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**IAN MCEWAN'S LATER FICTION**

**Tereza Němcová**

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- Ellam, Julie: Ian McEwan's "Atonement", Continuum 2009
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## ABSTRACT

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The aim of this undergraduate thesis is to analyse three novels from a contemporary, British author, Booker Prize winner Ian McEwan. The works chosen are written over a decade and include two novels, *Atonement* (2001) and *Enduring Love* (1997) and one novella *On Chesil Beach* (2007).

The thesis consist of four parts. The first three parts are the most extensive and deal with each of the books separately, starting with *Atonement*, afterwards there is *Enduring Love* analysis and finally the study of *On Chesil Beach*. The most important features of the novels and the message they relay to readers are divided into subchapters. Each analysis concentrates on narrative techniques, unreliable narrator and point of view, along with another significant aspect of the novels.

The final chapter presents common themes which connect these three books together, such as inevitability, anticipation, decision, misunderstanding and conflict, illustrated through examples from the novels.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN ATONEMENT .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION .....	3
1.2 (MIS)INTERPRETATION AND UNRELIABILITY .....	4
1.3 INTERTEXTUALITY .....	6
1.4 THE STYLE.....	7
1.5 ATONEMENT THROUGH NARRATION .....	8
<b>2 REASON AND INSTINCT SEARCH FOR ENDURING LOVE .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 SCIENCE VERSUS LOVE .....	11
2.2 JOE'S UNRELIABLE NARRATIVE AND OBSESSION .....	13
<b>3 A DREAM MISUNDERSTOOD ON CHESIL BEACH .....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 NON-COMMUNICATED EXPECTATIONS .....	19
3.2 NARRATIVE TURNS .....	20
<b>4 COMMON THEMES.....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 INEVITABILITY AND ANTICIPATION.....	25
4.2 (FATAL) DECISION .....	25
4.3 MISUNDERSTANDING AND CONFLICT.....	27
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>31</b>



## INTRODUCTION

Ian McEwan is a contemporary British novelist and screenwriter. He was born to a family of an army officer and he spent some time in the Far East, Germany and North Africa<sup>1</sup>. He became known for his rather shocking choice of topics, usually taboos or perverse themes, described in very thorough even scientific detail, earning him a nickname 'Ian McAbre', especially for his first two novels *The Cement Garden* in 1978 and *The Comfort of Strangers* in 1981. Later he stated that his first books were an attempt to oppose the typical prose of that day<sup>2</sup> and also might have been expressing his fears from growing up, his 'terror of not making full or rich emotional relationships'<sup>3</sup> (for Phil Daoust, *Guardian*) and he settled on narrations where the horror is more subdued, but present nevertheless. Kiernan Ryan calls it 'the art of unease'. The truth is that the reader finds very often that he or she is very apprehensive towards the outcome of the stories. Although the motives are usually dark and disturbing, the writing has a certain typical style and it is very articulate and captivating. Readers may discover that even though they find the story appalling or disgusting, they read on because they are caught in McEwan's net of eloquence and mastery of writing.

His winning of the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1998 for *Amsterdam*, is the most significant of many awards he has obtained for his novels. Several others were shortlisted for the Booker Prize, including *The Comfort of Strangers* in 1981, *Atonement* in 2001 and a novella *On Chesil Beach* in 2007, and he was awarded a CBE in 2000<sup>4</sup>.

McEwan's topics concentrate on characters being exposed to distressing, extreme or unexpected situations, he usually drives them to make a decision and then face the consequences. In majority of his novels we can observe his dealing with sexual relationships, often perverted or at least in some way out of normal. His recent works focus also on current social-political state of affairs and how they can influence the lives of us all.

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Based on the information found on

<sup>1</sup> <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/ian-mcewan#>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/12/ian.mcewan>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.notablebiographies.com/newsmakers2/2004-Ko-Pr/McEwan-Ian.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/ian-mcewan#>

Very important in McEwan's novels is the role of a narrator. Typically he lets the audience see the story from different points of view, regularly the narrator draws the readers so deep that they feel and might even think like the character him or herself but on the other hand there is no narrative convention that Ian McEwan would be afraid to breach or break, so inevitably, occasionally the readers have to be prepared for even rougher awakenings than they expected.

This thesis deals with three of Ian McEwan's novels written in the span of ten years, starting with *Enduring Love* (1997), then *Atonement* (2001) and finally *On Chesil Beach* (2007). The thesis analyses each novel separately to present the most interesting aspects, especially the narrative, point of view, author's eloquence and also how the story itself influences the narrator and makes him or her unreliable, and in the final chapter it concentrates on the common themes in those three works, such as inevitability, anticipation, the role of decision and misunderstanding and conflicts.

*Enduring Love* is a story about dangerous stalking and how surprisingly small interaction can cause an upheaval in somebody's life. There are several very promising turns in narrative throughout the book and also the role of decision has its part in the story.

*Atonement* might be considered an Ian McEwan's masterpiece, even though it did not obtain the Booker Prize, it is much discussed work. It follows a young girl with an ambition to become a writer, who living in a world of her own makes a decision that changes not only her life, but lives of many others forever. The narrative shifts to different people to an unexpected conclusion.

*On Chesil Beach* is a novella about a young, just-married couple facing the wedding night, both having different expectations, hopes and desires. Their inability to talk about their differences leads to decisions which would have serious effect on their future. The narrative is presented from both points of view.

The thesis aims to explore the narration techniques used and the common themes of the novels. The opinions presented are supported by citations from renowned critics and other academic works, listed on the reference page.

# 1 THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN ATONEMENT

## 1.1 *Subjective Perception*

According to Brian Finney (2002), *Atonement* demonstrates the frailty and unreliability of the fictional world and what possibilities and dangers it offers to the author and the audience. Pilar Hidalgo (2005) also points out the dangers of interpretation of what one sees, which can always differ from how the others perceive the same situation. The varied perception along with the attempt to describe the scenes from different points of view is one of the most profound elements of the novel.

The main character in Part I, Briony, is a girl of thirteen, seeing the world in accordance with her own imagination. She is obsessed with control and order, all her possessions have a specific place in her room and she is the one who directs this universe a fact also revealed in her wondering about the role of a narrator in a story where she holds all the control in opposition to a play where so many things depend on other people who can change the lines or even the meaning, this thought leads her to abandon the play immediately (*Atonement*, 37). She has a ‘passion for secrets’ (*Atonement*, 5) but while not having any, she is desperate to invent at least a story which contains a secret.

She considers herself to be a writer, always in her head in the stream of thoughts and associations and also pondering about a narrative, asking a question whether describing herself as a main character is inevitable (*Atonement*, 6) and in conclusion it becomes clear that her characters are herself and when she could not play them in a performance of the play, they are lost to her (*Atonement*, 14). Briony's family seems to think that she has a certain ‘narrative spell’ (*Atonement*, 7), a knack for expressing what she wants. The only thing that matters for her is writing, when she witnesses the Fountain Scene she is more concerned about the story, how would she write it, as soon as that she visualises a three-point-of-view description, concentrating on the fact, that after the encounter when the participants leave, all that is left is a patch of wet grass drying up quickly and when all the signs that something happened vanish, she could write anything she wanted about it, she thinks about the elusiveness of the truth. Brian Finney (2002) writes that ‘[n]arration is an act of interpretation.’ Briony can interpret the fountain scene any way she likes, when there is nothing left than the spot of wet grass. The truth would then be the thing she writes. She wonders about all these things before considering what the encounter might have meant, even though the meaning grows in importance in due

course. All this defines her character and later maybe explains although not forgives her behaviour.

The focal character changes in the novel, but the narrator is always the same, as the reader learns in the end. These changes in focus are there to distinguish the narrative from the realist novels which employ an omniscient narrator and also they are enabling Briony to make amends by trying to identify with the feelings of other characters, something she was not able to do when she was thirteen and because of her misunderstanding, she destroyed her life along with at least two others.

The key aspect of McEwan's works is to imagine how one would feel when being someone else, that the stories are 'about showing the possibility of what it is like to be someone else. [. . .] Cruelty is a failure of imagination.' (McEwan in Kellaway 2010, Finney 2002). The third person narrator changes to first person in the last part of the book, London 1999, where the reader finally finds out, that the whole novel was actually written by Briony and some parts of it are not true. According to Phelan (2005) Briony's atonement resides in her aptitude of imagining the feelings of others, in other words she finally finds the empathy she so significantly lacked when she was a child.

## ***1.2 (Mis)interpretation and Unreliability***

Misconceptions are the central point of Part I of the book. All the main characters are confused at least once to presume something that proves to be a wrong impression, for example, Cecilia's misconception about her feelings towards Robbie. She thinks the unease between them to be because of the difference in class, realizing only later that she was in love with him (Hidalgo, 2005). According to Finney (2002) after series of misinterpretations from various characters who mistake actions of others, McEwan indicates that the reader should be wary not to misinterpret the narrative him or herself. The most serious misconception with awful consequences would be Briony's observation of the Fountain Scene and her fitting of the circumstances to suit her 'story', even though she does not think she is telling lies at that time. She sometimes makes the reader to realize the fact of her being the author more visibly, with her flash-forward remarks, as McEwan said, "I sometimes feel that every sentence contains a ghostly commentary on its own processes." (McEwan, Begley, 2002). When going to visit Cecilia in Part III of the book, Briony admits feeling distance from her real self, when she takes the journey to her sister's

flat, like she was not really there. Although the reader does not know it at that point of the novel, the visit never actually happened and the author was perhaps hinting the invention of this particular event. Phelan (2005) explains: 'the historical Briony returns to the hospital while her ghostly persona continues her wish-fulfilling journey to Cecilia and Robbie' (*Atonement*, 334).

McEwan prepares his ground to make the surprising revelation of the novel being Briony's invention by some hints, for example Robbie's last words in Dunkirk in Part II are: "I promise, you won't hear another word from me," which is a warning for the reader and also Briony's 'ghost' mentioned above is another indication, that the reader should not be relying on the story too much.

Finney (2002) claims that thirteen-year-old Briony is not capable to distinguish between the reality and the fiction she has read and it shapes her reaction and 'reading' of the situations. The fiction determines her life. McEwan as the author tries to persuade the readers that all their lives are shaped by literature. That nobody can escape the influence of the books they have read, all their thoughts and views and the way they see the world is because of the experience of the world they obtained from literature. This actually leads Briony to read a letter sent to her sister by Robbie, an act for which she is briefly ashamed but soon those sentiments are forgotten because she is convinced that her sister needs her help. Finney (2002) thinks that after reading Robbie's unfortunate letter, she decides that her sister is in danger and she is the only one who can save her, this decision puts her straight into the centre of the story which was not hers in the beginning and it suits her. Because of her obsession with order she is desperate to frame Robbie as the offender, to serve the 'symmetry' (*Atonement*, 168). James Phelan (2005) explains that Briony's accusation of Robbie, even though she did not actually see him originates in her belief in the story she has been concocting in her mind. She confesses to be strangely 'elated' when she feels the story 'writing itself around her' (*Atonement*, 166) not realizing that she is about to make the gravest mistake of her life, craving the story to unravel. In Briony's opinion there is no other possible culprit, after what information she acquired about Robbie that day, when judging it from her position of inexperience with adult behaviour, and also her innocence, Robbie for her is a "maniac" and only a "maniac" could rape Lola. For her the sequence of events is quite logical, has an order and symmetry, she does not need any other, visual, proof.

On the other hand, while the narrative recognizes Briony's guilt and accuses her of the lie, it also suggests that the readers' judgement of her should not be too harsh (Phelan, 2005). Brian Finney (2002) states: 'Forcing life to conform to the aesthetic orderliness of art can have actual tragic consequences.' Briony would have all her life to ponder about that. In the end she tries to atone for her crime with a help of fiction when fiction was the original source for her accusations (Finney, 2002). To this Phelan (2005) adds 'the novelist power is also her limitation'. Her inventions, though being an attempt to make amends cannot undo the things she has done in reality. Briony is desperate to confess her guilt and by 'attempting the impossible demonstrate the sincerity and depth of her desire to atone'.

### ***1.3 Intertextuality***

Powerful role in the novel is assigned to intertextuality, a fact made clearer only by the end of the novel.

Pilar Hidalgo (2005) and Brian Finney (2002) both draw attention to the abundant allusions in *Atonement*, but while Hidalgo (2005) sees the intertextuality as the part of 'rich verbal texture of the novel' which 'engages the reader's literary memory,' Finney (2002) perceives it as a part of warning and 'guide' that McEwan provides for the readers, not to take the wrong way of understanding the novel as a classic realist one. These allusions 'act as a continuous reminder that the entire book is the final literary artifact of Briony, a professional author' (Finney, 2002). According to Hidalgo (2005), Finney (2002) and McEwan himself, the excerpt from *Nothanger Abbey* which opens the novel, shows the way how to read the book. A reminder of Catharine Morland's dialogue with Henry Tilney (finally alluded as the name of the hotel into which the Tallises' house was transformed), that it is no good to confuse stories for reality. McEwan himself calls *Atonement* 'my Jane Austen novel' (Kellaway, 2010) a statement accented by the fact, that Jane Austen was the first author to introduce the presentation of the characters' feelings by the third person narrator (Hidalgo, 2005). Hidalgo (2005) offers also *Atonement's* allusions to Mansfield Park in the motif of the country house and the play rehearsals which do not lead to actually delivering the play. The Tallises' home is only an act itself, it is a 'fake' probably to reflect that the life the family is living is only a pose, the most profound symbols of this are the abandoned temple and the painting in the dining room, which was bought to represent the history of the family and in fact does not have any connection with it.

## 1.4 The Style

Both Pilar Hidalgo (2005) and Brian Finney (2002) agree that the style of the four parts of the book varies. Part I narration resembles more the modernist novel influenced also by Virginia Woolf, because Briony herself claims the style to be the only way to write when she is eighteen, but later when instructed by Cyril Connolly, she adds the plot and characters, nevertheless there remain certain features of the stream of consciousness method. In Part II the structure of the sentences changes they are shorter to mirror the fact of war terrors, more suitable for the images described. The point of view is Robbie's, the structure serves also to depict how he and his goals had changed. For this ironic purpose there can be found some allusions (Hidalgo, 2005), like his remembering Malvolio's lines from the *Twelfth Night*: "Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes," he first thought of those words when he decided to study medicine, before the war and before the incident (Finney, 2002).

Trying to categorize the narrative style of the novel David K. O'Hara (2010) observes that McEwan tries to establish 'ethical complex' connecting the work with the world and readers and by quoting Dominic Head (2002) thinks that postmodernist novels prevent 'moral and emotional function of narrative'. O'Hara (2010) furthermore claims, that with *Atonement* McEwan is leaving the pigeonhole, while retaining certain qualities of postmodernist techniques of 'self-consciousness', 'without being particularly postmodernist about it'.

Although O'Hara partly agrees when Amy J. Elias (1994) who writes that the 'Traditional Realism' aims to create similar world as the real one, while 'postmodernist Realism' is more an imitation of reality, realizing the impossibility to summarize 'society's conflicting values', he feels that McEwan's imitative representation of the real world is distinctly varied from postmodernist metafiction (O'Hara, 2010) and that makes him one of the most significant writers to re-invoke connection 'between morality and the novel' and that by 'innovation [he] can embrace tradition' (Head, 2007).

The 'mimesis' is the way to reveal things already in existence in 'light of what is not yet (but is potentially)' and 'dialogical and *ethical* relationships between selves-and-others that are inherent [...] in the novels of Ian McEwan' (O'Hara, 2010). James Phelan (2005) also feels the role of ethics is important because 'individual narratives explicitly or more often implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgments'.

[E]thical judgments in narrative include not only the ones we make about the characters and their actions but also those we make about the ethics of storytelling itself, especially the ethics of the implied author's relation to the narrator, the characters, and the audience (Phelan, 2005)

Claudia Schemberg (2002) explains that McEwan's characters aspire to relate themselves to the world through creating their story from what the world offers them and O'Hara(2010) concludes that in *Atonement* McEwan presents a way to 'bring us imaginatively nearer to others' and realize 'what narrative *can do* but, in a self-justifying manoeuvre, what it might also be used *for*.'

### ***1.5 Atonement through Narration***

James Phelan (2005) together with O'Hara (2010) perceives *Atonement* as 'self-conscious, self-reflecting' novel.

Phelan (2005) introduces two levels of narrative. At one level a narrative is an account of things that happened. 'Something that happened' influences the reader's 'understanding' of 'unreliable narration'. On second level the narrative explores not only the change in characters and situations but also how the readers are 'developing responses to the characters' changes'. He observes that 'readers often judge characters' judgements' because the charters make them as a part of the narration. (Phelan, 2005)

A distinct feature of McEwan's later novels is suspension, creating an atmosphere of apprehension and highlighting it more than subduing by shifting the point of view to the future without revealing the details, only to confirm that something bad is inevitably about to happen and there is no knowing when or what it would be, like 'within half an hour Briony would commit her crime' (*Atonement*, 156). The atmosphere of unease is palpable.

Ian McEwan also uses some motifs to evoke certain images connected with certain people. For example Lola and Paul Marshall's scenes are always near a building resembling a Greek temple, as a constant reminder of the crime that happened by the Greek temple on the Tallises' grounds (Finney, 2002). Also the bullying scene in Dunkirk contains repetition of Briony's feelings when she was remembering the accusation, the will



to please the crowd (*Atonement*, 252), and there is no turning back on what was started, no matter how much anyone would want that.

Brian Finney (2002) feels that Briony's novel is a way to enable Cecilia and Robbie, whose lives she destroyed by her confusing fiction for reality, to stay together on the pages of her fictional novel forever. But James Phelan (2005) explains on the example of the final performance of Briony's first play that it is not only a circle closed, but it also shows that she hasn't changed in her perception of the world, she still seeks the happy-ending, having romantic notions on what a good story should be like, when these notions were the original source of her blaming Robbie.

Had she been more interested in realism then, she would have required far more evidence before fingering Robbie. Had she been more interested in realism here, she would have followed through on revealing the grim consequences of her transgression. Her failure to do that, in a sense, is to turn away from her quest to atone. (*Atonement* 332, Phelan, 2005)

Phelan (2005) claims that Briony had a chance to atone, she desired so much, in reality instead of in the novel. To reveal hers and Lola and Paul Marshall's crime publicly, but she had not done so, not even for clearing Robbie's name.

[T]he best we can say about Briony's efforts to atone through her novel are much like her efforts during the transgression: her intentions are good but her execution leaves a lot to be desired. (It is also possible to judge her even more harshly, as seeking the pleasure of having atoned without having done so.) (Phelan, 2005)

He goes even further in suggesting that McEwan himself is trying to make amends for his deception on readers' trust and expectations:

[W]e need to ask whether McEwan is speaking directly through her about his own narrative as well, since that narrative both involves its own transgression and explores the possibility of atonement. (Phelan, 2005)

Phelan (2005) observes that 'the relation between art and experience' is showed in Briony's structuring her novel as postmodern, while McEwan undermines this perception by adding the surprising ending, creating a novel inside a novel. Instead of avoiding, in Briony's words "the bleakest realism" McEwan puts the reader in the very position underlined by the reader's false hope of that there was a happy-ending (which the reader secretly craves) after all. But there is none, so he 'makes us feel the bleakness' fully.

In the end Briony confesses that her atonement 'was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all.' (*Atonement*, 372)

How can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? (*Atonement*, 371)

There is no one to apply to for forgiveness. Finally she states, that her attempt at atonement was:

A stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them in the end. I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me. Not quite, not yet. (*Atonement*, 372)

## **2 REASON AND INSTINCT SEARCH FOR ENDURING LOVE**

As in *Atonement* (2001), *Enduring Love* (1997) is narrated from the point of view of various characters. The main narrator is Joe Rose, middle-aged successful writer of popular neo-Darwinian theories, the reader also experience the point of view of his wife Clarissa Mellon, and sometimes the audience is even presented with Joe's description through Clarissa's eyes. One more point of view is that of Jed Parry, a psychically disturbed extremely religious stalker of Joe's who claims to be passionately in love with him.

### ***2.1 Science versus Love***

The novel opens with widely appreciated first chapter where a balloon accident takes place and a man dies. Typically for McEwan the chapter is brimming with suspension to create unease and confidence that something bad is about to happen. Apart from describing the accident in highly persuasive manner, the reader gets to know Joe's opinions on human behaviour in moments of crisis and might even be persuaded that there is a scientific explanation for almost everything, for example when he tries to genetically and biologically describe the reason why the attempt to save the balloon ended badly and what does it say on human nature. That is of course a point Joe is trying to make throughout the book, that the straightforwardness of science and facts is superior to chaotic "labyrinth" of feelings and love. McEwan's point, however, appears to be quite different.

According to Jonathan Greenberg's work *Why Can't Biologists Read Poetry?: Ian McEwan's Enduring Love*, McEwan proposes a peaceful cooperation of 'the sciences and the humanities' and the novel presents a discussion of neo-Darwinism by 'series of interrelated conflicts between scientific, literary, and religious worldviews' (Greenberg, 2007). But rather than offering an opinion about 'validity of neo-Darwinism' itself, it observes characters in critical events of their lives and thus explores their differences in their view of the world, dependent on their personalities. The novel engages in 'important neo-Darwinian themes' by arguing 'sexual fidelity, childbearing, self-deception and the power of narrative' (Greenberg, 2007). The characters' beliefs are showed in perspective with what they actually want. McEwan explains 'necessary connection between the characters' intellectual positions and their emotional investments' (Greenberg, 2007).

In the novel, Clarissa's and Joe's different approaches to the world represent the topics of conflict between science and literature, between 'reason and emotion, nature and culture'. While Joe represents the neo-Darwinian approach, Clarissa represents the view that scientific explanation of things lacks value and does not count with love, claiming that neo-Darwinism is "rationalism gone berserk" and "new fundamentalism" (*Enduring Love*, 75) and she feels that there is almost no difference between the "new fundamentalism" of Joe's neo-Darwinism and of Jed Parry's Christian extremism, when Joe always tries to deny something which is a blind faith in the obscure. The paradox is that Clarissa's criticism towards neo-Darwinism that it 'has forgotten its origins in the instincts' and 'transmutes into a kind of blindness or even madness' is exactly what Joe does not believe in (Greenberg, 2007). McEwan says:

Even for atheists, the question of faith has to be an issue of importance. I regard irrational belief as being the essence of faith. It's also an enduring quality of being human--perhaps even written into our natures. No amount of science or logic will shift it. (McEwan, *Random House Interview*)

However, *Enduring Love* shows such extremist faith is maniacal and destructive not only to people who believe in that way, but also to those concerned or connected with them. It is suggested, that this fact applies both for Joe Rose and for Jed Parry.

McEwan successfully employs the characters to represent the conflict without actually siding with any of them. The more important fact for him is the realisation 'that there is a conflict: science and literature are antagonists and Darwinism somehow threatens the values of the literary critic' (Greenberg, 2007).

Besides the conflict resolving from the tragic events when Clarissa does not believe that Joe is stalked by Jed Parry, the narrative shows another conflict on deeper level, as Carbonell (2010) agrees with Greenberg (2008), an ongoing struggle between Reason and Instinct. Clarissa is a literary critic and professor of literature at university, her area of expertise being the poet John Keats and she searches for his unknown but possibly written love letters. Joe, on the other hand, has a degree from science and believes in it completely, he is even jealous of Keats at some points, which illustrates another clash of this pair, Clarissa's demand of a written proof of love, such as Keats wrote to his lover, something

that Joe is not capable of, so in the end Greenberg (2007) suggests that Joe's birthday gift to Clarissa (the rare poetry book by Keats) should relay the written message of love which Clarissa wants and he is not able to do himself and because of that he turns for help to Keats towards whom he really feels jealousy and resentment.

Nevertheless, Joe aptly observes that their conflicts are "really" about something else, they 'result less from logic than from unspoken, even unconscious, motives', in other words from the fact that they do not have any children. This fact endangers 'the endurance of their love' (Greenberg, 2007), and also the neo-Darwinist approach claiming that sexual relationship exists only to produce progeny. 'The Darwinist account of love' resounds in the title of the novel. The conflict of love and reason is in fact a question whether the love can survive without producing a child and care for it together. The dispute then, according to Greenberg (2007) is in vain because in reality 'feelings and values originate in the same basic motives for survival and reproduction on which Darwin and his sociobiological successors put such great emphasis.'

## ***2.2 Joe's unreliable narrative and obsession***

Robyn Padwick (2006) observes in her work that *Enduring Love*, although it is not as favoured by literary critics as *Atonement*, 'illustrates the way real violence serves as a form of psychic violence', because the 'novel is concerned with the construction of a narrative intended to deal with trauma', offering one possible beginning out of many, which is represented by Joe pondering the horrible events all over again and again, and trying to precisely analyze where the story began. But he is aware that his story is 'dependent on the beginning he chose.' Greenberg (2007) partly agrees with this statement that one of the main themes of *Enduring Love* is the aim of fiction to 'structur[e] the way reality is understood.' Curtis D. Carbonell (2010) sees the topic of "enduring love" as one of the most profound in the novella. Joe's description of the beginnings of his and Clarissa's love just as the story begins is the first of many resurfacing recurrences.

[T]he concept of enduring love is explored via the three main characters: 1) Joe and his fight to maintain his relationship with Clarissa, 2) Clarissa and her study of Keats's enduring love of Fanny Brawne, and 3) Jed Parry, the evangelical erotomaniac and his absurd insistence that Joe has fallen in love with him during the balloon incident and that god has ordained their amorous union. (Carbonell, 2010)

The first chapter begins with the ballooning accident, where Joe participates in an attempt to save a little boy caught in the balloon basket. Nevertheless the attempt is not successful and in the end a man, John Logan, dies. Since that Joe is trying to cope not only with the horrific experience but also with Jed Parry's stalking and distrust he finds on every side, especially on Clarissa's who should be the closest and most trusting person to him. When asked why he puts his characters through such sufferings, McEwan answered for his Random House interview: 'Moments of crisis or danger represent a means of exploring characters--the strengths and defects of personality--while at the same time offering a degree of narrative interest.'

The novel is written in present mixing with the past in flashbacks (Padwicki, 2006) and the narrative is supported by descriptions of places, which according to Petr Chalupský (2012) serve as a symbolic connection of events in the characters' lives. For example the city and the house of flats where Joe lives is 'a humanistic Enlightenment symbol of rational reason, scientific progress and creative human endeavour' and the imperfections on the house, Chalupský (2012) feels, hint the events to come, "peeling white" of Joe's house is a symbol of 'vulnerability', shows possibility of influence from the outside, that in fact happens in the form of Jed Parry, disturbing the idyll by pushing into the sacred home area.

Joe becomes obsessed with discovering what Jed Parry might be able to cause him with his love assumptions, and also he strives to understand how his behaviour might have led to the death of John Logan in the balloon accident (Carbonell, 2010). It is 'Joe's challenge to understand himself and those around him' when the novel presents the role of narrative unavoidable in science as well as in literature. Joe is posed somehow between these two worlds, however condemning the narrative as unprofessional, but still he has to make do with the midway position between science proper and the popular "journalism" that is his well paid job. Carbonell (2010) feels that Joe's criticism towards himself and literature is ironic, because it is the narrative itself around which the story is woven. 'Joe must reconstruct the balloon incident in order to assess his guilt, as well as must enact a sort of penance by visiting to Logan's widow to confess what happened.' This fact is the very reason why Joe can be viewed as unreliable narrator. It would then seem that Clarissa, though member of the opposite camp 'is the rational one, a nod by McEwan (a novelist) to the power of literature,' in contradiction to Joe's proclaimed rationalism.

The argument is even more visible in the restaurant scene where two different stories are told, first a scientific one concerning a discovery of DNA, something that was

much opposed at that time, and a literary one of Keats visiting Wordsworth and being scolded by him. The first one, although true, proves according to Carbonell (2010) that 'science was adamant and wrong', when the second, probably false is a proof that 'the humanities admit up front the difficulties inherent in story telling.'

Jed Parry's religious approach is in Carbonell's (2010) opinion 'unacceptable because it goes beyond mere story telling into an arena of certainty.'

So now the reader has Joe in the middle where his obsessive rationality is replaced with rather different obsession, then Clarissa who should be the less rational presents the calm and 'a very human ability' to deal with the world around her. According to Carbonell (2010) the irony of the novel is that the religious approach 'maintains a degree of joy throughout the narrative, yet still remains in the worst light, the truly insane,' because unlike Joe and Clarissa, who try to narrate reality but recognize they have difficulties in doing so, Jed's religious view is detached from reality.

Joe does not believe literature is of much importance and that makes him an unreliable narrator, because in all probability this approach is 'at odds with that of his creator' (McEwan's) beliefs (Greenberg, 2007). '[O]nce Joe has taken such a dubious position on the value of literature, the reader will naturally suspect his other judgments as well.' Joe's unreliability as narrator is 'further undermined' by Jed Parry's letter to him which bears strong resemblance to Clarissa's view 'about Joe's failure to understand love' (Greenberg, 2007). He comes to appreciate the importance of literature when after reading Parry's love letters he admits that "[i]t needed the skills of a literary critic like Clarissa to read between the lines of protesting love" (*Enduring Love*, 151). He senses that his 'gathering of data' would not be enough to understand the meaning. 'His acknowledgment of the value of her professional work becomes a displaced lament for the loss of her love' (Greenberg, 2007), which again shows some other, more subdued motives than those apparent. Joe, like everyone else, even though believing in science rather than thoughts, is in a need of a story to understand the world (Greenberg quoting Childs, 110). Joe feels the narrative to 'cloud scientific judgement' (Greenberg, 2007) he is constantly annoyed by his being more of a journalist, therefore a narrator, than a real scientist, he views narrative as inferior to 'evidence', but he longs for a help from narrative 'that had been denied or repressed', Greenberg (2007) argues and Robyn Padwicki (2008) agrees when saying:

‘[H]e notes his tendencies to want to “invent or elaborate” illustrates that Joe is aware of the problematic nature of ‘truth’ in narrative, but the novel—as his story—suggests that Joe sees narrative as a valid way of mourning the loss of ‘truth’ narratives’ and ‘science, as a discourse, is dependent on the discourse of evidence and persuasion—of narrative.’ (Padwicki, 2008)

Both Greenberg (2007) and Padwicki (2006) observe that Joe refers many times to popular culture, films, soap operas, cartoons and thus admitting the influence narrative has over people, but Padwicki (2006) further explains that McEwan peruses various genres to raise reader's expectations or interpretation of the situation, as Joe after failing to understand or transmit the meaning of the horrible events after the balloon accident, turns to the genre of soap opera, which he feels creates some connotations for the readers.

At one point, Joe discusses self-deception concerning narrative, and Greenberg (2007) notes:

Joe's explanation of self-deception is an evolutionary account of narrative unreliability itself, and such an account may be taken as a not-so-subtle way of suggesting that Joe himself is unconsciously at the mercy of his own interests. (Greenberg, 2007)

Even though he is aware of the dangers the narrative can pose to rationality, he is caught himself inside one. From the opening chapter with the balloon disaster, where a man is killed and where he meets Jed Parry for the first time. Parry claims to be passionately in love with Joe, starts to stalk him and sends him love letters that suppose or declare Joe feels the same towards Parry. Joe tries and fails to persuade Clarissa that he is in danger from Parry even though he makes a serious misinterpretation to underestimate Parry after he was trapped by the traffic in the middle of the street and Joe stayed there watching, secretly hoping for an accident to happen (Chalupský, 2012). After an also failed attempt to persuade police that Parry is dangerous, Joe investigates alone, and diagnosing Parry as ‘the sufferer of de Clérambault's syndrome,’ feels threaten by Parry and he fears a physical attack (Greenberg, 2007). There comes a paradox moment when Joe actually wishes to see Parry, because ‘that is the only way to have him under control’ (Chalupský, 2012).



McEwan admits trying to reflect our treasured sensation of falling in love with the 'distorting mirror' of a psychotic mind influenced by De Clérambault syndrome (McEwan, *Random House Interview*). Joe is persuaded that he has to be always one step ahead of his possible attacker, to prevent him doing exactly that, and by such behaviour he resembles a mad man himself, as Greenberg (2007) confirms 'Joe becomes mad by mimicking the madness of his pursuer, stalking his own stalker;'

Both the novel's neo-Darwinian narrator and his primary antagonist, an anti-Darwinian religious stalker, become prisoners of their own narrative constructions and thus illustrate Jacques Lacan's insight that in paranoia narrative or fantasy acquires the capacity to structure facts. (Greenberg, 2007)

Padwicki (2006) agrees that at some points in the story the reader may ask who is obsessed with whom and start to feel some doubt whether Joe is not the one who really needs help.

Joe's behaviour then violates the reader's trust again and makes him even more unreliable. When it is proved that he was actually right about Parry, Clarissa, and probably McEwan too, thinks that his being right was not a justification for all the things he did. Carbonell (2010) adds:

If we are to search for any sort of consilience, it should be in the fact that Joe is proven right and wrong. Jed certainly is a stalker. Yet, Clarissa's point of view that Joe has not managed their relationship during the crisis is also correct. Ultimately, *Enduring Love* can be read as a love story of passion and madness. (Carbonell, 2010)

At the end of the novel, not as a part of the narrative, but as a briefly mentioned 'fact' included in the case study of Jed Parry in the appendix, the reader finds out that Joe and Clarissa's relationship survived the crisis in the end and that they adopted a child. Jonathan Greenberg notes this.

The reunion and adoption, occurring outside Joe's narrative, stand as a subtle but unmistakable rebuke to the evolutionary psychology that Joe has been promulgating for the entire novel: adoption entails a love uniquely free from immediate Darwinian motives. Joe and Clarissa take the chance on a parental love that offers no hope of ensuring the survival of their genes, wagering that they will be able to free themselves from the tyranny of their Darwinian inheritance - snapping the leash on which culture is held by the genes. (Greenberg, 2007)

Thus the last message of the novel is the need for a search of compromise of instincts and science in order to have a happy ending relationship.

### **3 A DREAM MISUNDERSTOOD ON CHESIL BEACH**

According to Laura Vipond (2008), only post-structuralist criticism is able to evaluate McEwan's work properly, without omitting any important feature of his writing, especially that 'his literature as a constantly evolving, indeterminate artefact'. All other approaches tend to 'label' the work in accordance with all the preceding writings, and so they are 'neglecting the author's true diversity', but McEwan is typical for never writing the same thing twice, so he 'manages to constantly evade labelling,' but his style is very specific, especially his narrative techniques, and usually he leaves many a thing open for reader to decide, thus the reader does not have any other possibility than to supplement those gaps.

'His [McEwan's] literature is both actually and metaphorically in the reader's hands,' so each new reader is creating an opinion and helps to co-create the meanings of the works, all his texts are submitted to 'continual modifications via its readers,' even though McEwan frequently denied some of the notions readers find in his novels, he was 'astonished to read the plot summaries in reviews' and 'having your fiction described back to you in ways that you wouldn't describe it yourself', nevertheless there are usually some darker notions that are only suggested and left for the readers to decide, so '[a] McEwan novel can never be rendered determinate.' (Vipond, 2008)

#### ***3.1 Non-communicated expectations***

In Ian McEwan's novella *On Chesil Beach*, the point of view is more or less fairly distributed to both performers of the story. The narrative jumps from one to another, telling all the necessary events of their lives evenly. Florence, talented violin player finds herself married to Edward, history graduate with no specific aim in life, it would seem, unless sexual relationship. The reader is offered an insight into both their minds and finds out that their memories and thoughts differ severely. Where Florence cares only for music, and Edward, whom she considers as her ticket to free life, Edward on the other hand thinks only about sexual experience and he is consumed by a long term celibacy caused partly by Florence's upbringing and partly by himself. The audience has an opportunity to learn how the pair met from both points of view and finds out their backgrounds and circumstances.

Florence and Edward are practiced at hiding secrets and in pretending that things are different from what they really are. It should come as no surprise then, that what

expectations they have from their marriage differ significantly without them knowing one another's mind. Florence has a sense of duty (*On Chesil Beach*, 40), feels it is only right that she should get married, even though she thinks her family annoying and admits to be "adept at concealing her feelings" (*On Chesil Beach*, 62). She wants to get rid of them and still presumes her only opportunity is to get a husband, preferably one she falls in love with. There is also a darker hint of Florence's desire to get away from her family, the possibility that Florence was sexually abused by her father. Hannah Courteney (2010) agrees by listing a number of examples, when Florence confesses to be revolted by her father's appearance, and more importantly when the feared moment is coming near and she lies on the bed, waiting for her husband, she suddenly remembers similar scene from her childhood when she was also feeling overwhelmingly disgusted, a scene consisting of her father undressing, like Edward at that moment and her, lying on the bed, waiting and trying to think about some music.

By dinner, both Florence and Edward can hardly think about anything else than the bedroom, each of them for very different reasons. In the first chapter the tension builds up by postposition and apprehension. Every time the pair moves closer to the act itself, their minds wander to some childhood memory or thought. Edward remembers his history of being aggressive and is scared by the idea that he would not be able to control himself properly. Florence is letting the reader know that her opinion on sex is that of utter disgust and horror, quoting some period manual for brides-to-be. All those circumstances make the readers feel all the more apprehensive towards something they now know cannot possibly finish in happy-ending, they know McEwan's catastrophe is, after all, again inevitable,

### **3.2 *Narrative turns***

Unlike his early novels narrated in the first person where according to Kiernan Ryan McEwan is capable of creating 'an illusion of unmediated intimacy' (Ryan, 1999), *On Chesil Beach* is narrated in third person narrator using focalization and insight into characters' minds. It is one of the features McEwan uses to prevent his writing and techniques from repeating itself.

McEwan is concerned about morality, Laura Vipond (2008) and Dominic Head (2008) agree. Head adds that even though McEwan's topics might feel amoral it is not

amorality he seeks, on the contrary it 'can be seen as one strategy for awakening the collective conscience' (Head, 2007).

Laura Vipond (2008) mentions McEwan's awareness of 'eighteen inches of bookshelf' (McEwan, Weich, 2004) which burdens his new work with a load of expectations of which *On Chesil Beach* is 'self-consciously aware' and plays on readers' anticipations about the conclusion of the novel. The readers compare their McEwan reading experience with each new novel and wait for a similar surprise as for example in *Atonement*. McEwan wants to fight this approach and so as Vipond writes:

[F]or the first time, there are no deaths, the narrator is never identified, and in a seeming confront to the reader, sexual intercourse never actually takes place between Florence and Edward. (Vipond, 2008)

Hannah Courteney (2010) also feels that McEwan, aware of the expectation his readers must have about his novels by now, is playing with these expectations to create even more disappointing result than the readers had thought of, but at the same time drawing attention towards his characters internal thoughts and feelings, which is another typical treat of McEwan's, and that all in very restricted period of time. Claire Kahane (2009) stresses 'the critical importance of timing and the power of contingency in human relations' and notes the timing of the crucial event, when the 'climax' of the novella corresponds with the (anti)climax of the lovers, according to Kahane (2009) this can be viewed 'as an example of bad timing in its most corporeal form.' She also points out that usually in a novel tension and expectations are continually rising towards the end but here the peak of the story happens in the middle of the book 'leaving a psychic remainder that unwinds in an extended denouement.' So the story is copying the same scheme as the actual disappointing events, proposing a general 'helplessness before the contingencies of experience' which, as Tim Adams (2007) agrees, together with 'the minute currents of tension that change a conversation and a life' have been McEwan's typical themes throughout his work.

By that time the readers are probably even more anxious than Florence and Edward, however, when the thoughts of them both revolve on the forthcoming, inevitable moment, which both are feeling apprehensive to for different reasons, the readers do not have the

luxury of ignorance of those feelings inside the heads of the protagonists and so they await the inescapable fate with even greater unease, knowing that nothing good is possible to happen (Courteney, 2010). Tim Adams (2007) adds that the story has almost 'a fairy-tale quality' because 'everything that follows seems inevitable.'

Vipond (2008) observes that the involvement of the readers to draw their conclusions is greater than in all McEwan's previous books, where the exploration of the human mind is 'one of the crucial components' and that makes the novella 'unmistakably McEwanesque'. Another prominent aspect of the text is its concern about the importance of language or more precisely the meaning and 'the inadequacy of words' that can be the reason why the lovers while "their love was so obvious" (*On Chesil Beach*, 91) could not be able to relay their feelings and anxieties to each other and they break up because of it. Vipond (2008) observes that the pair is 'trapped by language's power to define and attribute meaning' and that 'Florence is literarily being constructed by language; she did not understand herself until she was given a label' when Edward angrily shouts at her the word "frigid". But the McEwan also indicates that the reading of the novella can be varied from what is actually written there, by putting Florence in a position where the words from "a modern, forward looking handbook that was meant to be helpful to young brides" (*On Chesil Beach*, 7) make her only feel more frightened of the forthcoming sexual experience, instead of being much helpful and so the reader might presume that the text of the novella itself is slightly different from how it appears (Vipond, 2008)

Courteney (2010) observes that the focus of the novella turns from actual 'story and thoroughly onto the narrative.' The bedroom scene concentrates on Florence's feelings and thoughts rather than Edward's, the reader therefore relives the moment from Florence's point of view, empathizing with her. According to Courteney (2010), the text more than hints that Florence might have been sexually abused. Claire Kahane (2009) moreover notes that 'Florence is a hysteric' and while the narrator agrees that the psychoanalysis was not practiced at that time, Kahane (2009) feels that Florence's behaviour should be viewed in the light of it. She especially stresses that 'Freud's seduction theory, [states] that hysteria derives from a traumatic seduction by a paternal figure,' and as an example she presents Florence's thoughts of "memories she had long ago decided were not really hers." If that was the fact, her fear of the sexual intercourse with her husband would have to be viewed in completely different light, and that is why there is 'sympathy we feel for Florence' and why her point of view prevails in the story (Courteney, 2010).

The whole bedroom scene and the awkward episode is presented from Florence's point of view, Courteney (2010) argues that McEwan, by creating such a dense atmosphere at that one moment makes it the central point of the novella and 'thus the scene given pride of place – is entirely given over to Florence' and she feels the author wants to 'subtly pull the reader in favour of Florence's point of view.'

Although it seemed at the beginning that the point of view is evenly spread between the two main characters, it becomes apparent that McEwan (or the narrator) grants more space to Florence's side of the argument. The judgement on Edward may then be slightly less friendly.

Edward is clearly not evil (rather, a product of his time), we are not directed to feel he is anything less than selfish. Edward may be partway redeemed in the final pages of *summary*, but it is with Florence that our sympathetic thoughts largely reside. (Courteney, 2010)

According to her, this fact may suggest that McEwan is presenting feministic approach without the readers fully realizing the fact. However, McEwan's opinion on women's right changes in time from the 'romantic notion that if the spirit of women was liberated, the world would be healed' (McEwan, 2002), to suddenly realising that he 'did not want to be used as a spokesman for women's affairs' (McEwan, Haffenden, 1985). Therefore the reader cannot be sure if the author really supports the women movement in *On Chesil Beach*.

As in *Atonement* and *Enduring Love*, *On Chesil Beach* offers enough hints that the narrator is unreliable and this fact 'undermines the story's authority' (Vipond, 2008). The readers know the minds and feelings of both characters in detail but unlike in *Atonement* the thoughts are put side by side to stress their misunderstandings. By this technique, Vipond (2008) states, the author 'silently urges the reader to sympathise with one or the other, and to judge who or what is responsible for the tragic denouement.'

It has been noted that the third participant of the story is the 'somewhat patronizing narrator' (Kahan, 2009), and she observes that the narrator invites the reader to be involved in an extended view of the era in which the story takes place, pointing out that the narrator and readers share knowledge unknown to the characters.

They were young, educated, and both virgins on this their wedding night, and they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible. But it is never easy. (*On Chesil Beach*, 3)

Hannah Courteney (2010) and Laura Vipond (2008) agree in suggesting the narrator (or the author) supposes that all the events and thoughts leading to the dreaded moment in the bedroom are to be understood as an ironical account of something which might not have happened if only the characters were able to speak to each other about intimate things. Edward's constant misconceptions about how Florence might be feeling would be comical, if they did not end in bad way. Vipond (2008) writes that the irony is present in the whole book, 'as though McEwan is mimicking the instability of the act of reading; like Edward [...], the reader is equally vulnerable to making [...] serious misinterpretations of the text.' Colm Tóibín (2007) agrees that *On Chesil Beach* 'is a pure comedy', although the two main characters do not see it as one, he stresses that McEwan deals with this discrepancy 'without making either of them seem tedious'. He also points out that the writing is similar to *Atonement* in suggesting 'distance and irony' without exaggeration.

It is said at the very beginning of the book that they could not speak about sex, but the truth is that they could if they wanted, it was the restriction of the times that held them back, a fact that is supported throughout the novella on various occasions to further the distance between the readers and the characters era, giving them an extra knowledge upon which the readers should observe the situation - and take an ironic approach (Courteney, 2010).



## 4 COMMON THEMES

### 4.1 *Inevitability and Anticipation*

In all the three novels can be found some shared, typically McEwan techniques, like the use of narrator and points of view and making the narrator unreliable. Although each novel is unique and explores different areas of life, there are some rallying points to which they all might be assigned. Many words have been written on McEwan's ability to create uneasiness and atmosphere of anticipation, these both are present in all the three novels this thesis deals with, because it is not possible to omit such an important feature of McEwan's work. The author creates a dense atmosphere of inexplicable fear, and certainty that something bad is going to happen in the end, something inevitable. The techniques McEwan uses to evoke this uneasiness differ.

The reader can experience the sensation while reading the first part of *Atonement*, when the Fountain Scene is narrated from three points of view and the feeling of inevitable disaster is present in the descriptions of the priceless vase and its value for the family.

In *Enduring Love* while Joe explains the characteristics of humans and their behaviour in stressful situations, hanging on a rope of a hot-air balloon, when the readers learn that humans are naturally egoistic, they can also be sure that the catastrophe is now only a matter of time. But in this book McEwan pushes the accident deep inside the whole human life and relationships, so what the readers thought was the actual disaster is just a trigger and more trouble is yet to come.

The most profound anticipation can be found in *On Chesil Beach*. Almost from the beginning the reader is aware of the complications to arise, even though the characters are not. While the author moves constantly towards the inescapable event, he postpones it as far as possible and presents more and more details which only add to the reader's conviction that the story for the characters can only end in disappointment.

Even when the readers know McEwan and expect some kind of trouble, they are not usually prepared to what actually happens. That is what makes McEwan so readable, the element of surprise after all.

### 4.2 *(Fatal) Decision*

The role of decision is one of the most important in each of the three novels. The author pushes the characters to a decision and then let them live and cope with the

consequences, tracing their struggle as though they were his fictional human laboratory. As McEwan said he does not like to write the same thing twice, but this topic is obviously something he finds most intriguing.

Decision is most obvious in *Atonement* and *On Chesil Beach*, but it is also present in *Enduring Love*. The triggering decision in *Enduring Love* is when the men are hanging on the balloon rope - to risk their lives and possibly save the boy or to let go and save themselves. When they decide that, there is no turning back and they influence the course of events beyond their reach or knowledge. Joe's decision not to tell Clarissa everything from the beginning leads to serious conflict and disruption, as well as his decision to study the case of Jed Parry. It would seem his gravest decision is when he choose to buy a gun to protect himself and Clarissa against Parry. Nevertheless the underlying message is his determination to prove himself right and to win the trust and esteem of those close to him.

The fatal decision of the pair in *On Chesil Beach* is the fact that they got married, something possible only because of the general misunderstanding of each other. Followed closely by Edward's decision that Florence's coldness towards all the things physical are just shyness and Florence's decision that Edward does not need sexual intercourse in order to be happily married to her. The reason to get married was wrong from the beginning on the both sides, hers to get rid of her family, especially of her father who had presumably abused her when she was a child, his to have sexual relationship with a girl he hardly knew or bothered to get to know. There is no wonder then they have utterly different expectations from each other and their decision to follow their own goals instead of one common proves fatal in the end.

To be sure the most distinct role of decision is in *Atonement*. There is Briony's decision to wait for something important to happen, only when Robbie involuntarily makes a decision of his own by putting the wrong letter in the envelope and passing it to Briony on the impulse, just when Cecilia decided she has to leave the house of her parents. These all just lead, inevitably of course, to a disaster. Briony's decision to open and read the letter swings the story in her stride, even though it is later when she actually tells her lie and makes the most fatal decision of all, the event of opening the letter is determining and there is no turning back. Robbie himself claims his most significant decision was to search for the twins alone, and indeed, if he joined Briony, he could not be suspected of anything. But that was not possible anyway, Briony had condemned him long before that, so Robbie's decision was his but he did not have any choice in the matter anyway.

In all the three novels there is one event that changes everything for everybody. As if the author suggested how fragile our world is and how a tiny thing is enough to send one's world tumbling down.

### ***4.3 Misunderstanding and Conflict***

A common theme in *Atonement*, *Enduring Love* and *On Chesil Beach* is misunderstanding or misconception. It closely relates to the topic mentioned above, because the characters usually make a decision after some serious misunderstanding of the situation in general, but mostly of each other. They are often influenced by the environment in which they live and also the time and their experience. Essential misunderstanding is a key point in all the three novels and continually evolves into a conflict, also present in the three books. It can be said that the conflict is something towards which the whole text leads gradually and thus creating the uneasiness already mentioned in this thesis, it also means that the reader expects that there would be a conflict and it would have to be solved in some, probably not pleasant, way.

The main conflict in *Enduring Love* as had been already said is the clash between the science and literature, but it is showed on the basis of conflicts on less abstract level. Joe has an argument both with Jed Parry's opinions and with Clarissa's. The misunderstanding is at the root of all this. Joe does not understand Clarissa's feelings and so he behaves unreasonably towards her, but also Clarissa does not understand, and also does not believe Joe's preoccupation with Parry. Therefore Joe and Clarissa argue because of their different approaches to the world, because they feel they do not have proper support from the other and because they cannot have children together. Although their relationship seems at an end, they try to put aside their differences and begin anew, by adopting a child and live together again. This is an unusually optimistic ending, unlike in the other novels. However, this does not have a place in McEwan's story, only an austere mention in a scientific paper.

Florence's and Edward's conflict in *On Chesil Beach* is more explicit. Florence hates the mere idea of physical side of the relationship and Edward is not able to think about anything else. Their misconceptions are mutual. Edward continually perceives Florence's feelings wrongly and not once it occurs to him to actually ask her about them. He can only blame himself for the result. Florence on the other hand hardly ever wonders about Edward's needs and also does not look for any signs that he might feel differently than herself. After the disastrous Bedroom Scene, the conflict takes the shape of an

argument on the famous beach and unlike in *Enduring Love*, there is no hope for Florence and Edward to have a happy-ending.

In *Atonement* the conflicts are several, beginning from Cecilia's internal conflict whether to stay at home or leave, Briony's internal conflict whether to write a play or become a novelist, Robbie's internal conflict whether to behave like a servant's son or like a family friend, all these, though petty discords shape the form of the novel. The most serious argument is of course Briony's false accusation and the dissolution of the family. The last one is the base for the whole novel. By framing Robbie, Briony "committed a crime" but as the reader learns during the story, she did not do it to spite someone or to have revenge. She honestly believed in Robbie's fault. What led her to that was series of important misunderstandings of the real world in which she was not a great participant. Her head full of fantasies and dreams and battling thoughts, she tried to create order from chaos and let herself carried away by her godlike power to create a story. But at the beginning, there was misunderstanding of the adult behaviour with which she did not have much experience.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis aim was to analyse three novels by contemporary English writer Ian McEwan. The chosen novels are *Atonement* (2001), *Enduring Love* (1997) and a novella *On Chesil Beach* (2007). Each of the novels was at first analysed separately to find the most interesting aspects and the overall message of the books. In *Atonement* the main focus was on the changing point of view, unreliable narrator, on abundant intertextual allusions and also on the possibilities of atonement through narration. In *Enduring Love* also appeared the theme of unreliable narrator, then various forms of obsession and most importantly conflict of science and literature. Finally, *On Chesil Beach* examined especially the narrative techniques, when the story is told almost simultaneously from both points of view, and the significance of empathy, misunderstanding and the consequences. The respective chapters focused especially on the narrative techniques used in the novels by exploring the books themselves and the academic works and critiques of renown authors. It is apparent that the use of unreliable narrator, changing point of view and empathy are the unifying features of all three of the chosen novels and the thesis presented the unique narrative of Ian McEwan.

The linking themes found in those three novels are surprisingly numerous, despite the fact that the novels otherwise differ in style, topics and the author's intention.

This theses discussed the theme of inevitability and anticipation, the most typical aspects of McEwan's work. The feeling of imminent disaster, by creating an atmosphere of anticipation and inescapable fate.

The role of decision is also given a big part in both the thesis and McEwan's novels, and it is closely related to the inevitability and also to misunderstanding. In all the books the characters make decisions that influence their lives. Sometime the author leaves them no other choice than to decide and then face the consequences.

Misunderstanding and conflict is the last topic the thesis deals with. These two aspects take a key role in the novels as well. Conflict is something the story is continually leading to and it is usually through some misunderstanding that the characters make a decision which brings them to an inevitable end.

To sum up, Ian McEwan is an eminent British author, his novels address sometimes dark and uncomfortable topics like conflict and misunderstanding bordering with despair over the inevitability of fate, they breach many taboos, and sometimes they might even

seem revolting, but McEwan is able to interest his readers nevertheless, by applying empathy, entering the minds of his characters and let them speak to the audience. *Atonement* (2001), *Enduring Love* (1997) and *On Chesil Beach* (2007) have a lot themes in common, most of them are themes that appear also in other Ian McEwan's books, even though each of his novels is unique and almost incomparable with the others.

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## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo analyzovat tři romány současného britského autora, vítěze prestižní ceny Booker Prize, Iana McEwana. Vybraná díla jsou napsána během období deseti let, zahrnují dva romány, *Atonement* (2001) a *Enduring Love* (1997) a jednu novelu *On Chesil Beach* (2007).

Práce se skládá ze čtyř částí. První tři části jsou nejobsáhlejší a zabývají se každou knihou zvlášť, *Atonement* počínaje, poté *Enduring Love* a nakonec studie *On Chesil Beach*. Nejdůležitější rysy těchto románů a hlavní myšlenky které sdělují čtenářům jsou rozděleny do podkapitol. Každá z analýz se zaměřuje na vypravěčské techniky, postavu nedůvěryhodného vypravěče a úhel pohledu, ze kterého je příběh vyprávěn, spolu s dalšími významnými aspekty románů.

Závěrečná kapitola popisuje společná témata, která propojují tato tři díla. Mezi ně patří nevyhnutelnost, očekávání, rozhodnutí, nedorozumění a konflikt, a která jsou ukázána na příkladech z daných románů.