in Briony is, once more, being privy to adult behaviour, behaviour she cannot understand. In this case, the shock is altogether more striking, as it takes place through narrative. Therefore, it is not only that Briony does not understand adult behaviour, she also does not understand Robbie's use of language. Not only that, once more, she finds herself refused the pleasure of seeing - and in this case, the pleasure of reading, by inadvertently encountering unwelcomed turns of events and unspeakable words. "The word: she tried to prevent it sounding in her thoughts, and yet it danced through them obscenely, a typographical demon" (114). Briony finds the scopophilic act once more to be void of pleasure, because a word that she does not know and she does not know how to understand (or to use) cannot give her pleasure. As Charmaine Falzon states, "Briony's reaction to Robbie's note reveals an important contradiction in her – she wants to be part of the adult world, but is not yet ready to accept certain aspects of it, notably that notoriously disruptive force which is human sexuality." (Falzon 66) In fact, the language contained in the letter is one she has not encountered before. The narrator states she "ha[s] never heard the word spoken, or seen it in print, or come across it in asterisks", in fact, "[n]o one, in her presence ha[s] ever referred to the word's existence" (114), the word shocks her because it is completely unknown territory for her. The word is so foreign to her, in fact, that she can only guess what it means, as "no one, not even her mother, ha[s] ever referred to the existence of that part of her to which - Briony [is] certain - the word refer[s]" (114).

This second moment of trauma is riddled with the effects of belatedness. As Nadal and Calvo mention, this belatedness, "the failure to have awakened/reacted in

time - can give rise to the ethical imperative to act and speak that awakens others" (Nadal and Calvo 8). Consequently, feeling profoundly disgusted, Briony begins "sensing the danger contained by such crudity" (114), and immediately takes to writing. For the first time, she ends up sharing her traumatic experience with somebody else. First, she sits at her desk, knowing she has "at least twenty minutes to herself", "at that moment," McEwan adds, "the urge to be writing [is] stronger than any notion she [has] of what she might write" (115). Once more, this is Briony's way of coping, she is not "attempt[ing] to signify the trauma by naming it; [she only] engage[s] with it through [her] art in such a way that the art enhances our understanding not of the event itself, perhaps, but of the human nature capable of enacting it on the one hand and enduring it on the other." (Granofsky 174)

In fact, what she thirsts for, more than a finished fictional product in itself, is the therapeutic aspects writing affords her, as she "want[s] to be lost to the unfolding of an irresistible idea, to see the black thread spooling out from the end of her scratchy silver nib" (115). It is not, therefore, a wish to produce new material, although she does have a need to "do justice to the changes that ha[ve] made her into a real writer at last" (115), it is the pleasure obtained from the writing act in itself, the possibility to be able to fight the shock, horror and disgust provided by a traumatic experience with the imposition of her power, in the form of her writing. In fact, she herself admits that in that moment "[o]rder must be imposed." (115)

In *Atonement,* therefore, the moments of trauma experienced are attempted to be dealt with and somewhat overcome almost immediately, and always in the form of writing. Interestingly, given the fact that Briony's writing and authorship are inevitably linked to the feeling of power and superiority she feels when holding a (fountain) pen or sitting in front of a typewriter, the moments when she partakes into a

scriptotherapeutical act become moments in which she is trying to regain the control she has lost during the traumatic experience. Consequently, trauma is represented as a loss of power, and scriptotherapy, or writing in itself, as a means to obtaining power.

Robbie can no longer be who she had always known, he must be demonised, she can "never forgive Robbie his disgusting mind." (115) Interestingly, Robbie cannot be forgiven mostly because Robbie is the one that has used a word she did not understand and did not know how to use, a word she had difficulty connecting to a signified. Robbie, therefore, responsible for the writing of the letter, and responsible for her continued non-comprehension of the events taking place around her, becomes the perpetrator of her trauma, so he must be demonised and destroyed through fiction. As Falzon speculates, "[f]rom the moment Briony reads the note … she becomes convinced that the Tallis house is threatened by a monster in disguise. The judgement she passes on Robbie is as sudden as it is absolute" (Falzon 78), Falzon also refers to Robbie as having "has been assigned the role of Frankenstein's creature" (Falzon 66). The problem, of course, arises when Briony's fiction becomes more powerful than perhaps anticipated, and so it is not merely a fictional demonising and destruction which takes place, but also a real-life one. Reality must be transformed. Briony seems to experience something similar to what Foster refers to when he mentions "[t]here is a dissatisfaction with the textual model of reality--as if the real, repressed in poststructuralist postmodernism, had returned as traumatic." (Foster 122) In fact, what Briony experiences in this second moment of trauma is the need to expose Robbie, to inculpate him, strip him of his power, given that she now realises what his true nature is. This way, Briony is reworking her trauma through her testimony, by defeating truth, which is necessary in the reclaiming of power loss: "...a special truth seems to reside in traumatic or abject states, in diseased or damaged bodies. To be sure, the violated body is often

the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary testimonials against power." (Foster 123) Because Robbie holds power over Cecilia, and somewhat over Briony, he must be testified against both in real life but most interestingly, through her fictionalisation of the traumatic events.

Another of the ways in which Briony attempts to fight her trauma through scriptotherapy can be perceived by the importance she gives to words after reading Robbie's letter. Having shared the contents of it with Lola, she takes satisfaction and comfort when Lola uses the word 'maniac' to describe Robbie. The word is fitting, it has "refinement, and the weight of medical diagnosis" (119), and as this word, and a 'condition' are "named she fe[els] a certain consolation, though the mystery of the fountain episode deepen[s]." (119) The use of 'maniac' helps, because Briony needs words precisely to counteract Robbie's traumatic use of language: it helps because she can define 'maniac' in ways she cannot define 'cunt'. It allows her to put the blame on Robbie for behaving in incomprehensible ways, as he is the one who acts in wrongful ways, and she is not at fault for not understanding them. The existence of the word 'cunt' troubles her, provoking her anxiety with the thought she might have to "say the word aloud" when Robbie is arrested (for the crime of writing that word down, (121)).

Her reaction upon reading the letter only reinforces what was mentioned above, which is that every new traumatic moment Briony experiences during the day manages to reinforce her identity as an author, helping her to rise as more dictatorial than before. In this case, "[w]ith the letter, something elemental, brutal, perhaps even criminal had been introduced, some principle of darkness" (113), something that forces her to act in a protective way towards her sister (despite the fact she is yet to ask Cecilia for any kind of information).

All moments of trauma experienced by Briony have in common that she does not hold an active involvement in the action, but rather the role of a witness and a bystander. As it has been mentioned above, the traumas are moments in which the act of looking, something usually pleasurable and providing of information, becomes unpleasurable and incomprehensible. Soon after Briony reads the letter, she encounters the third moment of trauma (in the same day), one that once more proves to be incomprehensible, violent and void of pleasure in the scopophilic act. In this case, she witnesses Robbie and Cecilia having intercourse, interestingly, in the library, where fiction rests. This moment of trauma is informed by the previous ones experienced, as Briony acknowledges that "what she s[ees] must have been shaped in part by what she already knew, or believed she knew." (123) This instance of trauma works because it reinforces the importance of the previous moments, in which the behaviour of Robbie and Cecilia, in three different moments, puzzles Briony to the extent of needing to build a narrative that will explain why they have been behaving thus. After the incident at the library, Briony has no time to write and she does not turn to scriptotherapy the way she did the previous times, mostly because by this time she is already planning on the unfolding of her real-life narrative. At this point of the novel, events begin to be "...transfigured by Briony's imagination, or rather re-created by her so as to develop into a narrative of 'crime' and its consequences, of wrongdoing and atonement." (Golban 222)

At this point, Briony is aware she needs to intervene in the events that are taking place, to make them more fictional and consequently more interesting to become a narrative. Chapter 13 opens with the statement that "within the half hour Briony would commit her crime" (156), a crime that is both life altering and a violent narratorial act. Having yet to commit it, she "sense[s] (…) how [it] might be achieved, through desire

alone; the world she [runs] through love[s] her and w[ill] give her what she want[s] and w[ill] let it happen" (157), not only that, after she has interfered into the real life of the people around her, she will then "describe it. Wasn't writing a kind of soaring, an achievable form of flight, of fancy, of the imagination?" (157) McEwan anticipates these moments of trauma and scriptotherapy, action and reaction, through the use of prolepses, which as Finney asserts, "makes it obvious that Briony is going to have to spend much of her life working at the description of this scene before she can achieve the final multiple focalization of it from three characters' perspectives" (Finney 75–76)

Briony's form of scriptotherapy, therefore, after her traumatic day, is not only to write, but to tweak reality to be able to write a more thrilling narrative. Interestingly, she does not dwell on attempting to understand the events that have rendered her powerless or unable to understand, she once more thrives to turn the tables around and be able to be the one who is in charge. Instead of dwelling into non-comprehension, she decides to act, to define and diagnose the characters she wishes to write about, to write the narrative she is willing to live and understand, rather than one she is not familiar with.

The intent behind her actions, however, is somewhat more unclear. As Finney wonders,

> Is Briony's work of fiction an evasion or an act of atonement or both? What exactly does she mean when she says that atonement "was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point" (p. 351)? Is she implicitly recognizing the contradiction at the heart of her narrative — the impossibility of avoiding constructing false fictions around others at the same time as one is required to enter imaginatively into their lives? Or is McEwan suggesting that the attempt is all we can ask for, an attempt that is bound to fail, but that can come closer to or stray further from the reality of others? (Finney 82)

It could be suggested that due to the traumatised state Briony is in, she is not aware of what drives her to commit her violent narratorial act. Finney does not suggest an alternative possibility, which is she might be unaware of the reasons behind her writing. Briony's writing is her nature, something she does instinctively and which she does not

question. If "[f]rom the beginning, her powerful fantasy acts to bewilder reality with fiction" it is because Briony does not understand life outside of fiction, "Briony's explanation of life comes from the books she has read." (Filimonova 5), which would imply both, that she might be completely unaware of the reasons behind her writing and that the trauma she has been subjected to reinforces such inability to track the original source of her need. Her thirst for sharing her experience, however, her drive towards making it a public exercise, is the consequence of trauma. As Kim and Cho claim,

> ...Briony's writing cannot achieve anything practical for Robbie and Cecilia since both of them were already dead during the World War Two. Her writing, in this regards, cannot atone for anything, but rather enhance the meaningless of her attempt. *Briony, however, implies the importance of her writing as a means of a testimony which is instrumental in revealing the truth* by [emphasising] the need to publish her story before she completely loses her memory by dementia. (Kim and Cho 279–80 emphasis added)

However, Briony refuses to wilfully acknowledge her newfound interpretation of Robbie's character might be inaccurate. She can only focus on the fact that "[r]eal life, her life now beginning, had sent her a villain in the form of an old family friend with strong, awkward limbs and a rugged friendly face who used to carry her on his back, and swim with her in the river, holding her against the current" (158). It is almost as if it is too good to be true, and she cannot question it. Robbie now being the perpetrator of her moments of trauma, he must be punished, and him having been a familiar and comforting figure beforehand makes it all the more challenging. In fact, she thinks "it seem[s] about right" because "truth [is] strange and deceptive" as she has recently discovered, and therefore truth must be "struggled for, against the flow of the everyday" (158). Coming to terms with the fact that truth can be traumatic, that truth includes not knowing, and moreover, that truth can certainly be unexpected, she acknowledges the only way to live with it is through its fictionalisation. This realisation is, as Granofsky puts it, a "postmodern paradox" in which "lies are necessary to construct the substance

of truth" (Granofsky 160). Vartalitis, conversely, links this idea to post-structuralism, which, "shift[ing] the focus from the signified over the signifier, and, rendering meaning independent and detached from structures" establishes the notion that, if "meaning [is] a linguistic construction" so are "truth and reality." (Vartalitis 2856) Furthermore, this reclaiming of truth turns out to be a perfect example of the need for scriptotherapy in *Atonement,* as Briony understands

> [t]he fairy stories were behind her, and in the space of a few hours she had witnessed mysteries, seen an unspeakable word, interrupted brutal behaviour, and by incurring the hatred of an adult whom everyone had trusted, she had become participant in the drama of life beyond the nursery. All she had to do now was discover the stories, not just the subjects, but a way of unfolding them, that would do justice to her new knowledge (160)

It would almost seem like Briony gets a thrill out of her traumatic experience, because it grants her an unprecedented knowledge of herself and a grasp on reality that allows her to understand she is meant to be an author. In this sense, Briony is clearly taking a turn for postmodern narrative, way before she actively makes the decision to leave modernism behind. Granofsky puts it the following way: "The postmodern writer of metafiction, Barthelme, say, or Barth, views language as essentially cutting the individual off from authentic reality by creating the illusion of order, agreeing with Beckett's Molloy that 'there could be no things but nameless things, no names by thingless names'." (Granofsky 172)

2.2.2.3 Acting Out, Scriptotherapy and the Witnessed Rape

The fourth and last moment of trauma is Lola Quincey's rape. A moment that is once again only witnessed by Briony in yet another scopophilic act. In this case, the scene is narrated indirectly, in that the reader, just like Briony, must figure out what is taking place at the same time. As Pitt argues, this broken structure of the narrative can be

linked to the broken world Ian McEwan builds, along with the shattering entailed by traumatic experiences. Just as "[t]he world that is presented by McEwan is a world where structure and order is threatened and often broken down" (Pitt 68) so must his narratives be. Trauma cannot be depicted in a straightforward way, it must be hinted at, diluted, broken down. Briony sees a bush "changing its shape in a complicated way", and it takes her a while to recognise the scene in front of her, as she indicates she "would have stopped immediately had she not still been so completely bound to the notion that this was a bush, and that she was witnessing some trick of darkness and perspective" (164). She then recognises that the "vertical mass was a figure" and that "[t]he remaining darker patch on the ground was also a person, changing shape again as it sat up and called her name." (164) The description of the incident being indirect allows for a further identification of the moment as a traumatic event, given that it shows that Briony needs layers of interpretation/narrative between event and recognition. In this case, as it so happens with the scene at the library, but unlike the moments at the fountain and the reading of the letter, the reader is not made aware of Briony's feelings upon witnessing the rape. This section of the narrative is focused on describing the interactions between Briony and Lola, but most importantly, in portraying the rapid way in which Briony is aware she "c[an] describe him" because, even though a few seconds earlier she was confusing a figure with a dark shape of a bush, "[t]here [is] nothing she c[an] not describe" (165). Not only that, at this point, Briony is so focused on her narrative, that the only thing she cares about is for Lola to "say his name. To seal the crime, frame it with the victim's curse, close his fate with the magic of naming." (165)

Once more it is through language that Briony wishes to achieve closure, through *naming* and *labelling* people and objects, just as by *seeing* she can obtain truth. Briony

therefore adheres to Lacanian theories of the gaze and of language: "[a]s with language in Lacan, then, so with the gaze: it pre exists the subject, who, 'looked at from all sides,' is but a 'stain' in 'the spectacle of the world.'"(Foster 106 & Lacan in Foster). A few pages later, as the narrative rapidly unfolds into the inculpation process, McEwan remarks that Briony's "*eyes* confirmed the sum of all she knew and had recently experienced" (169, emphasis added), indicating that not only is Briony taking back possession of the narrative of her life, by interfering into events she is aware she should not be interfering with, but she is also repossessing the scopophilic act, by taking pleasure out of creating a narrative purely built out of things she has experienced by only being a witness of. Her actions are now unstoppable, on a path to becoming a ruthless author: "Within a couple of days, no, within a matter of hours, a process was moving fast and well beyond her control," beyond her control but by means of her use of words, which "summo[n] awful powers" (169).

In this case the instance of scriptotherapy is combined with the need for repetition. She is "asked again and again, and as she repeat[s] herself, the burden of consistency [is] pressed upon her. What she ha[s] said she must say again" (169): as her narrative unfolds in real life, she must adjust to the differences between writing for oneself and one's family circle, and the possible dangers of sharing a story with a public - the dangers of gaining an audience. Now she cannot go back and edit her story, change its genre or rip the posters announcing its performance. Now she is stuck with her version of events. Furthermore, by gaining an audience she is actually forced into a process of repetition of the traumatic experience, a process of repetition that is forced upon her by circumstances she cannot escape from. As Kim and Cho argue, this process of repetition forces her to face what has taken place: "Briony writing assumes grave importance because it represents and embodies her trauma and traumatic experiences,

while functioning as a witness and testimony to her traumatic experience which is essential to traumatic awakening.” (Kim and Cho 278)

Thus, her violent narratorial act begins, one that she conducts because, as stated, she must “clin[g] tightly to what she believe[s] she kn[ows], narrowing her thoughts, reiterating her testimony” and only that way is she “able to keep from mind the damage she only dimply sense[s] she [is] doing” (170). Briony has no time to process the trauma in any other way than through the creation of the narrative she produces. In a way, it could be considered that Briony’s signed statement to the police is actually her first published narrative. She begins the process of internalising her trauma quite earlier than most trauma survivors, as she is prohibited from a period in which she can be paralised or blinded by the event. It is only later on in life that she will feel “troubled” by “her fragmented recollection of that late night and summer dawn” (173), and as any other victim of trauma, she will also be troubled by “[h]ow guilt refine[s] the methods of self-torture, threading the beads of detail into an eternal loop” (173). This would be an eternal narrative loop where she is forced to repeat her traumatic experience through the telling act, and to understand there are experiences she cannot control from, given the fact her narrative is now public. As Kim and Cho stress,

> [a]s a means of sharing one’s traumatic experiences, the writing, especially in the form of published writing, is the best way because publication can secure its audience or listeners / readers from diverse classes. This is the reason why Briony is trying to publish her story, because she knows that from the moment when her story is published, her private trauma assumes social dimension which is essential to curing or healing her traumatic wound. (Kim and Cho 281)

As has been mentioned above, her identity as an author stems from her traumatic experiences, and the many instances in which she takes to writing after a traumatic event are the blatant evidence of that. What is interesting is that from early on in the narrative, Briony’s relationship to her fiction and her power over it is established. The same way she interacts with the statement that accuses Robbie of rape is the way she

will interact with the manuscript for *Atonement*. This means that the trauma that shapes her decision of accusing Robbie by blindly believing in her imagination and by being possessed of a need to control the situation, as well as being the centre of it, is a trauma that stays with her through the rewriting of the statement into a full-length novel. As an author, Briony is "able to build and shape her narrative in her own words and establish the key facts" (180). In the instance of the court statement, she is slightly powerless when it comes to the outcome of her fiction - while she does accuse Robbie, she cannot anticipate what his fate will be, as she is not the judge and does not dictate his sentence. This still renders her powerless in front of her narrative, something that, from that point onwards, she will work tirelessly to change. Due to the traumatic events she has experienced, events that have left her powerless in front of situations, language, and even the reception of her narrative, she will continue to fight for the possibility of being the one and only dictator of truth.

As discussed in the previous section, her time working at the hospital becomes another moment of redefinition, where her identity is first eroded but eventually reinforced. Ironically, despite the description of hospital rituals and despite the clear evidence of the horrors of World War Two Briony is a witnesses to, her full attention during part three of the novel is to the manuscript she is writing during her spare time at night. She seems moved to do so by a combination of her need to cling to her authorial identity, one that is attempted to be wiped out by the neutrality of life as a nurse, and by the inevitably constant reminders of war. In this part of the narrative, therefore, Briony seems more invested in the research act, perhaps to be able to depict with exactitude what her characters, Robbie and Cecilia, are going through, rather than being able to see and incorporate the horrors she is constantly fed at hospital. Interestingly, writing once more may become a form of scriptotherapy, one that allows her to "preserve her

dignity", her narrative being "the only place she [can] be free" (280). During this part, therefore, her only concern is to her truth, and to writing and rewriting her narrative. Perhaps as a form of evasion, perhaps as just mentioned, as a form of clinging to the only thing she knows and allows her to go through her trauma without consciously facing it.

It is only through an added layer of narrative that she can disclose to the reader her manuscript is about the events of the day that would mark and redefine her life. Through the letter she receives from *Horizon* in which her story *Two Figures by a Fountain* in rejected, the reader is made aware that what Briony is doing is rewriting (and therefore repeating, reliving) the moment of her trauma, just as she had planned on that fateful day. The rejection letter eventually works to make Briony realise what she has written until the moment is not a narrative worthy of being published as it lacks the structure and intrigue the magazine (and the public) require. She is faced with the realisation that her fiction has focused on a specific event and therefore, "nothing much happens after a beginning that has much promise" (313) which would indicate *Two Figures by a Fountain* is ultimately stricken by a condition from which she cannot move from. As has been discussed, her trauma, ill-timed, forces her to stay in the past, almost in a perpetual state of childhood, unable to move forward. While at the centre of the first part of the novel is her introduction towards adult behaviour, in this part it seems to be hinted at as something she once more witnesses but is never truly capable of becoming a part of.

It seems that Part Three discloses the reality that despite her wishes to become an adult, she has actually been unable to move onto the future: her life continues to be marked by what happened at the fountain, her job requirements mean she has no time of her own (aside from the time she spends writing): she lives separate from her family,

her job is the one that most suits her need for research, she does not socialise or mention any circle of friends or romantic interests, she certainly makes no mention of any other 'hobbies' and, consequently, the entirety of her life is devoted to the writing and rewriting of an event that took place in the past. The inability to move forward indicates she is stuck in a process of melancholia in which the revision of past events makes the subject become fixated into something that can no longer be reached, which would shed some light into the reasons why Briony keeps excusing her actions and working on a manuscript that takes her decades to complete. She feels she has been misunderstood and is stuck in a process of understanding and allowing others to understand herself.

2.2.2.4 Elevating the Authorial Self through Overcoming Trauma

Briony needs to rewrite the moment at the fountain because she lacks understanding of what happened still to the day, and because after her *crime* she needs to recalibrate her fiction so that it becomes more satisfactory than real life. Once more, her act of scriptotherapy works to grant her the opportunity to attempt to turn fiction into reality, by allowing her to create different fates for her characters that might affect their real lives. As Foster mentions, "[i]n trauma discourse (...) the subject is evacuated and elevated at once."(Foster 124) Briony must become absent from her own self by indulging in a moment of creation which, in turn, elevates her authorial identity.

In *Horizon*'s letter it is made clear that the story does not move forward, and she is made aware that she needs to expand it beyond the moment at the fountain. It is only through the letter, therefore, that it is understood that the moment at the fountain is the root of her trauma, rather than the consequent events of that day. In the letter, she is asked to elaborate on "her resolve to abandon the fairy-tale stories and home-made folk tales and plays", and she is even given the answer that the path towards a good narrative

would be to include "the flavour of one" (312-313) into her work. She is also told to question herself: "[i]f this girl has so fully misunderstood or been so wholly baffled by the strange little scene that has unfolded before her, how might it affect the lives of the two adults?" (313). Once more, McEwan makes use of a shattered narrative voice so that Briony's trauma is named, but not by herself. It is only through the voice of *Horizon*'s editor, Cyril Connolly, that Briony, as narrator, can put into words how the moment at the fountain affected her. This might be due to the fact that, as Roth suggests, "[t]rauma violates our conventions when it happens, and we may want it to violate our conventions when we retell it. We want to avoid its domestication, and yet we want to understand it. Does understanding entail domestication?" (Roth 93) This way, Briony avoids a complete *domestication* of her trauma, but does not renounce to a minor understanding of it.

There are two further fictional moments which might also shed some light to Briony's personal and emotional interaction to trauma: First is the case of Paul Marshall and Lola Quincey's wedding (a ceremony that the reader later learns took place but Briony was never a part of), where a new moment of imagined scopophilia takes place. In the church, she attempts to give her fictional doppelganger a power she lacked to exert in real life: she describes herself in a moment in which after having "been on her knees in a pretence of prayer" she "stood and turned to face the procession as it reached her" (326), a moment in which she "want[s] to be seen" as she "simply stare[s]" (326). Not only that, she imagines her presence at the wedding as a "ghostly illuminated apparition" (327), an indicator of her fictional presence at the scene, but one in which, once more, the pleasure of being watched, the pleasure of having her presence observed, gives her the power she seeks.

The second moment is in the coda of the text which allows the reader to understand the circumstances under which Briony is writing the final draft of the story. The last part focuses on her seventy seventh birthday, a detail that becomes significant, as it demonstrates the importance of her birth and it comes full circle, showing yet again the story can be branded as a *Künstlerroman*. This detail also becomes interesting to process both her narcissism and trauma, narcissism being explored in terms of the importance and adulation given to her during the day, which satisfies her need for grandeur and adoration, and trauma being explored by means of showing that she has reached a point in her life in which her biggest enemy (the unknown), will eventually become her reality. Briony explains she has vascular dementia, a disease that will make her

> lo[se] the ability to comprehend anything at all. The days of the week, the events of the morning, or even ten minutes ago, will be beyond [her] reach. [Her] phone number, [her] address, [her] name and what [she] did with [her] life will be gone. In two, three, or four years' time, [she] will not recognise [her] remaining closest friends, and when [she] wake[s] in the morning, [she] will not recognise that [she] is in [her] own room. (354)

Vascular dementia represents a mixture of everything that Briony cannot accept, as it serves as a complete loss of control over her own body and her own identity. The realisation that soon she will be unable to know and comprehend things mixes with the obvious recognition that her ability to use language will also dwindle: "loss of memory, short- and long-term, the disappearance of single words - simple nouns might be the first to go - then language itself, along with balance, and soon after, all motor control, and finally, the autonomous nervous system" (354-355). Everything that can define Briony's identity (understanding the life around her, understanding herself, her memory, her name) along with everything that can help her fight not-understanding (language, narrative) will soon be gone. The moment is one to be surely traumatic for any individual, but even more so an individual such as Briony, who prides herself on her

authorial identity and who values understanding almost above anything else. Interestingly, somewhat shockingly, she says upon learning about her diagnosis that she is not "distressed, not at first", in fact and "[o]n the contrary, [she is] elated and urgently want[s] to tell [her] closest friends", she actually says to have "spent an hour on the phone breaking the news" and goes on to describe the situation as "momentous". (355)

D'Angelo mentions that Briony, by facing "impending dementia, which will erase all of her memories, indeed her grasp of language itself" will also "experience a literal "death of the author," after which only the text will remain." (D'Angelo 102) However, Briony does not seem to show preoccupation with that, if only she seems to believe her dementia will not be affecting her reception as an author, by her reaction it would almost seem she is relieved. Briony's description of the reception of such news could be considered to have a tint of the ironic, but it is interesting how, upon receiving such an important piece of information, she says to feel "elated" at the occasion. In fact, it could be assumed that what the diagnosis does for her is to allow her to understand further the need to publish her text. As Kim and Cho argue, Briony, at this point, might understand that her

> writing cannot achieve anything practical for Robbie and Cecilia since both of them were already dead during the (sic) World War Two. Her writing, in this regard, cannot atone for anything, but rather enhance the meaningless of her attempt. Briony, however, implies the importance of her writing as a means of a testimony which is instrumental in revealing the truth by [emphasising] the need to publish her story before she completely loses her memory by dementia. (Kim and Cho 279–80)

It would seem, therefore, that her unexpected elation may easily be attributed to the fact that the news she needs to share turn her into the protagonist of the moment, news that require others to invest their attention and care towards her. This news also represents something that will affect her future as an author, which arguably could lead to better press, better sales, better repercussion and therefore a slight empowerment to her

authorial identity - towards the public eye, but perhaps not towards herself. After all, as Kim and Cho argue,

> as a victim of traumatic experiences, Briony should create imaginary listeners/ readers through her writing. Felman also emphasizes the transmission of traumatic events not only as a means of relieving one's trauma, but also as a matter of responsibility. He says that only a witness who literally saw the event is able to testify and nobody can do that for a witness, while arguing that 'to bear witness is to bear the solitude of a responsibility, and to bear the responsibility, precisely, of that solitude'." (Kim and Cho 281 and Felman as qtd in Kim and Cho)

Consequently, her story needs to be read and not only because of her thirst for authorship and publication, but precisely because her thirst for authorship stems from trauma, which indicates her story needs to be read because it needs witnessing, it needs to be shared with others to validate her traumatic experience.

Briony is now dying, "fading into unknowing." (355) While in the past scriptotherapy was her immediate coping mechanism, in this case it could be suggested she is experiencing a moment of distantiation between the event and her self, one that is evident in the text as well. As Granofsky mentions,

> The literary symbol in the trauma novel facilitates a removal from unpleasant actuality by use of distance and selection. While human memory achieves distance temporally, the symbol in fiction achieves it spatially by imposing itself between the reader and the thing symbolized. Selection is achieved in the mind by the very nature of the faculty of memory, which is capable of expunging painful experiences from consciousness. (Granofsky 6)

Whilst in other parts of the novel this detachment was performed through the use of different narrative layers, by playing with narratorial voices and structures, in this case Briony puts distance between the traumatic realisation she will soon cease to understand, by denying the experience to materialise entirely into her narrative through the use of irony.

However, most interestingly, nearing the end of the book the issue of 'atonement', rises more prominently. What is it Briony is attempting to atone for? Is it

Briony's atonement? Or somebody else's? As Filimonova argues, vascular dementia is actually a blessing in disguise, an act of liberation for Briony, a way out of her traumatic experience, which would indicate that the writing act in itself, rather than its reception, was her process of atonement: "Ian McEwan points out at the end of the book that only Briony's memory loss can free her from guilt. Writing does not atone for her sin, as she would never get the forgiveness of Robbie and Cecilia, who both died during World War 2. What she did at the age of 14 is irreversible." (Filimonova 20) This is a rather interesting point to take into consideration, because the atonement Briony achieves is her own. There is a lack of validation in knowing she will not live to see her work published, and therefore, her atonement has more to do with knowing she has blurred the divides between reality and fiction and hence allowed a past in which Robbie and Cecilia's fates can be interpreted differently, rather than an attempt at achieving forgiveness from their part. The audience that needs to do the exculpating is not composed of Robbie and Cecilia, but only of herself. Furthermore, the only way for Briony to be able to move on from her trauma is through the blind sharing of her manuscript, and through the loss of memory that McEwan awards her.

During her birthday celebration, Briony, now back at the Tallis' home (which is now an inn, where every trace of her family has gone, as well as every trace of the literature she produced amongst its walls) once more directly encounters her traumatic experience. She does so, once again, through a scopophilic act (she is to be the audience of her very first play). In this instance the moment is significant because it mixes all the issues discussed in this section: Briony is not only undergoing a new trauma of her own but she is also confronted by her first trauma once again, in an act of repetition different to the ones conducted over the continuous drafting process. Moreover, she re-experiences her trauma in a scopophilic fashion - through being the audience of the

play, coincidentally during a day which reinforces her narcissism, as the room full of people are there to celebrate her, to celebrate her existence and birth, and not just that, they are there to celebrate her genius, intricately linked to her whole existence.

When sitting and waiting for the 'entertainment' of the night, despite having "been expecting a magic trick", what she "hear[s] ha[s] the ring of the supernatural". (367) Briony experiences a moment of regression, which is another form in which trauma manifests in the individual. Granofsky describes regression as stemming "from disabling fear or from an inability to cope with a perceived responsibility for the occurrence of a traumatic event, in other words, with overwhelming guilt." (Granofsky 108) In this case, Briony's regression is unconscious and untoward, but it triggers something resembling guilt. Granofsky also considers "regression and fragmentation" as ""'stages" of response to trauma, not in the sense of one leading to or being necessary for the other (…) but in the sense of lying between the trauma itself and the final resolution if such resolution there be." (Granofsky 107) In this case, there is a resolution yet awaiting (publication).

Upon witnessing her own childhood narrative again Briony has the chance to evaluate what took place and how her writing came to be from a privileged position. She says "I knew the words were mine, but I barely remembered them, and it was hard to concentrate, with so many questions, so much feeling, crowding in." (367) The moment in itself is undeniably overwhelming and fateful. Upon finding out her career as an author is over due to a degenerative illness and that her thirst for control and thus her authorship will forcibly face decay, she is also aware she is going full circle by revisiting her first narrative, her first dip into authorship and significantly, by remembering the moment in which everything redefined itself, not only in her life but in her literary production. Furthermore, it is once more a moment forced upon her, rather

than chosen to be experienced. Thus, the act of scopophilia, the pleasure she could have obtained from being watched and watching others around her, the pleasure she could have obtained from witnessing others perform a magic trick, is taken from her, albeit this time she is forced not to witness the unknown, but to face herself, belatedly.

The performance of *The Trials of Arabella* somewhat triggers her to abandon the celebration, as she is "tired of being in company and the object of so much attention", and goes to her room, where she confesses to have "been thinking about [her] last novel, the one that should have been [her] first." (369) She goes on to state there were about six different drafts and calls the novel (*Atonement,* the text the real reader is reading) her "fifty-nine year assignment" (369) however, it is interesting she considers such assignment to be over. Now that she has come full circle in her exploration of trauma, that at seventy-seven she has faced once more that day in the summer before World War Two, now that her story has about six different drafts in which she has been able to indulge in the act of writing, her draft can be published (as soon as the Marshalls perish, and now she is aware, as soon as she does as well) (370).

Ultimately, it will be the act of publication that will fully allow her to confront and work through her trauma. To do so, we must analyse the ways in which metafiction allows Briony to make use of her own fiction to escape her trauma. This will be explored in the following chapter. Briony, as Tom Haley also does, integrates her traumas by feeding them to her creative needs, by reinforcing a part of her identity, and she does so by using the material that has reshaped her. Therefore, her embracing of a relatively new identity is not an attempt at eradicating her past self but an attempt at regaining control through the means of fiction. That is clearly exemplified in the coda, where all the topics that have affected her throughout her life come to clash, and where she is almost forced to acknowledge openly what her narrative act has consisted of.

Vickroy suggests that "...for healing to take place, survivors must find ways to tell their stories and to receive some social acknowledgement if not acceptance" (Vickroy 19). In McEwan's texts, such acknowledgement is achieved through the use of metafiction, howbeit, such metafiction stems from the need to reclaim power over a text. As the novel moves forward, Briony struggles to find a way for her voice to be heard, and to do so, she must face all her demons openly (as she does on the day narrated in the coda) to be able to rise as author, reclaiming power and achieving acceptance.

Consequently, while Briony's narrative stems from traumatic experiences and a need to cope with those, she alternatively seeks different aims from the publication act. Trauma victims must reinvent themselves to differ from the individuals they were when they suffered their traumatic experience. Briony describes her experience as an "act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair", as, by letting her "lovers live," she gives them "happiness" (371). Interestingly, her act of publication finally allows her to be at peace, and as she finishes her life's work, she can finally rest: "But now I must sleep" (372). Ultimately, she is successful in her use of fiction to overcome trauma, as well as in her metamorphosis into an author. Once her text is finished, she has successfully achieved her goal: She can rest, as she feels she has been able to give justice to her sister and Robbie's story, has given satisfaction to her readers, and has produced the text she felt compelled to write the moment she was traumatised.

In writing, Briony, just as Tom Haley will do, achieves her sought-after metamorphosis into an author, through her ability to repossess the moments in which she lost control. Most importantly, however, it is through her use of metafiction that she obtains such a result. As will be exemplified in the next chapter, in Ian McEwan's texts, metafiction develops as a form of imposing power into a narrative and an audience.

Penning a narrative is not enough, ultimately Briony must impose her power, the way powerlessness was inflicted on her. It is interesting that at the end of her narrative she emerges as victorious, she seems to set her pain or guilt aside, focusing thereafter on her achieved identity, on the publication of her text, and on the effect such publication will have. McEwan thereby depicts a journey towards authorship capable of reclaiming trauma, re-establishing an individual's identity, and ultimately repossessing truth. As mentioned before, as quoted above, Foster considers that in trauma, "the subject is evacuated and elevated at once" (Foster 124): It is then through her trauma discourse that Briony is able to abandon her traumatised self and elevate her authorial identity.

2.3 The Creation of the Author: Coping with Trauma through Revenge Narratives in *Sweet Tooth*

In *Atonement,* trauma becomes a driving force towards the reclaiming of a power which has been removed, as well as a thirst to understand a situation that eventually leads to the rising of the author. This author rises to power through sharing the story written resulting from the trauma itself. In *Sweet Tooth*, however, rather than thriving to understand or to share a story, trauma ignites an act of revenge that results in the emergence of a more solidified authorial identity. Trauma, in this case, will provoke a thirst to share the story written, but mainly to obtain personal gain. While in *Atonement* the communication of the distressful moments could be considered a social and public activity - as Briony's thirst to share her story has to do with the need to communicate her losses into an audience and to reform (through the act of rewriting) the history that has traumatised her, in *Sweet Tooth* it takes a far more intimate tone. As will be exemplified, Tom lives his trauma differently from Briony, and his thirst to share his story has a private aim, which is to connect on a higher level with his intended reader, Serena. Interestingly, the ways to achieve publication and working through trauma have to do with revenge - revenge towards the person that has inflicted one of the traumatic experiences, as well as the seeking for the validation of that person itself.

In this section, the idea that *Sweet Tooth* is set up as a revenge narrative stemming from trauma will be explored. In the narrative, Tom Haley is presented not as a victim in search for the answers that will allow him to understand how power was taken away from him, but rather as an individual which, striving to work through his trauma, decides to take revenge on its perpetrators through a violent narratorial act.

2.3.1 Tom Haley's Trauma and Narcissism

2.3.1.1 The Betrayed Authorial Identity

While in *Atonement* the traumatic experience is closely tied to a failure in obtaining the expected pleasure from a scopophilic act, in *Sweet Tooth* the traumatic experience is tied to the deprival of freedom in the authorial act. Not only is Tom an adult at the time he is introduced in the novel, unlike Briony, but he is also an established author, so to speak. His process of evolution towards authorship is not described in the same terms Briony's is, because he has already gone through that process, be it similar or differing, and because he is not the protagonist of the story in itself, at least not on the surface. Despite the fact he is a young and emerging young writer, by the time the narrative focuses on him, he has already published short stories, journalism and academic articles, not to mention he is in the process of finishing his doctorate (in itself another form of authorship, albeit it is unknown what happens to that text). Nevertheless, it is clear that his trauma comes from being dispossessed from his creative freedom. During the narrative, Tom himself will mention he has been experiencing writer's block (which would indicate a deprival of inspiration by external forces), but most importantly, he will be betrayed by both his lover, Serena, and the secret service of the government of his country, which attempt to hinder his creative authority without his knowledge.

Consequently, the novel, as hinted at above, not only becomes a revenge act towards Serena and her actions. Coincidentally, it also becomes an act of love, as with the publication of the novel itself he is asking for her hand in marriage, and by the act of having the real reader consuming the book, the boundaries between reality and fiction are transcended, as they are in *Atonement*, illustrating Serena has accepted his proposal. In so doing, not only is it indicated that Tom and Serena have decided to remain together, but it is also stressed that Serena has become an accomplice in his

metafictional act, conceding to continue to be his ideal reader and now co-creator. This act of revenge is not only directed at Serena, but also towards the Sweet Tooth operation: By writing *Sweet Tooth*, Tom takes revenge against those forces that attempted to contain his creative freedom, and he does so by using the knowledge they have provided him, attempting to leave them as powerless as he felt when he discovered the existence of the operation.

As mentioned prior, close to what is nowadays termed 'revenge porn', *Sweet Tooth* becomes a narrative in which the text itself is the act of revenge towards both an individual and an organisation. This revenge narrative stems from the traumatic events experienced by its author, and the manuscript produced is the means of obtaining a(n emotional) reward. Tom's authorship, therefore, one that, as explored above, is closely tied to the figure of his reader (Serena itself) is one that claims its power through the means of metafiction in an attempt to fully overcome the trauma experienced by taking revenge on her behaviour. Serena's betrayal goes beyond the personal as not only does she lie to her lover and partner, hence implicating ethical issues: she is in reality a biased reader, one that Tom cannot trust. The image of Serena and Tom joint in arms as reader and author, one explored in the previous section, is momentarily shattered when Tom discovers Serena has been behaving as his ideal reader when in reality she might not be (not until the end of the novel, at least), as she has been sent by an organisation with dubious political aims in mind.

This way, traumatic moments are not explored in the novel the same way they are in *Atonement*, they are only fully referenced in the last chapter of the story, which works as a postscript as it did in *Atonement*. For this reason, the postscript is the portion that will mainly be discussed in this section. However, here follow a few instances in

which the topic of 'freedom' is discussed in the narrative, to exemplify Tom's drive towards his revenge narrative.

2.3.1.2 The Prohibition of Creative Freedom

During the first Operation Sweet Tooth meeting, the organisation discusses the operative as a "slow-burn thing" which "aim[s] at showing the Americans how it's done" finding no reason "why [they] can't give [them] a leg-up along the way", also mentioning "sooner or later one of [their] own is going to be chairing the new Booker Prize committee. And [they] might look into that agent business. But as for the stuff itself, [the writers] have to feel free.'" (112-3) In this excerpt, Peter Nutting is highlighting that while the abilities of MI5 do not allow them to fully intervene and somehow bribe their writers, their mission is to guide them into feeling *free.* This was discussed above in terms of how different it is to write under real freedom as opposed to a performed one. Haley could be interpreted to feel that these moments described are in fact an attack on him and, consequently, on literature. Not only is he being targeted because he is young and promising, but also because he is perceived as malleable. The Sweet Tooth operation is also working under the assumption that creative freedom is something that can be tampered with. This way, the Sweet Tooth operation may be interpreted as a metaphor for social apparatuses that attempt to modify narratives to feed their creative needs.

This idea is further elaborated in the description of another meeting Serena is part of, this time with Max. Max mentions Sweet Tooth seems a mistake to him, as signing on a novelist is "too unpredictable", although, in reality "[t]he writer doesn't have to be a Cold War fanatic. Just be sceptical about utopias in the East or looming catastrophe in the West" (148). Further, when asked about what would happen "when

the writer discovers [they've] been paying his rent" Max claims that "[t]he calculation is that, if anything comes out, writers *will prefer to avoid the embarrassment*. They'll stay quiet. And if they don't, we'll explain there are ways of proving that they always knew where the money was coming from." (148, emphasis added) This section illustrates some of Tom's motives in writing the manuscript for *Sweet Tooth*, as it shows that he is put in a position in which, if the operation is brought to the surface, his whole literary career will be ruined. He is targeted, unwillingly, into a plot from which he cannot escape, where not only is he dispossessed of his creative freedom, but the chances of his literary career flourishing are also dimmed. In this way, Tom realises what the Sweet Tooth operation is attempting to do is to tamper with his authorial *intention*. Upon discovering he cannot be the God-like Author figure he considers necessary, his mission becomes one in which he *exposes* the operation in itself. Tom is not only writing a revenge narrative, but he is also publicly shaming MI5 for their offences against literature, and for attempting to attribute meaning and intention to his texts.

2.3.1.3 Acting Out Narcissism, Working Towards Freedom

Tom puts special emphasis on repeating the established ideals and intentions of the Sweet Tooth operation throughout the narrative. It seems that every time Max and Serena have a briefing, they end up discussing the repercussions of the whole operation entirely, rather than sticking to the matters they are scheduled to be discussing. This act of repetition could be considered part of the traumatic process for Tom. His understanding of the situation takes place through repetition, despite the fact he is quite agile in his coping with trauma.

This way, Max repeats Nutting's earlier words, highlighting the idea that

> the IRD in its heyday never told Orwell or Koestler what to put in their books. But it did what it could to make sure their ideas got the best circulation around the world. We're dealing with free spirits. We don't tell them what to think. *We enable them to do their work*. Over there free spirits used to be marched to the gulags. Now Soviet's psychiatry's the new State terror. To oppose the system is to be criminally insane. (148, emphasis added)

For Tom there is a tint of mystery when it comes to Serena's motives, as they are never openly discussed in the narrative, she does not seem to question the operation itself and simply gets along with it. There is plenty of repetition of her feelings of guilt and regret towards keeping information from Tom, and that could be interpreted as Tom's attempts to understand whether Serena has actively attempted to seduce him with the intent of further *enabling* him to work in a specific way (148, 151) or if her emotional and sexual interest in him transcend her job for intelligence.

As mentioned previously, Tom's experience of trauma is different to that of Briony's, albeit also marked by narcissism (arguably a personality trait, or rather, a condition which could be linked to any form of fictional authorship). He prides himself on being admired, as is exemplified when Serena lets him know she finds his work to be "utterly brilliant". She believes it to be "likely that no one, no stranger at least, ha[s] ever told him that his fiction [is] brilliant. Now he [is] hearing it and realising that he had always suspected it was so", in fact, she is delivering "stupendous news" to him. "How could he have known if he was any good until someone confirmed it? And now he kn[ows] it [is] true and he [is] grateful" (167). As Kristéva points out, in narcissism there is an inherent individuation which

> extends deep within the constituent mechanisms of human experience as an experience of meaning; it extends as far as the very obscure and primary narcissism wherein the subject constitutes itself in order to oppose itself to another, and to extent that it does so. Insofar as the return to this particular mechanism of individuation characterises psychosis, writing-as-experience-of-limits is its replacement. For precisely this reason it is the most fascinating and bizarre rival of psychoanalysis. (Kristeva, "Postmodernism?" 178)

The suggestion that *Sweet Tooth* is in reality a form of revenge narrative stems from moments like the one being described, in which Tom is alluded to being shocked yet grateful at being reassured in his suspicions of his own grandeur. These forms of reassurance, however, are in reality performed to obtain a specific reinforcement of Tom's ego so that he will not only accept the offer but also feel falsely confident, which will cause a further shattering of his narcissistic personality, leading him to position himself as a subject which opposes the other (in this case specifically, Serena), as Kristéva also suggests, in an act of writing that is mirroring of the psychoanalytical act.

Tom is told to be 'utterly' brilliant, and not just that, he is told that he will retain the rights to anything he writes (168) and that he is not even required to show his work or to expect commentary on it: "You don't even have to acknowledge us. *The Foundation thinks you're a unique and extraordinary talent*. If your fiction and journalism get written, published and read, then we'll be happy." (169, emphasis added). The repeated adulation to his work, both fictional and non-fictional, reinforces his ego, hence the more traumatic it is to discover that it all has been some sort of scam. The organisation arrives at a difficult moment for Tom, one where he is struggling with his writing, and not due to a lack of inspiration just yet, but because "[e]very day [he] thinks about this problem ... It keeps [him] awake at night. Always the same four steps. One, [he] wants to write a novel. Two, [he's] broke. Three, [he's] got to get a job. Four, the job will kill the writing. [He] can't see a way round it. There isn't one" (169). The foundation, therefore, is aware of Tom's context and his weaknesses, and uses them to rest assured he will need their support. Tom might easily feel betrayed and enraged upon finding out he was taken advantage of due to his situation and background.

Whereas Serena insists that the Foundation will not be orchestrating his writing ("[n]o one [is] going to tell him what to write or think or tell him how he should live",

as they believe they help "bring freedom to a genuine artist" (210)), Tom is fundamentally told what to write, what to think and how to live. As discussed briefly above, being enabled to have a more comfortable and independent lifestyle participates in allowing him to give free reign to his creativity in a way that would not have taken place had he not been economically encouraged. The text stresses the ways in which Tom and Serena spend the money provided by the Foundation, buying new clothes, spending money on Serena, enjoying luxurious dinners in restaurants, filled with expensive bottles of champagne and oysters that Tom and Serena do not even truly enjoy (222-3). Tom, ironically, buys a "new electric typewriter" (309), which becomes a symbol for the new version of Tom's writing that is an undeniable consequence of the fact he is writing as a new writer, one that has a more comfortable class position ahead of him. Therefore, due to the Foundation, his life (and writing) is not only affected but also improved.

As mentioned earlier, Tom's trauma and consequent act of revenge seems to come from an underlying attack on his social position. As Chalupský points out, the novel, "…through Operation Sweet Tooth (…) explores literature's potential function of shaping public opinion when used, or abused, for political and ideological purposes…" (Chalupský, 2015) This way, the reader is made aware of the thoughts of an author when facing attempts at covert manipulation. Not only does Tom consider that tampering with creative freedom is a serious offense, but specifically in this case, it is an offense which can be perpetrated on him because of his economic background. It is reiterated over the text that the Sweet Tooth operation specifically targets authors that, other than their apparent subdued political ideals, are not well-off, and so Sweet Tooth can use their poor economic background to allow them the free time necessary to dedicate to writing. For that, in his letter, Tom also decides to berate Serena, telling her

"you've complained to me about your time at Cambridge, you've told me it was intellectually stultifying, but you defend your place to the hilt and look down on mine. Well, for what it's worth, think again. Don't be fooled by loud music" (364), it almost seems as though Tom believes that the narrative he is writing, the fact he found out about the operation before Serena realised, and that he is writing this narrative, taking back possession of his rightful power as author, gives him an agency that reclaims his social space in the fabric he was attempted to be ostracised from. Moreover, Tom also mentions that her comments regarding their education are the reason why he "painted a curl on [her] lips as [she] passed under the sound of Jethro Tull, a sneer [he] wasn't there to see" (364).

Regarding Tom's narcissism, a clear exemplification of the ways in which his ego shatters when he does not understand a situation or when he feels publicly shamed is when Serena attempts to explain the Monty Hall mathematical problem on probability, which Tom is unable to understand (235-6). As Serena attempts to clarify his confusion, trying "not to sound like [she is] speaking to a child", Tom's reaction to the situation is to feel like he is going to vomit, a physical reaction to the disgust he feels upon being told he is wrong or that he cannot comprehend something despite his intelligence. "He lurche[s] his feet and hurrie[s] past the waiters without saying goodbye. When [she] [catches] up with him outside he [is] leaning by a car, staring at his shoes" (238), when Serena tries to push an explanation further, he mutters once more "no more. If I think about this again I really will throw up." Later claiming "I won't ask you again. Let's stick with pro-intuitive." (239).

The episode could be interpreted as an example of micro-trauma, one that is triggered once Tom's fragile narcissism is targeted. Just as Briony was incapable of dealing with situations she could not understand as a child, Tom has what could be

perhaps better described as "fits", such as the one just described, whenever there is a situation he does not understand. Tom seems to be under the impression he is brilliant, yet as mentioned in the text, his need for external validation represents that being told he is wrong becomes traumatic. Feeling physically sick because of the impossibility to understand a mathematical equation shows the importance he gives to being in complete command of knowledge.

Interestingly, this moment, just as moments of trauma do with Briony, leads to creation. Intent on reworking the traumatising moment, Serena wakes up to Tom announcing he "get[s] it!" he "understand[s] how it works! Everything you were saying, it's so simple. It just popped into place, like, you know, that drawing of a what's-it cube", now he "can *do* something with it" (239). After this moment of divine understanding, Serena goes back to sleep to the sound of "the rattle of his typewriter keys next door" and "[t]hree days later his story arrive[s] in the post" (239-40). Unfortunately, Tom has not understood the problem at all, notwithstanding, filled with a moment of uncertainty, he has attempted to regain back the power previously lost through the act of writing. In fact, in his moment of writing, he continues to commit the same mistake of not knowing, for the logic behind his short story, 'Probable Adultery' is in fact faulty, but his eagerness to turn it into a narrative does not allow him to see its errors. This incident shows how quickly Tom deals with trauma. Not only on this occasion but later on, when discussing the process of creating *Sweet Tooth* itself, Tom seems undeniably resolutive. Roth mentions that "…traumatized people still have the "immediate task" of processing an occurrence that has overwhelmed their faculties." Despite the oftentimes lack of awareness of the real effects and impact of the traumatic experience, there are cases in which such experiences "must be quickly qualified, however, since the immunity can itself be put to work." (Roth 92) This could explain

Tom's rapid response to trauma, in that he does not allow his system to fully react and instead acts immediately: the moment he understands something to be affecting him, he resorts to writing so that he can (re)possess the experience. The maths problem happens at night, and in the morning, he is already working on it, writing a story in three days. In fact, the process is quite similar to the writing of *Sweet Tooth*: the day he finds out about the Foundation, through Max Greatorex, he unravels for a night and in the morning, he picks himself up and starts drafting with great resolution and resolve (355).

Another instance of trauma for Tom is writer's block, or rather, his trauma is manifested through the metaphor of writer's block. This way, at the time of meeting Serena, he seems to already be undergoing a period of trauma which manifests itself in the form of writer's block ("I was a novelist without a novel" (355) he tells Serena). The previous trauma is unbeknown to the reader, and in fact, as is being suggested, it may be in itself his sudden and unexpected inability to write. In this instance, there also appears to be a combination of several events. Furthermore, later on in the narrative, when Tom indicates to Serena what *Sweet Tooth* is composed of, Tom seems to use his second moment of trauma, which is discovering the existence of the Sweet Tooth operation, along with the fact Serena has betrayed him, in order to attempt to fight his first moment of trauma, which could be his writer's block. In this way, Tom's trauma is also riddled with a certain belatedness, although it is not articulated in the novel in the way in which the concept defined by Freud could be understood. In fact, Tom *uses* this second moment, rather than have his second occurrence of trauma awaken his memories of his first. He verbalises his process to Serena during the coda, by using the metaphor of the white sheets he has left behind in what became their home, which work as reminders of the blank page: "The blank page writ large and sensual…" he says, "I spent most of

December staring at that blank page. I thought I was falling in love, but I couldn't summon a useful thought" (349-350).

At the core of trauma is silence, the impossibility to speak out the traumatic event and, therefore, to rationalise it. A white sheet, or a blank page, are appropriate metaphors for silence and a writer's block is a powerful symbol for the impossibility to speak out a trauma. As Caruth puts it, "beyond the loss of precision there is another, more profound disappearance, the loss, precisely, of the event's essential incomprehensibility, the force of its *affront to understanding*" (Caruth as qtd in Youguang 6), because trauma is precisely an experience that is incomprehensible, and consequently highly complex to represent, yet deeply intense (Roth 90–91), the blank page is a great metaphor which combines the lack of understanding with the powerful *absence* of words that can help mitigate the experience. For that reason, it is whilst attempting to find the story that will take him out of his creative misery that Tom attempts to weigh his options to battle writer's block. He tells Serena that "he [doesn't] have an idea, not even a scrap of an idea, for another novel, and he doubt[s] he ever [will]" (260), in fact, his creative block goes as far as making him consider going back to academic writing, as, "walking past Brighton Pavilion, an inconsequential line of Spencer ha[s] come to mind" which has prompted him to begin "to map out an article about poetry's relation to the city, the city through the centuries" (260). To go back to academic writing is considered, by both Tom and Serena, as an act of stagnation, even as an act of regression towards a lesser form of writing. Having considered academic writing, contemplating his future, Tom confesses to Serena he feels "fraudulent", "constrained", as "it [is] a real possibility that he would never write another novel again, or even a story" and that leads him to feel ashamed: "How could he admit such a thing to Maschler, the most respected publisher of fiction in town?" (261) When it comes to

going back to academia, he considers it demeaning, because it is "supposed to be behind him" especially as "there had been times when his thesis had driven him to despair", and yet "nostalgia [is] creeping in - nostalgia for the quiet integrity of scholarship, its exacting protocols" (260). A thirst, therefore, for control over a narrative, something that depends entirely on him. While going back may represent a regression in his progress as an authoritative fiction author, he recognises there are genres that may allow him to hold the power over this creation in ways fiction cannot afford. Nevertheless, Tom also understands, as will be exemplified below, that it is only in fiction (rather, in metafiction) that he can find the structures he needs to not only possess the control he needs but to reshape his traumatic experiences.

2.3.3.1 Tom's Quest towards the Revenge Narrative

Tom's reaction to writer's block shows the different stages of working through trauma. While he does not seem to have difficulty letting go of the stories he has written, he finds it difficult to find inspiration to write anew. Once he has moved forward, going back seems to be a setback, hence his views on going back to academia. It would seem Tom writes his stories to overcome a trauma, and going back to them, reworking them or rewriting them, even thinking about them, proves to be something he is not interested in. As mentioned above, while Tom does *act out* his moments of trauma (because in writing he is re-living his experience) these instances are oddly short, and only a mechanism to accomplish his *working through*. In other words, Tom does not inhabit *melancholia*, but rather he *mourns* his past self through his writing, as opposed to Briony, who although presenting instances of working through, is clearly in a perpetual state of melancholia, acting out her traumatic experiences for decades.

Furthermore, the fact that Tom's voice is purposed only at the end of novel, creating a two-narrator structure that is only accessible through the coda, is relevant because it reinforces the idea that to work through a trauma, a process of voicing it out or writing it down must be carried out. This process is possible through Tom's rebirth as inscribed author, one that allows him to set aside his past authorial identity by fully embracing a reinforced version of his authorship.

In the letter he writes to Serena, one separated as a different chapter (the coda for the novel) he indicates he has tidied up the flat where his writing act(s) took place, which is also the place where his relationship with Serena developed. In his tidying up, Tom wonders whether "[Serena]'ll find it sterile, or at least unfamiliar, stripped clean of [their] life here together, all the good times wiped away" (348). This way, Tom is indicating that in his writing he is also capable of erasing real-life events, "wiping away" the time spent with Serena which has proven traumatic, or, rather, fictionalising his time with Serena to suit his fictional needs. He states he "suppose[s] [he] was cleaning up for [him]self" because, in reality he is "bringing this episode to an end, and there's always a degree of oblivion in tidiness." (348) It is interesting that McEwan has both Tom and Briony use the noun 'oblivion' to describe their emotions when facing trauma. Both use the term referring to their writing act, illustrating that it is only through turning to narrative that they can reach oblivion from the overwhelming situations they have been exposed to. In Tom's writing act, just as in his tidying-the-flat act, he is attempting to leave his trauma behind.

While Briony ends her narrative aware she is writing the last draft of her story, because she has been diagnosed with vascular dementia, Tom wants to put an end to his *prior* writing life because he wants to move onto other things, namely with Serena. Granted, Tom's trauma, as far as the reader is aware, is nowhere near as grave as

Briony's, in fact, his approach towards writing is resolutive, whereas Briony's is one of surrender. Tom does not indicate this is the last draft of the story, as a matter of fact, he indicates otherwise: he is tidying his old self, to make room for Serena: "when I started clearing out the junk and scrubbing the floors I convinced myself I was doing it for you - as of last week your name is on the rent book and the flat may be of use" (348), whereas Briony tidies up her writing area aware she will not be making use of any of her research again.

Furthermore, at the beginning of his letter, Tom also mentions his cleaning up is "a form of insulation", and that with "all this scrubbing [he is] erasing [Serena], [Serena] as [she] [was]" (348). He explains to Serena that "this is not an extended accusation, and [he] promises it will end well, at least in certain respects" (349), but she must know that "all traces of [their] former selves [are] lost to the launderette opposite the station." (349) Tom is attempting to get rid of anything that reminds him of his past identity, but in this act, he has come to the realisation that Serena is necessary for his future identity as well. The act of clearing up everything in the flat, therefore, differs from Briony's, as it does not represent a clear stop, or an ending, to his writing, but rather a clean break from which he can be reborn. Interestingly, Tom embraces his trauma entirely, consciously requesting the presence of the perpetrator of his trauma in his future. As Roth suggests, in some cases, it is not "enough to preserve the traumatic past in some isolated neurological archive or storage system for it to be benign, it ha[s] to be integrated with the rest of one's life" however, this act of integration might be "debilitating" for the individual, hence why not only does Tom also link it "with an openness to imitate the personalities of others", as he does by using Serena's life to speak out his trauma, but also why he chooses to *incorporate* the trauma into his future self, attempting to leave the traumatised self behind. (Roth 79) He may be tidying up,

but, as just stated, it is an act of erasing a past identity, aware that in each moment of trauma there must be a certain occurrence of metamorphosis. Nevertheless, this act of metamorphosis does not imply Tom is necessarily erasing his past identity, after all, in writing his traumatic experience, and by incorporating his perpetrator into his future, he is fully embracing the past, accepting it, incorporating it into his (new) self. Which implies he is changed, he is metamorphosed, but the past is not forgotten, even more so as the past has been put to writing. What Tom could be said to be doing, therefore, is to attempt to modify his past self in his writing, which, as Roth suggests is quite common, as "[n]arrative memory … *transforms* the past as a condition of retaining it." (Roth 85)

Furthermore, he refers to this exercise of clearing up the apartment as "locking something down, or locking it away" (349).[33] He cannot embrace his new identity as an author unless he puts the past behind them, unless he redefines it. Thus, this act, in which he is able to put his traumatic experiences behind through tidying up the traces of his trauma narrative, reminds him, precisely, of "the blank page. The blank page writ large and sensual" which he compares to the page that "was certainly large in [his] thoughts before Christmas, when [he] was convinced that [he] would never write fiction again" (349-50). While at the time he is writing the letter the blank page represents the opportunity for a new beginning, now it becomes the promise of further stories to be told hand in hand with Serena, given that, during that period of creative block in December, in the midst of his struggle to find his voice, Tom describes "something extraordinary happen[s]" (351) when he is visited by Max Greatorex, who, possibly jealous of Tom's relationship with Serena, has decided to expose her and the Sweet

[33] This 'locking away' could also be understood as a form of disassociation, which Roth points out is similar yet differing from Freud's concept of repression. "Janet's emphasis on dissociation rather than repression has drawn the attention of many who work with people victimized by violence or traumatic accidents. The Freudian concept of repression is troubling in such cases because it always involves the question of desire, of how the victim's own ambivalent desires interact with memory to disturb the present." (Roth 81) In the case of Tom, his act of scriptotherapy could be considered to work both, as a form of dissociating from his past self, but also a form of repressing, because in his act of revenge there certainly is a desire which is interacting directly with all his memories of his experience with Serena and MI5, and with what he wishes to do regarding his thirst for revenge.

Tooth operation. What Tom mostly retains from the encounter is that if the truth "ever c[omes] out that [he] was funded by an intelligence agency, [he] would never outlive the disgrace" (351). After that realisation he is "beyond anger", something he describes as "a new dark place of hatred - for [Serena], for [him]self, for Greatorex, for the Bristol Blitz and the grisly cheap horrors the post-war developers had heaped upon the bomb sites" (352), his reaction is once more to lean "into a doorway of a boarded-up show and tr[y] and [fail] to throw up", in this case, he intends to "get the taste of [Serena] out of [his] gut." (351-352)

Tom also makes several references that connect traumatic experience with 'dirt', as though something that was clean before has been dirtied up with a new event. This could be connected to the idea that trauma is a corruption of innocence. For that reason, he mentions that he cannot "imagine doing anything but watch the rain clean the filthy street" (353). At this point, Tom does not "want anything, even oblivion."(353) However, he acknowledges that "beyond existence and oblivion there's no third place to be" (353), indicating that he refuses, at the moment of trauma, to remain in a neutral space, to remain in the past (as most trauma victims would do).

After battling writer's block, and after his encounter with Max, Tom mentions that "in that hour, if [Serena's] lovely pale throat had appeared upturned on [his] lap and a knife had been pushed into [his] hand, [he] would have done the job without thinking" (354), hence starting his pursuit of a revenge narrative, as, instead of murdering Serena in real life, he decides to murder her through text. The eradication of her real identity takes place by replacing what does not fit his needs, with a fictional identity he can modify at will. Nonetheless, he indicates that this "moment doesn't last" (354), and that despite his hatred for Serena in the moment, something fruitful emerges from such a situation.

Initially, Tom resorts to drinking Scotch and writing Serena "a savage letter on hotel stationary" (355). After that, he mentions that upon waking up "some hours later into total darkness" he enters "one of those moments of untroubled but total amnesia." (355) The moment of trauma is described almost like an episode of extreme hungover, in which what has been experienced the night prior has been blocked and is difficult to recollect. As Roth highlights, "[t]he paradox at the heart of trauma [is] that the most intense occurrences may be those we are unable to represent or even experience, [which] is perfectly compatible with the view that we are not fully present to ourselves and that we represent all our experiences to ourselves in highly mediated forms." (Roth 99) In this moment, therefore, Tom is unable to perceive himself and his traumatic experience; for that reason, he will experience a moment of rebirth from which he will seek to represent himself through different means, as the trauma he has experienced makes it impossible for him to access the memories fully or directly in themselves. Hence why he needs to adopt Serena's voice and identity, to try and add an additional layer to his experience and his narrative that allows him to reshape the experience of himself through a 'mediated form'. The moment of complete darkness he undergoes indicates that with this piece of information something has happened to his identity, it has been fatally affected, fragmented, and he can only move forward if he reshapes it. The possibility for a new identity, one which he conveniently and repeatedly compares to being analogous with the blank page, is what he believes takes him back to himself. It could be suggested that Tom's approach to trauma, his approach to the moments in which he has been left powerless in front of a situation - even more so a situation that has to do with his writing process; is to rise from his ashes as a stronger version of himself.

As just mentioned, Tom experiences what he describes as a moment of "brief cleansing amnesia" (355), upon waking up to darkness. This moment allows him to place a line between the moment of trauma and his own self. Once more unwilling to allow traumatic experiences to destroy his identity, he decides to use the moment to reinforce his authorial identity further. In this case, as this moment of trauma has to do with his identity as an author, (rather than his identity as a whole), his rising from the ashes has to do with producing a narrative that is more powerful than anything else he has written before. Hence, the use of the metafictional device, which is the only apparatus that might allow Tom to make use of his narrative in a way that is effective enough to be able to contra rest the consequences of the actions performed by Serena and MI5.

It is therefore only the morning after that he realises it was not "or wasn't only, a calamitous betrayal and personal disaster" but rather that he had been "too busy being insulted by it to see it for what it was", and in reality, what this traumatic experience provides him with is "an opportunity, a gift", in other words, a perfect chance for new creation (355). This way, Tom understands that as Roth states, "[t]elling the story of the traumatic past makes it part of ordinary life: the trauma is robbed of its uniqueness, its aura destroyed. Narrative memory is threatening because it can be forgotten – unlike hallucinations, automatic memories, and acting out, in which the past takes over, and the "pastness" of what one is conscious evaporates." (Roth 82) Thus, in order not to be fully destroyed or have his identity entirely eradicated due to his trauma, he chooses to make it part of his ordinary life indeed, and realises he is actually "a novelist without a novel, and now luck ha[s] tossed [his] way a tasty bone, the bare outline of a useful story" (355). Tom decides not to share this information with Serena or anybody else, and instead use the opportunity to create something more impactful and powerful. It is

precisely because he understands his authorship as a form of salvation, that he can allow himself erratic behaviour. As Booth states "…art justifies all – indeed, the novelist who engages wholeheartedly in the act of creating an ethical world is "leading the ethical life,"" (Booth, *The Company We Keep* 130) and this is not something Tom can afford. Tom's violent narratorial act is a response that comes from trauma, and consequently, "[s]ince a traumatic event is characterized, however by its inability to be integrated into one's normal patterns of meaning-making, this response will always be inadequate, always be painful or disruptive." (Roth xviii) In both Briony and Tom's stories and experiences with trauma there is the knowledge that "[t]he writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream… Everything [else] goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is worth any number of old ladies." (William Faulkner as qtd in Booth *The Company We Keep* 131)

Booth ponders if it really "[c]an … be so? Are story-tellers really justified when they decide to exploit and even corrupt some parts of life in order to grace life with their own creations?" (Booth *The Company We Keep* 131) In the case of Tom, he does feel justified, he proclaims that given the fact "[t]here was a spy in [his] bed, her head was on [his] pillow, her lips were pressed to [his] ear. She concealed her real purpose and crucially, she didn't know that [he] knew. And [he] wouldn't tell her" (355), he decides to lead his new expedition in "silence, discretion, patient watching, and writing. Events would decide the plot. The characters were ready-made. [He] would invent nothing, only record, [he'd] watch [her] at work. [He] too could be a spy." (356) That night, aware of his new authorial identity and high on his new-found power, Tom translates his inspiration into passionate love making. The scene is described through Serena's

perspective, in which she believes he is “now entirely [hers] and always would be” (284), exemplifying that his act of authorial rebirth also includes his reader. In this case, as Booth suggests, “[t]he remaining responsibilities of the reader – to those whose lives are used or abused by the author, or to truth – can both be put in the form of a responsibility to point out authors’ successes and failures in meeting *their* responsibilities.” (Booth, *The Company We Keep* 137) Tom certainly feels successful by the end of the chapter, and real-readers will recognise he *has* been successful, as his novel is published and he and Serena are together, therefore, Tom’s responsibility to his art remains intact, and the ethicality of his actions is not questioned, or rather, does not seem to carry any great repercussions.

In the coda, Tom describes his writing process by going over the mapping of his story and of his research process. He states how he finds a “notebook and fill[s] it in two hours” (356) claiming all of the material he needs is already there, alluding to the idea that in reality the story is so perfect for him it can write itself: “I merely had to tell the story as I saw it, from the moment you came to my office at the university to my rendezvous with Greatorex - and beyond.” (356) He goes further, describing all stages of his drafting process: he buys three extra “exercise books” and sits in a hotel room in Bristol, “order[s] coffee and set[s] to work, making notes, setting out the sequences, trying out a paragraph or two for taste.” (356) During the recollection of events, he exposes to Serena what drives him to take on her voice in the narrative, by stating that after writing half a chapter using his own voice, “[b]y mid-afternoon [he is] feeling uneasy”. He becomes angry, throwing “down [his] pen with a shout and st[anding] up suddenly, knocking over the chair behind [him]”, he realises the story is “dull”, “dead”, it is not working (356-57). Tom feels frustrated not only because the story is not working (something rare in him, who usually writes his stories in three days) but also

because the narrative voice he is using (his) will not do. It could be argued the reason behind the inefficiency of his narratorial voice is due to the fact that in this case he needs a narrative layer in between himself and the text in order to fully convey or disguise the extent of his trauma, something also reminiscent of Briony's process. As LaCapra points out,

> [t]rauma brings about a dissociation of affect and representation: one disorientingly feels what one cannot represent; one numbingly represents what one cannot feel. Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation. (LaCapra 42)

Hence why this time Tom needs a lengthier writing process. It could also be argued that the first draft he sets out to write, after his moment of amnesia, is one where he is not yet dealing with or exposing the real intent behind his text. He is not yet able to mediate between his past and his present self. In traumatic situations, the self is "too late to take in the intensity of an event as it occurs, and [it] reenact[s] the event in a futile attempt to finally arrive on time. To use what is by now a quaint old phrase: we are *always-already* too late." (Roth 99) Consequently, not only does Tom need the rewriting of his story (and to take longer to write it than he usually would), but what he is also trying to convey cannot be implied through his voice. Notwithstanding, through Serena's voice he can simultaneously interact with his traumatic experiences, he can fully become his authorial self by inhabiting his creation, and most importantly, he can regain control of his creative freedom by fictionalising Serena.

This way, by trying on Serena's voice (358) he inhabits the skin of the perpetrator of his trauma. In this version of coming to terms with his own trauma, therefore, Tom must go through a different creative process than any other process he has gone through before. He must explore new writing techniques, ones heretofore

unexplored, which also explains his jump to the novel form. This shift also represents the need to try his hand at experimentation and instead of composing entirely fictional characters he starts by fictionalising the real people in his life.

Furthermore, to prove to Serena and the Sweet Tooth operatives that creative freedom cannot be tampered with, he must write a novel that is different from the rest, hence one that is deliberately shocking both in content and form, one that implicates everybody in the process with its legal repercussions. In this case, as Booth exemplifies, "[w]hen art and criticism are viewed as forms of conduct, they lead us into the very battles that we may have hoped to escape by turning to art in the first place." (Booth, *The Company We Keep* 137) This is the reason Tom turns to metafiction for the first time, he must gather all techniques and narratives that can grant him creative and authorial power. Because of that, he turns his revenge narrative into a hybrid which also includes a tint of testimony literature. For that same reason, he must also make use of metafiction, something he has only toyed with during his conversations with Serena, not only to give himself further power, but to prove he can be whoever he wants to be in his newfound identity, this way stopping himself from dwindling back to the techniques of the past. The use of metafiction is also interesting, in that it shows that trauma narratives need of experimentation to be told. As previously mentioned, both Briony and Tom could ultimately be considered to partake in acts of autobiographical scriptotherapeutical writing, in this case, the writing needs to be different in both occasions. LaCapra considers that "...in an attempt to restore the victims, insofar as possible, the dignity to which they were deprived by their oppressors…" trauma victims may need to "attempt to elaborate narratives that are not simply redemptive narratives but more experimental, self-questioning narratives." (LaCapra 178) LaCapra also mentions that the essay might be the best "exploratory form of writing" as it is not

“simple coded in an entirely predictable way.” (LaCapra 178) As mentioned above, as well, Henke considers that in scriptotherapy, forms such as memoirs or the diary are the best treatment (or cure). In the case of Briony and Tom, however, their trauma as postmodern subjects, and the need to implicate the reader into their journey, along with their authorial identities and delusions of God-like power make their writing slightly more complex.

LaCapra actually points out the difficulty in branding trauma narratives with a specific label is quite common,[34]he states that it is common to see “the text as undecidable with respect to its status as fiction or memoir. One might then analyze it either along with other works of fiction or with other memoirs. (Or perhaps one might see it as belonging to an emerging hybridized genre: the *faux mémoire.)*” (LaCapra 34) I consider that while LaCarpa is addressing other forms of trauma testimonies, in the cases of Tom and Briony, as their authorship within both novels is rather complex, the novels can indeed be considered a hybridized genre, and, as noted above, both novels could be considered to somewhat dip into the autobiographical, nevertheless, the novels are clearly metafictional fictions. Either way, as Roth argues, what is necessary in both cases is to find the paths to express that which is non-articulable because “[t]rauma should give rise to new forms of listening and new responsibilities for transmission.” (Roth 101)

Consequently, having found his subject matter, his narratorial voice and the genre and techniques with which to narrate the most important story he is to write, Tom feels so thrilled he “almost pass[es] out”. He understands that what he is truly doing is

[34] It should also be stated LaCapra would not agree that Briony and Tom are traumatised subjects. As Roth argues, “LaCapra has set up an important position for himself in the emerging field of those writing on memory, trauma, the holocaust, and the sublime. He has rejected those who want to see trauma as always and everywhere (should we still say “already”?) a structural part of experience that makes us all victims.” (Roth xxiii) Notwithstanding, one does understand Tom and Briony as living in a postmodern traumatological era, in which the traumatic experience has been redefined and is understood as something quite other and alien, situations where there has been a specific *loss,* as Freud enunciated, which ultimately renders Tom and Briony as traumatised subjects.

to "reconstruct [him]self through the prism of [Serena's] consciousness" (359), aware that there also needs to be an element of seeing oneself through somebody else's eyes in order to perform an act of self-recognition. Writing through Serena's voice gives him power to analyse his prior authorial identity, and to note which of its parts must be disregarded in the future. By writing through Serena's voice, Tom is participating in an exercise or rather, process, of working-through where he "tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future." (LaCapra 143) Not only that, as is obvious, writing through Serena's voice is also that which ultimately allows him to incorporate the reader into his narrative, understanding that the collaboration between author and reader, despite his reservations for it, is necessary for his revenge.

Consequently, what Tom is doing through the writing of the *Sweet Tooth* manuscript is to undergo a process in which he can fully perceive his identity from different standpoints, in its fragmented and postmodern nature, in order to pick up every piece and reconstruct it in full as he emerges as its rightful possessor. This way, it can be understood that after moments of trauma, its survivors must go through a process of re-evaluation, one both Briony and Tom exercise through writing, so as to go back to a consciousness shattered the moment they underwent a traumatic experience.

After his process of research, Tom specifies he "set [him]self a target of fifteen hundred words a day, seven days a week. Sometimes, when [his] invention ran out, it was near impossible, and at others it was a breeze because [he] was able to transcribe [their] conversation minutes after [they'd] had it", most importantly, as mentioned earlier, Tom truthfully believes he is merely repeating and replaying what has happened in front of him (365). He says "[s]ometimes events wrote whole sections for me", "[t]he story was writing itself" (365). However, what Tom does not seem to envision is the

fact that by allowing events to take place and not interfering with the way he usually would have done, he is allowing his authorial identity to take over, thirsting for moments in which he can fictionalise, something highly reminiscent of Briony's approach towards life and authorship as well.

His moments of trauma have therefore affected him to the point in which he must prove, above anything else, that his creative license is only his for the taking and it cannot be controlled by any other being. With his writing, he modifies reality to fit his needs, even if that harms him. "Why did I make the claim anyway?" he asks, regarding the telegram he and Serena write to specify he is allegedly unaware of the real economic source behind the literary Foundation: "More story! I couldn't resist it (…) I knew I was about to do myself a lot of harm" (365) he states, something that does not matter, because at this point he admits to having been "reckless and obsessed (…) to see what happened." (365). Once more, adjectives like 'reckless' and 'obsessed' are key to understanding Tom's state of mind, it is not out of rationality that his novel is written, but out of a state of obsession to make things right and be able to thrive in his authorship, showing no compassion for what comes in his way. With his newfound power, he realises he can not only work through his traumatic experiences, but with his fiction, he can also have an effect on reality and inflict revenge on his perpetrators, hence his interest in seeing what will happen and the effect his revenge will have on the society that has turned its back on him (365).

Moreover, Tom is aware that the repercussions of his actions may not only harm him emotionally but put a stall on his writing career. However, the publishing act is not his end goal, his writing is. What Tom seems to need is to show Serena and MI5 his authorial abilities, so that they understand (specifically Serena) he has been capable of turning them into fictionalised character, that he has been able to turn all the hurt and

pain imposed on him into fiction, because he has a creative freedom which cannot be taken from him. Furthermore, the metafictional act further reinforces his power as author: not only is he using all his time with Serena, but he is also not disclosing it until he decides so. Tom faces public shaming, he knows he "won't be in a position to buy a copy of the *Express*" the following day, but that does not "matter because [that] afternoon [he'll] incorporate what [the journalist] told [him]" and he will "have [Serena] read the story on the train" (366), indicating that his thirst to finish his story, his drive towards completing it, recreating what has taken place, reclaiming the experience, is more important to him than anything else, even his reputation.

He knows he is "headed for public ignominy. [They] all are. [He]'ll be accused, and rightly, of lying in [his] statement to the Press Association, of taking money from an inappropriate source, of selling [his] independence of thought" (366), but it all seems worth it, once more specifying the power of literature and art, and the gravity that attempting to tamper with it represents: "Who says that poetry makes nothing happen?" he says, "[b]y miserable comparison, Sweet Tooth, that precursor of decay, reversed the process and failed because intelligence tried to interfere with invention". (368) With his revenge narrative, consequently, Tom is claiming creative power for the author, proving precisely that it is not the 'patron' the one that gets a say on *intent*, but rather the author. He is also demonstrating that the author ultimately holds a power that cannot be tampered with, given that, as shown precisely in his case, the author has the ability to become all-knowing and it is fiction which makes 'things' happen.

2.3.4 Tom's Working Through Trauma through the Revenge Narrative

In his last words to Serena, Tom recounts what drove him to write the narrative she is about to read. Insisting "it wasn't anger" but "there was always an element of tit for tat" (368), further explaining everything he had to do in order to write his narrative. The many details of Serena's ordinary routines are highlighted, exemplifying the amount of work Tom has put into inhabiting her fictional representation. In this moment, it is once more obvious how important this process of building Serena has been for Tom's *deconstruction* of his former self. "Living inside you, I saw myself clearly" he reiterates (369). Revenge and his thirst to inhabit Serena so he can understand his trauma is what drives his writing act. He goes as far as stating that this writing exercise is an event that has allowed him to not only rise as rightful author, but also to shamelessly embrace his narcissism as one: "my ludicrous vanity, sexual, sartorial, above all aesthetic - *why else make you linger interminably over my stories, why else italicize my favourite phrases*?" (369, emphasis added). As LaCapra highlights, and as referenced before, after experiencing trauma, the "self overflows itself or is carried away and becomes involved in other selves, with an uncanny pattern of relating that is typically repeated in a compulsive way." (LaCapra xvi) This is represented in the way in which Tom needs to get involved with Serena so the overflowing of his self can be placed under control. This exercise, which is concurrently also one on narcissism, allows him to understand that an indispensable part of his identity relies on Serena, here understood as 'the other', as she has become the subject that allows him to constantly reinforce his ego. Without Serena the fictionalised version that flatters his ego and reinforces all aspects of his vanity, his sexuality, and his aesthetic writing, Tom cannot fully rise as an author.

This rise of a new self has to do with topics regarding authorship and readership, content and response, invention and reception, and topics regarding trauma. By understanding that he loves Serena as much as he loves himself, and that his authorial identity depends on her reading one, Tom understands that the only way to move forward from his trauma is through embracing it. Tom accepts he cannot continue to inhabit his traumatised state, so he must work through it, as Roth suggests, "[i]f we ignore the traumatic event (if we try to leave it alone), we seem to have neglected a moral obligation to come to terms with horror and pain…" this might be what Tom is trying to fight against. Instead, he tries to "understand the traumatic event by putting it in relation to other events" which happens when we "try to make it a part of our history…" (Roth 210) In this case it is quite clear Tom is trying to move forward by his embracing of his past history, and to do so, not only does he revisit the experience from his own point of view, but he attempts to inhabit the experience from the perspective of the perpetrators as well. However, in the case of working-through, as Roth points out, there is a peril in that "we seem to be forgetting the intensity that engendered the obligation in the first place." (Roth 210) It is possible, consequently, that in working-through his trauma, especially considering how quickly Tom seems to attempt to put the episode to an end by writing his story, he is precisely risking his own understanding of the situation in itself. He moves forward so swiftly that he may not be able to have fully incorporated into his being the events that have taken place, granted, the story might take longer to write than his previous stories, as mentioned above, which further dislocates Tom, notwithstanding, on the grand scheme of things, he still manages to produce a final manuscript in a matter of a few months.

His breakthrough in the writing of the manuscript is a representation in his breakthrough in his emotional distress. His epiphany is double, therefore, as it allows

him to write what he considers to be his masterpiece, but it also allows him to understand who he is and what he needs to continue to be his true, rising self: an author with a reader. Tom now fully grasps that only through reliving the traumatic experiences (rewriting Serena's betrayal through Serena's point of view), acknowledging them (publicly, through the press) and finally embracing them (proposing to Serena) can he cope with trauma and ultimately live with it. Therefore, the process of overcoming his trauma is double if understood by LaCapra's terms: he is simultaneously acting out his experience (by rewriting it) as he works through it (by exposing it and incorporating Serena, his perpetrator, into his life). Moreover, he does recognise that in disposing of Serena, he would be attempting an act of blocking the traumatic experience, which would be detrimental from him moving forward. As LaCapra specifies, "working through does not mean avoidance, harmonization, simply forgetting the past, or submerging oneself in the present. *It means coming to terms with the trauma, including its details, and critically engaging* the tendency to act out the past and even to recognize why it may be necessary and even in certain respects desirable or at least compelling." (LaCapra 144 emphasis added) Therefore, Tom represents a traumatic subject which not only understands his traumatised self but also comprehends the need to embrace the traumatic experience and the traumatic state and the need to incorporate such states into its being. Tom's inhabiting of trauma is therefore one done consciously, as it shows he is in full possession of his emotional and psychological needs to move forward.

Conclusively, what is interesting is that it is Tom's trauma which drives him to behave in ethically questionable ways, and that it is quite impossible to ascertain, given the lack of information regarding his true identity, whether the behavioural patterns he showcases towards the end of the narrative are common for him or rather entirely

inflicted by the traumatic occurrence. As referred to above, LaCapra considers there might be a unethical behaviour involved in the moment of dealing with trauma. (LaCapra 70) This is what leads to the narrative he writes to possess a tint of the vengeful. In his working through, Tom needs to prioritise his art (as Booth suggests), disregarding any moral qualms such art may represent. Hence why he makes use of Serena's personal details, why he jeopardises her career and life by exposing Operation Sweet Tooth, or why he chooses the revenge narrative. He needs to prioritise his artistry above all else.

Tom claims the power of his narrative from two sources: the real reader and Serena - objects that have been undeniably linked several times above. The potential real reader of *Sweet Tooth*, therefore, has their power put on hold with an undeniably postmodern technique: that of the highlighting the fact that narratives do not need closure, as human beings barely have access to such a concept, which simultaneously points out the fact that endings and closure are impossible in contemporary society.

Consequently, Serena is not the only one that suffers the consequences of this so-called revenge. The reader is also put under the knife, if we consider that, occasionally, open-endings do not provide the reader with meaning but rather further take it away, almost mirroring the traumatic experience. Western society has been obsessed with chronology, endings and closure, to the point that it results in what is considered to be a bad reading experience if stories are left unresolved. An experience that is left undetermined, like a narrative that is left unresolved, is therefore linked to "[t]he inability to properly represent some events" inherent in traumatic experiences. This inability, or as Roth calls it, "inadequacy of representation" creates a "painful gap between meaning-making and experience that comes to light" both, in the processing/representing of trauma, and in the accepting of an unresolved experience (as

might be an open ending) which consequently leads to "the more general failure to make sense of experience." (Roth xix)

Without a narrative that includes closure, readers are left dislocated, seeking answers, similar to the traumatised being. While the postmodern critic would consider these acts as a transportation of power from author to reader, in cases like the one at hand, the author shows it is in power because the author is the only legitimate possessor of that information, and it is at its will that it is unrevealed, whereas the reader is left powerless, unable to create meaning for the narrative, unable to satisfy its narratological needs in the communicative act, or to truly be given a choice.[35] Furthermore, the open-endedness metafiction allows is also a way of mirroring the traumatic experience. As LaCapra specifies, "[w]orking-though itself should be understood as an open, self-questioning process that never attains closure and counteracts acting-out (or repetition compulsion) without entirely transcending it, especially with respect to trauma and its aftermath." (LaCapra xxiii) This indicates that the traumatic experience needs to be represented in terms of format as well as in terms of content when it comes to trauma narratives. And thus, experimenting with form, even creating a new literary genre (as the revenge narrative could be considered) allows Tom to overcome his trauma on more than just one narrative layer.

Ultimately, Tom rises to not only hold power over Serena and the fictional world, but also to hold power over the real reader by disenfranchising his characters and readers of information that the reader knows to be in his possession. This action, once more, grants him the chance to rightfully rise as God-like author of the narrative. In doing so, he reinforces his ego, embracing the power granted by authorship, actions

[35] For an in-depth exploration on the nature of open-endings, especially in their relation to metafiction and postmodernism, see the Conclusions.

which validate and strengthen his narcissism, henceforward making him able to work through his trauma by embracing it.

3. CHAPTER THREE: THE METAFICTIONAL DEVICE

> Postmodern representation itself contests mastery and totalization, often by unmasking both their powers and their limitations. We watch the process of what Foucault once called the interrogation of limits that is now replacing the search for totality. (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 37)

3. 1 The Metafictional Device

3.1.1 Postmodernism

In "What is the Contemporary?", Giorgio Agamben refers to Barthes in describing the contemporary as "the untimely" (Agamben 40) and to Friedrich Nietzsche in that "[contemporariness] with respect to the present [is] a disconnection and out-of-jointness." (Agamben 40) In his essay, Agamben makes a distinction between two types of individuals: "[t]hose who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, [which] are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands" (Agamben 40), understanding that the "condition" of the contemporary needs "disconnection" and "anachronism"; and "[t]hose who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, [which] are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it." (Agamben 41) Further, Agamben states that "[o]ur time, the present, is in fact not only the most distant: it cannot in any way reach us. Its backbone is broken and we find ourselves in the exact point of this fracture" (Agamben 47) he understands that, ultimately, there is an urgency in the attempt at defining what composes the contemporary that is "the untimeliness, the anachronism that permits us to grasp our time in the form of a "too soon" that is also a "too late"; of an "already" that is also a "not yet."" (Agamben 47)

Following Agamben's train of thought, the 1970s were "too soon" to define the postmodern, and the 2020s might be "too late", nevertheless, there is something inherent in postmodernism that is all too coincidental with the issue of its definition, which is its self-awareness. Perhaps the problematic of contemporaneity and of the postmodern is so blatant precisely because the postmodern subject understands that to define something is to attribute it with an absolutism that is counterproductive. Madan Sarup, in *An Introduction Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (1993) mentions that "…postmodernism is of great interest to a wide range of people because it directs our attention to the changes, the major transformations, taking place in contemporary society and culture…" nevertheless, he also states that precisely because of the contemporaneity of the term itself, it "is at once fashionable and elusive." (Sarup 129)

Hutcheon points out that the postmodern "takes the form of [a] self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight,' and to subvert, or 'subvert,' and the mode is therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic – or even 'ironic' – one." In fact, as pointed out above, "[p]ostmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 1). It is this duplicity which problematises its clear definition. Nonetheless, what is clear is that within postmodernism there is an intrinsic and crucial element of self-reflectivity, in all areas of social, political, religious, moral, intellectual, artistic, and personal development. Peter Brooker puts it thus: "postmodernism … splices high with low culture, it raids and parodies past art, it questions all absolutes, it swamps reality in a

culture of recycled images, it has to do with deconstruction, with consumerism, with television and the information society, with the end of communism…” (Brooker 3)

This inevitably affects literature to the core, O’Hara points out that “[w]here modernism (…) foregrounded questions such as how the self can understand the world, postmodernism focuses on questions of how to construct or define a world as well as one’s *being* in that world.” (O’Hara, "Mimesis and the Imaginable Other") In literature, therefore, and to refer back to Hutcheon, there ensues a “study of representation (…) not a study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past.” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 7) What O’Hara is referring to here, serves to point out that postmodern techniques ultimately allow the individual to understand how individual identity is built, by being witness and participants to how narratives are built. If consciousness and human perception are to be seen as processes mediated by language use and narrativisation, postmodern techniques allow subjects to understand their reality is also built through the same means. Patricia Waugh mentions that metafiction, which as exemplified below can undeniably be linked to postmodernism, is “a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary world, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live in day by day is similarly constructed, similarly ‘written’.” (Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* 20) In short, postmodernism’s basis of overt self-awareness allows the individual to not only understand how literature and art are built, but inevitably to understand that the individual is shaped by the same means, thus allowing postmodernism to become an accessible tool towards self-recognition. Any attempt at “exploring fictional rules”

allows for a discovery of "the role of fictions in life." Postmodernism, with most of the techniques it is manifested by aids individuals in understanding "how we each 'play' our own realities." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 35)

Hutcheon places the emergence of postmodernism in the 1960s, indicating "Gerald Graff has distinguished two strains in the 1960s' version … one of apocalyptic despair and another of visionary celebration", further pointing out that "the postmodernism of the 1970s and 1980s offers little cause for either despair or celebration; it does leave a lot of room for questioning" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 10). Brooker, alternatively, states that "[t]he terms 'postmodern' and 'postmodernism' surfaced briefly in the forties and fifties and were then employed, still earlier than is usually supposed, in the next decade as organising terms in critical essays registering tremors in cultural values." (Brooker 2) Notwithstanding, Chris Snipp-Walmsley points out that it was "American architect Charles Jencks [who] famously declared that postmodernism began on 15 July 1972" with the destruction through a "controlled and planned explosion" of a housing scheme in St Louis, Missouri. Snipp-Walmsley argues that the planned destruction "signalled a clear rift between the modern and postmodern periods" (Snipp-Walmsley 405), nevertheless, Snipp-Walmsley also notes that "despite the confidence of this assertion, many other theorists of postmodernism (…) content that such a clear, dividing line is impossible to achieve." (Snipp-Walmsley 405) In fact, referring to Umberto Eco, Snipp-Walmsley indicates that it is counterproductive to consider postmodernism as a chronological phenomenon, and that, instead, it should be understood as a "mode of representation present in every epoch." (Snipp-Walmsley 405)[36] This is widely considered as a fact, as most

[36] Eco's thoughts on postmodernism are quite clear. In "Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable" (1992) he states: "Actually, I believe that postmodernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined, but, rather, an ideal category – or, better still, a *Kunstwollen,* a way of operating. We could say that every period has its own postmodernism, just as

postmodern theorists believe its preoccupations are inherent from the novel form, and that the only innovations to be found in the postmodern is in how unapologetic the self-awareness inherent in postmodern art forms becomes. Tracing back on the term, Snipp-Walmsley acknowledges that what is clear is that "[b]y the mid to late 1970s, postmodernism had become a buzz-word, a catch-all term to define art that was neither realist nor Modernist. It was a manifestation of the counter-culture, a form of anti-art reflecting a post-war change in the 'structure of feeling' which was anti-élitist, anti-establishment, and counter-aesthetic." (Snipp-Walmsley 407)

That being said, it is worth to note, as Snipp-Walmsley does, that many critics continued (and continue) to refute the existence of postmodernism due to its shared similarities with modernism. As he argues, most of these critics insisted that what was being defined as postmodernism was in reality "a revitalized, sophisticated revision of Modernism more suited to current times." (Snipp-Walmsley 407) Hutcheon refers to postmodernism nay-sayers as "crypto-modernist anti-postmodernists" who have a "strong sense that postmodernism somehow represents a lowering of standards or that it is the lamentable consequence of the institutionalization and acculturation of the radical potential of modernism" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 27). Brooker mentions "postmodernism is first of all a name for the series of social and cultural tendencies provoking the definition of modernism" (Brooker 3), Jean-François Lyotard even confirms that the postmodern "is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday (…), must be suspected." (Lyotard 148) Fredric Jameson, in turn, after asking "What is so new about all of this? Do we really need the concept of *post*modernism?" goes on to state that, indeed, the shift is clear: "until the

every period would have its own mannerism (and, in fact, I wonder if postmodernism is not the modern name for mannerism as metahistorical category). I believe that in every period there are moments of crisis like those described by Nietzsche in his *Thoughts Out of Season*…" (Eco 226)

present day those things have been secondary or minor features of modernist art, marginal rather than central, and that we have something new when they become the central features of cultural production." (Jameson "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 177) What is clear, therefore, is that it is challenging to define or understand postmodernism without having a full understanding of modernism (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 27) and that the lines and boundaries between both may, in some occasions, be undiscernible.

Ultimately, however, as Hutcheon argues, what the emergence of postmodernism has executed is a "[call] into question [of] the messianic faith of modernism, the faith that technical innovation and purity of form can assure social order, even if that faith disregards the social and aesthetic values of those who must inhabit those modernist buildings." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 12) For the sake of this research, it should be stated that in the 2020s one believes it is quite impossible to deny the existence of the postmodern, as there has been an increasing differentiation between modernist and postmodernist features, and the sceptical attitude adopted by critics at the time was, it could be argued, precisely a result of the contemporaneity referred to above. Nevertheless, this study understands postmodernism as perceived in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as both of Ian McEwan's novels are written as a response to such current of thought, and to delve into the state of the arts at a later time would be fruitless. At the same time, it should be understood that postmodernism does not break with modernism, but rather react to it (and other literary traditions), because it consciously "reappropiate[s] forms of the past to speak to a society from within the values and history of that society, while still questioning it…"(Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 12), and that "we cannot view postmodernism as an historical situation and present a critique of it from a position on

the outside – for how can we be outside history?" (Brooker 3) Concurrently, postmodernism's endeavour is quite complex, as it attempts to refer to not only past societies and traditions, but simultaneously to comment on its own time, which Hutcheon perceives as the "paradox of art forms that want to (or feel they have to) speak to a culture from inside it, that believe this to be the only way to reach that culture and make it question its values and its self-constructing representations." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 13) While it can certainly be asserted that all art is eventually politic, and that most (if not all) forms of art reflect on the times in which such forms of art were produced, postmodernism ultimately makes that process of evaluation obvious, bringing it to the conscious level. It aims to show its critique in being "accessible through its overt and self-conscious parodic, historical, and reflexive forms and thus to be an affective force." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 13) What makes it all the more different from other literary movements is precisely that its ironic self-reflectivity first presents a "critical distance and then undo[es] it" and it "paradoxically manages to legitimize culture (high and mass) even as it subverts it." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 15)

Notwithstanding, it is generally agreed that it was Lyotard with *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* which, in 1979, cemented the term and ideology. His report had the intention to "study (…) the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies" and he "decided to use the word *post-modern* to describe that condition" arguing that the term was "in current use on the American continent among sociologists and critics" and that he understood it as "designat[ing] the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts." (Lyotard xxiii) As a

matter of fact, as Fredric Jameson notes, and as quoted above, Lyotard is not necessarily actively detouring from modernism; Jameson considers Lyotard to be

> "in reality quite unwilling to posit a postmodernist stage radically different from the period of high modernism and involving a fundamental historical and cultural break with this last. Rather, [he sees] postmodernism as a discontent with an (sic) disintegration of this or that high modernist style – a moment in the perpetual "revolution" and innovation of high modernism, to be succeeded by a fresh burst of formal invention…" (Jameson, "Foreword" xvi)

Lyotard further refers to a "crisis of narratives" (Lyotard xxiii), a crisis induced by an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv) and to a society whose "goal is no longer truth, but performativity" (Lyotard xxiv). In fact, he believes knowledge to now be considered as a tool eventually "purchased not to find truth, but to augment power." (Lyotard 46) In his pivotal work, Lyotard explores a society with an exhausted faith in grand narratives, and he warns about the dangers of the production of knowledge and information for the future. It could be argued all such issues are undeniably related to the self-reflectivity mentioned above. Ultimately, however, as Hutcheon points out, what the debates on the nature of postmodernism show is "a problematizing force in our culture today: it raises questions about (or renders problematic) the common-sensical and the "natural." But it never offers answers that are anything but provisional and contextually determined (and limited)." (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Preface xi) Focusing, therefore, on the idea of self-awareness, ensues a time in which postmodernism becomes a performance, one in which the attention is placed straight into the artist, the art and the process of creation (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* 26). This performance is one which aims to "speak to a culture from inside it, that believes this to be the only way to reach that culture and make it question its values and its self-constructing representation" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 13). This postmodern performance is "made

possible by the self-referentiality, irony, ambiguity, and parody that characterize much of the art of modernism" and that "postmodern fiction has come to contest the modernist ideology of artistic autonomy, individual expression, and the deliberate separation of art from mass culture and everyday life." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 15) What is most interesting from this self-referential concern is that it allows for postmodern subjects to both legitimise culture and to subvert it (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 15). As a matter of fact, Hutcheon places the responsibility of this kind of art into both the author and the audience, stating that "we are all implicated in the legitimization of our culture" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 15).

Postmodernism therefore aims to understand art itself, the society it stems from and the individuals it originates from, but in so doing, it encounters the barriers of definition. Not only is it complex to describe what postmodernism consists of due to its contemporaneity, it is also an arduous endeavour because postmodernism itself fights against pre-established norms, definitions, and traditions. Because of that, it undergoes an exhaustive process of evaluation and re-evaluation that not only targets art and the individual, but postmodernism itself. As Waugh points out, "[i]f our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself." (Waugh, "What Is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things about It?" 41) To do so, postmodernism certainly also goes to the past, hence why techniques such as ironic re-imagining, parody or pastiche are quite common, albeit Hutcheon establishes this is not a "nostalgic return; it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society, a recalling of a critically shared vocabulary of architectural forms (…) Its aesthetic forms and its social

formations are problematized by critical reflection." (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 4) In literature, and therefore for the purposes of this work, the consequences are all-encompassing, as there is always an element of uncertainty and duplicity that renders all conclusions questionable. A consequence of the "postmodern inquiry into the very nature of subjectivity is the frequent challenge to traditional notions of perspective, especially in narrative and painting", Hutcheon states, further highlighting that "[t]he perceiving subject is no longer assumed to a coherent, meaning-generating entity." For example, "[n]arrators in fiction become either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate (…) or resolutely provisional and limited—often undermining their own seeming omniscience…" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 11) Most importantly, however, one of the main aims of postmodernism, as argued above, is to locate the self within its culture and to possibly reform such a culture. Consequently, "...in its very contradictions, postmodernist art (…) might be able to dramatize and even provoke change from within." (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 7)

Ultimately, what postmodern works such as that of McEwan's do is to not only problematise established absolutes but to simultaneously question how subjectivity is to be obtained. These works therefore "[seek] to 'represent reality'. But 'reality' for the fiction of existence is a behavioristically observable reality. This behavioural fiction is a report on manners, customs, institutions, habits…" for that reason, the postmodern novel "is doubl[y] involved in time: as fiction in the evolution of fictional forms, and as a report on changing patterns of behaviour." (Scholes 25) Fundamentally, what is being exemplified in this work, and will continue to be explored in the chapter that follows, is that McEwan creates fictions in which, embroidered in the narrative's inner layers, is an exploration of both the patterns of fiction and the patterns of life, and precisely because

he makes use of postmodern techniques, he does so within the limits of not establishing a single figure as the uncontested supremacy (although, arguably, *he* is the figure that ultimately holds the most power) and that is due to the fact that "postmodernism's interest in blurring boundaries, in genre games and narrative experiments, has opened a kind of solution, a way to speak without appearing to claim authority." (Margaronis 140) This is mainly possible due to the refuting of the grand narratives referred to by Lyotard and the turn to the "smaller and multiple narratives which seek no universalizing stabilization or legitimation." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 24) In literature, the traditional view of the God-like author figure should be understood as a grand narrative, and its questioning and the inevitable rise of the figures of the narrator, the inscribed author, or the reader, is what composes the *petite récit* Lyotard claimed societies were looking towards instead.

3.1.2 The Metafictional

"The first use of the term 'Metafiction'" as Mark Currie argues, "is attributed to William Gass in the late 1960s, who wanted to describe recent fictions that were somehow about fiction itself. As it was defined in the 1970s, metafiction was fiction with self-consciousness, self-awareness, self-knowledge, ironic self-distance." (M. Currie 1) It could be argued that what Gass coined is in itself a derivation of what Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky explored in his essay "Art as Device" in 1917, which was later popularised and developed by Bertolt Brecht as *Verfremdungseffekt* (when developing his theory on Epic Theatre)[37], or what is more commonly known as the v-effect, alienation or defamiliarization. In his essay, Shklovsky considers that "held accountable for nothing, life fades into nothingness. Automatization eats away at things,

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[37] See *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (1964).

at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war.” (Shklovsky 5) It is this automatisation which requires and inadvertently demands the need to “return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony” and hence that is why “man has been given the tool of art.” (Shklovsky 6) Shklovsky thus understands that “[t]he purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition” and that it is “[b]y “enstranging” objects and complicating form” that “the device of art makes perception long and “laborious.”” (Shklovsky 6) What would eventually be recognised as defamiliarisation is not to be considered the same as metafiction, but it is nonetheless interesting to understand both notions stem from a similar need, which is that of forcing audiences to reconsider their relationship with their perception of life through the means of art.

In this respect, it is interesting to see how Currie understands that metafiction “…can be located at the conscious and the unconscious level of the text. (…) In other words, postmodernist fiction and criticism both aim to articulate the unconscious, and in particular the unconscious self-referentiality of non-metafictional fiction” (M. Currie 17), to do so, it is necessary to make the act of writing or the process of creation obvious, hence why Hutcheon chooses a variety of terms to define the phenomenon: she coins the concept of narcissistic narratives, but also refers to the occurrence as “instrospective, introverted, and self-conscious” fiction, or even “self-reflective, self-informing, self-reflexive, auto-referential, auto-representational” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 1–2). Any act which ‘lays bare the device’ (as Shklovsky first named this concept) can therefore be considered as an act of metafiction, and most studies which centre on the technique focus on its nature and repercussions rather than on its uses. Instead of being interested in discerning which elements are defining of metafiction, this section likewise attempts to put forward what the use of metafiction

ultimately represents for the literary text. As Waugh mentions, the term, "which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact", does so "in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality." (Waugh, "What Is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things about It?" 40)

Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980) opts to develop on the concept by calling the narratives which feature the variety of techniques that compose the term as 'narcissistic narratives' (understanding the novel "continued to prosper, seemingly self-important and unself-critical, until it became Romantically intrigued with its own reflection…" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 11)), specifying that such narratives could be considered to stem from the *nouveau roman* which had a clear impact "in France in the 1950s and 1960s", as well as in the use of *mise en abyme* (most popularly known as the 'story-within-a-story'), another "major mode of textual narcissism", as she calls it (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 11),. For the purposes of this work, Hutcheon's narcissistic narratives will be considered equal to the term metafiction, however, it must be stated that just as Waugh also points out, metafiction should not generally be understood as a specifically postmodern endeavour. Waugh reiterates that "…although the *term* 'metafiction' might be new, the *practice* is as old (if not older) than the novel itself", in fact, she goes as far as to proclaim that she believes metafiction to be "a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 5)

Nevertheless, in this work, metafiction *is* understood as an indispensable part of postmodernism. While it is acknowledged that the concept and technique are not new nor belong exclusively to postmodernism, it is understood as a consequence of the period and approached from the perspective that it is a device utilised due to postmodern *needs*. It is not my intention to contradict Waugh or Hutcheon's statements,

quite the contrary, but it is also my belief that specially in the case of McEwan, metafiction should be understood as part of a postmodern preoccupation with structure, self-reflexivity and therefore, inevitably to do with authorship, readership, and text intention.

Notwithstanding, as it so happens with postmodern definitions, "[t]here is a sense in which any definition of metafiction is a contradiction. Since [it] concerns itself above all with a reflexive awareness of the conditions of meaning-construction, any typological definition of metafiction rooted in objective characteristics or essences will contradict the linguistic philosophy that it attempts to describe." (M. Currie 15) For this reason, metafiction is hereby understood as a phenomenon that is utilised to "…[foreground] the act of authorship within the boundaries of the text (…) [a]s a defensive response, either conscious or intuitive, to the questioning of the idea of the author and of the mimetic function by modern critical theory." (Lodge, "The Novel Now" 154) That is to say, while metafiction is certainly concerned with making obvious all the techniques and devices used within the fictional act, it could be said to centre around the figure of the author and the reader, because ultimately, what it does is to bring awareness to the writing and reading acts. For this reason, any text that contains any kind of metafictional device will inevitably be taking part in a process of self-reflection that can be closely linked to that of criticism. Further, as Currie points out, "...it is often through an internal boundary between art and life that the novel develops the self-commentary that gives it critical self-consciousness." (M. Currie 4) In *Sweet Tooth* and *Atonement* this works on several layers, but one of the effects the use of metafiction has for both inscribed authors is the fact that with the metafictional act, their texts also become a reflection on the critical work being produced at the time, and both inscribed authors, therefore, show the audience they are not in control of themselves,

but rather a higher entity, namely that of the real author. Furthermore, the novels not only provide a story, being self-contained fictional narratives: with their use of metafiction they also provide an added layer of literary criticism that may or may not be picked up by the reader. It will therefore depend on the intertextual relationships created by each reader that the works will be read one way (as traditional narratives with a 'twist'), the other way (as clear references to literary theory) or as both (as metafictional narratives which contain both). As Currie adequately points out, "...metafiction is less a property of the primary text than a function of reading…" (M. Currie 5) which indicates it is only in the reading act where such different layers may or may not emerge, like dormant meanings planted by the author waiting for discovery.

While Hutcheon considers that metafiction should not be entirely tied to postmodernism, in that "…the term "postmodernism" seems to [her] to be a very limiting label for such a broad contemporary phenomenon as metafiction" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 2), she acknowledges three crucial points in the history of literature in which there was a change of focus, which are Romanticism, Modernism, and consequently, Postmodernism as well. As Lodge does, she acknowledges that on such occasions "[t]he focus of a debate on the causes of the change must necessarily be on the perpetrator of the change – the author." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 3) Nevertheless, she goes on to argue that specifically in the case of metafiction, the interest is not only placed on the author, but also "on the text, on the literary manifestation of this change, and on the resulting implications for the *reader*." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 3) Hutcheon's observation, to be explored in depth below, leads to the conclusion that metafiction, as argued in this subsection, is particularly linked to postmodernism in that the focus of attention is shifted to the reader, rather than exclusively placed on the author. Notwithstanding, it is my intention

to demonstrate that the concern with the reader and the shift in attention does not necessarily require the reader's proclaimed authority over the text, but rather a shift in interest, an acknowledging of the fact that texts are written and then consumed by readers, and that there should be a preoccupation with both roles. In fact, it is my intention to show that metafiction aids McEwan's quest towards reclaiming authorial intention whilst acknowledging the reader's presence.

Hutcheon specifies, this way, that while reading a text containing metafiction, the reader "lives in a world he is forced to acknowledge as fictional" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 7). 'Forced' is here quite a key term, as it shows that the reader's power is not absolute, and rather there is another agent enforcing the action: "[p]aradoxically the text also demands that he participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 7) This way, metafictional texts show the same concern for the reader as the literary criticism of the 1960s onwards does: authors using the metafictional device understand the need to shift the spotlight on the reader, as they perceive the reader has been dormant far too long, and now demands not only attention (as the critic will give it) but also to be forcibly made to take a more active role in the reading act (as the author will force it to). Some texts containing metafiction, therefore, might "make a specific demand upon the reader, a demand for recognition of a new code, for a more open reading that entails a parodic synthesis of back and fore-grounded elements." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 25) The reader is thus pressured into understanding reading should no longer be an easy task, the reader can no longer take its "role of passive consumer" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 13) and certainly reading will "no longer [be] a comfortable controlled experience" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 25-6), rather, the reader will be required "to control, to organize, to interpret. He [is] assaulted from all

sides, often by a self-consciously literary text." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 26) This takes place because in its self-awareness and introspection, the postmodern novel, specifically that which contains metafictional elements "actually has *no* existence apart from that constituted by the inward act of reading" and for that reason, in the act of reading, "the reader is made aware of the fact that he too, in reading, is actively creating a fictional universe." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 28)

The way in which metafictional fiction achieves these constant demands from the reader may take different forms. Mostly, it will take place in the interruption of the reading act, one where the reader is made aware of the text as artefact, something Hutcheon calls "disruption and discontinuity" which is something that takes place "by disturbing the comfortable habits of the actual act of reading" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 139). Ultimately, this is obviously not produced in such texts to 'annoy' the reader, or to necessarily make the reader 'uncomfortable' to no avail, it is done so the reader becomes involved in the text and partakes in an exercise of (self)recognition. As Waugh puts it, "[m]etafictional deconstruction" provides both readers and novelists "with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative", and in so doing, due to the nature of both postmodernism and metafiction, this device offers "accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 9) That is to say that, as mentioned above, postmodernism is not only about understanding the web of systems in which the world operates but also the ways in which the *self* operates. In this way, metafiction forces audiences to understand that their selves are a fabrication just as the narrative text is. Metafiction therefore "[questions] not only the notion of the novelist as God, through the flaunting of the author's godlike role, but also the authority of consciousness, of the mind, [it]

establishes the categorization of the world through the arbitrary system of language." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 24)

Notwithstanding, it is important to understand the levels of metafiction contained within a text might certainly have a detrimental effect on this endeavour. How much alienation is too much alienation? Or rather, how much awareness is too much awareness? If a process of self-reflectivity is so exhaustive that it renders the other elements inherent in a fiction irrelevant, would that not be counterproductive? The same might apply to the individual subject, if a subject is in a constant state of self-introspection and never-ending analysis of its functioning as a human being in a narrativised society, is not that individual ultimately more concerned with understanding its performance in society than in *performing* in such a society? McEwan opts for texts that contain metafiction but his use of it is not flagrant. This allows for his novels to be able to provide a variation of experiences: they may be perceived as escapism (as most forms of art are), as forms of entertainment, as reflections on the nature of human kind, as historical and societal ruminations, just as reflections on the nature of the literary endeavour, but precisely because his works contain all of such possibilities, his novels are not oversaturated with postmodern techniques and they do not necessarily overtly overwhelm the reader with the need to understand each of the processes that are taking place.

It is therefore interesting to note that metafictional texts which tend to adhere to 'realistic' settings could be considered more successful in creating a more agreeable reading experience. As Waugh mentions, metafiction can "offe[r] both innovation *and* familiarity through the individual reworking and understanding of familiar conventions." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 12) She points at novels that

> can thus initially be comprehended through the old structures, and can therefore be enjoyed and remain in the consciousness of a wide readership which is given a far more active role in the construction of the 'meaning' of the text than is provided either in contemporary realist novels or in novels which convert their readers into frenetic human word-processors, and which 'last' only as long as it takes to read them. (Waugh, *Metafiction* 13)

This can be achieved thanks to the fact that "[a]lthough the reader is thereby distanced from the language, the literary conventions and, ultimately, from conventional ideologies" because of self-awareness, "the defamiliarization proceeds from an extremely familiar base" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 13).

This familiarity has inevitable consequences for the building of a reality as well. Previously, it has been mentioned how Briony and Tom, in their roles as inscribed authors, manage to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. Further, through their use of the metafictional device, it will be exemplified how successful they are in dislocating reader's perception of what constitutes fiction and reality, by producing texts that seem to transcend into the world of the 'real'. Hutcheon puts forward the idea that "because postmodern novels focus on the process of event becoming fact, they draw attention to the dubiousness of the positivist, empiricist hierarchy implied in the binary opposing of the real to the fictive, and they do so by suggesting that the non-fictional is as constructed and as narratively known as is fiction." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 76) If, as mentioned above, the real and the fictional are built using the same strategies and systems of discourse, it is possible for one to be confused with the other. What is being suggested is that McEwan's use of metafiction through his inscribed authors, attempts at blurring the divide between one and the other and to force readers to consider what is fictional and what is not in their own conscious perception of the world they live in. As will be exemplified, McEwan puts forward narratives where audiences are ultimately faced with the understanding that the reading act they are participating in might be as fictional as their lives are, or rather that, the fictional novel

they are reading is in fact, part of their reality. As Waugh states, metafiction tends to "foregroun[d] 'framing' as a problem … The first problem it poses, of course, is: what is a 'frame'? What is the 'frame' that separates reality from 'fiction'? Is it more than the front and back covers of a book, the rising and lowering of a curtain, the title and 'The End'?" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 28) Ultimately what the use of metafiction does in the novel, specifically the contemporary novel, is to problematise the understanding of both fiction and reality; these "novels usually set up an internally consistent 'play' world which ensures the reader's absorption and then lays bare its rules in order to investigate the relation of 'fiction' to 'reality', the concept of 'pretence'." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 40–41) Specifically in the case of McEwan, in the codas for both novels, the reader finds itself in a quandary that either the assumed to be fictional characters are actually being inserted into the real world, or the reader is actually part of their fiction, which is due to the fact that in the metafictional act, the reader becomes "aware that, in the fiction-reading process, an act of consciousness creates an 'object' that did not exist before. However, the reader is further reminded that this act cannot create anything that could exist outside the dialectic of text and consciousness." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 104)

3.1.2.1 The Intertextual Diversion

One of the main features of postmodernism is the awareness of the widely referred to (and utilised) intertextuality. A "state of the 'between-ness' of meaning" which refers to the idea that "[t]exts are not created out of nothing, but from already existing texts and discourses." (Willis 40) As Don Fowler states, what intertextuality does is to "creat[e] meaning in texts through a dialectic between sameness and difference" (Fowler as qtd in Willis 41). What makes intertextuality inherently postmodern, and I would argue, closely related to metafictional ideals as well, is its own awareness of the text as being

part of a literary tradition, the awareness of the text as artefact. Whereas in previous eras the use of intertextuality was obviously present, it was usually not blatantly so. During postmodernism, therefore, intertextuality becomes an additional mechanism to place the focus on the awareness experienced by authors and readers alike of the importance of other texts and traditions into the text being both created and inspected.

The concept is attributed to Bulgarian-French philosopher and semiotician Julia Kristéva, who coined the term in 1966 in "Word, Dialogue and Novel", albeit her work was an expansion of the concepts of 'heteroglossia' or 'dialogism' put forward by Mikhail Bahktin in 1935. In her work, Kristéva analyses the "three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue" understanding that its main components are the "writing subject, addressee and exterior texts" (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 36). In this exploration, she points out that there is a "horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context) [which] coincide, bringing to light an important fact: each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read." (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 37) The horizontal and vertical axis are reworkings of what Bakhtin terms *dialogue* and *ambivalence*, which Kristéva herself considers as the conclusion that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 37) The horizontal axis, therefore, is understood as the relationship built between author and reader, whereas the vertical axis is understood as the link created between texts (and, consequently, that which affects (or is affected by) the author's reading history as well as the readers'). This way, Kristéva puts forward the understanding that a text is not only meant to be interpreted or read on its own, but it should also be considered part of an embroidery of texts, hinting at the realisation that intertextuality leads to "poetic language [being] read as at least *double*." (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 37)

Consequently, every text is composed of the entire reading history of an author, just as it is composed by the entire reading history of a reader. Furthermore, in postmodernism, intertextuality becomes itself an *obvious* component of the text, in that the postmodern author will no longer shy away from referencing other works, mixing different genres, or heavily drawing (in form or content) from its predecessors. A similar effect can be observed within the reader, in this case however faced with a difficult task (as all tasks offered by postmodernism seem to be): that of participating in the intertextual game. Readers may be aware of the intertextual dynamic of the text they are reading, or they may not. As Gerald Prince argues, "[f]or a writer, an ideal reader would be one who would understand perfectly and would approve entirely the least of his words, the most subtle of his intentions. For a critic, an ideal reader would perhaps be one capable of interpreting the infinity of texts that, according to certain critics, can be found in one specific text." (Prince 9) Interestingly, the creation of meaning discussed in Chapter One may be hindered by the reader's understanding (or rather, capability) of putting together all such references. In the case of McEwan, as will be exemplified below, intertextual diversions are just another of the ways in which the author participates in attributing himself the power over his literary production. Waugh mentions that such practices "attempt to create 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, *Metafiction* 4) As Hutcheon argues, the intertextual game observed in most postmodern novels may create a "problem of accessibility", as she ponders on the possibility that the reader may "not recognize the represented figures or the parodied composition…" and links this possibility to the existence of a "real threat of elitism or lack of access" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 105).

Hutcheon, in the portion of her work being now discussed, is focusing on the concept of 'parody', a practice which is inherently both postmodern and intertextual. She considers that the "question of accessibility is undeniably part of the politics of postmodern representation. But it is the complicity of postmodern parody – its inscribing as well as undermining of that which it parodies – that is central to its ability to be understood." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 105)

Bahktin was not the first one, however, to make the observation that every text is composed of a "mosaic of quotations". As referred to above, it could be argued Eliot had already highlighted the importance of understanding the awareness of a literary *tradition* as crucial in the literary field, thus extrapolating that to write a text is to become part of such a mosaic. (Eliot 37) With time, it has been understood that despite the lack of acknowledging of the presence of tradition, or the lack of definition and coinage of the term intertextuality, it is by far not a contemporary preoccupation, but something inherent in the study of literature. David Lodge argues that "[s]ome theorists believe that intertextuality is *the very condition of literature*, that all texts are woven from the tissues of other texts, whether their authors know it or not", be it in the terms of "parody, pastiche, echo, allusion, direct quotation, structural parallelism…" (Lodge, *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts* 98) As he goes on to argue, the idea of tradition, or the more complex notion of intertextuality, "is entwined in the roots of the English novel, while at the other end of the chronological spectrum novelists have tended to exploit it rather than resist it, freely recycling old myths and earlier works of literature to shape, or add resonance to, their presentation of contemporary life." (Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* 99)

To discuss the inner workings of intertextuality, Kristéva refers to Freud and his "two fundamental 'processes' in the work of the unconscious: *displacement* and

condensation." (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 111) To these two processes she incorporates the need for a third, which she terms 'transposition', that is "the *passage from one sign-system to another*." (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 111) This is a process that emerges from a combination of the two pointed out by Freud, which additionally, as she states, "also involves an altering of the thetic *position* – the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one." (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 111) She specifies that 'intertextuality' "has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources'", and therefore there is the need to understand that a term such as *transposition* might certainly be more useful when wishing to specify "that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality." (Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* 111) Notwithstanding, transposition in this study is used very similarly to how it is done by Gérard Genette, in that it is the combination of processes (or texts) that results in the eventual birth of an additional process (or text): "[t]hese are rewritings which openly transform, rather than simply imitate earlier texts, and which do so in a serious mode, rather than a playful or satirical one." (Willis 54) Therefore, intertextuality and transposition go beyond the knowledge that texts are influenced by other texts and the consequent study of such a link. They also go beyond the understanding that a text will need a familiarity with previous literary history. Ultimately, what both Kristéva and Genette put forward in their individual works is the view that, as Eliot mentioned at the beginning of the twentieth century, the creation of a text will inevitably not only be affected by previous texts, but that its creation will, in itself, simultaneously modify all of past and future literary tradition to a lesser or greater extent.

Genette, writing after Kristéva, focuses on a variety of fields dealing with narratology. In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982) he uses the term

‘transtextuality’ as an umbrella term which has to do with the relationships inherent between texts. In his text, he “differentiates five major types of relationship between texts: intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, hypertextuality, and metatextuality.” (Onega 277) As Susana Onega mentions, however, Genette is aware that this division “is in fact somewhat problematic, since (…) it is often difficult to separate some categories from others.” (Onega 277) The distinctions made by Genette are as such:

> *Architextuality* is the implicit determination of the generic status of a given text; *intertextuality*, the perception by a reader of the relationships existing between a given text and another preceding or following it by means of quotations, plagiarism, or allusions; *paratextuality*, the relationship of a text to its paratext (title, epigraph, preface, epilogue, footnotes, dust jacket commentaries, photographs, etc.); *hypertextuality*, the relationship establishes between a text B (hypertext) and a pre-existing text A (hypotext) through transformation or imitation (parody, pastiche, transvestism, etc.); and *metatextuality*, the relationship of critical ‘commentary’ existing between a text and another that speaks about it without explicitly quoting from it. (Onega 277 my italics)

It could be said all such categories are employed by Ian McEwan to a greater or lesser degree. In fact, I would say he participates in performances not necessarily contemplated by either Kristéva or Genette. Following Genette’s categorisation, McEwan participates in intertextuality, mostly by adding allusions to other works and literary genres in *Atonement*; he also makes use of hypertextuality, in that *Sweet Tooth* refers back to his early short stories published in *In Between the Sheets*; lastly, metatextuality, as with both codas in *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*, McEwan includes a built-in critical section in his texts, precisely without being explicit, replying back to “The Death of the Author”. Most interestingly, however, *Sweet Tooth* itself comments on literary techniques and discusses metafiction openly.

Therefore, it could be argued McEwan’s use of intertextuality (encompassing transtextuality, intratextuality, and transposition) is conducted with a specific purpose in mind, not only that of showing awareness of the literature produced before his, and to

acknowledge the importance of previous literary tradition in his work (and the work of his inscribed authors), but instead, with the intention of giving an extra turn of the screw to place the focus on his own literary production. Discussing *Sweet Tooth* below, my focus is placed on what Genette would refer to as 'metatextuality', but given the shortcomings of the term, I opt instead for the term 'intratextuality', to refer to the links built between works belonging to the same author. McEwan, as will be further exemplified below, makes use of his own literary creation by referencing back to earlier texts from his career. Therefore, in this case, his latter texts (and somewhat his earlier texts) might be better understood when studied as a whole, that is to say, when the real reader is aware that latter texts may be referring to past ones. By referring to his earlier creations, McEwan is making obvious the circumstance of the importance of tradition, evidencing not only the importance of all his work, but at times participating in transposition as well (if the understanding of the reader allows for a new text to be created due to its reference to the past). Moreover, while to feature the author within the text is a common postmodern attribute, McEwan never features himself, but rather uses a fictional literary persona in Tom H. Haley, which as will be stated below, mirrors some of the feats of his own career. Nevertheless, the intratextuality employed in this case is subtle: only a reader that has read McEwan widely or one that is familiar with biographical details of his life may put two and two together. Thus, for McEwan, intratextuality becomes an endeavour which might attribute additional meaning to texts, and thus become what is understood by both Kristéva and Genette as transposition. As Willis points out, in fact, "[i]f meaning wanders around between texts, we understand texts in part through comparing them to others." (Willis 40)

Ultimately, intertextuality is a further elaboration and exploration on the concept of the literary tradition, one that, because it is conducted under a postmodern prism,

results in a self-aware exploration of the effects writing inside of a literary tradition may have for a text. Arguably, understanding the text as a mosaic of quotations, the awareness that "[l]iterary texts cannot be purely new or entirely original; indeed, [that] 'a work that had only original elements would be doomed to incomprehensibility'" (Willis 41 and Conte as qtd in Willis) allows authors such as McEwan to explore the repercussions of postmodern awareness. As Willis suggests, the focus is not only placed on the reader, although as just mentioned, the reader is quite key in this process, but the spotlight is also on the author, and their necessary understanding that they "do not create out of nothing, but 'realize, transform or transpose' - that is, actively receive and rework - material which already exists within the system in which they write." (Willis 41) Arguably, this focus on the author is cleverly used by McEwan: as will be exemplified below, his use of intratextuality, epitomising in *Sweet Tooth,* ultimately takes power from both Tom Haley (and to a lesser extend Briony Tallis), to place it instead on McEwan himself.

3.2 Manifesting Authorship through Metafictional Devices in *Atonement* (2001)

3.2.1 Metafiction in the Book: The Writing Process

The power in McEwan's use of metafiction rests in its timing, his choice to include a metafictional twist at the end of the novel somewhat redefines his narratives and even awards them different hybrid statuses. Nonetheless, metafiction is present throughout the entire narrative of *Atonement* albeit in short instances. Scholes mentions that metafiction "tends toward brevity because it attempts, among other things, to assault or transcend the laws of fiction - an undertaking which can only be achieved from within fictional form." (Scholes 29) First of all, during parts One and Three of the novel, there are several examples of Briony in the writing act, which inevitably bring attention to the art of the creation of fiction. The reader is made privy of the writing process, as well as of the pleasure Briony obtains from such a process. Second, there are other instances which could be considered clues (or insights) into the story that upon re-reading the text would allow the reader to anticipate the metafictional twist. For such occasions, McEwan makes use of prolepsis.

The novel opens with the mention of fiction ("the play", a fictional text), occupying most of the length of the first few pages, as McEwan moves through the different roles assigned to Briony's literary production. From the first few pages, the reader is made aware of which type of author Briony is struggling to be (one in full control of every single step of her creation), as well as of the virtual and ideal readers of her fabrication (in this case, her family circle) (3-4). As was mentioned in the first chapter, the first few pages establish Briony as an author depicting the way in which she both treats her play as an ordeal of the utmost importance, and the way she reacts to the reception it has. At this point of the narrative, McEwan is attempting to specify the

drives behind authorship and provide an insight into the mind of an author. At first, Briony doubts the path she has taken, as "[p]retending in words [is] too tentative, too vulnerable, too embarrassing to let anyone know" (6), she questions the pros and cons of the role of an author, allowing the reader to understand the possibilities that inhabit an author's mind before, during and after the act of writing. D'Angelo asserts that

> Briony's perfected notions of her audience extend to her understanding of storytelling itself and the manner through which stories unproblematically transfer meaning (...) Briony's description of the reader's relationship to a text seems little more than a form of mental telepathy, through which words and symbols transmit an author's meaning into the reader's mind, and no linguistic "gap" exists. (D'Angelo 93)

Moreover, this vision is rendered ironic when during the fountain scene, Briony fails to read and obtain the 'automatic meaning' she pondered before the scene took place.

At first, Briony has a need to establish herself as an author that is a different entity to herself. She is worried "the reader [is] bound to speculate that she [i]s describing herself" (6), something she seems to reject from the get-go. Without knowing the particular terms that would describe her as an author, without understanding that what she needs from her creation is the power of intention, she is already aware that "[o]nly when a story [is] finished (…) c[an] she feel immune" (6).

The first few pages of the novel provide these little insights into Briony's mind as she attempts to come to terms with what *The Trials of Arabella* really is, almost allowing for discernment on the mind of an author upon the publication or the final stages of the writing process ("[t]he page of a recently finished story seemed to vibrate in her hand with all the life [it] contained" (7)). She seems to be evaluating what her role has been during the writing of the play and whether she wishes to modify such a role for her future endeavours, hence her realisation that she is writing the 'wrong' genre. Arguably, these musings allow McEwan to explore what the different authorial approaches towards a narrative can be, implying there is a decision that is to be

consciously made by each author. These moments of self-discovery grant the reader the opportunity to track Briony's navigation of literature. Pilar Hidalgo states that "Briony's nascent literary imagination allows the reader to follow her development […] from folk tales" to "melodrama to modernist and finally realist fiction", which ultimately "foregrounds issues of genre and narrative technique" (Hidalgo as qtd in Dahlbäck).

This way, metafiction can be traced in the first pages of the novel, as it is during these pages that a clear analysis of the writing process is made. The reader learns that for Briony, authorship equals "miniaturisation" and a demand of the reader's "total attention as she cast[s] her narrative spell" (7). Not only that, but the reader is also made aware of the inspiration process behind Briony's creations. While later on the novel's treatment of trauma will be the main trigger, in the first few pages, the "news that her cousins from the north [are] coming to stay [prompts a] leap into a new form" of fiction. (8) Thanks to the visit of the cousins, and to the rehearsals they execute of her play, Briony can understand there is more to the process of creation than its writing. She discovers reader-reception only when "Jackson beg[ins] to read from his sheet in a stricken monotone", allowing her "to understand the chasm that lay[s] between an idea and its execution" (9). O'Hara mentions McEwan "ultimately provide[s] self-conscious illustrations of mimetic processes. [His] are novels which reinforce, rather than undercut, a threefold relationship between narrative, reader, and world, by describing that dynamism self-consciously within their storylines" (O'Hara, "Mimesis and the Imaginable Other").

McEwan thus provides Briony's approach towards reader-response criticism, which not only enhances an understanding of Briony's character, but it ultimately works to establish and maintain a dynamic between narrative and reader, as the reader is forced to face what it means to write a narrative – to attempt to get both into an author's

mind and into the process of creation. During the same episode mentioned above, Briony clashes with Lola when the latter unexpectedly identifies with the fictional Arabella, an unforeseen turn of events for Briony. Lola's identification with the character, along with her wish to portray it herself, gives Briony a glimpse into the dangers of reader interpretation, and how damaging it can be for her authorial intent to allow her readers to give meaning to her text. From then onwards, it could be argued that Briony starts paving the way towards the kind of authorship she wants to hold, one where the author is in full possession of the text's intent, which leads her to start experimenting with different literary forms to see which one can allow her to hold power most. This information, in turn, becomes key for the astute reader, which will begin to process the many intricacies that lay behind the relationship between an author and its text. The discussion of Briony's first play, therefore, is a clear metafictional exercise in that it forces readers to consider the existence of authorial intention, as by being made aware of Briony's feelings upon receiving reader feedback, the reader may understand any reaction that is not expected or foreseen by Briony is not only poorly received by the author but might also be the cause of an identity crisis.

The reader is also made privy to the moments in which Briony is writing, which, in turn, will become moments in which Briony is writing *Atonement* itself, the text being read by the real reader. This is achieved when the novel plays close attention to describe the moments in which she is writing (as explored in both Chapters One and Two), even specifying the tools that she utilises, as well as which events lead her to participate in moments of writing. There is, however, a case in which what she writes and the feedback she receives makes it obvious that she is actually writing the novel that is being read, which is the correspondence she shares with *Horizon*.

3.2.1.1. The Case of Horizon

As was previously mentioned, D'Angelo mentions how the specific use of intertextuality also works to produce further meaning in *Atonement*:

> Brian Finney reads these intertextual elements as a further move toward textual "productivity," a term he acquires from theorists Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida: "What they mean by that is that once a text establishes its interdependence on other texts, its signification proliferates. Atonement offers particularly clear instances of what Kristeva claims are some of the different ways in which a text, in relating to other texts, becomes productive of further meanings" (73) (D'Angelo 94)

What D'Angelo hints at is the idea that by having intertextuality be such a prevalent presence in the text, what McEwan is doing is to instruct, or rather, reward, a specific kind of reader. Knowing both the original and the 'recreation' or being able to identify the texts that are being emulated or the literary genres that are being put at use, the reader can become further informed, or be left in the dark. By knowing both meanings produced by the two different texts, or by being able to acknowledge the references laid out in the text, the reader can make a more educated reading of the text. D'Angelo goes on to say, in relation to Finney's article and to Eliot's postulated ideals, that a 'general' reader might misread the first section of *Atonement* - perhaps because *Atonement* has different layers to the narrative, that make it accessible to a wider, less well-read audience.

Intertextuality also takes on a big role in *Atonement*, especially during the first part, and it serves a very specific purpose, which is to allow for a chronicling of the history of literary genres through Briony's exploration with her writing from an early age.[38] Furthermore, the inclusion of a full letter discussing the nature of Briony's fiction within the text, which becomes a discussion on the nature of fiction itself, is something both undeniably metafictional - as it forces the reader to evaluate the writing process it

[38] In *Atonement*, Briony grows and explores different literary genres, just as different literary genres emerge and grow with time, in a way that could possibly allow to brand *Atonement* as a *Künstlerroman*. This chronicling of literature, albeit miniaturised through specific points, becomes another of the ways in which McEwan tends to either chronicle the nature of literature or the nature of the writing process.

is being a witness of; and irrefutably postmodern. Consequently, the fact that so many connections can be made to other literary works contemporary to the time in which Briony is writing is yet another postmodern element added into the narrative - intertextuality is here explored through the connections Briony makes to other texts, and how those affect her process of creation. For this purpose, it is interesting to inspect the episode where Briony interacts with the literary magazine *Horizon*. As mentioned in the first chapter, this moment works to reinforce Briony's thirst to overpower rejection, but most importantly, it makes the writing process obvious, in this case, through depicting the editing stage, and through depicting the writing of *Atonement* itself.

The letter not only puts in the spotlight the fact that stories need origins (as exemplified through Briony struggling to come with the perfect genre or Briony experiencing trauma in the moment of understanding her own limitations) as well as writing acts (as chronicled through observing Briony in the process of writing in different instances) but also reception (Emily Tallis considering the play 'stupendous', Cecilia placing Briony's manuscripts in the library shelves, Briony producing her first narrative by signing a police statement) along with editing. To reach the publication stage, aside from the author, external and professional forces must also collaborate, thus it seems necessary for a novel so preoccupied with the process of creating fiction to depict all such stages. What makes her interaction with *Horizon* specifically pertinent is that the occurrence represents yet another use of metafiction, as it is not merely an interaction between Briony and a literary agent, but rather a conversation regarding Briony's writing of her manuscript for *Atonement*. This means that, in the case at hand, the reader is made aware of the changes that were suggested for the first drafts of the novel - changes that, upon inspection of the letter itself, seem to have been incorporated

into the final draft of the narrative. Hence, it could be argued that the novel chronicles its own creation.

Horizon was a real-life literary magazine which ran monthly from 1939 to 1950, and the letter received by Briony is reproduced in full in the text (311-315). The letter is signed by CC, which stands for Cyril Connolly, the real-life editor of the magazine. This is not the only time McEwan will make use of real-life literary organisations, including them into his narratives, almost rewriting the past of literary history to introduce his character-authors into the literary canon. In *Sweet Tooth*, Tom Haley and Serena Frome will interact with real-life authors, agents, and literary prizes, placing Tom Haley inside of a real-life realm which he was never a part of. McEwan is also, consequently, placing his authors within the literary tradition, in the case of Briony, as Ana Mitrić highlights, "McEwan's inclusion of Connolly should also, and just as importantly, prompt readers to look outside the text: to situate Briony's work within a period that was a crucial turning point (…) in twentieth-century literary history." (Mitrić 718) Furthermore, by making Haley interact with such, and by making Briony share correspondence with a real-life magazine, McEwan not only blurs the divide between reality and fiction, but he also reinforces a false veracity for his stories. Of course, there was never an author called Briony Tallis, the correspondence shared with Connolly is fictitious, and yet, by allowing a fictional character to interact with a real-life human being, McEwan may possibly obtain specific reactions from his real audience, as mentioned above, "[t]he most radical boundaries crossed [in postmodernism] have been those between fiction and non-fiction and—by extension—between art and life." (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 10)

As Mitrić points out,

> Connolly's letter is significant, then, not least because it contains the first hard evidence confirming the reader's suspicion that we are immersed in (what is at

> least in part) a metafiction… Having made this discovery, we have no choice but to scrutinize Connolly's letter for any other clues it might offer. And clues there are aplenty, from local corrections he makes to Briony's text (for example, she has misidentified a Bernini sculpture in her draft) to global suggestions for her revision that seem to have been incorporated into part 1 of *Atonement*. (Mitrić 716)

On the one hand, an astute reader might know about *Horizon* magazine well before Briony introduces it into the text, creating a layer of reality which will lead to trusting and relying on *Atonement*'s plot; on the other hand, an intrigued reader might even decide to ensure if such a magazine did exist, and, upon realising it is a real magazine that did run in London, might reach the same conclusion than the astute reader. Consequently, by choosing a real magazine with a real editor and by writing in his name, instead of making up a fictional magazine with a fictional editor, McEwan intentionally and successfully blurs the divide between reality and fiction one more time.

This piece of correspondence is first mentioned in a letter sent by Cecilia to Robbie ("by the way" she writes, "she also said she's had a piece of writing turned down by Cyril Connolly, at *Horizon*. So at least someone can see through her wretched fantasies" (212)), the letter is first mentioned in passing, and amongst many other details Cecilia must tell Robbie. Later on, however, the letter is reproduced in full. As Seyed Javad Habibi mentions "[r]eaders do not have any access to this initial draft and they can only infer Briony's narrative technique, plot, characters and so on from Connolly's elaborate rejection letter as well as the revised and developed version of the novella, which appear[s] as "Part One" of *Atonement*." (Javad Habibi) Beginning with the news that inform Briony that, "[u]nfortunately we are not able to take any of it" (311), Connolly explains to Briony that "against [their] better judgement" the magazine found itself "reading the whole with great interest" (311-312), and for that reason would

show interest in her future productions. The fictional Connolly[39] suggests she start writing short stories, rather than novellas (perhaps due to the publication format of *Horizon* but also pointing out the preference for young authors to start with shorter texts and structures). Connolly proceeds to clarify that the interest taken in her text, despite the magazine's refusal to publish it, is of great importance, as they "cast aside a great deal of material, some of it by writers of reputation" (312) and goes ahead to point out which parts of the narrative he found to be most valuable ("[s]omething unique and unexplained is caught." (312)) Intertextuality here is key as the letter not only refers to what will become a real-life text, but it is also latent when Connolly points out the obvious connections between Briony's writing and that of other authors, specifically Virginia Woolf ("we wondered whether it owed a little too much to the techniques of Mrs Woolf" (312)). Here a criticism towards modernism can be felt, a reticence to the movement that occurred upon its early development. As Habibi mentions, "'the real' Cyril Connolly is a confessed anti-Bloomsbury figure" (Javad Habibi), and so he is of the opinion that Briony's narrative would benefit from detouring from the movement, as, while it is difficult to "doubt the value of this experimentation (…) such writing can become precious when there is no sense of forward movement" (312). However, for *Horizon*, Briony's text would have held their attention "more effectively had there been an underlying pull of simple narrative. Development is required." (312)

As Mitrić suggests, as well,

> [t]he last portion of the letter (…) not only suggests Connolly's more complicated relation to modernist debates, particularly regarding the autonomy of the aesthetic object, but also puts McEwan's novel in dialogue with the even more pressing conversations of the late 1930s and '40s about writer's social, political, and, indeed, moral responsibilities to the society at large, many of which were carried out in the very pages of *Horizon*. (Mitrić 717)

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[39] For an in-depth analysis of not only the letter but also Cyril Connolly, his career, *Horizon* itself and specifically his representation in the novel, see Ana Mitrić's "Turning Points: *Atonement*, *Horizon*, and Late Modernism" (2014).

Which, as suggested above, indicates McEwan's preoccupation with surveying the state of literary history. *Horizon*'s letter, consequently, allows McEwan the possibility to explore not only the *intention* and *reception* of an author's work, but to explore the responsibilities inherent in authorship, be it morally or, as argued above, socially as well as politically.

Nevertheless, the main purpose of the letter is to make readers of *Atonement* aware about the contents of the first drafts for the story, which Briony has titled *Two Figures by a Fountain*, hence further allowing audiences to understand that *Atonement* was not always a full-length novel which disposed of a "plot" but that was rather a novella which heavily fell into the realm of modernism. Simultaneously, it permits the audience to understand the writing process of a story, and of the different stages it might and must undergo before becoming a finished product ready for publication. As Habibi mentions,

> Connolly's letter thus connotes Briony's transitional poetics and gives an insight into the young Briony's *Two Figures* as an "underdone" modern novella, which is pushed forward through Connolly's advice to become a higher modernist work. Referring to McHale's definition of the postmodernism which is a shift from the epistemological preoccupations of modernism toward an ontological unhinging, Richard Robinson argues that Connolly's letter brings just such an ontological jolt, violating the boundaries between real and fictional worlds well before the metafictional adjunct of the epilogue. (Javad Habibi)

Therefore, Briony is not the sole creator of the manuscript being read, having no part in its publication, *Horizon*'s commentaries still become key to shaping the story that is being read, proving once more than in the reading act there is more than one player and that each has its allocated responsibilities. The fictionalised Connolly goes on to suggest a few changes for Briony's text by pointing out that "nothing much happens after a beginning that has such promise" (313). In this way, the reader is made privy to events that are in Briony's story, *Two Figures by a Fountain*, without being expressly told *Two Figures by a Fountain* will go on to become *Atonement*. Once more, a casual reader of

Atonement may not give importance to the letter, nor to the information it can provide to the story and to Briony's growth and development as an author. Nevertheless, upon closer inspection, or upon acts of re-reading, the reader might notice Briony's chronicling of her novel has always been a preoccupation within her final manuscript.

The same can be said for the moment in which Briony is suggested to change small events from the draft, such as discussing the fate of the Ming vase which breaks during the fountain scene: "[w]ouldn't it help you if the watching girl did not actually realise that the vase had broken? It would be all the more of a mystery to her that the woman submerges herself" (313). The reader is aware the vase broke, but it is so because it is narrated through Robbie and Cecilia's point of view (29). The chapter focalised through Briony's perspective does not mention Briony being aware of the vase during the incident, therefore, the final manuscript using a split narratorial voice indicates that Briony has taken into consideration Connolly's suggestions, incorporating them into her final draft. With this act, Briony is also detouring from modernism and venturing into postmodernism, through the use of a complex narrative structure, once more indicating that the letter's contents are taken into account (she is told her "most sophisticated readers might be well up on the latest Bergsonian theories of consciousness, but [they are] sure they retain a childlike desire to be told a story, to be held in suspense, to know what happens" (314)).

In short, Briony is told by a literary magazine that her use of modernism is not suitable for the needs of the story she wants to tell, and she is asked to reconsider her literary technique, as well as to consider such remarks "given with sincere enthusiasm", to actually use *Two Figures by a Fountain* "as a basis for another draft" (315). Briony seems to follow almost every one of the recommendations made to her by a real reader (Connolly), and she uses them to perfect her draft. The only recommendation she does

not follow is the one suggesting she does not discuss the war in her work, since according to Connolly, “artists are politically impotent.” (315) In this case, Briony makes war one of the key elements of her narrative, perhaps because after receiving the letter, she understands that what her narrative is lacking is a tint of the postmodern, which includes, at its core, historical metafiction. As Habibi mentions, “McEwan, through “Part Two” of *Atonement*, suggests that the world of history itself is a multiplicity of “alternative world”, as fictional as the world of novel. Inserting real historical events and personage along with borrowing from the real historical sources overtly fictionalizes the historical contexts.” (Javad Habibi) The inclusion of the war is not only relevant in terms of the genre and structure of the novel, but it also becomes yet another of the ways in which McEwan chooses to reply back to real-life criticism through text. It could be said it is not only Briony choosing to use ‘politics’ in art, it is also McEwan choosing to side with a perspective about the function of art within society which antagonises what the real Cyril Connolly believed. This does not only happen in *Atonement*, in *Sweet Tooth* precisely, political issues and how they interfere on literary production are certainly explored.

Later on, Briony will repudiate her initial drive towards modernism: “Did she really think she could hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and drown her guilt in a stream - three streams! - of consciousness?” (320). Interestingly, with such a comment it would be safe to assume that *Two Figures by a Fountain*, despite being a novella, and despite being stuck in modernism, already contained a split narrative structure. This fact might have allowed Briony to see that in initial drafts, “[e]verything she did not wish to confront was ... missing”, but most importantly, it is “necessary to it”, so she must produce a second (or third) draft (320).

3.2.1.2 Prolepsis and Narrative Voice

Upon the reading of Connolly's letter, an astute reader might be able to tie the loose ends and understand what they are reading is Briony's latest attempt and draft. In fact, afterwards, while she is pondering on the contents of the letter itself, she once more goes over her process of creation, showing just how much criticism affects her final text. She is said to "ha[ve] been carrying [the letter] in her pocket", understanding that "without intending it, [the letter] delivered a significant personal indictment." By having Connolly ask Briony "*Might she come between them in some disastrous fashion*?" (320), she then admits "Yes, indeed. And having done so, might she obscure the fact by concocting a slight, barely clever fiction and satisfy her vanity by sending it off to a magazine?" (320) It is in moments like this, therefore, that without directly addressing the reader, Briony does manifest her authorship of the manuscript before the chronicled time in the narrative. Further, her authorship also manifests, quite significantly, in the moments of the narrative which she later admits are complete fiction (rather than those she has subjectively fictionalised to fit her needs but that are based on true events). She is a "ghostly illuminated apparition" (327) in the Marshall wedding, and she is later "the imagined or ghostly persona" when "walking in the direction of Balham" to meet Robbie and Cecilia (329).

Prolepsis in the text is used to explore the process of creation, along with giving the narrative information regarding the future of Briony as an author. Furthermore, prolepsis works to plant clues within the narrative. As Genette mentions, "[t]he "first-person" narrative lends itself better than any other to anticipation, by the very fact of its avowedly retrospective character, which authorizes the narrator to allude to the future and in particular to his present situation, for these to some extent form part of his role" (Genette 67). In fact, this use of 'anticipation' is rare in Western contemporary texts

(Genette 46), which would indicate its use is foreshadowing of a narrative interplay, or of a certain unreliability to be expected from the narrator. By making use of a technique usually used by first-person narrators, in a chapter that is narrated from a third-person perspective, McEwan is therefore also planting the seed of doubt within the text, dislocating the reader and foreshadowing a certain unreliability towards the alleged third-person narrator.

There are a few instances of prolepsis in the text, which are all coincidentally linked to moments in which Briony is either about to commit an action that has to do with her writing process, or in moments in which the text is concerned with describing parts of the writing process. The fact that both acts coincide would go on to indicate that the uses of prolepsis have a micro-metafictional effect, allowing the reader to be made aware of the process of creation, but also to be aware that the text has specific concerns that are not transparently disclosed.

As Briony is plotting how she will be writing the fountain scene she has just witnessed, the third person narrator announces that "[s]ix decades later she would describe how at the age of thirteen she had written her way through a whole history of literature" (41), which is a form of anticipating events non chronologically (this, however, is an isolated event in the narrative). Prolepsis thus represents a break in the text, as it conspicuously breaks grammar cohesion rules, making the reader stay fixated with the *prolepsical* statement, rather than being able to continue with the narrative flow. For instance, when Briony is later debating what will happen after she accuses Robbie, she thinks about the different possibilities, and therefore the third-person narrator makes use of the second conditional: "If the police made an arrest, she, Briony, might be made to appear in court, and say the word aloud, in proof" (121), the second conditional is the correct verb tense to use, as what is being narrated is not an event that

has happened, but a hypothetical situation. Consequently, when Briony continues to ponder on the hypothetical situations that may take place as a result of her impending inculpation, in the following excerpt, the third person narrator should also make use of the conditional, rather than the future tense: “She wanted everything to be different, and here it was; and not only was it bad, it was about to get worse.” (121) By stating “it was about to get worse” the third-person narrator shows it is privy to information the reader is not, which is an obvious statement, as the narrator is omniscient. However, the narrator has chosen the past tense to narrate the story so far, and has not shown its omniscience, rather focusing the narrative through the different characters, only sporadically having these moments of prolepsis, which work towards effectively and momentarily puzzling the reader in a subtle way.

A further example happens when Chapter Thirteen opens with the sentence “[w]ithin the half hour Briony would commit her crime” (156), once again, the third person narrator anticipates events that are ahead of the chronological time and structure of the novel. In these cases, the third-person narrator not only shows its all-knowing powers, but it also makes the reader question what kind of narrator this is. If it is a third-person omniscient narrator, there are other issues that must be taken into consideration: is this an extra-diegetic narrator, or is it an intra-diegetic one? By planting sentences which use prolepsis, therefore, McEwan is allowing for the astute reader to question, ahead of its allocated time, whether the narrator might also be a character within the story. As this is not a third-person narrator that is verbose about its knowledge, something common in the postmodern tradition, and as prolepsis is only used seemingly randomly during the text, the reader is forced to start questioning the reliability of the narrator despite having no other indications towards its unreliability. In the grand scheme of things, this works for McEwan to question author reliability. As he is making

an exploration of authorship through Briony's actions, readers are bound to project their thoughts on Briony towards the bigger and abstract entity of authorship. This works, especially, by having Briony be both, a character inside her own narrative, and its own narrator. As Dahlbäck mentions,

> McEwan explores the line between fiction and imagination, as well as authors' reliability and narrative levels. He states that he, in Atonement, "examine[s] the relationship between what is imagined and what is true", and whilst McEwan states that "no one will be much interested in whether [Briony] is real or not [as] she will only exist within the frame of the novel" (Reynolds and Noakes 19) he poses the reader to question authorship all together as he makes Briony a character in her own novel. (Dahlbäck)

The third-person narrator is also used to manifest thoughts and feelings in Briony she would not accept under a first-person narrator, or that are not discussed when the narrative is focalised through Briony, but only through Cecilia's point of view, and briefly through Mrs Tallis. For instance, after the fountain scene, the narrative focalised through Briony only focuses on her process of creation, not on how she is feeling, however, in Chapter Four, focalised through Cecilia's point of view, the reader gets to see Briony is "clearly in distress. Her eyelids [are] swollen and pink, and she [is] pinching on her lower lip with forefinger and thumb, an old sign with Briony that some serious weeping was to be done" (43). Narrative voice in *Atonement*, therefore, is used to bewilder the reader and to hint at unreliability.

Upon closer inspection, or upon re-reading the text, it could be considered that the reason why prolepses is taking place, along with the reason Briony's feelings are depicted from an external rather than first-person perspective, is that Briony herself is disguised in narrating the story. When it comes to prolepsis, these could therefore be considered moments in which Briony, performing the role of third-person extradiegetic narrator, slips outside of her chosen role and manifests herself in the narrative, behaving as a third-person intra-diegetic narrator. It could also be considered that these are moments in which her narcissism grows stronger than usual during the process of

writing: when she must depict herself, her thirst to be an author is too prevalent, which means she needs to make clear that the only concern in Briony's mind was (and continues to be) her authorship, whereas when she is narrating through other characters' voices, she allows for other issues to arise, as these characters do not perceive her only as an author. What McEwan achieves with this intricate narrative structure is a 'metafictional deconstruction' that, as mentioned above, is meant to provide "novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative" as well as "offer[ing] extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems." (Waugh, "What Is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things about It?" 46)

3.2.1.3 Instances of the Writing Process

Moreover, Briony's writing process is not the only one chronicled through *Atonement*, the novel is consciously concerned with literary imagery, from Cecilia and Robbie's conversation on the novels they are reading and how they feel about them (25), to their act of making love in a library (122), to Robbie and Cecilia's exchanging of letters during his time in prison (204), the novel is clearly concerned with the creation of narrative(s). McEwan is not only concerned with depicting how fiction comes to life, but also how narratives are built, therefore providing both the tools necessary to *write* a story, as well as the tools necessary to build a fictional realm.

An instance of that can be discerned when Robbie's first letter to Cecilia is written: a description (albeit not exhaustive) of the scene is provided: "half dressed" he goes "into his study and [sits] at his typewriter, wondering what kind of letter he should

write" (81), not only that, Robbie is also awarded the label of an author, as he goes through the writing process as one might go over creating a new form of life: "he tilt[s] back his chair and survey[s] his desk as one might a life" (81), the different copies of books and poetry he has been reading (Auden, Housman, Shakespeare) as well as other non-fiction are listed as well (82), he even spends time re-reading notes and paper work ("revision notes", "anatomy piles", "various letters and cards", "unpaid battels", "letters from tutors and friends", even a "message from Jack Tallis" or "application forms" (83)) all of which provide him with "exile", almost as though Robbie's pleasure in writing and reading could equal Briony's. The section goes as far as to mention Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* and *The Romaunt of the Rose* (a retelling of one of the first ever texts to be considered to include metafiction), and as his writing is chronicled just as Briony's is, he is said to be feeding "a sheet of paper into the typewriter" and not forgetting "the carbon", going as far as recording his pauses and his thought process during the writing of the note (85). He is seen during the drafting stage, and then typing up "a fair copy" (85), and then, just as it happens to Briony, the intended intention of his text (to apologise to Cecilia, or perhaps ignite a spark of desire in her) is received differently than anticipated - by Briony, who reads the wrong draft and gives an entirely erroneous reading to his text.

As for Cecilia and Robbie's letter writing, it becomes another wink from McEwan to the power of words, it is noted they "had been making love for years - by post" (205), but interestingly, the letters shared require to be written through a code of their own making. This is not the only time the use of language is referred to as a code in the text, as Briony is described as writing in secret code earlier in the narrative. However, while Briony does so to be able to be in full possession of her creations before they are finalised, in the lovers' case, having had "[s]ome letters - both his and

hers (…) confiscated for some timid expression of affection" (204) they are forced to communicate their love by writing "about literature, [using] characters as codes" (204), redacting their affection by writing about

> Tristan and Isolde, the Duke Orsino and Olivia (and Malvolio too), Troilus and Criseyde, Mr Knightley and Emma, Venus and Adonis. Turner and Tallis. Once, in despair, he referred to Prometheus, chained to a rock, his liver devoured daily by a vulture. Sometimes she was patient Griselde. Mention of 'a quiet corner in a library' was a code for sexual ecstasy. (204)

Text and literature have an unquantifiable effect in their relationship. It could be said Cecilia and Robbie's relationship is not only told through literature, but almost composed out of the literary. These moments of writing, consequently, which not only come from Briony but also from Robbie and Cecilia, work in the structure of the text as little musings on the nature of fiction. In *Atonement*, texts, whatever their intention or form may be, are portrayed as powerful artefacts which are produced, delivered, and received in equally significant ways.

Briony's authorial intent, or her decision towards authorial intent, rather, is once again brought up when she attempts to write after her second moment of trauma. Once she has had a conversation with Lola, sharing her experience and publicly labelling Robbie as a "maniac", she wonders what the best approach towards a narrative is. She believes "[t]here must be some lofty, god-like place from which all people could be judged alike, not pitted against each other (…) in all their glorious imperfection" (115). At this point, she feels she is however "not worthy" of such a place, because she can "never forgive Robbie his disgusting mind" (115). Briony here is portrayed as being a subjective author, one that cannot detach herself from the events that happen to her or the events she chooses to narrate. Granted, this is the kind of writing Briony will always take part in, taking it to the extreme of blurring the divide between reality and fiction, but at this point what concerns Briony is the divide between narrator and author. As she mentions at the beginning of the text, she does not want other people to confuse her

narrators with herself, and for that reason, her musings on being unable to write objectively regarding Robbie prove that she is still pondering the same idea.

This process in which Briony attempts to find her own voice continues to show the process of creation, making the reader aware about all stages of the writing act. A few paragraphs later, Briony is concerned with "how to do feelings" and once more showing her writing is subjective, stemming from a place of need, she states "even harder was the threat, or the confusion of feeling contradictory things." (116) Interestingly, these moments in which characters ask themselves how to approach the writing act tend to be linked, naturally, to the moments in which the physical act of writing is also portrayed. This is metafictional in that, by making the reader aware that Briony is with her "pen in hand (…) star[ing] across the room towards her hard-faced dolls", not only is she experiencing the "chilly sensation [of] growing up" (116), she is also pointing out the process of creation, and by consequence, making the reader aware of the process of reading.

The real reader (the one holding the physical book in its hands after its purchase, the one passing its pages), is repeatedly forced to acknowledge that just as Briony is holding a pen, so they are holding a book, and even, to take it further, just as Briony is holding a pen in the narrative, there must be someone else, the real author, Ian McEwan, conducting writing as well. These small moments of awakening, these small reading epiphanies, are at the root of metafiction, and McEwan uses them in the most subtle of ways, to point out towards the nature of fiction without blatantly dislocating the reader to the point of making it detach from the narrative itself. McEwan's use of metafiction in *Atonement*, therefore, works to awaken the reader to understanding the process of creation, and to take it beyond its fictional limit.

3.2.2 Manifesting Authorship through Metafiction

3.2.2.1 The Nature of the Coda

Metafiction also allows to blur the boundaries between the real world and the world within fiction. Briony states: "I know I cannot publish until they are dead. And as of this morning, I accept that will not be until I am." (370) Due to legal complications, she is aware her text would be barred from publication until the Marshalls pass away, and she now understands her illness would not allow for her to fight them before that happens. However, the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred, as the reader is immediately awakened to the realisation that the act of holding the manuscript in their hands is representative of an action that has taken place within the fictional realm. If the real reader is reading *Atonement*, it means the Marshalls are dead, and so might Briony be. This is how a fictional character's actions transcend into reality, and how Briony continues to blur the divide between the two realms through her authorship. As Dahlbäck mentions, Briony "entangles life and fiction in a way that makes it impossible for her to separate the two for the rest of the life", she is "forever trapped in a world in which the differences between fiction and reality are hardly noticeable. She manages to blur the line between fiction and reality, in her mind, almost completely." (Dahlbäck) Precisely because of that, it is important that her narrative also blurs such boundaries, forcing readers to experience what she does and to accept what she inevitably demands from her texts. By blurring all such boundaries, what is achieved is a necessary interrogation of the fictional system. O'Hara puts it this way: "self-conscious narrative, in the case of McEwan, is oftentimes utilised in order to reassert an ethical complex that lies between author and reader, text and world", in this way, McEwan's "storytelling does not mark the beginning of a free-play of signifiers or a dispersal of constituting fictions, but rather the beginning of a dialogical and ethical relationship between texts

and readers; of stories not just being told from one to another, but by one for another" (O'Hara, "Mimesis and the Imaginable Other"). McEwan's use of metafiction is what establishes his texts with an ethical dimension in which the role of authors and readers and their responsibilities within texts are put into question, but as O'Hara mentions, it is not just about the relationship itself, but about the fact that texts are written with a specific purpose and are directed at specific audiences.

The moment the mysterious signature "B T/ London 1999" (349) appears in the text, the reader must go through an unexpected new process of recalibrating the narrative. As Armelle Parey mentions, "[s]et at temporal distance from the events that constitute the plot, literary epilogues and postscripts, as their respective etymology indicates, usually add information to a story that has already reached its conclusion: they supplement but do not contradict the outcome of the story" (Parey). Something discussed further by both Gennette and Belsey, the inclusion of an epilogue into a narrative is usually perceived as a "locus for the confirmation of the stability reached at the close of the novel" (Parey). However, in Atonement, that is contradicted, as the coda uses the "final pages to unsettle the conclusion reached earlier, and leave the reader in a state of uncertainty" (Parey). This way, the reader must go through a new process of understanding: first it must acknowledge that the signature means what has just been read was a manuscript, then, the reader must get on with the narrative and face Briony's first-person narrative voice. As Parey states, "rather than being part of a deflating and decelerating process of conclusion, the closing pages prolong and encourage rather than put an end to "retrospective patterning"" (Parey). Retrospective patterning is here understood as the process of "readjust[ing] not only our expectations concerning the future items, but also our perception of the preceding ones" (Herrnstein Smith as qtd in Parey). The patterning taking place is broken because the reader finds itself in a state of

confusion that does not allow for a typical process of reading. That is to say, the reader is forced (by the author) to adjust its expectations. In this instance, it could be argued that McEwan is encouraging a re-reading of the narrative, an idea that will be explored in depth below. Moreover, this moment in the narrative indicates that while readers are given prominent roles in the act of fiction, they continue to be under the influence of the author, behaving as the author expects them to behave, thus, giving rise to the rebirth of the author.

It is difficult to quantify, analyse or understand reader response in metafiction. To understand how readers react to a twist such as the one portrayed in *Atonement*, it would be necessary to track their reading activity for years, through different genres and literary movements, allowing for a balance between a natural selection of texts, conducted by the reader, and texts selected specifically to analyse the reception of different techniques. It seems like an impossible endeavour to put into motion, and so what is discussed in the following pages is merely speculatory. That being said, it is natural to understand there is a difference between the text that will make a use of metafiction the way *Atonement* does and the text that will not. The text that does not use metafiction, does not reveal the narrator of the text to have been a ploy narrator, the text that at its end does not reveal that some of the events discussed within its pages have been specifically manufactured as fiction (to please the wishes of an author or what such author believes constitutes a satisfactory read), clearly differs from the text that reveals all such things.

By revealing herself as author of the text that has been read, Briony inevitably plays with reader expectations and comfortability in the act of reading. By revealing herself as author, Briony forces readers to question the narrative they have read. From the moment the signature appears, therefore, the reader must doubt the veracity of all

events that have been narrated, including those events masked with historical accuracy. Furthermore, the revelation is even more shocking, as McEwan “combines two elements, an epilogue and a surprise ending, that are contradictory and mutually exclusive since one implies "gentle deceleration" and the other invites “retroactive reading"” (Parey). Here is where the use of historical metafiction also becomes key. The inclusion of events surrounding World War Two and the evacuation of Dunkirk add a narrative layer of veracity, which indulges the reader into not only empathic identification with historical events, but also in a trust towards the narrative and its author. However, upon reading the signature and the epilogue, it becomes clear that perhaps everything that has been narrated was one of Briony’s ‘fairy-tales’ that the beginning of the novel put so much emphasis on. Thus, the reader is made aware that it is a key player in the narrative, that by purchasing a book it is included into a fictional game in which all players must be active. Without the reader, Briony’s story cannot intrude into the realm of the real. By reader involvement, therefore, Briony’s fiction becomes reality.

There is, however, a conundrum in that by confessing to having falsified a part of the story, Briony’s whole reliability as an author can and should be questioned. Dahlbäck puts it this way: “Due to this revelation everything that the reader has read up to that point has to be questioned; all the events in the novel, Briony’s novel rather than McEwan’s, are told by Briony; she has thus ‘taken a novelist’s license to alter the facts to suit her artistic purposes’.” (Dahlbäck and Finney as qtd in Dahlbäck) Her confession originates a mist of confusion towards everything that has been narrated. Briony, in fact, has Cecilia indicating the same idea in the narrative, when she states “[i]t isn’t difficult. If you were lying then, why should a court believe you now? There are no new facts, and you’re an unreliable witness” (336).

While the reader is prone to understand that Briony fictionalising parts of the narrative makes it impossible to fully believe or grasp which parts are factual and which parts are fictional, the reader is also forced to come to terms with the fact that most of what has been narrated is in one way or another Briony's fabrication, and simultaneously it becomes necessary to understand that Briony does not distinguish the differences between reality and fiction. Briony makes it clear that she does not consider she is doing a disservice to the truth: "the perspective was unfamiliar. Weak, stupid, confused, cowardly, evasive - she had hated herself for everything she had been, but she had never thought of herself as a liar" (336). The fictional conversation between Briony, Cecilia and Robbie works for Briony to plant more clues into her metafictional twist. Not only is Briony not excusing herself (she stresses "[s]he hadn't intended to mislead, she hadn't acted out of malice" (336)), she also forewarns the reader: "And if I can't go to court, that won't stop me telling everyone what I did." (337) Not only is she described as a "ghostly persona" during the scene, thus indicating its fictionality, it is also pointed out that she "ha[s] thought about this conversation many times, like a child anticipating a beating. Now it [is] happening at last, and it [is] as if she wasn't quite here. She [is] watching from far away and she [is] numb" (341) somewhat showing that to Briony, her imagination is as powerful as reality.

There is great debate over the true nature of the last part of the novel. Some scholars believe it should be considered a diary entry penned by Briony, while others consider it a post-script, or coda, in which she addresses the reader of the novel. Parey puts it this way:

> [the section] bears diverse generic characteristics. It reads like a diary as it covers the events of a single day and refers to new characters – "the family" and "Stella and John" (355) - without introducing them. It also reads like a postscript to the book-within-the book when the author-persona comments on her finished work but it acts like an epilogue too, insofar as it gives "a brief résumé of the subsequent lives of the principal characters" (Lodge "Ambiguously" 143). Moreover, the performance in the last pages of *The Trials of Arabella*, the play whose writing by young Briony the novel opens with

> sets up a pattern of repetition and symmetry between Briony's novel and the last section, putting them on the same narrative level whereas they are supposed to be on different ones (Parey)

This way, all options seem possible, as the letter is not (directly or literally) directed to anybody, however, what is clear is that the text becomes an appendix to the manuscript that has just been read. If it were a diary entry, it would have to be assumed it was written by Briony in a detached and non-personal way, including details of her writing process, in case she forgot what she had done, given her vascular dementia, but as Parey mentions, there are careless references to characters not introduced previously, providing a familiarity which would need to be lacking if it were not a diary entry. If it were a letter directed to the reader, it would be easier to assume it simply was not directed to a 'Dear Reader' or a specific 'you'. Conversely, as a personal letter, it does not seem to have the tint of the private and intimate that would populate letter writing. Furthermore, it could even be considered an appendix in the form of an essay, where an author muses on the nature of fiction and reflects on the text that has just been read. All things considered, the tone of the letter is clearly confessional, hence why in this work I assume the final chapter to be a post-script directed at the real reader. Ultimately, it seems the question mark surrounding the nature of the final part of the novel could be considered yet another of the ways in which McEwan plays with literature. The ambiguity deliberately exerted on the coda is inherently metafictional as well, as O'Hara mentions, "is not metafiction *supposed* to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the reader's investment in a story that is, after all, just fiction? Is not metafiction that which self-consciously reminds the reader that what they have been imagining all this time -as if it were real - has simply been made up?" (O'Hara, "Briony's Being-For: Metafictional Narrative Ethics in Ian McEwan's Atonement" 86)

3.2.2.2 Chronicling the Process of Creation and Deception

This way, Briony chronicles her seventy-seventh birthday as she chronicles the ways in which the manuscript just read was created, linking them in time, as though the writing of it culminated with both her birthday and her vascular dementia diagnosis. On her birthday, she says she has been to the Imperial War Museum library, where "scholars now gather to research the collective insanity of war", and she says, before her car arrives, she needs the distraction and so she will "chec[k] final details and sa[y] her farewells to the Keeper of Documents, and to the cheerful porters who have been escorting [her] up and down in the lift during these wintry weeks" (353). Her description of her visit to the Museum indicates she is not only saying her goodbyes to the workers and people who have helped her, but she is rather also finalising the writing stage, which, interestingly, she seems to attribute to the last few "wintry weeks". It could be deduced, therefore, that Briony has just finished the writing of the very last draft of the story, not only because she mentions what she has done during the last few weeks, but also because both the signature at the end of part three and the title of the coda indicate the same date: 1999. She is also donating "to the archives [her] dozen long letters from old Mr. Nettle", getting busy "with those little tasks of housekeeping that come at the end, and are part of the reluctant process of letting go" (353). Briony gets ready for the downfall of her health by finalising the writing process, even if reluctantly and it should be assumed the manuscript she has just finalised, and whose research she is disposing of is precisely the manuscript being read by the real reader.

As Briony describes the diagnosis and the consequences her illness will have on her life and on her writing, she starts introducing little excerpts that have to do with the writing of *Atonement* into the narrative. As her car takes her through the streets of Lambeth, she gets a "glimpse of St Thomas's Hospital" (356) which leads her to

elaborate on one of the first things she modified to suit her narrative needs: "I worked in three hospitals in the duration" she says, "Alder Hey and the Royal East Sussex as well as St Thomas's" (356), however, the reader is aware she only mentioned one hospital, St Thomas, and she explains she "merged them in [her] description to concentrate all [her] experiences into one place" (356), a change that conveniently and almost non surprisingly is described as "[a] convenient distortion", but most importantly what she considers to be "the least of [her] offences against veracity" (356). It seems that at this point in time Briony might have a different approach and understanding of truth. She now seems aware her fictionalising and writing were 'offences' towards it, although that does not make her show any remorse.

As part of her confession, she also mentions the arduous process of research involved in the writing of her final manuscript. These sections are inevitably to be considered metafictional, as they are concerned with the process of writing the very text the reader has been reading. She discusses the correspondence shared with Mr Nettle, in an attempt at being historically accurate in her description of Dunkirk ("'Absolutely no (underlined twice) soldier serving with the British army would say "On the double". Only an American would give such an order. The correct term is "At the double".'" (359)) indicating her love for "these little things, this pointillist approach to verisimilitude, the correction of detail that cumulatively gives such satisfaction" because she feels that "[l]ike policemen in a search team, we go on hands and knees and crawl our way towards the truth" (359).

Briony mentions she has "returned the books [she] had been using to the front desk, and [has thrown] away various scraps of paper. The workspace was cleared of all traces of [her]" (366), erasing all of the traces of the research stage. This is mirrored a few pages later when she mentions that back in the Tallis home "all the books [are]

gone from the library, and all the shelves too" (366). Disturbingly, it would almost seem like every piece of evidence towards the events that took place has either been erased prior or is now being erased by Briony herself. Perhaps in an attempt at having her narrative be the only source of information, once more making it impossible for future generations to distinguish between what was factual and what was fictional within it. Briony mentions she "regarded it as [her] duty to disguise nothing - the names, the places, the exact circumstances" as she "put it all there as a matter of historical record" (371), right before giving explanations regarding why she decided to proceed to alter the factual events that took place.

In the coda it becomes obvious that she still feels the same pleasure when writing, despite the fact she is now having to face her farewell towards it. That is why in the "ride back north, [she thinks] about the colonel's letter, or rather, about [her] own pleasure in these trivial alterations" (360), at this point however, she points out it has to do with the fact she has been victorious. She finds it amusing that the colonel worries so much about the veracity of the small details when she has committed a violent narratorial act towards the truth that crosses the boundaries of veracity far more. She makes it explicit that "[if she] really cared so much about facts, [she] should have written a different kind of book", aware that perhaps the distinction lies between fiction and non-fiction, but her "work [is] done. There would be no further drafts" (360).

During these few pages she also references how difficult achieving publication might be. She includes these sentences here and there, participating once more in a slight stream-of-consciousness, jumping from one topic to the other, allowing her writing to flow with the different memory triggers she faces during the day, but indicating this story, her past, her writing, is the only thing she re-evaluates upon discovering her identity is about to disintegrate. The coda almost becomes an act of

clinging into what makes *her* - her manuscript, her writing. *Atonement* is therefore the only legacy she can leave on earth after she plunges into the unknown. This might be interesting in terms of understanding literature and art as what could lead to immortality, but it becomes even more relevant when explored from the perspective that by only leaving behind a manuscript which does not adhere to fact the way it is traditionally expected, she would also be altering history. Dahlbäck mentions this is Briony's way of claiming that "the power of the written word is strong enough to change certain elements of the past, or how it is remembered." (Dahlbäck) Aware her text would now inculpate a powerful couple, she points out that while she "might outlive Paul Marshall (…) Lola would certainly outlive [her]. The consequences of this are clear. The issue has been with us for years. As my editor put it once, publication equals litigation. But I could hardly face that now" (359), she claims to be "haunted" by the thought of Lola, aware that her cousin "was always the superior older girl, one step ahead of [her]. But in that final important matter, [she] will be ahead of [Lola], while she'll live on to be a hundred. [Briony] will not be able to publish in [her] lifetime" (361). Later on, she mentions again that "as a matter of legal reality, so various editors have told [her] over the years, [her] forensic memoir could never be published while [her] fellow criminals were alive". (370) Once more, this reveals Briony's intent is publication, something unsurprising given her wish for authorship. Nevertheless, she seems to have come to terms with the idea that she will not be alive by the time her life's work is published. This is interesting in that it points out towards two directions: first, the realisation, mentioned above, that the real reader is only capable of reading this text if Briony has indeed passed away, not only indicating at events within fiction that transcend into reality, but doing so through the metafictional twist, which, as Hutcheon points out, is a common eventuality, as "[p]ostmodern fiction often thematizes this

process of turning events into facts through the filtering and interpreting of archival documents." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 57) Second, the understanding, from Briony's part, that she will be unable to witness the reception of her novel. Thus, Briony acknowledges that her manuscript does not have the power to obtain atonement from Robbie and Cecilia, and therefore it would seem that such atonement must be invested and expected from someone else (be it Briony or the reader).

Not only that, Briony goes into the publication stages aware she cannot modify her text any further, aware that she will not have a word upon the reception of her work, and, precisely because she knows she cannot have a word on how her life's work is received, she tries her best at having the final intent of her manuscript. Thus, her inclusion of the coda into the narrative is her way of reclaiming the full power over the meaning and motive of her narrative. In the last pages of her novel, she specifies what the reception of the novel will be, which is exactly what she intends to achieve. Consequently, by having an author proclaim their intention so openly and literally in the text itself, the reader becomes almost powerless in the creation of meaning. This does not mean the reader plays no role in *Atonement*, on the contrary, the reader is of the utmost importance for Briony, but that is because she needs to share her work and she needs her work to be read, not because of a need for validation. She also needs the reader to be invested in her narrative, because it is a matter of life and death for her. But it is clear that the reasons behind her writing and inclusion of the coda into the manuscript for *Atonement* work as a means to reclaiming the power of her narrative and to make sure that even if she is not around upon its publication, her words and her narrative will be interpreted as she intended them to be, ensuring there are no other meanings attributed to her text.

Briony is forced to see the performance of her very first play (on the day in which she has finalised the completion of her very last work (367)). This inadvertent encounter with her first text is shocking and overwhelming: “I knew the words were mine, but I barely remembered them, and it was hard to concentrate, with so many questions, so much feeling, crowding in” (367). With the inclusion of snippets of her own play within the text, Briony evaluates her writing career (368). She also gives a speech to the audience, in which, rather than celebrating her birthday, she seems to be celebrating her literary career (369), almost as though her life had only begun the moment she started writing. She explains “that it was entirely [her] fault the rehearsals fell apart, because halfway through [she] had decided to become a novelist” (369), once more indicating that more than a celebration towards her seventy seventieth’s birthday, the room seems to be celebrating Briony the Author. This is a rather interesting portion of the text, as it shows a Briony that goes over her literary career, at times quoting her texts, understanding how she has progressed and developed as an author. This is later reproduced similarly for Ian McEwan himself, when in *Sweet Tooth*, he performs the same actions (by quoting himself and also going over his own literary career). Granted, McEwan has not been diagnosed with vascular dementia, and *Sweet Tooth* is not his last narrative, but it is nevertheless quite peculiar he ends up adopting behaviours in his literary production that he has previously attributed to his inscribed authors.

Finally, in what could possibly be her last writing act, she says it is “five in the morning and [she] is still at the writing desk, thinking over [her] strange two days” (369), once more making readers aware of the act and moment in which she is writing the very words that are being read. She says she “has been thinking about [her] last novel, the one that should have been [her] first” (369). First, she mentions that its “earliest version” was produced “January 1940, the latest, March 1999”, and specifies

that "in between, half a dozen different drafts. The second draft, June 1947, the third… who cares to know?" (369). She calls the narrative her "fifty-nine-year assignment", one she considers now to be "over" (369). Noteworthy, the first thing she mentions about the narrative in this section is the fact that it is about a "crime". She says, "[t]here was our crime - Lola's, Marshall's, mine" and indicates that "from the second version onwards, [she] set out to describe it" (369). There are a few key points to take into consideration regarding her statement: to begin with, she proclaims that from the second draft onward she set out to describe their crime, as the date would coincide with the time around which she received feedback from *Horizon*. It is also interesting that she mentions both the Marshalls and her are responsible for 'the crime'. Paul Marshall's crime is understandable to be mentioned, but by including Lola into the sentence, Briony is hinting at the fact that her act of creation was exacerbated by Lola, as though she had been a co-writer of her fiction. At this point, it is completely and utterly clear for the reader that the manuscript they have just read is, in fact, the very one Briony has written half a dozen times.

In this manner, Briony fully accepts there was "a crime", but also "the lovers", and in reality "[i]t occurs to [her] that [she has] not travelled so very far, after all, since [she] wrote her little play. Or rather, [she's] made a huge digression and doubled back to [her] starting place" (370), she admits that it is only in the final draft where "[her] lovers end well, standing side by side on a South London pavement as [she] walks away" given that all "preceding drafts were pitiless" (370). The reason why she has decided to modify reality is because she can

> no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, [she] tried to persuade [her] reader, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicaemia at bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station. That [she] never saw them in that year. That [her] walk across London ended at the church on Clapham Common, and that a cowardly Briony limped back to the hospital, unable to confront her recently bereaved sister. (370-71)

By confessing to her crime, not only is Briony making use of metafiction, but she is also making it obvious that her use of metafiction serves a purpose to her as an author. She decides what the fates of her characters are because this way she can modify the past, altering her life experience as well as that of others. What is more, "[b]ecause Briony is trapped within the boundaries of her own imagination she has, in writing her novel, managed to hold Robbie and Cecilia captive in her imaginative world." (Dahlbäck) She believes that sticking to the truth would be unsatisfactory for the reader, and at seventy-seven she is powerful and conscious enough to understand metafiction can give her the power she needs to modify her narrative to suit her needs.

Nevertheless, this act of aggression towards the truth should also be seen in how it affects the reader, rather than just how it affects Briony. As Crosthwaite asserts,

> Briony's tacit admission that Robbie and Cecilia died in the early stages of the war presents, then, an initially unassimilable rupture, which demands to be repeated before it can be integrated into the text's narrative (and the reader's psychic) economy. More profoundly, perhaps, this revelation confronts the reader with past events that were themselves somehow missed or incompletely experienced as they occurred, and retroactively imbues them with an intense and terrible significance. (Crosthwaite 63)

As stated previously, there are many revelations throughout the coda which force the recalibration of the reader's understanding of the novel, nevertheless, it is the fate of the 'lovers', as Briony calls them, the one which seems to be meant to affect readers more. However, regarding narrating the truth, in a novel that is admittedly preoccupied with historical accuracy, Briony ponders "[h]ow could that constitute an ending? What sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism?" (371) Certainly, it would seem Briony made the right choice in choosing postmodernism, rather than modernism, to write her manuscript. Her navigation through different literary movements throughout

the narrative is what allows her to reach the conclusion that the only way to tell this story and to hold its power is through postmodern means. She argues that she is "too old, too frightened, too much in love with the shred of life [she] has remaining" that she faces "an incoming tide of forgetting, and then oblivion" and therefore no "longer possess[es] the courage of [her] pessimism" (371). For that reason, with her writing, she is allowed the fact that "[w]hen [she] is dead, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, [they] will only exist as [her] inventions" (371). Hutcheon, reflecting on historiographical metafiction, points out that "[w]e only have access to the past today through its traces – its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials. In other words, we only have representations of the past from which to construct our narratives or explanations." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 58) This way, what Briony is participating in is a postmodern exercise on the exploration of history as well: she clearly understands history is built through social discourses and narratives, hence her pride in understanding that the characters will only be accessible through her words and narrative. Hutcheon considers that to be the "paradox of postmodernism. The past really did exist, but we can only know it today through its textual traces, its often complex and indirect representations in the present: document, archives, but also photographs, paintings, architecture, films, and literature." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 78) Making sure her characters will only exist as parts of her invention, she also makes sure that the "certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what *really* happened?" (371) is silenced, as she repeats that "[t]he answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of [her] final draft, then [her] spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love." (371)

3.3. Narrative Creation in *Sweet Tooth* (2012)

3.3.1 Ian McEwan and the Metafictional Device

Ian McEwan kicked off his literary career with the publication of a collection of stories, *First Love, Last Rites* in 1975. Most of those short stories were first published in "The New Review" and were later collected for publication by Random House, Vintage. Despite the fact that for a large portion of McEwan's writing career no traces of metafiction are to be found, both in his debut and in his second collection of short stories (*In Between the Sheets*, 1978) a clear preoccupation with postmodern affairs can be observed. The kind of metafiction that is explored in his first works is not as blatant as the one displayed in later works. Nevertheless, the former shows a rather subtle interest in the process of literary creation.

In "Solid Geometry", for example, from *First Love, Last Rites*, McEwan writes about a man who is editing the diaries of his grandfather, wishing for publication. His devotion to his grandfather's diaries is so that his wife becomes jealous. There reaches a point in the narrative where in the middle of intercourse, the man manages to make his wife disappear (24). The short story displays themes of literary creation, and it could even be considered an exercise on exploring authorship and fiction - it seems that McEwan's infatuation with exploring the nature of the God-like author figure can be traced back to his very first publication.

In "Reflections of a Kept Ape" from *In Between the Sheets* (1978), McEwan presents a story that is a parable of the writing process, exploring the process of creation as well as the relationship established between author and reader. Interestingly, the reader that is provided for the story comes in the shape of an ape, starting a possible comparison between the role of readers in texts. Furthermore, he adds an element of

sexuality, or perhaps seduction, to the story: just as in “Solid Geometry”, in “Reflections of a Kept Ape”, the relationship between reader and author is brought to the seduction stage by the recurrent exploration of the sexual intercourse both characters participate in. The ape mentions he was ascended to lover status for a few days, but that the lack of literary production experienced by the author led to the dissolution of the sexual relationships between both (32). What is interesting is that McEwan will later make use of his short stories to work on *Sweet Tooth*, by re-working them into the latter text, which not only provides examples of intertextuality (or rather, intratextuality), but also mirrors the sexual connection between the author, Sally, and the ape in “Reflections of a Kept Ape” to that of Tom Haley and Serena Frome in *Sweet Tooth.*

Therefore, given the fact that Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, “What Is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things about It?” 40), it could be ascertained that “Reflections of a Kept Ape” is a metafictional piece, mainly because it is entirely concerned with depicting the writing process on the page. At the same time, the short story attempts to describe the existence and preoccupations of the main actors in the writing process (author and reader), as well as the ways in which they interact to achieve communication, along with an exploration of their personal aims and achievements as participants in the literary endeavour.

In the story, Sally (the writer) becomes haunted by her characters and cannot escape their popularity, which has made them so powerful that they have ultimately become an entity on themselves, making her unable to control them, so much so that she cannot even write a sequel to their story (35). During this whole portion of the story, what can be observed is a clear postmodern preoccupation with the authorship of texts,

and with who holds the power over the written page. In this case, it would seem that it is not the author (Sally), or even the reader (the ape), but rather fiction itself, with characters that have become institutions, provided meaning by the general public, taking possession of the written text and, consequently, perhaps of their existence as fictional creations. The reflection in itself - that fiction can become so powerful that it eventually blurs the lines between reality and fiction, is undoubtedly postmodern.

In the short story, Sally resorts to rewriting her original work, over and over (44-45), perhaps to trick herself into experiencing the original power felt upon first writing her novel, but also indicating the reality that once a text is published, a process of metamorphosis begins that cannot be controlled nor contained by its own author. In this case, it should also be remarked that McEwan, ends up acting the same way as another of his original inscribed authors did, when, in the writing of *Sweet Tooth*, he revisits his previous work. In this case, interestingly, he does not merely revisit and rewrite his original words, but he modifies them for his 2012 novel, which could easily be interpreted as a way of reinforcing his slight shift of ideas in regard to the power of an author over the passing of time: whereas in "Reflections of a Kept Ape" the writer is ultimately disempowered, as she is forced to write the same story over and over again in order to attempt to regain control, in *Sweet Tooth*, Ian McEwan is capable of reworking and revisiting his own work, modifying it enough to obtain a different end-product. Needless to say, the reworking of a past work into a more contemporary setting is an homage that has a postmodern nature, and in this case, such homage allows McEwan to hold a power as author that is different to that of his fictional counterpart(s) by partaking in an act of self-transposition.

The ape eventually becomes Sally's reader and begins to fantasise about his role being crucial for her writing process. He considers himself an editor that guides her in

the excruciating act of producing new work. McEwan also ventures into exploring the expectations created by the writing process and the inevitable disappointment that is to follow (44). Ultimately, the short story poses several questions: What is the nature of the disappointment felt by both active parts in the writing process? Does it have to do, as mentioned, with unattainable expectations? Is it due to a lack of trust, a lack of contract between author and reader? Is it due to the fact that Sally is not composing for the ape? Or is it because she is not, in fact, composing *the ape*? The story touches on topics that are revisited in *Atonement* but most specifically in *Sweet Tooth*, concluding with the realisation that, perhaps, Sally might have needed a reader all along (48) (an idea ingrained at the end of *Sweet Tooth)*. Inevitably, it can be asserted that the short story paves the way for topics that McEwan is set to revisit more than thirty years later, and it certainly contains most of the elements that have been discussed in this study. The idea that McEwan's work is ultimately meant to be understood as an oeuvre rather than as individual works (if it is to be fully understood) can be contemplated if the influence of his earlier works on his latter ones is considered.

Consequently, thirty years after its publication, the short story produces additional meaning, with the publication of later work. The text published in 1978 is one that is complete and contained, one that has been shaped by author and readers alike for over thirty years. The moment in which McEwan reuses it and reworks it into *Sweet Tooth*, he creates a form of intratextuality that will reward his long-term readership, forcing them to perhaps go back to his first works, but that will not affect the meaning of either text if the connection is not made. McEwan, therefore, uses metafiction not merely to play with language and fiction, or attempt to understand the nature of fiction itself: he uses it to play with the nature of *his* authorship and *his* readership: every new

work he publishes forces his readers to go through a process of re-evaluation of their knowledge on his oeuvre.

From a total of twelve full length novels and four novellas, McEwan only openly displays metafictional devices in "Reflections of a Kept Ape", *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*. He does show an interest in the process of writing in texts such as *Black Dogs* (1992) or his collections of short stories, but ultimately it is after two decades of writing that McEwan begins to display the first signs of blatant metafiction (with *Atonement*), and then an additional decade to revisit the technique (in *Sweet Tooth*). Ergo, McEwan is by no means an inexperienced writer by the time he makes use of such techniques, in fact, by the time he uses them in his texts he has had the time to establish a faithful audience and to establish himself as an author. It is not being implied that McEwan is an assiduous user of the technique, but rather that the passing of time and the specific and punctual texts in which he decides to use it, turn its use into a long-term preoccupation. The texts where he explores the nature of literature in such a thorough way are distant in time and almost evenly distributed throughout his career.

That being said, *Sweet Tooth* is expressly and openly concerned with the process of creation, as Savu Walker states,

> McEwan also reveals a self-reflexive awareness of his own signifying practices that highlight the emotionally charged and creative ambiguity of the language of literature, as opposed the impersonality and expediency of Cold War rhetoric … in *Sweet Tooth* the central object of reflection is not so much the covert state as what I call "covert authorship," a mode of invention reliant on secrecy and deception that, in evoking the conspiratorial sense of plotting, links manipulations of Cold War politics to narrative manipulation, thus suggesting that the author holds as much potential for control as a spy. (Walker 495)

It could be stated therefore, that McEwan's role in the narrative is that of a spy indeed, ever looming over the narrative, a presence not openly felt yet informing every of its pages. Certainly, the novel is preoccupied with depicting the dynamics of the Cold War

and how the arts may be targeted in order to obtain specific political goals, yet from the early stages of the narrative, the novel already displays an interest not only for the writing process but also for the reading act, and not only that, but the novel also ends up becoming a covert exploration of McEwan's literary career. Due to the fact that Serena's reading practices were tended to in chapter one, the present section focuses precisely on the ways in which the text makes obvious the creative process, paying special attention to the notion that in the depiction of Tom Haley's process of creation, an intrinsic link is created with Ian McEwan's writing.

To fully delve into this chapter, it is important to reiterate that while Serena is essentially the first-person narrator of the story, it is eventually revealed to the reader that Tom Haley is its real narrator, adopting Serena's voice as that of a fictitious narrator. In a way, that leads McEwan to being doubly present in the text, as Walker claims, "…the novelist inserts himself into the text as both character (Tom Haley) and narrator (Serena Frome). Tom and Serena come across as McEwan's secret literary agents –twin aspects of his personality embodying tensions within society at large." (Walker 496) For that reason, the reader will in time come to understand that all comments made regarding his fiction from Serena's point of view are comments that reveal Tom's perspective, rather than Serena's, (and in a way, all comments are simultaneously as well comments made by McEwan himself on his own authorship). Such a concept might seem contradictory when entwined with reader-response criticism theories, but what makes the narrative unique is its vengeful nature, as this narrative shift has the ability to dislocate the roles of all players in the reading and writing processes. Nonetheless, the main focus of this chapter is to analyse the comparisons that can be drawn between Haley's writing along with McEwan's prior works, eventually

leading to the ad hoc conclusion that in *Sweet Tooth*, McEwan is revising his literary career.

Even though *Sweet Tooth* could potentially be marketed as a spy novel centred on the cold war, it is conspicuous that its main concern is literature. From the beginning of the novel, Serena shows a great interest in reading, as she simultaneously develops all her interpersonal relationships through the act of reading. The novel ponders on literary matters by having Serena become an agent for the Sweet Tooth operation, one concerned with recruiting inadvertent authors who will unconsciously allow MI5 to promote a safe and comfortable social atmosphere which is sought after by the British government. In the process of recruiting the carefully selected authors, *Sweet Tooth* begins a process in which the work of Tom Haley is minutely analysed by Serena, and the intimate relationship developed between Haley and Frome undoubtedly leads to the analysis of the connection between author and reader, as was explored above.

In the process of creating such connections, Tom Haley's works and perspectives are extendedly put forward, which with the later knowledge Tom is the real narrator behind the narrative, allows for the novel to become a commentary on the nature of art and literature made by an author which has had its creative freedom targeted. Nevertheless, that should be considered to be inherent of the postmodern condition. As mentioned above, one of Lyotard's main qualms with the society of the future is the awareness that knowledge is power, and power is inextricably linked to monetary gain. As Hutcheon mentions, "[w]e should perhaps also keep in mind that art has never been free of institutional constrains and even construction…" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 19), Tom's creation is inherently postmodern, and that might be a consequence of the structures and social systems in which it is produced. Hutcheon states, "[t]here is little doubt that a certain kind of theory has supported and even created

a certain kind of art and that the academy, art institutions, and the publishing industry have, in part, *constructed* postmodernism." (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 19) The novel also adopts the metafictional device, adding an extra layer to the text that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, when, upon closer inspection, clear comparatives can be made between Tom H. Haley, fictive author of *Sweet Tooth*, and Ian McEwan, real author of *Sweet Tooth*.

There seems to be an element of revision in *Sweet Tooth,* the novel can be read as an exercise on evaluating the nature of literature, but also the nature of a literary career: by the act of choosing to include aspects of his own past literary creation, McEwan places himself in the narrative as an invisible (yet powerful) figure throughout. There are clear issues of intertextuality behind his drive, as the use of his own work to shape Haley's is undeniable and paves the way for the full understanding of the text. As will be exemplified in the conclusion for this work, this might be a choice made by McEwan to place himself at the centre of the authorship of his texts. Not only does McEwan reward familiar readers (those who, acquainted with his oeuvre, will be privy to a level of understanding *Sweet Tooth* that other readers may not initially have access to), but by retracing his own work, he is participating in an exercise in which he reworks his literary career by providing it with new meanings when stories that were finalised and published decades ago are rediscovered and altered, renamed, and reclaimed by Tom, now his alter ego.

3.3.1 The Writing and Reading Process: Authors and Letters

Special attention is paid to the process of writing of other characters: Shirley and the "notebook she carri[es] with her always, a childish pink plastic-covered thing with a short pencil tucked into the spine" (52) is made referenced to, as Tom (or perhaps

Serena?) seems to believe there is meaning not only behind the process of creation but also in the utensils and rituals attributed to each writer discussed, something which is coincidentally also relevant for Briony in the documenting of her writing.

There is also special emphasis put on letter writing - yet another form of writing that is indispensable to McEwan's works. Serena seems to receive life-altering news and establish life-altering relationships through text, through the letters she receives and sends. Most of the letters portrayed in the narrative are first shortly described in terms of form and later fully reproduced in the text, with an indentation of the text that permits the reader to understand it is a separate block of text, rather than part of the narrative. The inclusion of letters is not only relevant for the story itself - as they communicate vital information, showing that life cannot be carried out, as neither can human communication and collaboration without the use of language; but also, because letters are a vital part of *Atonement*, and this might be McEwan's manner of referencing his own work.

An example of that is the few letters Serena receives from Jeremy Mott. It is through a letter authored by Jeremy that she finds out Tony Canning is dead. The narrative first indicates Serena reads "the letter one morning on [her] way to work on one of the rare occasions when [she'd] managed to push through the packed fetid carriage and find [herself] a seat". It then states "[t]he important paragraph", about to be quoted, "began halfway down the second page" (56). Later on, she receives a postcard from Jeremy which Serena is described to find as she "approach[es] the front door (…) among the junk of mail scattered across the lino" (328). In this postcard, then reproduced in full in the text, Jeremy tells her he has been speaking to someone about her (later the reader will realise that someone is Tom).

The same technique is used when Tom sends Serena a letter accepting the Foundation's proposal. Upon receiving it she is described as standing "by the glass door to read" and specifies "then there was a new paragraph. [She] brought the letter closer to [her] face. He'd used a fountain pen, crossed out a word, made a smudge. He wanted to impose a condition." (200) The letter is then quoted (albeit not in full) in the following page (201). There is also a lost letter written by Tony Canning, withheld from Serena by MI5, which is given to her towards the end of the novel. In this case, it is also reproduced in full and the narrative follows the same pattern, indicating that Serena "walk[s] down one flight of stairs and [goes] along the corridor to a landing where there was a view down Curzon Street. [She] look[s] over [her] shoulder before [she takes] the envelope from [her] bag. The single sheet of paper [is] grubby from much handling" (335), after that, Tony's letter is indented in the text and reproduced fully once more. The last letter to consider is the one which constitutes Tom's final chapter, a chapter addressed to Serena, one the reader knows she reads sitting down at the kitchen table (347). In this case, Serena does not introduce it further, nor does she warn the reader about the fact that what is to come is a reproduction of Tom's note, although it is entirely obvious once the chapter begins.

Consequently, the only letters mentioned in the narrative are letters that affect Serena regarding her relationships with Jeremy, Tony, and Tom, and it would be fair to assume in a time when mail was one of the main means of written communication, she must have received far more correspondence than that. It could be ascertained, therefore, that only the letters that have an impactful effect on Serena (as the fictional Serena Tom wants to reproduce) are documented in full in the narrative. All the letters mentioned above provide life-altering information for Serena: from finding out about Canning's death, to finding out her relationship with Tom is starting, to being given

clues as to the impending decay of her professional career, to being informed of the fact that Tom has been writing her into a novel. The effects the letters reproduced have on Serena, therefore, can be matched to the impact letters have in *Atonement*, in that pieces of writing not only provide information but also change the course of events in the narrative and the lives of these characters.

3.3.2 The Convergence of Tom Haley and Ian McEwan's Paths

Throughout the narrative, connections between Tom Haley and Ian McEwan are continuously put forward. In fact, these have biographical as well as textual dimensions. As Alghamdi states, "…Tom Haley bears a strong and conscious resemblance to McEwan in terms of his background and literary interests. The similarity is sufficiently pronounced for us to conclude that Haley is in fact a fictionalized version of McEwan himself, even if a similarity with regard to their experience cannot be confirmed." (Alghamdi 90) Such similarities will be explored below, and they are mostly concerned with the ways in which McEwan repurposes his original short stories (all contained within his collection *Between the Sheets*, 1978) by having Tom's short stories mirror both the content and the format of McEwan's original works. The biographical connections are interesting in that they reinforce the idea that McEwan is re-evaluating his literary career through Tom Haley's character, but also in that, as mentioned previously, they reward the reader who is familiar with McEwan's work and life achievements. The connections planted within the text will only be perceived by figures such as the critic, the academic, or a devoted reader of McEwan's oeuvre, thus leaving a sporadic reader out of the equation.

According to Maya Jaggi, *Sweet Tooth* "traces the geography of the author's own life. Its locations include the rural Suffolk of his schoolboy years; Brighton, seaside

setting for his first love at the plate-glass Sussex University (where he devoured Kafka and Thomas Mann, Philip Roth and Updike); and Norwich, where he became the first creative writing graduate of the University of East Anglia." (Jaggi) Indeed, McEwan has Haley study at the University of Sussex, where McEwan himself received a degree in English Literature in 1970. McEwan went on to earn an MA from the University of East Anglia where his dissertation was not centred on criticism but rather on a creative-writing submission, something that differs from Haley, whose MA is in public relations (from Sussex as well (109)). Other than using the same degree and university, McEwan seems to include real-life personalities in the text that have had an impact on his literary career, and which therefore also have an impact on Haley's. Mentions of Tom Maschler, a publisher interested in Tom's stories (234), who happens to be McEwan's first publisher; a conference where the only other speaker is Martin Amis (286), McEwan's known close friend; or a meeting at a bar with Ian Hamilton (298), also a friend and mentor of McEwan's, give an extra layer of reality to the narrative as they further connect both authorial personas. Furthermore, as Jaggi highlights,

> [a]lthough McEwan claims never to have been given a stipend by a blonde siren, he recalls his pride at having an early short story published in Encounter. The English poet Stephen Spender had quit as editor in 1967 when the magazine was scandalously revealed to have covert funding from the CIA. From 1949, McEwan says, "the CIA poured tens of millions of dollars into often very good culture," from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to Rothko exhibits. (Jaggi)

This further indicates that the use of metafiction and intratextuality in McEwan's novel is not coincidental, but rather that it is specifically used to point out at issues that have affected or rather, delineated, his literary and public career.

3.3.2.1 'This is Love'

The first intrusion of Tom Haley's presence in the narrative is also executed through text. Before Serena's first physical or written contact with him, his persona is introduced through one of his narratives. In the opening of chapter 8, Serena "settl[es] [her]self into [her] armchair, angle[s] [her] new reading lamp and [takes] up [her] bookmark fetish", she mentions she has "a pencil at the ready, as though preparing for a tutorial" and thus the reading starts (116). The first short story, titled 'This is Love', is described at first with certain detachment by Serena. She describes the "story had been published in the Kenyon Review in the winter of 1970 and the whole issue was there, with a protruding purchase slip from a specialist bookshop in Longacre, Covent Garden" (116).

Serena's narrative voice, along with Tom's, is represented in a few different ways during her reading process. In this way, "[b]y weaving story upon fictional story, McEwan manages to trap his reader in a web of meta-narration that is at once exciting and unsettling." (Marshall) First, she describes the contents of the story, indicating "[i]t concern[s] the formidably named Edmund Alfredus, an academic teacher of medieval social history who becomes in his mid-forties a Labour MP" (116), already suggesting a subjectivity in the description through the use of praising adjectives. Other than the moments where she summarises the story, the text also makes direct reference to the short story by directly quoting portions of it during Serena's description. This way, in the same paragraphs or sentences, the text displays both types of narration: "He's well to the left of his part and *something of a trouble-maker, an intellectual dandy, a serial adulterer and a brilliant public speaker* with good connections to powerful members of the Tube train drivers' union" (116). By placing parts of the sentence in italics there are two elements that are highlighted: first, the idea that this is Tom's authorial voice

seeping through the narrative, one that he also makes use of in punctual points of the narrative to try out Serena's voice. These moments, however, and most importantly, work as clues within the narrative, as well as reminders that the real reader is reading a fictional narrative. By highlighting different writing techniques, and by playing with formatting, the process of writing is made evident in the text through the use of metafiction.

Second, the use of italics can be interpreted in different ways: either these are Serena's favourite parts (or rather, Tom's favourite parts), or they constitute pivotal moments for the text (thus showing her biased predisposition to manipulate reader expectations - which is precisely her role as a MI5 agent), or, more interestingly, these could be direct quotations from the short story itself.[40] Either way, these portions remind the reader about the reading experience by disrupting the narrative flow, making it impossible for the reader to forget they are reading a story-within-a-story, and that they are simultaneously being guided in this reading by Serena, who coincidentally, sometimes abruptly intrudes into her summary. An example of that is when, in the middle of the paragraph, she lets the reader know how her process of reading is making her feel: "That Sunday he is due to deliver the sermon in his church in the presence of the Bishop of Ch-, well known for being a prickly, intolerant sort. *(Naturally, I projected my father into the role.)* His Grace will not be pleased to be told…" (117 emphasis added). While at first her intrusions are embedded into parentheses, as seen in this excerpt, later, as will be exemplified, her voice intrudes the narrative without the warning of the written symbol. Serena repeats this technique later on, indicating "if they had ever been to a theatre *(so Haley adds in aside)*, to a parody of Olivier." (118 emphasis added)

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[40] Tom himself indicates, in the coda of the novel, that the italised sections are his personal favourite passages. (369) Notwithstanding, that is information unbeknownst to the reader at this point.

In terms of form, the first story is introduced to the text as Serena somewhat warns the reader she is about to read it, also providing information about its published status, with the use of italics and the use of parentheses to differentiate which narrative voice belongs to whom. This extra information about the published text will be omitted in the latter reproductions of the other stories. At this point, the reader should either assume Haley's words are in italics (or Serena's summary of her favourite parts are in italics), whereas Serena's are not (just as letters are indented to indicate a portion of the text belongs to somebody else's narrative voice). The summary of the story goes on for about four pages, until Serena interrupts the synopsis with a short interlude, separated by an extra space, in which she muses about the meaning and nature of an asterisk. Virginia R. Marshall suggests this is a break in the narrative flow, in which Serena's "consciousness is our own; until Serena decides to move on and read the rest of the story, we will not know the ending." (Marshall) This is a further indication that not only is Serena guiding the reader's experience, but she is also a representative of the reader in the text itself, as her interpretations are to become the reader's as well. After her brief interlude, she resumes her summarising of the plot by indicating that she "blinked [the asterisk] to a standstill and read on." (122) In the second portion of the summary, Serena's voice continues to disrupt the reading of the story-within-the-story, but noticeably, her voice is weakened, giving further space to the short story's plot itself. She only interrupts the narrative one last time, to mention "-Haley describes their intimacy in detail [she] f[inds] difficult" (123), this time introducing herself with a dash, rather than a parenthesis.

The reader can tell the summary of the story is over once Serena explicitly mentions it: "There it was. Only as I reached the end did I realise that I had failed to take in the title" (126); and proceeds to narrate her impressions on the piece. All in all,

the re-telling of the short story occupies the entirety of chapter eight. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the title of the short story is only revealed at the end of its summary, which provides a mimetic layer on Serena's reading process. This way, the real reader only gets to experience the short story through Serena's eyes, by only including the information she deems relevant, when she deems it necessary. Most importantly, however, finding out about the title at the end allows the reader to experience the story *only* through Serena's eyes, thus becoming unable to provide its own meaning, only being able to do so the moment Serena does.

What is interesting about this specific cause of myse-en-abyme is that despite the fact the narrative flow is interrupted by the inclusion of a different story into the main narrative, in this case the reader cannot be fully immersed into the short story being reproduced, because not only is Serena utilised to constantly interrupt the narrative (to mirror her reading process) but she is also guiding the possible creation of meaning produced by the reader. Serena's voice as a reader and her subjective guidance makes it difficult for the reader to fully get into the short story's realm, rendering it almost impossible for the real reader to conduct a 'normal' (or rather, 'traditional') reading experience. Nevertheless, as Marshall suggests, "Haley's words are in italics next to Serena's interpretation of the story so that both McEwan's and the fictional Haley's words are seamlessly fused in the novel." (Marshall) All in all, the format chosen to go over Haley's work serves two different purposes: first, to understand Haley and McEwan are somewhat authorial counterparts, and second, to show that Serena is the representation of the reader within the text.

In terms of content, the first short story does not seem to have any connection with any of McEwan's previous works, albeit it seems to display themes that are reminiscent of the themes discussed in *Enduring Love*, McEwan's sixth novel,

published in 1997, four years before the publication of *Atonement*, and fifteen years prior to *Sweet Tooth.* In both texts, characters become obsessed with another character to the point of illness. In the case of 'This is Love', the obsession is not given a name, but in *Enduring Love*, McEwan explores the so-called 'De Clérambault's' syndrome. Furthermore, what would also be interesting to point out is that in his fictive writing of *Sweet Tooth,* Tom seems to be going over the same process of career re-evaluation as McEwan himself is going through. By having Serena read and comment on his stories, Tom is not only revisiting his own work, but quoting his favourite parts as well, indicating to the reader which parts are more relevant, and making the reading activity a guided and subjective process. In fact, Tom's voice as fictive author is the one that is ultimately guiding the reader in its reading process. The same could be ascertained from McEwan, who is choosing which themes and topics, along with which stories he wishes to repurpose in his writing, as real author of *Sweet Tooth*.

3.3.2.2. 'Lovers'

The second short story is reproduced in the following chapter, although this time the chapter does not open with its reading, but rather with a description of a night out with Shirley. As Serena comes back home she says she decides to "read another story" (136). The summary of this story differs from the one offered for 'This is Love' in that Serena does not explain details on its publication but rather, after a line space, begins its summarising. The narrative voice in this case differs slightly from Serena's usual writing style, indicating that rather than summarising in her own words, she is paraphrasing Tom's story, and, as it happens with the previous one, direct references to Haley's text are made with the use of italics.

In this case, the reader is only aware it is reading a story-within-the-story because of Serena mentioning it, and because of the extra space within paragraphs

(aside from the obvious change in content). It is only after four pages that Serena briefly interrupts her reading process. Her interruption also differs from the ones portrayed in the previous short story, as it happens in the middle of a paragraph and there are no writing symbols that indicate its impending intrusion. A paragraph opens with a quote: *"That evening, no one saw her arrive in the arms of the driver"* and immediately after it, Serena intrudes the narrative flow by saying: "At this point I got myself out of my reading chair and went downstairs to make tea" (140). This interruption is more dislocating than the ones prior, because after four pages of a different narratorial voice, it is only through the use of the first person pronoun that the reader is brought back to the main narrative, this time having been allowed to enter the realm of the short story in itself. This abrupt change in point of view and narratorial voice works as a reminder for the reader of the act of fiction, possibly making the reader dizzy and confused in its change of focus but making it impossible to forget that Serena is paraphrasing the short story under her own impressions. Were her narrative voice not present in the story in itself, it would be possible for the reader to believe they are reading a full reproduction of 'Lovers', but because the reader is made aware of Serena's presence, it becomes obvious that the process of reading is subjected to Serena's whims. In fact, this interruption takes place because she has had to stand up and go downstairs, and the reader can only continue reading the summary the moment she decides "[w]ith some reluctance" to carry her "tea upstairs and [sit] on the edge of [her] bed, willing [her]self to pick up another of Haley's pages." (140-1)

Not only is the real reader denied the possibility of experiencing the short story on their own, concurrently becoming unable to provide their own meanings, but the reader is also forced to take part in Serena's reading process, having to stop its engagement with the short story whenever she decides to pause in her own reading, and

having to be given full details on her feelings. Serena seems less enthralled by this short story than with the last one, as she specifies that it seems clear to her that "the reader was intended to have no relief from the millionaire's madness, no chance to stand outside and see it for what it was" (141). The way in which Serena guides the story marks the real reader's predisposition to continue reading the summary according to Serena's opinions, rather than their own. She resumes the paraphrasing of the story by saying "[a]t last I returned to the chair and learned that the mannequin's name was Hermione" (141). The descriptions of the short stories are therefore chronicled in real-time, simultaneous to Serena's experience.

Interestingly, the story does not contain any other interruptions from Serena other than the one mentioned above. In this case, her narratorial voice does not interrupt the text with comments in between parenthesis or with the use of dashes. Consequently, despite Serena's only interruption, the reader gets to read the summary of the story without the same amount of guidance provided in the previous story. What is more, the effect is exacerbated as the chapter ends with the secondary story, without further guidance from Serena. She does not provide any final thoughts on how she feels about the ending of the story nor the story overall. This is interesting because, as just mentioned, the reading process is chronicling the real-time reading activity, and as Serena has mentioned, she has just been on a night out, which could further indicate her narration ends the moment she possibly falls asleep. At the same time, the fact that the chapter ends with the story-within-the-story along with the fact that the following chapter opens normally, with Serena continuing narrating her life and not making reference to the story read the night prior whatsoever, provides a feeling that the fictional story is completely intertwined with the narrative in itself, possibly making the reader feel they have finished reading the story themselves as well, having had a full

reading experience - perhaps yet another subtle clue of the manipulation being concurrently extracted by Tom as real narrator.

In terms of content, the story provides a wildly interesting approach that opens up the layers and possibilities of fiction for the reader: in this case, 'Lovers' is a retelling of the story 'Dead as They Come', first published by *Harpers/Queen* and collected in McEwan's second short story collection, *In Between the Sheets,* published in 1978 by Anchor Books. 'Dead as They Come', the fourth short story within the collection, is originally written by an unnamed first-person narrator who becomes obsessed with a mannequin in a store and gets it home, naming it 'Helen', and treating it as a lover. The main character shapes the mannequin into the kind of woman he wants and lives a life with her until the moment in which he becomes blindly jealous of his driver, an obsession which has dire consequences for his relationship with the mannequin.

The short story reproduced in *Sweet Tooth*, now titled 'Lovers', gives this character a name, Neil Carder, changing some of his background as well. Whereas in the original McEwan story the character makes it known he is "wealthy. Possibly there are ten men resident in London with more money than [him]. Probably there are only five or six. Who cares? [He] is rich and [he] made [his] money on the telephone" ('Dead as they Come', 75), in Haley's short story, "[no] one knew how Neil Carder came by his money or what he was doing living alone in an eight-bedroom Highgate mansion" (*Sweet Tooth*, 136).

There are other small changes made to the story, in McEwan's, the mannequin is named Helen, whereas in Haley's it is named Hermione, along with the fact that the three marriages experienced by the character in McEwan's story are turned into a "brief" one in Haley's. The story also differs in that in McEwan's story the unnamed

protagonist becomes obsessed with the idea that Helen is having an affair with Brian, his chauffeur, "still she said nothing. What did [he] expect? That she suddenly be of a mind to confess an affair with my chauffeur? Helen was a silent woman, she did not find it hard to conceal her feelings" ('Dead as they Come' 88) whereas in Haley's story, Carder becomes obsessed with the idea that Hermione is having an affair with Abeje, his female housekeeper: "[w]hat revived his doubts the next morning was a parallel shift in Abeje's attitude(…) [h]is housekeeper was both brisk and evasive (…) [t]he truth was always simple. They were lovers, Hermione and Abeje. Furtive and fleeting" (*Sweet Tooth* 143).

Both stories have the same ending: in his delusional state, McEwan's character "conceive[s] in that frenzied instant two savage and related desires. To rape and destroy her", he goes on to explain he "came as she died. That much [he] can say with pride. [He] know[s] her death was a moment of intense pleasure to her. [He] heard her shouts through the pillow" and while he says he "will not bore" the reader "with rhapsodies on [his] own pleasure. It was a transfiguration." ('Dead as they Come' 92) Haley's story explains that Neil Carder "*tore into her with all the savagery of disappointed love, and his fingers were round her throat as she came, as they both came. And when he was done, her arms and legs and head had parted company with her torso, which he dashed against the bedroom wall*" (*Sweet Tooth* 143). McEwan continues to depict his character's journey as an unravelling, where there does not seem to be recognition of the real nature of his relationship with the mannequin:

> I saw the corpse and before I had time to turn my head I vomited over it. Like a sleepwalker I drifted into the kitchen, I made straight for the Utrillo and tore it to shreds. I dropped the Rodin forgery into the garbage disposal. Now I was running like a naked madman from room to room destroying whatever I could lay my hands on. I stopped only to finish the Scotch …. I tore, trampled, mangled, kicked, spat and urinated on… my precious possessions… oh my precious … I danced, I sang, I laughed …. I wept long into the night. ('Dead as they Come' 92-3)

In Haley's story, however, Carder conceals "her body parts in a plastic sack and carri[es] her and all her belongings to the dustbins. In a daze he wr[ites] a note (…) to Abeje to inform her of her dismissal 'forthwith' and l[eaves] on the kitchen table her wages to the end of the month" (*Sweet Tooth* 144) the only thing he seems to do that resembles McEwan's depiction is to go "for a long and purging walk across the Heath", and it is Abeje who, modelling "the outfits for her husband" acknowledges that "[the mannequin] *left him and it broke him up*" (*Sweet Tooth* 144). However, at the end of Haley's story there is a moment of clarity for Carder, as he "*an ordinary fellow, ha[s] discovered for himself the awesome power of the imagination*" (*Sweet Tooth* 144).

It is interesting that while the short stories in themselves do not directly touch on topics of metafiction, they do explore the life of a man who becomes obsessed with a mannequin, attributing it with a personality and creating a character out of it, somewhat echoing what Tom is doing as the inscribed author of *Sweet Tooth*. Furthermore, there is a slight implication of authorship in the story, as McEwan seems to be interested in the creation of characters that are concerned, indeed, in the process of creation, in the process of taking characters that are *tabula rasas* and ascribing meaning to them through a slow process of production, be it in the means of fictionalising human beings or in the means of shaping human beings into becoming what the characters wish them to be. Not to mention there are clear parallelisms to be drawn from the two short stories with *Sweet Tooth* in itself: the male character that takes a malleable woman into his life, builds her identity and then destroys her when he believes he has been betrayed. The storyline itself is indeed reminiscent of the way Tom and Serena's relationship pans out, or rather, of Tom's approach towards Serena as human being and character.

What is also interesting is the fact that thirty years after its publication, McEwan's short story is awarded additional meaning, with this, McEwan is somewhat

forcing his readership to go through a process of re-evaluation on their knowledge of his oeuvre. As Irena Ksiezopolska points out, "McEwan thus improves his own story and then ironically comments on these improvements though the obnoxious figure of Serena's superior, obviously a "bad" reader, even less refined than Serena." (Ksiezopolska 425)[41] Furthermore, in the case his readers are aware of the existence of the original short story, *Sweet Tooth* therefore offers the possibility of transposition, something unreachable for those readers that do not hold enough knowledge on McEwan's previous literary endeavours.

Therefore, by modifying his original short story in order to incorporate it into *Sweet Tooth*, adapting it to the needs of the latter narrative, McEwan is ultimately not merely recycling his work but editing it to suit his needs as he experiments with reader-response. It could be argued the changes made in the narrative are ultimately changes that somewhat better it for the purposes at hand. The change in narrative voice also allows for an ethical dimension to be awarded to the narrative, one lost or not explicitly provided in the original. Ultimately, what McEwan is doing is to provide new meaning for his own work, doing so through a multi-layered narrative, as not only does he loan his short story to Haley, he has Haley narrate it through Serena's voice.

3.3.2.3. 'Pawnography'

It is interesting to note that Tom's stories are only reproduced almost in full up until the moment Serena develops a relationship with him. After that, as will be shown below, the summaries of the stories change almost radically. This may be due to the fact that there is a point in the story where, as Marshall points out, Serena "…falls in love with Haley, but only after learning to love his fiction." (Marshall) The two stories discussed

[41] Ksiezopolska is here referring to Max as the 'superior' to Serena, as Max also comments on the short story in conversation with Serena. (135-36)

above are the stories she reads prior to her first meeting with him, whereas 'Pawnography' is the short story she reads immediately after meeting Tom for the first time. Furthermore, 'Pawnography' is the story that occupies the most space in its reproduction (once more occupying the entirety of a chapter spanning through fourteen pages of the main narrative). After 'Pawnography', as will be exemplified below, Serena will either briefly summarise Tom's writing or she will start modifying it herself, as was analysed in previous chapters.

'Pawnography' is introduced by Serena announcing she "took up one of his stories to re-read" and is separated from the narrative by including an extra space between paragraphs (173). The summary is reproduced the same way the two previous ones are, making use of the same techniques: Serena combines paraphrasing with citations (using italics). This time, Serena's paraphrasing voice seems to have grown more familiar with the use of this technique, the language she uses is more embellished, it is almost as though there is an additional third person narrator, or that Serena is taking on an entirely different voice than her own for the moments in which she summarises Tom's stories.

In this retelling, the use of citations slightly varies in that Serena paraphrases making use of the present verb tense, whereas the portions that are quoted remain in the past tense. For that, there are sentences as the following: "He turns and *standing before him was a kid of sixteen or so*" (174). My suggestion is that the incongruous use of verb tenses is McEwan's way to keep reminding the real reader they are reading a retelling of a story, rather than a narrative that is part of the main narrative, hence continuing to make the reading and writing process obvious. Interestingly, the language becomes over-flourished as the chapter progresses, showing the process as it simultaneously happens, proving the narrative (or the summary of the story) has not been edited.

Sentences that are short and simple ("Sebastian Morel is a teacher of French at a large comprehensive school near Tufnell Park, north London" (173)) are substituted in time with the addition of adjectives that prove further subjectivity ("One dark late afternoon in December…" (174), "What troubles Sebastian is the boy's agitation, the way the knife trembles in his hands, the terror in his face" (174) to "that seems to heighten the bleakness that comes down to trap them into silence." (176)). There are moments when Serena seems to have forgotten she is meant to be the guiding voice of this summary or retelling: "On the way home - has he ever walked more slowly? - he would have stopped in that same pub for another fortifying drink…", (182), all in all, the level of description in the use of language becomes detailed in ways that the previous short story-summaries were not.

The only time the retelling is interrupted is one paragraph before the end of the chapter, when Serena introduces her voice by saying "[i]n my opinion Tom Haley spent too long over this farewell chicken dinner, and it seemed especially drawn out on a second reading" (185). In fact, she is reading the story on a train, and she is about to reach its destination and confesses to feel "tempted to skip [the end] altogether" (185). After musing on the actions of the fictional characters she is reading about, again with no warning, the narrative jumps back to the secondary story, switching from criticism to fiction once more. Before the end of the story, she once more intrudes the narrative by saying "[a]nd then came the final lines of 'Pawnography', with the characters perches uneasily on ecstasy's summit. The desolation was to follow, off the page. The reader was spared the worst" (186), then finishing the chapter with an indented quotation which is perceived to be the closing paragraph of the short-story itself.

In this case, the secondary narrative seems to take almost full possession of the main one. For thirteen pages there is no interruption or intrusion from Serena's part, and

the only reminders that the story being read is a story within a story are, outside of the obvious different subject matter, the combination between paraphrasing and citing. This chapter feels like a moment in which Tom's voice is fully populating the narrative, despite the fact his narratorial voice is yet to be a true presence in the novel itself. Moreover, despite the fact this is the second time Serena reads this story, she does not give pointers or provide opinions on the way the story has changed for her from the first reading, nor does she show her familiarity with the text at all. In fact, she only comments on it at the end, as just exemplified, to comment on one scene and to wonder how much of Tom there is in the sexual fantasies of his fictional characters.

What this represents for *Sweet Tooth* is an experimentation with narratorial voice coming from Tom Haley himself. As the narrative progresses, he grows familiar with the techniques that are to be used, hence why the first two short stories only tamper with these techniques, whereas in the third attempt his voice is more prominent. It could also be argued that this shows the draft-status of the novel itself. Given the ambiguous nature of the ending of the novel, it is unclear if the novel has been revised jointly by Tom and Serena or if it has been published without further editing.[42] The fact one can chronicle Tom's growing and evolution as an author through his writing not only shows how authors become more familiar with specific writing styles, thus commenting on the nature of writing, but it also shows Tom has not revised the text to incorporate the changes into his previous writing, opted instead (along with Serena) to leave the text as it was originally written.

As for the rest of Tom's stories depicted or summarised in the novel, they are stories Tom writes after beginning an intimate relationship with Serena. For that reason,

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[42] As Ksiezopolska points out, "[i]n his interview for *The Guardian Books Podcast*, McEwan overtly states that the novel contains the final draft, after Serena's revisions. He also states that it was his intention to indicate in the last words of the novel a whole story of forty years without actually describing it. Thus, it appears that his intention is to have Serena marry Tom and help him improve his novel." (Amistead et al as referenced in Ksiezopolska 432)

because their relationship changes, so does Serena's reading process. Because of their changing relationship, this time Serena has to "take a peek" into Tom's writing desk because, as she says, "he d[oesn't] like talking about his work before it [is] finished" (224).

3.3.2.4 'Her Second Novel'

The fourth story reproduced is 'Her Second Novel', one that is yet to be titled at the time Serena reads it. Interestingly, the story's summary only takes up half a page on this occasion, and Serena focuses her critical remarks on the fact Tom is making use of metafictional tricks. Serena describes it as follows:

> One story, completed in a first draft by the end of November, was narrated by a talking ape prone to anxious reflections about his lover, a writer struggling with her second novel. She has been praised for her first. Is she capable of another just as good? She is beginning to doubt it. The indignant ape hovers at her back, hurt by the way she neglects him for her labours. Only on the last page did I discover that the story I was reading was actually the one the woman was writing. The ape doesn't exist, it's a spectre, the creature of her fretful imagination. (224)

Not only is the length of the summary surprising at this stage, as it only occupies a few lines, whereas the last few summaries have occupied whole chapters, but the story is extremely reminiscent of McEwan's own 'Reflections of a Kept Ape', originally published by *The New Review* and, just as 'Dead as They Come', then collected in *In Between the Sheets.*

As mentioned above, in 'Reflections of a Kept Ape' McEwan presents a story that is a parable of the writing process, exploring themes of writing inspiration and the writing process as well as the relationship that is established between author and reader. In 'Her Second Novel', however, McEwan modifies the ending of his original story, given that, as mentioned before, "on the last page [Serena] discover[s] that the story [she has been] reading [is] actually the one the woman [is] writing" and that in reality,

the “ape doesn’t exist, it’s a spectre, the creature of her fretful imagination” (*Sweet Tooth* 224). The story’s ending is different in that, in the original, Sally is not revealed to have been writing the story itself, and the ape is not explicitly revealed to be a figment of her imagination. Both stories are narrated by the ape, and in the original, at the end, there is an image of the ape advancing “noiselessly into the room and squat[ting] down a few feet behind Salle Klee’s chair”, and thinking “[n]ow I am here, it seems an impossible idea she will ever turn in her chair and notice me” (‘Reflections of a Kept Ape’ 48), which could potentially indicate the ape is also a metaphorical impression of the reader, but whatever the case it is not as clear (or is not made explicitly so) as it is in Serena’s retelling of Haley’s story.

As it happens with ‘Dead as They Come’, McEwan needs to shift some of the events taking place in the original story to fit the needs of his later narrative. The reason why Sally is revealed to be the fictive author of the story in *Sweet Tooth’s* ‘Her Second Novel’ becomes a clear forewarning of what is about to happen in the ending of *Sweet Tooth*, and by modifying his own work to include a textual ‘clue’, McEwan is providing with the notion that he has the agency to modify his former fiction as its rightful owner.

A relevant part about this portion of the text is, essentially, Serena’s reaction to Haley’s story: “*No*. And no again. Not that”, begins her brief soliloquy. “I instinctively distrusted this kind of fictional trick. I wanted to feel the ground beneath my feet” (224) she says, interestingly attributing her dislike to an ‘instinct’. Perhaps implying no reader truly enjoys losing control over a narrative. She insists, “[t]here [is], in my view, an unwritten contract with the reader that the writer must honour. No single element of an imagined world or any of its characters should be allowed to dissolve on authorial whim. The invented had to be as solid and as self-consistent as the actual. This [is] a contract founded on mutual trust.” (224) As Ksiezopolska points out, Serena’s attitude

to metafictional artefacts relates even to the title of the novel itself: “The title seems to apostrophize the reader of the novel as someone who, despite all the sophistication and awareness of postmodern techniques in literature, will still lust after the sweetness of the conventional happy ending.” (Ksiezopolska 418) In her musings on the nature of fiction, Serena shows a clear awareness of postmodern techniques, she simply does not enjoy them, she consequently prefers the more traditional option, the one that she eventually gets.

Furthermore, this is not the first time Serena exposes her theories on the author-reader contract, and what is interesting about this specific excerpt is that this is the story that has the shortest summary of them all. That could be due to the fact that because she dislikes the ending so much, even disapproves of it, she does not wish to spend any narrative time summarising it, or it can be a way in which Haley attempts to not give importance to the matter so as to not make the real reader truly suspicious. All in all, due to the brevity of the summary, the real reader will not get a tight grasp of the story unless they are familiar with McEwan’s work and can therefore go to the 1978 version and re-read it, looking for further information, which is yet another of the ways in which McEwan rewards his familiar readers with this specific use of intratextuality.

Serena summarises her feelings for her reading experience by simply calling it ‘disappointing’ and quickly jumps to the next story. Nevertheless, precisely for the familiar reader, it is interesting to see that the themes and ideas discussed in the original story are continued in its retelling. What McEwan explored in depth in his short story is briefly yet convincingly reinforced through Serena’s words, indicating the feelings of a reader in front of a narrative that contains such a conclusion. McEwan is therefore also providing his novel with tints of reader-response criticism, showing he is aware of the reception his metafictional narratives may have and consciously depicting the process of

reading and the possible aftereffects of what the imposition of metafiction on a text might bring to the reading experience.

Another reason to vouch for the shortness of this retelling might be the fact that Tom needs to exemplify in the text the fact Serena is speed-reading. As was mentioned above, she mentions she is sneaking into Tom's office to read his stories as he is quite secretive about them. The first reading activities were performed in a calm and relaxed environment and therefore Serena had the time to be lengthier in her explorations of the stories, whereas in the cases of 'Her Second Novel' and 'From the Somerset Levels' she admits she is performing secretive and "guilty speed-reading" (225), afraid she might be caught in the act by Tom. Once more, this is an indication that the commentaries provided by Serena regarding the stories are produced in real-time, without revision, and so it is only common that her comments regarding the last two stories are shorter and more superficial than the rest. This would also indicate that the commentaries in themselves create a different timeline within the text, in that, while the rest seems to be chronicled in retrospective ("almost forty years ago I was sent on a secret mission for the British security service" (1), starts the narrative) and therefore its timing is not real-time, the moments of reading seem to take place at real-time timing, taking them to an external time realm. Playing with time in a narrative is quite a modernist technique, and as exemplified in the analysis for *Atonement*, McEwan's repurposing of past literary movements is something he toys with.

3.3.2.5 'From the Somerset Levels'

'From the Somerset Levels' is Tom's "first draft of a short novel", one he has kept secret from Serena and that initially "amaze[s] [Serena] before [she] star[s] reading" as it is "over a hundred and forty pages long, with [the previous] week's date written in longhand below the last sentence" (224).

The retelling of the novella differs from previous summaries in that it is only about two pages long (225-227), which is striking considering it is the longest piece of writing produced by Tom. Just as with 'Her Second Novel', the reader is aware Serena is reading the story while hiding from Tom, nonetheless, Serena's voice is more present in this summary, detouring from the retelling of 'Lovers' and especially 'Pawnography'. Not even a paragraph into its description, Serena indicates "[t]his plaza, where much of the central section of the novel takes place, is a giant microcosm of a sad new world" (225) later showing frustration as the nameless main character "the man (annoyingly, we are never told his name) meets up with an old friend…" (226). Her comments intrude the story, with a clear subjectivism absent from previous summarising activities. With sentences such as "[t]he reader doesn't find out where the man and the little girl are headed until the final pages" (227), the act of metafiction makes it difficult for the reader to truly get into the retelling of Tom's story in the way it was made possible in the short stories told before and explored above.

Shortly after that, she provides her final thoughts on the story and its reading process, saying it has "taken [her] an hour and a quarter to read to the end" (227), musing on how its contents will not be well received by Operation Sweet Tooth. To provide commentary on the story, Serena assumes the role of Peter Nutting, indicating what *her* "phantom Nutting" would "go on to say": "Here were the doomed dystopia we did not want, the modish apocalypse that indicted and rejected all we had ever devised or built or loved, that relished in the entire project collapsing into the dirt" (227).

Serena's reaction to the story is chronicled in section one of this chapter, and once more what is interesting is the fact that McEwan has a fictional character respond to his own story, written years prior. 'From the Somerset Levels' mirrors "Two Fragments: March 199-", first published by Harper/Queen and then also collected in *In*

Between the Sheets. Nevertheless, the events of both stories, while both portraying a father and a daughter in a dystopian vision of the surroundings of London, are not identical. In McEwan's story, separated into two fragments (the first narrated from a third person point of view and the second in the first voice, by the father and main character), the lives of a father (Henry) and a daughter (Marie) are depicted as they journey into what seems to be the ministry, where Henry works for the day (52-55). This journey allows the third person narrator to describe the horrors they see during the day, allowing the reader to realise how different the society in the story is compared to modern-day society (or the version of society of the 1970s). In the second fragment, narrated from his own perspective, the father visits an old lover, they have intercourse and reminisce about the past. In this section, Henry also considers moving outside of the city, to a little village where he believes his mother lives, and where a brighter future might be possible for his daughter (59-72).

In Serena's retelling of Haley's story, father and daughter are unnamed, and most of the story concerns itself with the depiction of the journey they make "across a ruined landscape of burned-out villages and small towns" (*Sweet Tooth* 226), while they cue at a ministry, it is not stated the father works there, making it "clear elsewhere that civilisation's collapse began with the injustices, conflicts and contradictions of the twentieth century" (*Sweet Tooth* 226) something not specified in the original by McEwan. Other than that, the father visits an "old friend who is lucky enough to have a room" (*Sweet Tooth* 226) but it is not mentioned they are lovers, and most importantly, while in the original there is absolutely no mention of the mother of the child, in Haley's, "[t]hey have been searching for his wife, the girl's mother. There are no systems of communication or bureaucracy to help them" (*Sweet Tooth* 227). In Haley's story, "[f]ather and daughter die in one another's arms in the rank cellar of the ruined

headquarters of a once-famous bank" (*Sweet Tooth* 227), giving the story a clear anti-capitalist undertone, one not entirely portrayed in McEwan's original, where Henry sees that a lamp "still burn[s] above the doorway" and "[k]nowing the difficulty of finding paraffin [he] turn[s] it out, then stepp[ing] into the black street" ("Two Fragments: March 199-" 72). The endings differ, therefore, once more indicating McEwan has modified his original story to fit the needs of his more modern narrative, discussing a post-modern, post-apocalyptic world that has clearly decayed and deteriorated since his original publication decades before.

In this story, most importantly, McEwan quotes his own original story, something that is not done in the rest of the stories he reuses. All of the sections italicised in the summary for 'From the Somerset Levels' are direct quotations to McEwan's "Two Fragments: March 199-". That is to say, a quote such as "…vegetables, rotten and trodden down, cardboard boxes flattened into beds, the remains of fires and the carcasses of roasted pigeons, rusted tin, vomit, worn tyres, chemical green puddles, human and animal excrement. An old dream of horizontal lines converging on the thrusting steel and glass perpendicular was now beyond recall…", is not only a quotation taken by Serena from Tom's novella, found in page 225 of *Sweet Tooth* but is simultaneously a quotation taken from page 52 of McEwan's "Two Fragments: March 199-".

The second repurposed quotation makes reference to a fountain, the air above it being, in both texts, "…grey with flies [as m]en and boys came there daily to squat on the wide concrete rim and defecate…" (page 226 in *Sweet Tooth*, and page 52 in McEwan's "Two Fragments: March 199-"). The other quotations italicised in 'From the Somerset Levels' are in regard to a telephone ("On the table there was a telephone, its wire severed at four inches, and beyond that, propped against the wall, a cathode ray

tube…" page 226 in *Sweet Tooth* and 61 in "Two Fragments: March 199-"), which prompts a conversation on the importance of objects ("the products of human inventiveness and design. And not caring for objects is one step away from not caring for people" found in page 226 in *Sweet Tooth* and 72 in "Two Fragments: March 199-"). The only other quotation which is repurposed is uttered by the father's friend/old lover (Diane in the original short story) when she says "[e]verything has changed so much I can hardly believe it was us who were there." (226 in *Sweet Tooth* and 65 in "'Two Fragments: March 199-")

'From the Somerset Levels' does not only mirror "Two Fragments: March 199-" content wise, and not only is it the only short story to make use of McEwan's own words verbatim, but the repercussions of its publication are eerily similar to McEwan's literary career as well. With it, Tom receives the Jane Austen Prize (313) (a fictional award paralleled to the Man Booker Prize in the novel [312-313]). McEwan did not receive an award for "Two Fragments: March 199-", it was rather for his first published collection of short stories, *First Love, Last Rites*, but what seems to be a wink to the reader is the names used to equal Tom's story to McEwan's own experience. McEwan was awarded the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976, and Tom's short novel includes 'Somerset' in its title.

3.3.2.6 'Probable Adultery'

The retelling of 'Probably Adultery', the story Tom writes after having a rather troubling conversation with Serena regarding the Monty Hall problem, only occupies two pages of the overall narrative of the novel. This is a rather surprising decision, as 'Probably Adultery', unlike 'Her Second Novel' or 'From the Somerset Levels' is read by Serena, not in hiding, but "in the icy kitchen over a mug of tea before [she leaves] for work" (240). The story follows the same technique of summarising as the last two

stories, in that the description is short and Serena intrudes the narrative, mid-sentence, to give information to the real reader and help them understand the structure of the text, at the same time that it does not allow for the reader to get immersed into the summary at all (for example, "When they've gone Terry hesitates. Here the story becomes tense as it rises towards its climax" (241-2)).

The story, in fact, ends with no further comment from Serena. An extra space between paragraphs indicates the summary has finished and Serena only goes back to it explaining that, during the day, "[w]henever [she] had a break, [her] thoughts returned to the doors on the fourth floor of a Brighton hotel" (242). Despite her intrusion, the differing techniques used to summarise the stories seem to correlate with the state of the relationship between Tom and Serena. It could also be assumed McEwan chooses different ways to approach the analysis/reading of Tom short's stories to avoid repetition, or it could be understood he is trying to mimic different reading experiences (individuals real differently depending on which moment or text they are encountering) nevertheless, it seems that Serena becomes more and more detached from the fiction she reads as her relationship with Tom becomes more serious. Their dynamic as real author and real reader seem to begin to interfere in their dynamic as implied author and narrator. In this case, and as analysed in the chapters above, Serena's reading act is even more different, as this time she decides she needs to edit the story to help Tom create the best story that can be, and she initiates an act of rewriting, as she creates notes and recreates the story Tom has sent her. As mentioned above, with this story, Serena takes on the role of co-author, yet another possible explanation for the differing nature of the summarising of the story: now that Serena is actively participating in the creation of meaning, she cannot reflect on the narrative the same way she did as a more 'passive' reader. It almost seems as though McEwan is chronologically mirroring the emergence

and evolution of reader-response criticism and pointing at the fact that the use of metafiction might be more detrimental for the reader than the criticism seems to indicate. The more active a role a reader takes, in McEwan's works, the more detrimental it becomes for the analysis created by the reader. McEwan seems to clearly want to maintain the barriers between author and reader stipulated by traditionally established literary guidelines.

Ultimately, it is interesting to note that the way in which Tom, as inscribed author, chooses to retell Serena's reading acts becomes an attack on the idea of the death of the author. By carefully choosing which information suits his narrative and which information to provide (as well as the way Serena's relationship with his own texts evolve) he is participating in the idea put forward by David Lodge, that

> [w]orks of literature – in our era of civilization, at least – do not come into being by accident. They are intentional acts, produced by individual writers employing shared codes of signification according to a certain design, weighing and measuring the interrelation of part to part and parts to the developing whole, projecting the work against the anticipated response of a hypothetical reader (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 158)

It is deliberately planned to narrate each of the summarising acts in a different way. It is not merely an act of documenting the reading process, but it is also an act at allowing the reader to understand Serena's interpretation and reception of each of the text is conditioned by her context and current emotions and experiences, and most importantly, determined by her ever-evolving relationship with the author of the text. As their reader-author contract emerges and evolves, is tested and reinforced, her reading acts change, her production of meaning shifts, and she becomes a different reader. Ultimately, what McEwan is doing is to once more indicate the different ways in which both, author's intention and reader's reception merge into the text producing a construction of meaning not often reflected upon.

3.3.3 Manifesting Authorship through Metafiction: *Sweet Tooth*

Tom Haley rises as author of the manuscript in the coda for *Sweet Tooth* the same way Briony does in the coda for *Atonement*. In this section, clear parallelisms will be drawn as to how both inscribed authors approach to confess to their authorship, as I believe that what McEwan is doing in having Tom confess to his authorship at the very end of his novel is to be interpreted as a direct reference to Briony's confession while simultaneously bringing attention to himself. As Alghamdi asserts, specifically in the case of *Sweet Tooth*, "…the similarity between McEwan himself and his character Tom Haley suggests that McEwan is stimulating and surreptitious entry into the action of the novel as himself." (Alghamdi 93) Nevertheless, the coda for *Sweet Tooth* does not open the same way the coda for *Atonement* does, as there is no signature at the end of Chapter 21 to indicate that Tom has signed a manuscript. Rather, Chapter 21 ends with Serena spotting "a parcel done up with brown paper and string, and, lying on top of it, a white envelope with [her] name on it in [Tom's] writing." (357) Further, Chapter 22 opens with a "Dear Serena" leading the reader to immediately understand what is being read is the letter that has just been mentioned from Serena's point of view. In *Atonement*, however, it may take longer for the reader to adjust their understanding, as "BT / London 1999" (*Atonement* 349) may take slightly longer to understand, and as stated prior, the nature of what constitutes the last chapter is more ambiguous.

Therefore, both codas start in a similar manner, as one of the main characters of the story suddenly emerges, using a first-person narratorial voice, to speak directly to an audience. In the case of *Sweet Tooth*, this audience is Serena, and there is no denying that the nature of the chapter is a reproduction of a letter, although it could be considered that by the end of the chapter, the real reader might also be considered a recipient of the contents of such letter, as the information being given to Serena is key

to the real reader. As Tom states, "[i]f your answer is a fatal no, well, I've made no carbon, this is the only copy and you can throw it to the flames. If you still love me and your answer is yes, then our collaboration begins and this letter, with your consent, will be Sweet Tooth's final chapter. Dearest Serena, it's up to you." (370) This portion, the very last lines of the novel, indicates that the manuscript that Tom has been writing (one that, as referred to above, is mentioned earlier in the narrative, and one for which Tom chronicles its research and writing process during the coda itself) is the one that has now achieved publication. Had Serena not 'accepted', according to Tom's words, the manuscript would not be in the real reader's hands, it could not have been purchased nor read. As is the case with *Atonement*, this allows for a transgression of the barriers between fictionality and reality, as the reader understands that the actions of the fictional character (in this case, Serena accepting Tom's preposition and proposal) affect reality (the real reader purchases a novel and reads it). Further, as is also the case with *Atonement*, this is another of the ways in which McEwan brings attention and awards importance to authors and readers alike, as not only is reality affected by the actions of fictional characters (what they do, as just established, affects the lives of the real readers) but what the real readers do (purchase the novel, invest their interest and time in its reading act) also affects fiction: Tom and Serena would not become co-creators of a narrative if *Sweet Tooth* went unread.

In the same way that in *Atonement* the change in narrative voice at the end of the novel dislocates the reader, in *Sweet Tooth*, the reader also needs to recalibrate their understanding of the narrative the moment Tom inserts himself in the text through his letter. Not only does he begin by assuming when (and how) Serena will be reading the manuscript for *Sweet Tooth* ("[y]ou may be reading this on the train back to London, but my guess is that you're sitting at the kitchen table…" (348)), but he also

immediately jumps into giving explanations as to why the apartment looks the way that it does. As Alghamdi mentions, this way, the novel's

> meta-literary twist (…) forces us to turn the narrative upside down and to re-examine what we thought we had known. In so doing, the ending asks us to radically reorganize our assumptions regarding the author's intent and the very structure and identity of the work. In effect, we think we are reading one story, only to discover at the very end that we are reading another that contains and frames, and perhaps deliberately destroys, the first. (Alghamdi 90)

Thus, upon understanding there has been a shift in the narrative voice and in the narrative's theme, the reader has its reading experience disrupted and is forced to recalibrate their knowledge and understanding of the narrative. Granted, as just mentioned, in the case of *Sweet Tooth*, unlike in *Atonement*, the reader is not to be confused for long, and most importantly, the reader is not unfamiliar with the shifts in genre and the inclusion of fragments of letters or short stories into the main narrative. The case of narratorial voice is rather more pertinent in this case as well, as it resonates with ideas long posited by McEwan himself, hence forcing yet another link between the real author and his literary counterpart. In interview, McEwan accepts to having "lost all interest in first-person narrative. I could hurl a book across the room when I feel that the writer is hiding slack writing and clichés behind his characterization – writing badly because this is how a character speaks. I want narrative authority. I want Saul Bellow, I want John Updike, I want Chekhov, I want Nabokov and Jane Austen." (McEwan, Cook, et al. 133), thus, it should not come as a shock that in a novel where he deliberately plays with narrative expectations, he would also be making further commentaries on the nature of fiction and specifically narratorship, by playing with both narratorial voices and attempting to see the effect each has on the reader. As Alghamdi claims,

> Surely a fictional first-person account is always just that – fictional, and the result of an author's ability to adopt a character's voice? Yet if scepticism is activated during the course of reading, it indicates that the fiction itself is fault, providing an imperfect illusion. In Sweet Tooth, McEwan seems to want to convince us of the permeability of this faulty illusion. Therefore, he displaces and destroys the first person narrative he has created, forcing the reader to share his own scepticism of it. (Alghamdi 91)

In this case, therefore, the reader's expectations could be said to be broken, certainly, as what appeared to be a story narrated through a first-person female narrator is in reality a story authored by the first-person female narrator's jilted partner, using her voice and persona for the purposes of his revenge narrative. Nonetheless, what *Sweet Tooth* achieves may be somewhat different to the dislocation possibly experienced by the first-time reader of *Atonement*, and the difference in reception ultimately rests in the relationship established between real reader and real author. A reader reading McEwan for the first time would certainly feel their reading act has been disrupted at the end of *Sweet Tooth*, although their disruption should not be all that shocking considering the novel is explicitly preoccupied with fiction, discusses metafiction openly during the narrative, and has had other pieces of mise-en-abyme displayed throughout the length of the novel. A familiar reader, however, one familiar with McEwan's oeuvre (and considering *Atonement* continues to be one of his most popular works, most likely to have been read) would not only be familiar with the shift in narrative, the metafictional twist, but would inevitably and immediately recall the reading experience of *Atonement*, possibly immediately connecting the two novels, and concluding that McEwan is once more winking at his earlier work. In here, the understanding of tradition is key, and what was discussed at the beginning of this Chapter is quite relevant. Intertextuality (or rather, in this case, intratextuality), along with tradition, are conducted by the author but their power of execution rests entirely on the reader's understanding of past literary history.

With the use of the metafictional 'twist' at the end of the narrative in *Sweet Tooth*, therefore, McEwan is not only encouraging readers to re-read the text once more, he is also forcing the reader to come to terms with the realisation that if *Sweet Tooth* is echoing *Atonement* in this regard, there might be other parts of *Sweet Tooth* that echo other parts of *Atonement*, or, as has been explored in depth, there might be parts of *Sweet Tooth* that echo other works by McEwan. By choosing to close the novel the same way he finalised *Atonement*, McEwan is claiming his power as author by nudging readers to redress their knowledge of McEwan's literary career. *Sweet Tooth*, therefore, becomes an exercise far more interested in placing the spotlight into McEwan's career than *Atonement* or any other of his works. What became an interest in narrative experimentation in *Atonement* is given an extra turn in *Sweet Tooth*. It is my belief that McEwan's revision of his own career also makes *Sweet Tooth* a critical commentary on his own narrative techniques, in this case, specifically on his previous use of postmodern techniques. What in *Atonement* was a shy attempt at experimentation, in which metafiction was subtly utilised and mostly only emerged during the coda, in *Sweet Tooth* becomes an overt metafictional experimentation. It could even be concluded that McEwan's second try at the metafictional exercise cements the critical commentaries he is attempting to make

Thus, the nature of the coda is doubly inherently metafictional: not only does it represent a 'twist' in the narrative, revealing that what has been read is an exercise on mise-en-abyme and therefore further indicating the layers of metafiction in the story were double (as all short stories by Tom are not only recycled from Ian McEwan, they are also featured as not only stories-within-the-story but stories-within-the-story which is also a story-within-the-story) but the chapter in itself is a reflection on the process of writing the story that is being read. "I've never folded a skirt before. This one wasn't

easy. Typing 'folded' reminds me that any point before I've finished you could put this letter back into its envelope, in sorrow or anger or guilt…" (349) states Tom, urging Serena (and the real reader) to '[s]tay with [him]." (349) As exemplified above, he explains he was experiencing writer's block ("[t]he blank page writ large and sensual. And that page was certainly large in my thoughts before Christmas, when I was convinced I would never write fiction again." (349-350)) then he explains upon meeting Max Greatorex and finding out the truth, he realised he would be disgraced as a writer (351). He elaborates in depth on what drove him to decide to write *Sweet Tooth*, on the days after finding out Serena was a spy and puts emphasis on his moment of redefinition (as exemplified in chapters above), and the rage driving his violent narratorial act. He moves forward to chronicle his process of creation, explaining the different stages: once he has narrated the moment in which he found out he was being betrayed, he explains he had a few days in which he tried to battle with his own rage, but then upon being struck by inspiration, he became an unstoppable force: he finds his notebook "and fill[s] it in two hours…" indicating a first draft for the story, and further explains he buys "three exercise books from a friendly newsagent…" to continue on his endeavour (356).

Nevertheless, something is lacking, not quite working, and thus Tom also explains to Serena what drives him to switch the postmodernism, to use metafiction in his work, by telling her "Fuck! It was dull, it was dead. I'd covered forty pages, as easy as counting. No resistance or difficulty or spring, no surprises, nothing rich or strange. No hum, no torque." (357) It was argued on the previous chapter that the reason why Tom *needs* to use metafiction (rather than *chooses* to) is linked to the overcoming of his traumatic experience. It is now also suggested that this is the moment in which, without verbalising it, Tom understands this is a story too important for him to use his old

techniques. As Maureen Corrigan points out "[b]etrayal certainly dooms the relationship between Serena and Tom, as well the relationship – built on an illusion, after all – between the reader and this novel itself." (Corrigan) Tom needs to utilise postmodern tools because the story, and how he experienced it, was one that contained twists and turns, his story and history is one that makes him feel betrayed as an author, and conclusively he needs to 'betray' his reader, so that perhaps such a reader might experience the same. The only way to impose revenge on a reader is through breaking the author-reader contract, and one of the ways to break the author-reader contract is through the metafictional device. Could McEwan be giving information as to when, how and why authors choose to use metafiction? Explaining it is not a cheap resource used by authors, not something seemingly randomly used to fit contemporary needs, but that in some cases it is necessary, so as to mirror the story that needs to be told? "Living inside you, I saw myself clearly: my material greed and status hunger, my single-mindedness bordering on autism…" (369) Tom's approach to his postmodern writing exercise, clearly mirrors what O'Hara and, to an extent Waugh, state regarding postmodern subject's needs. Readers are thus forced to understand how they operate within a fiction, how their *being* is affected by narrative discourse. Moreover, it is only by using metafiction that Tom can achieve such understanding of himself, and only through postmodernism that his novel can achieve the ends he requires. He highlights, "my ludicrous vanity, sexual, sartorial, above all aesthetic – why else make you linger interminably over my stories, why else italicize my favourite phrases?" (369) clearly giving explanations for his actions to Serena, while simultaneously addressing a real reader, allowing them to understand how the formatting took place in the sections of the novel explored above.

In his thirst for telling this story the only way it can be, in his thirst for revenge towards Serena (who conveniently has stated several times during the text of her dislike of 'these tricks'), Tom must use metafiction and fully embrace postmodernism. The description offered of his first draft could easily work as a description for the 'traditional' novel in the eyes of Tom, and hence what follows is his understanding and rationalisation of why he chooses to use Serena's voice as his first-person narrator

> I saw it. So simple. This story wasn't for me to tell. It was for you. Your job was to report back to me. I had to get out of my skin and into yours. I needed to be translated, to be a transvestite, to shoehorn myself into your skirts and high heels, into your knickers, and carry your quite glossy handbag on its shoulder strap. On my shoulder. Then start talking, as you. (358)

Furthermore, Tom's use and fictionalisation of Serena's voice is necessary, because without using a first-person narrator, he cannot play the metafictional trick he needs in order to gain full power over his narrative. As mentioned above, Tom *needs* metafiction, because that is the only way he can withhold some power from his reader (Serena), despite his proposal to Serena at the end (quoted above), and her acceptance to it, the story as read by the real reader remains a display of Tom's authoritarian authorship. The reader is left dislocated, without the possibility to create meaning, having been told through a letter that all meaning created heretofore is, in fact, faulty, and in need of re-evaluation. Furthermore, by his use of metafiction, not only is he keeping and holding onto his rightful power as author of the narrative, but he is also exposing Serena and MI5 to the public, in his act of revenge, awarding himself another kind of power that transcends the written word and the literary realm, vouchsafing for creative freedom.

Over the chapter, as argued above, Tom not only gives a full explanation on what drives him to commit his violent narratorial act, he goes through his process of

writing, as just exemplified, along with his process of research, and his intentions for publication. “And let’s talk about research…” (360) he states, and after two pages he elaborates:

> [b]ut why trouble you with details of my research? First, to let you know I took this matter seriously. Second, to be clear, that above all it was you who were my principal source. There was, of course, everything that I saw for myself. And then the small cast among whom I wandered in January. That leaves an island of experience, an important fraction of the whole, that was you alone, you with your thoughts, and sometimes you invisible to yourself. (363)

He moves forward in his documentation, by pointing out individual moments of his process, “[s]ometimes, when my invention ran out, it was near impossible, and at others it was a breeze because I was able to transcribe our conversation minutes after we’d had it. Sometimes events wrote whole sections for me...” (365) further indicating his thought process in exposing the foundation and Serena. Having been publicly disgraced by an article on *The Guardian* which exposes the Sweet Tooth Operation, Tom explains that rather than protecting himself or Serena, he had to throw coal to the fire for the purposes of fiction: “[s]o why did I make the claim anyway? More story I couldn’t resist it! And I wanted to seem like an innocent in your hearing. I knew I was about to do myself a lot of harm. But I didn’t care, I was reckless and obsessed, I wanted to see what happened.” (365) This sentiment clearly echoes moments in Briony’s literary career where she allows events she could potentially stop from taking place so that she can continue creating her fiction. Nevertheless, in Tom’s case, as mentioned prior, there is a clear element of revenge as well: “Face it, Serena, the sun is setting on this decaying affair and the moon and stars are too.” (366)

In his thirst for producing a story that is as thrilling as he expects his fiction to be, Tom continues to self-sabotage his career, perhaps intent on making use of the extravagance of the story to obtain a reputation (better infamous than not famous at all,

better to have his story read, despite the loss of a reputable career, than have his story unread). He continues to explain to Serena how the story is somewhat writing itself in real time, he mentions "a woman from the *Daily Express…"* showing up at his doorstep, and how after giving her no comments, "[a]s soon as she'd gone [he takes] notes." (366) He has a clear vision in his mind, specifying that "[he] won't be in a position to buy a copy of the *Express* [the day after] but it won't matter because [that] afternoon [he]'ll incorporate what she told [him], and have [Serena] read the story on the train." (366). This parallels Briony's thirst for publication as well, as the stories they are presenting to the world are their legacy on earth. Briony knows she will not see her manuscript published, due to the legalities entwined in her narrative, but she knows that once her story is published, that will become her legacy and it will become *the truth*. Tom knows that publishing this manuscript leaves him and Serena out of a good opinion for the public, as he states "I'm headed for public ignominy. We all are. I'll be accused, and rightly, of lying in my statement to the Press Association, of taking money from an inappropriate source, of selling my independence of thought." (366) Just as it happens in *Atonement*, Tom indicates that they will need time for the story to be published: "…there are obstacles. We wouldn't want you or Shirley or even Mr Greatorex to languish behind bars at Her Majesty's leisure, so we'll have to wait until well into the twenty-first century to be clear of the Official Secrets Act. A few decades is time enough for you to correct my presumptions on your solitude, to tell me about the rest of your secret work…" (369) going on to even begin discussing possible first sentences: "…how about, 'Now that the mirror tells a different story, I can say it and get it out of the way. I really was *pretty*.' Too cruel? No need to worry, I'll add nothing without your say-so. We won't be rushing into print." (369-370) Coincidentally, the line

discussed *is* indeed featured in the novel, at the end of the first chapter (17)[43]. This once more proves that both authors show *intent* in their publishing act, they intend to create a specific meaning, to be able to overcome their traumas, to be powerful enough as author figures. Their preoccupation does not rest in how the stories will be received, because they understand their narratives to be so powerful that the reader has little possibility to create meaning.

Furthermore, Tom's proposal to Serena ("I'm in the business now of watching over you. Wouldn't you like to do the same for me? What I'm working my way towards is a declaration of love and a marriage proposal. Didn't you once confide to me your old-fashioned view that this was how a novel should end, with a 'Marry me'? With your permission I'd like to publish one day this book on the kitchen table" (369)), despite being one where it seems he is asking for consent, may not be construed as so, precisely due to the nature of the letter being written. This is due to two different reasons: first of all, just as in the case of Briony, the reader is left to question the veracity of Tom's words. For how can the reader be sure that what Tom is stating in the coda is, in fact, reality? How is the reader to know Serena has accepted this proposal and is indeed, marrying Tom and agreed to the publication, and not suspect that Tom has decided to move forward despite her refusal? That is one of the incongruences at the end of *Atonement* as well: in metafiction, how much deceiving is too much deceiving? How much misleading is the reader to take as 'acceptable' and how much will force the reader to be distrustful of every word being written? If Tom has known about Serena's betrayal and has chosen to fictionalise the story and breach the author-reader contract, what would indicate he is not still breaching it now? Granted, the element of confession

[43] As a matter of fact, the comment by Tom which indicates the novel needs to be published in the twenty-first century, precisely when it was published (2012), yet another wink or choice made by McEwan to attempt to award his fiction and to blur the divide between reality and fiction – the novel can easily be construed as a real story by choosing to include such information, and by choosing to publish it in 2012.

in the letter itself might be an indicator, as might the coda for *Atonement*. There are other elements at play here, just as in *Atonement*, McEwan has inserted a variety of real-life figures into the novel that have forced the reader to create an empathetic bond with the story as 'real'. Mentions of different authors or agents or the institution of MI5 in itself, albeit all fictionalised, make the reader believe the story to be grounded in between the confines of reality. Nevertheless, Tom's admitting to having lied over his knowledge of the operation, and his use of Serena's voice to create a novel without alerting her previously (both considered to be his 'crime') give way for the reader to doubt and question the veracity of not only the entire narrative, but also the 'confessional' letter itself. As Corrigan states, "by novel's end, McEwan ridicules us reader for ever believing in Serena and the fictional world he's blown breath into." (Corrigan)[44] Just as in *Atonement*, ultimately, the reader is forced to accept it has no access to the *truth*. The novel will end on an ambiguous note, just as *Atonement* does, because the metafictional trick will force the re-evaluation of all the structures of meaning that have been built. Such structures may now need to be interpreted under different prisms, rather than the prism of realism, because the reader finally understands this novel should be read under the rogue guidelines of postmodernism.

Second, there is something oddly eerie in Serena's acceptance of Tom's proposal. The real reader might perfectly believe and understand Serena's acceptance and consent to the publication, but both such actions should be considered as well under the position that she is in. Arguably, she has no other option than to accept the

[44] It should be noted Corrigan produced a review of the novel that showed a clear disdain for what the metafictional trick does in the novel, claiming *Sweet Tooth* "is the closest I ever want to come to the experience of watching a snuff film. Think that's harsh? Open up *Sweet Tooth* and find out what McEwan thinks of you, Dear Reader, particularly if you're a woman, as most readers of fiction are" (Corrigan), explaining that the novel is merely a "cynical novel about the art of fiction and its pointlessness in the larger scheme of things" (Corrigan) and that ultimately, "McEwan's postmodernist narrative "tricks" simply serve as weapons of mass destruction. The novel is exposed as little more than a mental game, and Serena, whom we've grown attached to, is brutally silenced. All that remains is a reader's grudging recognition that McEwan, our Author-God, is awfully clever." (Corrigan) It is actually rather interesting to see her review, as it shows the effect the breach of the reader-author contract by the use of metafiction can have on a specific real reader.

publication, she is indeed in love with Tom (or so his words make it seem) and her career has been targeted. She is facing public shaming, and her trajectory in MI5 will certainly not withstand this test ("As for you, you have no chance of surviving tomorrow's press. You appear stunning in the photographs, I was told. But you'll be looking for a job." (366)). Furthermore, if the reader is to believe the version of Serena that has been narrating the story under the eyes and vision of Tom, having a narrative written *about* her, *exclusively* for her, and as he mentions, that ends with a proposal and a 'happy ending' (even more so *her* 'happy ending'), along with the knowledge the novel is published, it is clear she has probably accepted and Tom is not deceiving the reader once more. Nevertheless, her acceptance in itself is, arguable, a rather ambiguous issue that leaves much room for speculation. Ultimately, in this case, the confession at the end of the narrative, as it so happens in *Atonement,* creates a dilemma, in that ironically, the reader is left to decide whether to accept the fictionalisation of one part of the narrative, or if the entire narrative is jeopardised by the metafictional twist, and nothing else can be construed as 'true'.

Finally, in Tom's request towards Serena, what he is doing is proposing her to go from reader to co-author. Not only does Tom understand that to get over and work through his traumatic state he needs to incorporate the perpetrator(s) of his trauma into his life, publishing a story that shows how he has been deceived, but he also understands the importance of the reader in his endeavour and accepts that the reader is also responsible for the creation of meaning. It is not being suggested Tom does not believe in the God-like author figure, quite the contrary, as stated above he needs his intent and purpose to be the major features of his narrative, but Tom knows his story needs to be read, and that in his writing, he needs Serena (the reader) to acknowledge the meaning he attempts to create. This can be understood as a commentary on how

McEwan's view of authorship has progressed since the publication of *Atonement*. In *Atonement* it is unclear who the specific reader for the manuscript is, it should be assumed Briony expects the general public to read her story, moreover, she never requests the opinion of the reader (but rather dictates what the reader would benefit from) and she never allows any other figure or player in her narrative to rise to her same level. However, Tom does acknowledge the importance of the reader. As stated prior, "[t]ogether, Tom and Serena make up an inextricable whole, a mixture of innocence and experience, masculinity and femininity, logic and feeling. Each reads the other, and in doing so, learns about and interprets the other. Each needs and feeds off the other, and both are essential to McEwan's notion of authorship." (Walker 510) Consequently, while in *Atonement* metafiction is utilised to deliver an authoritarian author, in *Sweet Tooth*, metafiction is utilised to both deliver an authoritarian author, but to simultaneously acknowledge the existence of the reader. My speculation is that, considering both works from a metafictional perspective, in that both include critical commentary on the execution of the narrative and consequently the state of literature, it is quite striking to see McEwan's ideological evolution in what the novels provide.

Therefore, that which in *Atonement* could be construed as a clear rejection of the ideals of the death of the author (by having an author rise at the end of the narrative as the uncontested authority over the text), in *Sweet Tooth* there ensues a variation, a revisiting of such ideals, in that the author does rise at the end, but not uncontested. The author understands that the reader is necessary. McEwan might not believe in the death of the author, therefore, but he understands the need to acknowledge the birth of the reader. This way, it could be said that McEwan's use of intratextuality in *Sweet Tooth* could also be considered a form of 'parody' as Hutcheon understands it. She mentions that "postmodern parody does not disregard the context of the past representations it

cites, but uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated from the past today – by time and by the subsequent history of those representations.” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 94)

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Ian McEwan's Sustaining of Authorial Power

> "…every death contains within it the meaning of rebirth, every birth comes from the same region of the body as does the excremental. And the excremental is itself a source of regeneration…" (Booth, *The Company We Keep* 402)

> "Today, thirty years after the death of the author, we are witness to a strange rebirth of the author as zombie, to a paradoxical condition of absentee authority." (Foster 124)

McEwan thrives in questioning authorship because he cross-examines the nature of fiction in his texts, and he does so by implicating the reader into the process of creation. It could be stated that McEwan is aware of the need of the reader to reinforce his own authorial persona. As Iser suggests, "[i]f the virtual position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two, and so exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself." (Iser, *The Act of Reading*) Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely due to such reasons, in his concern for exploring the nature of authorship and readership, and due to the underlying postmodern nature of his texts, it becomes almost inevitable to turn to McEwan himself as an author.

It is key to observe the use of metafiction in both texts studied on two different layers: the layer of the inscribed authors (both Briony Tallis and Tom Haley are aware they are making use of metafiction, and as discussed above, they consciously make use of the device for specific purposes) and the layer of the real author (where McEwan ultimately brings attention to himself by making use of the technique twice, in ironically resemblant ways, in a relatively short span of time). This second layer of metafiction, provided by the real author, is one of the ways in which McEwan sustains his authorial power. Without his 'last-minute' intervention in the narrative codas, the novels could be

perceived as something other (a musing on World War Two, on the perils of false accusations coming from children's imaginative minds, or as an exploration of Cold War Britain's preoccupation with communism and espionage), but the metafictional nature of the texts, emerging ever more perceptibly towards the end of the narratives, creates a new dimension to be examined from the texts, mainly a critical dimension in which, as established above, McEwan ends up providing the literary criticism deemed necessary for the understanding of his texts, concurrently providing material for further debate. In his exploration of the different components of the literary device, and as Waugh states, "[b]y breaking the conventions that separate authors from implied authors from narrators from implied readers from readers, the [metafictional] novel reminds us (…) that 'authors' (…) work through linguistic, artistic and cultural conventions." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 134) That is to say, every act in the text which points at its own artifice eventually and inevitable ends up placing the spotlight precisely on the author of the text, in a way that recalls literary tradition.

In the understanding of the different metafictional narrative layers within both texts, McEwan's presence becomes undeniable. While McEwan does not introduce himself as a character within the narrative, something common for other authors making use of metafiction, he does create a question mark regarding his power. As Charles Cornelius Pastoor suggests, this power rests in the timing of his so-called appearance into both novels, in the case of *Atonement* specifically, but in *Sweet Tooth* as well:

> And what of McEwan? Does he too stand outside the pale of atonement? Or does he manage to create a world without paying homage to the God whose existence he denies? Not according to James Phelan, who writes that "the delayed closure [of the novel's ending] is an instance of McEwan's playing God, his using the novelist's absolute power not only to decide the outcome but to reveal the decision suddenly and, from the perspective of our emotional engagement in Briony's novel, violently. (Pastoor 303)

Put simply, by providing his inscribed authors with power, McEwan is also providing power for himself. He shocks and dislocates audiences, and he is ultimately the one possessing the true *intent* in both novels. This happens not only but most noticeably because of the timing in which he chooses to display the metafictional technique. In the coda for *Atonement* the reader will need to re-evaluate their understanding of Briony and her authorship; in *Sweet Tooth*, the reader will be subjected to an enforced re-evaluation of the narrative and a new and fresh understanding of Tom Haley as author, but ultimately, the reader which consumes both *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* will inevitably turn to *Ian McEwan*, and re-evaluate, reshape and reconduct their understanding of his authorship.

Ian McEwan produces characters whose lives are inevitably interlinked with fiction in one way or another. From the very first texts he produced, he created characters for whom literature was an influential source for their moral belief system. From the diary one of the sisters keeps in *The Cement Garden*, to the short story of an author intimately linked to her reader, an ape, in "In Between the Sheets", to the judge that must find a solution to save someone's life within legal scriptures in *The Children Act*, to the author that attempts to "win" back the love of his betraying girlfriend by producing a manuscript in *Sweet Tooth*, most (if not all) of his novels are ultimately concerned with showing the effects of language and literature in the human being. As mentioned above, the concern with the effects of fiction in culture and in the human being is one inherently literary, but in McEwan it involves an intricate web of self-referentiality and intertextuality that makes his work also inherently postmodern. As has been established throughout this study, while most of his texts do deal with the literary, and while trauma is a common feature in most of his oeuvre, it is only in *Sweet Tooth* and *Atonement* that all such elements are combined, along with the use of the

metafictional device. Featuring metafiction so blatantly in only two of his texts, linking it to the traumatic experience and featuring the building of an authorial identity ultimately links both novels in an endeavour to overtly explore and point out the nature of the relationship between fiction and criticism.

Many a reader might find the connection between *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* to be a poor attempt at recycling a technique, Pastoor asks, “why would a novelist of McEwan’s stature risk courting the displeasure of his devoted readers, who will immediately note the obvious borrowing of *Atonement*’s most distinctive narrative trope? Perhaps he is so enamoured of this particular device that he couldn’t resist using it one more time, just to see if he could get away with it?” (Pastoor 304) My suggestion, however, is that his reasons for choosing to make use of the metafictional device in both works is not aleatory nor a mere act of cheaply recycling a technique. To achieve to display the construction of an authorial identity for both of his characters, McEwan goes to traumatic experiences, to source the determination moving his inscribed authors, and he moves to metafiction, to conclude and provide a solution to deal with such traumatic events. The codas for both novels become a statement on the nature of fiction and creation (or recreation) of reality, and consequently, an assertion on the creation of an author. Therefore, not only does McEwan reinforce the authorial figures’ intentions, but he also includes one last commentary on the nature of authorship, one which inevitably attacks the death of the author. The codas intrude in the reader’s cognitive response to the text, by making them reconsider and revalue both, the fiction they have read and their reading experience, but the codas also represent the rise of real author McEwan itself, imposing his voice at the last minute, making the reader aware that that which takes place during the reading process can be ultimately affected by the author at any given moment. As McEwan himself points out “…the personality of the novelist leaves

its ineradicable traces (…) the novel is a special case. As a form it's so rich in explicit meaning, so intimately concerned with other minds, with relationships, and with human nature, and so extended too – tens of thousands of words – that the writer is bound to leave his or her personality behind on the page." (McEwan and Begley 100)

McEwan's ascendance, therefore, affects the late 1960s perception that the author is dead, and that the reader holds the ultimate power over the text: in *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*, McEwan proves that the power is ultimately held by the real author, as two novels that have dealt with issues concerning love, family, class, politics or war, inadvertently become texts about the powers of fiction and about the poignant role of authors and readers within such fictions. As Alghamdi mentions, this is due to the fact that he "proves himself to be alive and well, visibly pulling the strings of the narrative and demanding to be seen." (Alghamdi 91) Notwithstanding, despite the author's hold over the power of the text, McEwan makes sure to also compel an acknowledgement of the reader's importance over the text, giving rise to a new perception of authorship not fully contemplated by postmodern ideals.

As Booth mentions, there are different approaches to authorship, just as there are different approaches to the act of reading, and "[t]here is a sharp difference between authors who imply that we readers are essentially their equals in the imaginative enterprise, because we are embarked on the same quest, and those who suggest that we are either their inferiors or their superiors or that our path must be entirely different from theirs." (Booth, *The Company We Keep* 184) In this case, McEwan positions himself in the first instance, in that he does not treat his readers as lesser-than, making sure to bring to the surface the importance of both players in the creation of meaning.

The same could be argued of his treatment of trauma, as McEwan's sustaining of authorial power is undeniably linked to the use of the trauma narrative. While

metafiction is certainly that which allows him to experiment and play with the reader and with the basic notions of fiction, he makes a specific point in using traumatised subjects to be his inscribed authors. Without the traumatic dimension of the experience of both characters, as mentioned before, there would be no specific intent or purpose to be attributed to his narratives. Therefore, by exploring traumatic narratives and how the individual subject can overcome the traumatised state, McEwan shows that authors not only have intent in their creation of narratives, but also that the intent they attribute their stories with is meant to be equally received and perceived by audiences. Audiences, therefore, are not always allowed to create meaning, but rather sometimes must detect it within the confines of the fabric of the narrative. Meaning, ultimately is not a venture provided solely by the author, McEwan is fully aware that meaning "emerge[s] during the reading process" (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 35) and readers are, as just mentioned, in the same quest than the author.

Moreover, McEwan also shows and repossesses authority as author by creating a connection between *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth*. With it, readers must face the cognisance that texts not only may have intention, but they are inevitably linked to each other, and consequently to their authors. In 2009, before the publication of *Sweet Tooth* Sebastian Groes already mentions that "[t]he trajectory of McEwan's later work should be read as his increasing engagement with the canon of English literature." (Groes 4) Almost anticipating a far richer delving into his past in future endeavours, Groes also points out the links between McEwan's entire work and the influence earlier texts continue to exert on his later ones (Groes 7) something which will increase on McEwan's part in the following decade.

When reading *Sweet Tooth*, the reader may understand that by revisiting McEwan's own literary career, he is linking all his works to the same individual,

namely, his authorial persona. As Booth points out, "there is a *cumulative* character whom we infer as we read a second or third tale told by what we call the "same" teller." (Booth 150 emphasis added) With this instance of intertextuality, the reader is left to accept and assume that it *does* matter who is speaking, because texts are built from past literary history and its authors partake in creating literary tradition. These metafictional or intertextual procedures show "that the 'author' is a concept produced through previous existing literary and social texts" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 16). Thus, it could be argued that by linking both texts, and by creating such an intratextual web between them, himself, and the reader, McEwan is claiming his space in the literary canon, forcing readers to understand that all texts are connected and, most importantly, foregrounding a need to be carefully considered before being disregarded. Therefore, McEwan shows specific intention as well, not only in proving that the author is alive, but also in showing that his authorship is to be regarded distinctly, and attributed exclusively to himself.

As a matter of fact, this connection made allows for both of his texts to be 'open', rather than 'closed', as attributing authorial intention does according to Barthes. As Burke states, "[f]rom the point of view of interpretation, it matters little whether the author disappears into a transcendental annex or into the void: the text to be read is one in which the personality of the author is nowhere figured" (Burke 110), however, as has been exemplified, the personalities of Briony and Tom do figure in their texts, and not only that, McEwan's may do as well. Conclusions can be drawn about the kind of author McEwan wishes to be perceived as, given the fact that with the connections made he is clearly attempting to gather attention and attribution. Burke also points out that according to Barthes, "the discovery of the author's intentions is all too often used to close rather than open the interpretation of a text. For Foucault, too, the greatest

reductions reside here…" (Burke 109–10) nevertheless, as is being exemplified, it could be argued McEwan *opens* his texts for further interpretations when attributing authorship to them. Consequently, attributing an author to each narrative, the possibility for intention coming from the reader is not necessarily restrictive in every case. Booth understands that even when texts are left open, their readers will attempt to "close" them. He specifies that human "minds are unable to resist making sense of whatever data we encounter, even if they are in fact random (…) a totally open-ended work would leave a reader totally free to invent meaning, unengaged in any transaction with possibilities contained within the text." (Booth, *The Company We Keep* 62) While Briony and Tom are somewhat attempting to close their narratives so that they can only be interpreted the way in which they expect them to (as has been discussed above), McEwan's use of metafiction and intratextuality however, *open* the text, proving that the moment in which he decides so, his texts may become *multiple*. This leads to issues in which his choices in the ending of his texts lead to further implications for the reader, in that they monitor the reader's reception and reaction (as just mentioned, the reader will attempt to make sense of the ending) which will be explored in a section below, when discussing the effect of the re-reading paradox.

Nevertheless, as Booth continues to assert, the issue of leaving texts open or close for interpretation goes beyond Barthes' preoccupation with the possibility (or lack thereof) of providing interpretations for texts; Booth puts it thus: "… 'to be open' or 'to leave questions open' is rarely if ever an end in itself but rather *either a side effect or a means to some other end* (…) At its most profound, it serves a value that perhaps we could all embrace: genuine encounters with otherness." (Booth 69 emphasis added) McEwan's use of metafiction to enforce two open ended narratives, therefore, is a means to allowing readers with the possibility to encode their own readings into the text

as he provides open-endedness to texts that had, on the other narrative layer, been closed by the inscribed author. This way, McEwan participates in the exploration of different forms of authorship and different approaches to intention.

4.1.1 Ian McEwan, the Narcissistic Author

Much has been discussed regarding the rebirth of the author in this study, and as is being exemplified, one of my main conclusions is that McEwan intends to show the re-emergence of an author that is ultimately existent and quite powerful. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see *what* kind of author is being reborn. Is McEwan vying for the option to have the concept of the God-like author reinstated? Or is he, instead, attempting to redefine the figure of the author that was killed by Barthes (the God-like author) and show there are possibilities to keep that version of the author buried and give way for another side, or perhaps fragment, of the authorial identity? What kind of author is McEwan reclaiming?

McEwan is a part of a small circle of well-established authors in the contemporary British literary scene. Late in 2006, in a piece titled 'Welcome to Planet Blitcon' from the New Statesman, Ziauddin Sardar labelled McEwan, along with Martin Amis and Salman Rushdie, as part of the 'Blitcons', a group of authors who had "become international brands" (Sardar).[45] *Sardar* stated the three novelists seemed to dominate the literary scene with a certain mysticism attached to them. "When they speak, the world listens...", he claimed, asserting that the three novelists "speak not just through their fiction, but also via newspaper opinion pages, influential magazines, television chat shows and literary festivals…" In fact, these "[n]ovelists are no longer

[45] It is interesting to complement the reading of Sardar's piece by reading Robert McCrum's counter piece from *The Guardian*.

just novelists - they are also global pundits shaping our opinions on everything from art, life and politics to civilisation as we know it" (Sardar), further stating that the three authors also happen to have a political agenda to attend to. Granted, Sardar's piece dates from 2006, and arguably the contemporary British literary scene has changed in recent years, but it could still be ascertained that McEwan's presence and power over society were and continue to be strong enough for him to be considered one of the most influential writers in British society.[46]

His work having been repeatedly shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize (arguably the most influential award given to works written in English, one which he was awarded in 1998 for *Amsterdam*)[47], and his novels being generally and widely well received by critics and readers alike, McEwan has become a part of British culture, embroidered into its tapestry, the same way his texts could be said to have become part of the British literary canon. Whether he has a political agenda or not, whether his ideas are neoconservative (Sardar) or merely contemporary (McCrum) is not relevant for the present work; what is relevant, rather, is the importance that is given to his work. McEwan is widely read by British society and even more so nowadays, where he is growingly and widely adapted: his role in literature has also morphed into other media in recent years.[48] McEwan's persona, therefore, through the adaptation of his work into

[46] Suzanne Keen, for example, in *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (2001), places McEwan in a fourth generation of Contemporary British novelists, acknowledging that whatever is brought up during the 2000s (the year in which she makes such a claim), it is still likely that such fourth generation is expected to be producing work "whose experience of their nation has been conditioned by decolonization and a declining global status". (Keen 17) Further, in a profile for *The New Yorker* dating from 2009, titled "The Background Hum: The Art of Unease", Daniel Zalewski refers to McEwan as "England's national author" (Zalewski).

[47] His work has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1981, for *The Comfort of Strangers*, in 1992 for *Black Dogs*, in 1998 for *Amsterdam* (which, as mentioned, he was awarded), in 2001, for *Atonement* and in 2007, for *On Chesil beach*. *Saturday* (2005) was also longlisted for the award.

[48] McEwan is responsible for the writing of several scripts of his own novels (another of the ways in which McEwan doubles as an author and an interpreter of his own work), going on to become a movie-producer as well: Nine of his novels have been adapted into film, and so have a few of his short stories. In 2017 a total of three of his novels were adapted into both the small screen (*The Child in Time* directed by Julian Farino) and the big screen (*On Chesil Beach* directed by Dominic Cooke, and *The Children Act* directed by Richard Eyre), with McEwan playing a role as both

different forms of media, now transcends the literary milieu. His public self, be it in the forms of author, columnist, producer, screenwriter, or judge, is imbricated into the fabric of British culture.[49]

Moreover, to this day, he keeps producing works which question the basic foundations of literature (as Groes puts it, he has made "continued attempts at reinventing the novel form." (Groes 9)) and, arguably, literary criticism. At the start of his career, McEwan produced two short story collections (*First Love, Last Rites* (1975) and *In Between the Sheets* (1978)), which are particularly relevant for the work he has produced during the last decade. Such collections, together with his first novella, *The Cement Garden* (1978), gained him the nickname of Ian Macabre[50] due to the raw obscurity of the topics that dominated his texts. McEwan has come a long (and comfortable) way from such writings,[51] but he continues to experiment with notions of authorship, readership, politics, and genre in his writing. The ways in which he has attempted to provoke shock in his readership through the use of delicate topics has evolved throughout the decades. Withal, McEwan proves himself to be, time after time,

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producer and screenwriter for the latter two. Adaptations for *Enduring Love* (adapted in 2004), *The Innocent* (adapted in 1993) *The Cement Garden* (adapted in 1993), *The Comfort of Strangers* (adapted in 1990) and even for some of his short stories (such as "First Love, Last Rites" (adapted in 1997) or "Solid Geometry" (adapted in 2002) have also been conducted.

[49] As mentioned, not only has he had roles as executive producer for *On Chesil Beach* (2017) and *Atonement* (2007), and as associate producer for *Enduring Love* (2004), as of 2018 is a member of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. He has also recurrently written pieces for *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, as well as for *New Republic*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Observer* with topics ranging from his own work, to work on author authors, or climate change.

[50] This is a nickname that was given to McEwan for the sensitive and rather shocking nature of his early texts. As Aline Buzarina-Tihenea mentions, "[h]is early literature of shock (as the critic Ryan Kiernan labels it), the exploration of grotesque and disturbing themes (such as breaking social conventions, codes and taboos, incest-sado-masochism, rape, pornography and murder) challenge the precepts and determinations of society, questioning and then defying the restraints predetermined by sex and class, by politics, culture and gender." (Buzarina-Tihenea 59). Tony MicKibbin, in turn, attributes the nickname due to the "brilliance of his early stories appearing to lie in the capacity to combine depravity with innocence, and in an image structure that captured fragile terror." (McKibbin 1) For further thought, see Christina Byrnes' 'Ian McEwan – Pornographer or Prophet?', where the censorship issues he faced due to the nature of his texts are briefly recounted.

[51] Richard Pedot opens his article "Rewriting(s) in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" (2007) by stating that "[o]nce known as Ian Macabre or the Clapham Shocker, Ian McEwan now has critics and reviewers wonder whether he would not have gone soft with age." (Pedot 148)

not afraid of redefining his literary persona, just as he provides his texts with a fearlessness towards the impositions of literary convention.

As Mark Currie mentions in *Metafiction*, "...metafiction [should be seen] as a borderline discourse, as a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject." (M. Currie 2) Thus, McEwan's role in contemporary fiction is that of the author that morphs and shifts through time, and which allows his work to morph and shift through time as well, creating texts that double as fiction and criticism, inserting themselves into such a border, with the emergence of characters that double (and perhaps triple) as authors, readers, or critics.

It has been ascertained that McEwan's literary creation has a clear preoccupation with issues of trauma and the literary (albeit, not always connected), nevertheless, the exploration of the author figure is exclusive to *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* - his work prior, in-between and after both novels shows experimentation with genre and even narratorial voice, but to this day he has not yet embarked on an exploration of fiction the same way he does in both novels being inspected. The suggestion is that such act is not coincidental, but rather quite telling. With the writing of *Sweet Tooth*, McEwan generates a theory on authorship, one that originated in 2001 and culminated in 2012. This suggestion mostly stems from the fact that just as the coda for *Atonement* develops into a commentary on the nature of fiction, *Sweet Tooth* comes to be a commentary not exclusive to *Atonement* but also to McEwan's entire literary creation. Ksiezopolska puts it this way:

> while in *Atonement* the twist ending seems to entirely "unwrite" the story of the lovers, thus asserting the author's right to revise reality and then – on an afterthought – dismantle the careful edifice of fiction, *Sweet Tooth* flounces to excess the novel's intertextuality and thereby foregrounds the reader's entanglement in the textual web, simultaneously offering that reader the possibility to become the master spider in this pattern of deception. By

> studying the intertextual echoes in the novel, we are allowed to glimpse the fascinating process of fiction constantly remaking itself. (Ksiezopolska 416)

It is this key occurrence of intratextuality which cements McEwan's alleged view on authorship concurrently indicating that the author McEwan attempts to resuscitate is of a narcissistic nature. Why else point to his own literary production, and not elsewhere in the tradition?

Nevertheless, what is being suggested is that McEwan's rebirth of the author is one aware that authorship cannot be absolutist. As Burke argues, "…this is not at all the same thing as disputing the actuality or necessity of intention; rather, what is put in question is the absolutely determinative hegemony of intention over the communicative act." (Burke 140) While, as Alghamdi suggests, what McEwan does by resuscitating the author is to "protes[t] the death of the author by allowing him to infiltrate the narrative, drawing attention to both its truth and its fictionality" (Alghamdi 93) and that with that, McEwan is partaking in proving "himself to be alive and well, visibly pulling the strings of the narrative and demanding to be seen" (Alghamdi 91), what he is doing is not purely to replace one absolutist mission with another. In fact, what McEwan does is to "destroy a version of reality in order to create another one." (Alghamdi 93) In this way, McEwan's intention in his fiction is similar to what Burke suggests his own intentions to be in the exploration of the death of the author itself. Both aim to show that "the domination of intention over the textual process is to be rigorously refused, intention itself is not thereby cancelled but rather lodged within a broader signifying process." (Burke 140)

One of Burke's main aims in his work, and the main conclusion of his book is that in the end, Barthes, Derrida and Foucault's impressions on the death of the author are contradicted within their own work and oeuvre, something he calls a "belated

recognition of [their] critical blindness." (Burke 172) It would seem, therefore, that much of what postmodern criticism is based on (the death of the subject, the death of absolutes, the death of the author) can, under the own nature of the movement, be refuted. Ultimately, as Iser asserts, what "[m]odern art has shown us [is] that art can no longer be regarded as the representative image of such totalities, but that one of its basic functions is to reveal and perhaps even balance the deficiencies resulting from prevailing systems." (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 13) It is therefore not in killing the subject and the author that efforts should be placed, but in studying it/them, in inspecting them, in questioning them so they can be redefined appropriately. As Burke puts it, the kind of author being eradicated in the late 1960s is one possessed of the

> attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence, of being the first uncaused cause, purpose and end of the world [which] are all affirmed a priori of the Christian God: they inhere in his definition, without them He is not God" nevertheless, "we can, without contradiction, conceive of authors who do not issue 'single theological messages', who do not hold a univocal mastery over their texts" (Burke 25)

which is precisely the kind of author McEwan attempts to catapult.

Burke states that with "The Death of the Author", the focus was on eradicating a theocentric understanding of authorship, one which was overtly concerned with the "glorification of the author." (Burke 25) Notwithstanding, the author that should now be considered does not coincide which such ideals. In fact, quite the contrary, precisely due to such a process of reconsideration and scrutiny, if one thing can be ascertained is that the (post)modern world cannot accommodate an author operating under such absolutist tendencies, and that the subject cannot be regarded under such glories. McEwan, therefore, does not vie for the rebirth of the God-like author, but rather a more heterogenous one. In fact, in his exercise, he is not only giving importance to his authorship, but also to that of his inscribed authors (which differs from his, as will be exemplified below, mostly in their authorial intent). It could even be ascertained that

McEwan opts to put an end to the glorification of the author as he makes sure Briony and Tom both in their individual and authorial identities are not to be admired: they are not portrayed as necessarily 'good' human beings, and most of the actions they partake in in the name of literature are in fact, quite morally flawed. Briony and Tom are traumatised subjects which victimise themselves and hurt the people around them, simultaneously breaking their codes as authors, they are portrayed as selfish and self-absorbed, their narcissism and thirst for fame leading them to behave in questionable ways. They are, consequently, not necessarily portrayed as good human beings or as authors who are to be admired and glorified, but rather, as flawed human beings that are also flawed narrators and are to be somewhat reprimanded. In this way, what McEwan does is to ensure that "[t]he return of the author thus does not reopen the closed-casket case of his death…" (Burke 33) that is to say, that the returning author is one with many identities and forms. He shows the possibility that "[t]he author can be at once both dead and alive", that is, that it can be both God-like but reprimanded, and redefined (Burke 33). "The task here accomplished" as Burke goes on, "is that of returning the author to the house without shaking its foundations, quietly, inconspicuously, an author who can leave by the front door only if he enters from the back: the uncanniest of guests." (Burke 33)

McEwan himself reflects on his presence in his texts in several interviews, he states that "[his] point of departure was to look for de-socialised, distorted versions of [his] own existence. Many of those early stories were like dreams about [his] own situation: they carried only a little biographical content, but they bore the same structural relationship to [his] own existence that a dream night." (McEwan, Louvel, et al. 67) Musing that at the beginning of his writing career he was interested in finding "a fictional world that was socially, and even historically, disembodied. So these

characters carry with them something of [his] loneliness, as it was, and something of [his] ignorance of social texture, and something also of [his] longing for social texture, social connection." (McEwan, Louvel, et al. 69) However, he also shows awareness of the fact that his presence in the text could be easily misconstrued, understanding that "… if you open yourself up too much, you can be taken over. There are always people who want to take you over. [He believes] that there's a small indefensible core of your own selfhood which you have to hang on to at all costs." (McEwan, Louvel, et al. 74) He therefore acknowledges a muted presence in his oeuvre, and along with a clear disdain for postmodern thoughts on the death of Truth[52] he proclaims he does not "hold with the sort of postmodern relativist view that the only truth is the one an individual asserts. [He does] believe there are realities that await our investigation. In that sense [he's] an objectivist." (McEwan and Roberts 189)

Nevertheless, I would not suggest that given his muted presence in the texts he is vying for the idea of the biographic fallacy, in fact, quite the contrary, as in his statement on 'opening oneself too much' he clearly has no interest in positing all parts of his individual identity onto a text or in having his personal life being scrutinised. Rather, what he does is to attempt "to project not a godlike, dictatorial creator but rather a "human, all too human" authorial persona" who is also "willing to delegate part of his power to another entity, namely the engaged reader" (Walker 500) The reader he engages with, the reader which at the end of the day is the one bringing the author (and consequently McEwan) back to life, along with the critic (Burke 30), is directed not at his personal life but rather at his career. For instance, in *Sweet Tooth*, the focus is not on

[52] In interview with Ryan Roberts he states "Something rankles in me when people talk about "My truth." You must be more familiar with this in the universities than I am, especially in the world of literary theory. There's a strong anti-rationalist streak that I find intellectually repellent. I can't engage with it at all. That's one more reason why I find that I would rather read a cognitive psychologist, or an evolutionary psychologist, or a neuroscientist on human behavior, than I would, say, Jacques Derrida, Lacan, or Baudrillard." (McEwan and Roberts 189)

his personal biography but on his bibliography, on his literary career, and on aspects of his life that have to do with his literary production.[53]

As hinted at as well, if Foucault referred to the need to acknowledge that some authorship is linked to discourse, it could be argued McEwan is also attempting to portray his entire oeuvre as a form of discourse itself. Hence why in sections above, it was argued that McEwan's view of authorship seems to follow Foucault's ideology. It is by linking both texts with the same techniques and preoccupations, and by revisiting his past work in one of his novels, that he is able to connect both works under his name (despite the irony that in both texts he creates two very powerful inscribed authors). Foucault referred to the need to acknowledge the author's name and figure to categorise a group of texts, and by using intratextual procedures, what McEwan does is to precisely attribute himself with the power of creating a literary discourse. At the end of the day, if he is interested in invested readers, he needs to ensure they will be able to link and explore his work as a corpus. Thus reiterating that "faith in the oeuvre is nothing less than faith in the author, or in his signature at least, and the constants and correspondences thereby contracted. In absolutely minimalist terms, the author is that principle which unites the objects – whether collusive or discrete – that gather under his proper name." (Burke 35)

4.1.2 Ian McEwan and the Metafictional Twist

The metafictional approach has been discussed widely throughout the duration of this study, as it is the tool that allows McEwan to provide a commentary on the nature of authorship and readership and that ultimately marks the two cases studied to stand out

[53] Interestingly, McEwan does participate in the endeavour of endowing fictional characters with biographic traits in another of his novels, *Saturday* (2005). See "Zadie Smith Talks with Ian McEwan" (McEwan and Smith 121) and "A Conversation with Ian McEwan" (McEwan and Lynn 144).

from the rest of his work. It is the key device that allows him to rise as author, it is used to play with the power dynamic in the text and to engage the reader in the reading act, and ultimately, it is used to give importance to both authors and readers alike.

Ultimately, it is in the use of the metafictional method that McEwan holds power of his narrative by requiring specific actions to come from his readers: first, he forces readers to understand the only figure that can provide 'answers' to the text is McEwan himself, or rather, the exploration and understanding of McEwan; second, he forces readers to face the realisation that they have been participant, albeit inadvertently, in a literary 'game' which McEwan is conducting, one where he has been attempting at the manipulation and withholding of the 'truth' and attempting to 'keep' and 'restrict' meaning. McEwan is capable, thus, of changing and providing meaning for his texts long before they would be traditionally considered to be 'closed', as exemplified above, the reader must face that an author with such a power, is far more powerful than a 'ghost'. Lastly, he may be forcing the reader to understand that the only way to regain power in the process of creation is through partaking in an act of re-reading, hence manipulating the real reader's reality. In this, McEwan is showing concern not only for the rebirth of his own authorial figure, but also for the maintaining of the reader as co-creator of meaning, thus echoing Hutcheon's thoughts on reader involvement in metafiction, as she states "[p]ostmodern metafiction (...) posits a new role for readers: we are not simply to identify with characters, but to acknowledge our own role in co-creating the text being read. Almost like authors, readers must accept the responsibility for actively participating in the constructing of fictive worlds through words as we read." (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 27)

As hinted at above, this way, McEwan goes against the ideas inherent in "The Death of the Author", because in his texts the roles of both authors and readers are just

as prominent. Despite his character-author's intentions of holding possession over their texts and to keep the intent of their narratives, the reader is still a necessary presence within the text, which results in an evenly distributed presence of power amongst all players. McEwan himself admits to wishing to "incite a naked hunger in readers" (McEwan in Zalewski), which is why he creates two characters that are both authors and trauma survivors, and why he chooses to place the spotlight on his own literary creation. By doing so, and by allowing such narratives to transcend to the real world, McEwan is also providing a commentary on the nature of fiction, testing the reader in the process, concurrently providing an afterthought on literature as an essential aspect for the understanding of life.

As discussed previously, the power of McEwan's use of metafiction rests on the timing of the use of said technique. By introducing a metafictional twist at the end of the narrative, readers are left powerless in the construction of meaning, as they face the realisation that in reality, and despite their assigned role as readers, they do not have the power to decide over the meaning of the narrative. Timing here is key, as the reader has been allowed time and space to perform their role during the duration of the narrative, but they have it taken away at the very end, being thus forced to accept the outcome of the novel. However, not all power is lost. As referred to above, McEwan is vying for a reader who is considered to be on the same path of creation as the author, and therefore the implications of the act of re-reading should be considered, due to the fact that in these cases, they may grant readers the opportunity to understand what has taken place and redefine their reading experience. McEwan's use of metafiction, therefore, his "insistence on 'the constructed nature of fiction' serves to bring into question, if not outright repeal, the ethical import of narrative" (Head as qtd in O'Hara, "Briony's Being-For" 87) as what McEwan is doing is to also participate in a breaching of the

author-reader contract. Timing, here, affects the narrative further, because "[w]here the reader had trusted the narrative's insight into its reported events, he or she is forced, in a "postmodernist" gesture, to distrust the veracity of that same narrative" (O'Hara, "Briony's Being-For" 87). Thus, as O'Hara points out, McEwan's choice of metafiction, therefore, specifically "works to call into question a reader's investment in the narrative which, rather than transparently wedding text to world, openly admits to misconstruing things." (O'Hara, "Briony's Being-For" 87)

Furthermore, while the role of the reader is necessary, it does not possess the sole power over a text, as a variety of postmodern studies suggest. This circumstance is reinforced by the idea that the reader is presented, on both occasions, with a text that transcends the literary realm, as, with the codas of each novel, the reader is once more forced to come to terms with the idea that the only reason they are reading the novel in the first place is due to the acts contained and conducted by the characters and authors inside of the narrative's realm. Something that, inevitably, allows the novels to create a fictional world that transcends the fictional and has the power to alter reality.[54] At the end of both novels, therefore, because of metafictional uses, "…the relations between real life and representation are no longer clear, either within or beyond the fiction." (M. Currie 21)

The author, therefore, becomes a "dialectical figure, embodying both the production and reception of fiction in the roles of author and reader in a way that is paradigmatic for metafiction." (M. Currie 3) It would seem, consequently, that the much discussed death of the author encounters an impediment when an author operates using

[54] Mitrić puts forward the idea that while it should be openly acknowledged that fiction does not have the power to alter reality retroactively ("Briony's fiction, like the poetry about which Auden writes, "makes nothing happen": she can neither bring her sister and Robbie back to life nor achieve atonement through writing"), it can however create an effect on the reader ("[a]n obvious, if minor, case in point: if McEwan's novel made nothing happen, readers wouldn't feel crushed by the epilogue's disclosures.)" (Mitrić 734) She also states that "*Atonement* has the potential to shape reader's understanding of – and response to- the present", referring to Samuel Hynes in that "[t]o the degree that literature *creates* as well as *records* consciousness, it begins to exist when it enters history – when publication makes it a public reality." (Hynes as qtd in Mitrić 735)

metafiction, as it is inevitable for the real author to hold an intent over the text unbeknownst to other literary techniques. As Burke points out, "… the return *of* the author is as it inevitably and implicitly occurs in the practice of anti-authorial criticism (…) What follows then, under the rubric of the death of the author, is at one and the same time a statement of the return of the author … the concept of the author is never more alive than when pronounced dead." (Burke 7) Once more, postmodernism contradicts itself, in that at its very root (that of the disappearance of absolutes) it is the author who ultimately pulls the strings in most (if not all) of the techniques utilised in texts that are considered postmodern.

It was mentioned before that McEwan creates new genre breeds, that is mostly due to his use of metafiction, given that, as Currie points out, the device can be perceived "… as a borderline discourse, as a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject." (M. Currie 2) That is to say, with the use of metafiction, the novelist positions itself at a crossroads in that not only are they creating a fiction, they are also creating a commentary on the nature of fiction itself. Furthermore, whenever a narrative "assimilates critical perspective it acquires the power not only to act as commentary on other fictions, but also to incorporate insights normally formulated externally in critical discourse." (M. Currie 21)

According to Waugh,

> Metafictional novels (…) thus reject the traditional figure of the author as a transcendental imagination fabricating, through an ultimately monologic discourse, structures of order which will replace the forgotten material text of the world. They show not only that the 'author' is a concept produced through previous and existing literary and social texts but that what is generally taken to be 'reality' is also constructed and mediated in a similar fashion. 'Reality' is to this extent 'fictional' and can be understood through an appropriate 'reading' process. (Waugh, "What Is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things about It?" 51) .

In this case what makes McEwan's work innovative, especially in *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* is the fact that in the end, his metafictional trick does not work in rejection to the traditional figure of the author, as Waugh suggests. What McEwan does is to precisely contest the idea that a text that is fictional and that can accommodate several truths, a text that is aware of its fictionality with narrator figures that are aware of the ability of their work in intervening with fiction and with reality at the same time, can still hold a space for the traditional all-empowering version of the author rejected in recent decades. For that reason, the version of the author McEwan presents, is a reworking of the traditional emblem, and, unlike what Waugh proposes, the author figure presented by metafictional novels may be one that albeit not fulfilling all previously existing literary expectations, does possess the great majority of them, with the added element of the reader as a commodity. Waugh also mentions that "'[r]eality' is to this extent 'fictional' and can be understood through an appropriate 'reading' process." (Waugh, "What Is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things about It?" 51) In McEwan's novels, reality becomes fictional just as fiction becomes reality, and such dynamic is built through the process of reading *and* re-reading.

4.1.2.1 The Re-Reading Paradox

As Waugh states, "[s]ome metafictional novelists make the reader explicitly aware of his or her role as player" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 42): as mentioned previously, one of the consequences of the use of metafiction is that in the dislocation of the reader's understanding of the text, one of the ways in which the reader may find it possible to create meaning is by taking part in an act of re-reading. I would suggest one of McEwan's aims in his use of metafiction is precisely to compel such an act, and what is all the more interesting is that with his use of metafiction in *Sweet Tooth* he is also

participating in enforcing an act of re-reading that goes beyond the single text (he may be forcing readers to go back to his entire literary career, to re-visit it in order to have a fuller understanding of his work in *Sweet Tooth*). In a review for *Sweet Tooth* precisely titled "*Sweet Tooth* Rewards Rereading, not Reading", Leo Robson states that "McEwan's latest novel is a riddle, or perhaps a joke, in which a number of baffling, even boring, elements are clarified and justified by a final flourish. It rewards rereading, but not reading." (Robson) Robson, however, does not fully develop on the idea, albeit it is clear the act of rereading is rewarded due to the metafictional nature of the text referred to as a 'riddle' or 'joke' and described as 'baffling' and 'flourishing'. Similarly, when discussing *Atonement*, in "*Atonement*: A Case of Traumatic Authorship", Ana-Karina Schneider reflects on the fact that as McEwan "sets Briony's subjectivity firmly behind the narrative voice of the novel, he invites not only a re-reading of the text, but also a revaluation of the reader's construal of the characters." (Schneider 76) Aside from such texts, to my knowledge, studies on metafiction have not been conducted on exploring the possible association with the use of metafiction and its propulsion of the re-reading act. Hence, the nature of this subsection is almost purely speculatory on my part, as one of my findings in this study is precisely the conceptualisation of re-reading as an inherent need in the nature of metafiction.

In this way, McEwan, with his fiction and storytelling, is affecting the reality of the real reader not only on an emotional or intellectual level, but also on a specific level that transcends the metaphysical, as he incites the real reader to perform a specific action in reality. This is a reaction sought to stop the reader from moving on and instead constrain it to stay with the text, to attempt to understand the fabric from which it is composed. As Hutcheon mentions, metafictions "disrupt the codes that now *have* to be acknowledged. The reader must accept responsibility for the act of decoding, the act of

reading. Disturbed, defied, forced out of his complacency, he must self-consciously establish new codes in order to come to terms with new literary phenomena." (Hutcheon 39) This represents a change for the reader, but not a deprival of power, quite the contrary. As Hutcheon specifies, the reader is faced with the task of establishing new reading values and new forms to create reading paradigms. One of the paths the reader might take to establish such new reading codes might be in the act of re-reading. As mentioned above, Iser considers meaning is created precisely in the process of reading and he further posits that

> Meaning is the referential totality which is implied by the aspects contained in the text and which must be assembled in the course of reading. Significance is the reader's absorption of the meaning into his own existence. Only the two together can guarantee the effectiveness of an experience which entails the reader constituting himself by constituting a reality hitherto unfamiliar to himself. (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 151)

If meaning and significance can only be absorbed into the reader's existence through reading, when a reader is left dispossessed of the knowledge absorbed within the first reading act, only a re-reading act may be the possible solution to continue to create meaning. Hutcheon specifies that while "the reader of narcissistic fiction is indeed left with more than his usual share of freedom to create order, to build unities and relationships between parts [and that the] author lets the reader complete the "open" work", the author will continue to "retain some control". (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 152) That is because with the use of metafiction, I would argue, the author makes sure that "the reader never really creates literary meaning freely: there are codes and rules and conventions that underlie its production." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 152) It is my suggestion that one of such "codes and rules and conventions", is precisely the implementation of the re-reading performance. Once again referring to

Hutcheon, it would seem McEwan is precisely acting as an author that "seems to want to change the nature of literature by altering the nature of the reader's participation in it." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 150)

Furthermore, metafiction allows for both, authors and readers, to continue to examine the text – more so, metafiction becomes a game (organised by the author) which forces the reader to become more active in the reading act as well as in life. My intention in titling this study 'the rebirth of the author' is not to ostracise the figure of the reader, as a matter of fact, if anything, the novelist participating in metafictional strategies is interested in having these affect the reader's experience, which problematises the vision of the author as God-like, as it shows that the author can only hold power if some other player is present. Hutcheon highlights that the "act of reading, then, is itself, like the act of writing, the creative function to which the text draws attention..." (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 39) in that, metafictional narratives consider reading as a creative process just as predominant as the process of writing. (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 144)

As argued above, this so called 'rebirth' is a claim for the acknowledging and reclaiming of the existence of the author, one that can only be conducted if it is understood under the impression that the reader is also recognised in their role. This study has focused on the ways in which authors *need* to have their experiences and narratives interpreted in specific ways, in the ways in which some authors might *need* of the writing act, and of the *reading* act to overcome situations that have to do with their individual and authorial identities. In these cases, "[t]he reader must work to decipher the text as hard as the writer did to cipher it". (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 144) In the cases at hand, the reader must work to put together such intentions, the reader must decode and decipher what drives Briony Tallis, Tom Haley and even Ian McEwan to

write such texts, and consequently, in that process, not only do such authors rise, so do their readers.

Texts like McEwan's, in their use of metafiction, create a paradox for the reader. As Waugh states, they "brin[g] the reader up against the paradoxical realization that normally we can read novels only because of our suspension of disbelief. Of course we *know* that what we are reading is not 'real', but we suppress the knowledge in order to increase our enjoyment." (Waugh, *Metafiction* 33) This paradox is reinforced precisely because in the reading acts presented in this study, the reader is forced to acknowledge there is a possibility this suspension of disbelief may not even be effective: reality and fiction are intertwined in a way in which the text seems to hold answers that affect our behaviours as readers. In this way,

> metafictional novels simultaneously strengthen each reader's sense of an everyday real world while problematizing his or her sense of reality from a conceptual or philosophical point of view. As a consequences of that metafictional undermining of the conventional basis of existence, the reader may revise his or her ideas about the philosophical status of what is assumed to be reality… (Waugh, *Metafiction* 33–34)

Consequently, the only position the reader can find itself in, is to turn back to the text to attempt to understand what has taken place, and as mentioned above, to be able to hold possession of the text's intention. What is being suggested, therefore, is that with metafiction's attempted and assumed stipulation of the re-reading act, power is given simultaneously to readers and authors alike. McEwan, as real author, has the power to force the real-life action of re-reading, of re-evaluating the text, while the real reader is given the opportunity to re-evaluate their own reading experience and hence be able to create meaning and attribute intention to the text. In the re-reading act, the reader might simply re-evaluate their own reading experience, understanding what the author's intention was, and understanding their own process of reading and creation of meaning,

or they might, alternatively, create new meanings. This could, in turn, become a further act of transposition, in that the text that is being re-read might become an entirely new text when read anew.

In acts of re-reading, interestingly, the individual is facing something that is quite familiar (a text previously visited and read) but under different terms, the reader's history and intertextual knowledge have changed, which means that the reading experience can never be the same as the first. In the cases of novels containing metafiction, this issue becomes even more complex: by being able to rediscover the narrative and its different layers with a heightened knowledge of both the narrative and the workings of literature, the text has the possibility of becoming multiple, and it can be given further meaning by the reader (who has first given it one meaning, and upon a second visiting, another). As Pastoor argues, and as has been exemplified throughout this study, both *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* present a redistribution of power within the text, so it should be noted that "the power we still often attribute to the author, and that authors, like Briony, attribute to themselves, is in reality something they share with their readers. That redistribution of power might not deprive the author of all his or her authority (…) but it does alter and modify that relationship in ways that some postmodern theorists have drawn our attention to." (Pastoor 305)

Ultimately, re-reading is a powerful tool and should be key in creation, as it awards both authors and readers with the power of re-defining texts, showing that texts are not closed but rather open, once more proving Barthes' proclamation that in finding the intention of a text renders it sealed and contained is quite incorrect. As a matter of fact, what McEwan does in his use of metafiction is to simultaneously attribute intention to his texts as he gives further 'homework' to his readers, allowing them to understand that just as he has been able to revisit his own literary career, reshape his

short stories and create after-lives for his texts and characters, so can (and so should) the reader. By attributing intention to his authors and his texts, what McEwan does is to drive the reader to understand that texts are *not* to be easily consumed and forgotten, as mentioned in the first sections of this study, but quite the opposite, he allows his texts to be blank canvases, which can be revisited by both himself, his inscribed authors, and his readers. Notwithstanding, it is McEwan the figure which orchestrates such a rebirth, hence the title of this study. It is McEwan who pulls the strings so the reader is forced to evaluate his texts in ways they might not evaluate others'. It is McEwan who chooses to reuse his previous work and his previous techniques so that astute and readers familiar with his work may create different meanings than other readers. It is McEwan who masterminds the workings of his texts and anticipates the reactions the real reader might have, enforcing a different ending to what is expected from his narratives. Consequently, despite his acceptance of the value of the reader, he is still capable of rising as an all-mighty and God-like author, albeit one renewed and reshaped to contemporary needs. As exemplified above, he certainly seems to drive away from the biographic fallacy, the answers the reader might seek are not in his public persona, but rather ingrained in his texts and his inscribed authors. McEwan shows that the answer, therefore, is in literature.

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