

Ambivalent Ambivalence: Cecilia's Monological and Dialogical Subjectivity in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

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Subject or Individual?

Individual Subject in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

Cecilia and Robbie have known each other all their life; they have been childhood friends, they have been university acquaintances; yet, although their friendship has “become vague and even constrained in recent years” (A¹ 134), it is “still an old habit” (A 134), and this habit, their being “old friends” (A 134), becomes “a barrier” (A 134) when Cecilia and Robbie, in the library, are facing the challenge of entering a new stage of their relationship, of becoming lovers. They are “embarrassed before their former selves” (A 134). Cecilia and Robbie are highly self-conscious due to being aware of their former friendship, and the associated identity of *childhood friend* needs to be overcome “in order to become strangers on intimate terms” (A 134). Language, however, proves to be insufficient to overcome the awkwardness of the moment: they are “unable to speak” (A 134); they are beyond discussion and for “the moment, there seem[s] no way out with words” (A 135). In this specific moment, words fail them, because language is expression of consciousness. Consciousness denotes the linguistic state of human existence in which human beings are able to think about and discuss their identities; consequently, to overcome identity is to overcome consciousness. However, with awareness being the reason for their awkwardness, and awareness being established in language, language cannot be the means for Cecilia and Robbie to overcome their embarrassment; eventually, with language failing them in their purpose, words are replaced by deeds.

Her mouth tasted of lipstick and salt. They drew away for a second, he put his arms around her and they kissed again with greater confidence. Daringly, they touched the tips of their tongues, and it was then she made the falling, sighing sound which, he realised later, marked a transformation. Until that moment, there was still some-

¹ A = McEwan, Ian. *Atonement*. 2001. London: Vintage, 2002.

thing ludicrous about having a familiar face so close to one's own. They felt watched by their bemused childhood selves. But the contact of tongues, alive and slippery muscle, moist flesh on flesh, and the strange sound it drew from her, changed that. This sound seemed to enter him, pierce him down his length so that his whole body opened up and he was able to step out of himself and kiss her freely. (A 135)

Language, basis to consciousness, causes Cecilia and Robbie's self-consciousness and is thus no means to overcome their embarrassment. Realising this deficiency of language, Cecilia and Robbie exchange timid intimacies; they kiss, they embrace, they kiss again "with greater confidence" (A 135); yet, those intimacies are consciously exchanged: "having a familiar face so close to one's own" is "ludicrous" (A 135). Sensuousness is a form of intimacy which is captured by reason and thus words, and hence Cecilia and Robbie feel "watched by their bemused childhood selves" (A 135). Only when the intimacies intensify, when experiencing "the contact of tongues, alive and slippery muscle, moist flesh on flesh" (A 135), ludicrousness vanishes, and Robbie can enter a state of unconsciousness leaving behind the embarrassment of former identity, for he is "able to step out of himself and kiss her freely" (A 135). Soon, their intimacies are described with verbs denoting animalistic, even violent and thus instinctive behaviour. Their kissing becomes a *gnawing* (A 135), and Cecilia *bites* Robbie, first "on the cheek, not quite playfully" (A 135), then, after Robbie first pulling away and then moving back, "hard on his lower lip" (A 135). Robbie next kisses Cecilia's "throat, *forcing back* her head against the shelves" (A 135; emphasis added). Cecilia then *pulls* his hair and *pushes* "his face down against her breasts" (A 135). Their actions are no longer controlled and captured by reason; the sensations caused by their instinctive behaviour are overwhelming and extinguish any thought. They feel "nothing but *obliterating sensation*, thrilling and swelling" (A 136; emphasis added). Cecilia and Robbie undergo a change from consciousness (conscious action guided by reason and expressed in language) to unconsciousness (instinctive action beyond reason and language); sensations cause oblivion, human instincts conquer the state of consciousness in which Cecilia and Robbie are aware of their identities, and thus their former identity of *childhood friend* stops causing embarrassment. "At last they were strangers, their pasts were forgotten.

They were also strangers to themselves who had forgotten who or where they were" (A 136).

In "order to become strangers on intimate terms" (A 134), Cecilia and Robbie need to enter a state of unconsciousness in which they are unaware of former identities. This development from a state of consciousness to a state of unconsciousness can be described, in Peter Zima's terminology, as a development from subjectivity to individuality. According to his theory, it is necessary to distinguish these concepts "um die biologische Bedingtheit und die Naturwüchsigkeit der individuellen Subjektivität ins Blickfeld zu rücken" (*Theorie* 8). Individuality is defined as the natural (biologic) and unconscious state of human existence; Cecilia and Robbie are *individuals* when their actions unconsciously originate in instinct. Subjectivity, in contrast, is defined as the cultural (linguistic) and conscious state of human existence, in which human beings, due to language, are able to consciously think, speak and act, with the performance of speech and action giving outward evidence of subjectivity. "Der Einzelne, der uns anonym auf der Straße oder in offener Landschaft begegnet, wird von uns als Individuum, nicht jedoch als Subjekt erkannt. Erst wenn er sich durch Wort und Tat zu erkennen gibt, nehmen wir ihn als Subjekt wahr" (*Theorie* 8). Subjectivity is hence linguistic consciousness of one's cultural identities, for "subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity" (Hall 3); first meeting in the library, Cecilia and Robbie are *individual subjects*, aware of their cultural existence and identities.

Individuality, as biological existence, provides the basis for subjectivity, and, usually, the development in human existence is from natural individuality to cultural subjectivity. "Individuen [sind] zunächst Natur [...], die als vergängliche Basis der kulturell und sprachlich formierten Subjektivität eine kontingente und äußerst prekäre Grundlage bildet" (Zima, *Theorie* 9). However, Cecilia and Robbie's development exemplifies that subjectivity may be conquered by nature; while the state of individuality becomes necessary for Cecilia and Robbie to overcome their former identity, may thus be considered positive, a development from subjectivity to individuality is usually considered a regression. "Krankheit als *natürlicher* Prozeß" may destroy "Subjektivität als *kulturelle* und sprachliche Erscheinung" (*Theorie* 8-9). Nature (be it illness or instinct) is deemed a threat to individual subjectivity "als Möglichkeit eines Rück-

falls ins Bewußtlose" (*Theorie* 9). This threat is most prominently displayed in author-Briony's vascular dementia. Author-Briony, primarily defining herself according to her ability of conscious thought, finally needs to accept her regression to individuality, to "an inferior race" (A 356).

The process will be slow, but my brain, my mind, is closing down. [...] 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. Bon voyage! (A 354-55; emphasis added)

If subjectivity, conscious existence, is dependent on a human being's faculty of speech, aphasia is regression to individuality, to unconscious existence. Individuality and subjectivity must thus be considered interdependent; the individual subject is "Wechselbeziehung zwischen *Individualität als sozialer Physis und Potentialität* einerseits und *Subjektivität als Verwirklichung dieser Potentialität* im Sprechen und Handeln andererseits" (*Theorie* 21). On the one hand, individuality is the basis for subjectivity while the state of subjectivity is necessary to discuss the state of individuality (*Theorie* 21-22); on the other hand, as both Cecilia and Robbie's development and author-Briony's vascular dementia exemplify, individuality and subjectivity may fluently transition into each other, an interdependence beginning with language acquisition and ending with aphasia. The individual subject is "*dynamische Einheit von Individualität und Subjektivität*" (*Theorie* 21).

Autonomy or Ideology?

Identities in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

Subjectivity, defined as consciousness, allows the individual subject to think about and discuss its identities; thus the terms *subjectivity* and *identity* must not be interchangeably used: "one's identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being" (Hall 3), while subjectivity "as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent

it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence or control" (3-4). The specific shaping of subjectivity in the form of identities is changeable. Each individual subject "may have numerous discrete identities, of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and a subjectivity that is comprised of all those facets" (134). Subjectivity is constant "negotiation with broad cultural definitions and our own ideals" (134), and each individual subject may adopt various identities (simultaneously or successively).

Identity is hence, thus Zima applying Greimas's actantial model to the individual subject's quest for identity, "das Objekt des fühlenden, denkenden, sprechenden und handelnden Subjekt-Aktanten" (*Theorie* 24); *lover* is the identity Cecilia and Robbie have decided to adopt. A crucial question, however, is arising from this statement: to what extent, if at all, is the individual subject able to freely *choose* its identities? The individual subject "konstituiert sich im Diskurs, indem es auf andere Diskurse imitativ oder dialogisch-polemisch reagiert [...]. Seine Identität als spechendes und handelndes Subjekt kommt im Diskurs als *narrativem Programm* zustande" (*Theorie* 15); however, with the individual subject's behaviour being rather monologically imitative than dialogically polemic, it is consistent to acknowledge "Überdeterminierung des Einzelnen und der Gruppe durch Sprache und Gesellschaft" (*Theorie* 15). The individual subject is discursively determined.

Zumeist läuft diese Überdeterminierung darauf hinaus, daß Subjekte in bestimmten religiösen, politischen oder wissenschaftlichen Soziolekten aufgehen. Der Soziolekt kann als ein *Ensemble von wirklichen oder potentiellen Diskursen definiert werden, die von einem gemeinsamen lexikalischen Repertoire und einer gemeinsamen semantischen Grundlage, d.h. von bestimmten Relevanzkriterien, Klassifikationen (Taxonomien) und Definitionen, ausgehen*. Da der Einzelne zumeist keine eigenen Relevanzkriterien kennt, orientiert er sich, um seine Ansichten und Interessen artikulieren zu können, am Vokabular und an der Semantik eines oder mehrerer Soziolekte. (*Theorie* 16)

Ideological discourses offer, by means of classification, simplification in reducing the complexity of existence; hence, in aligning itself to ideological discourses, the individual subject can rely on binary definition and clearly distinguish *right* from *wrong* values (good vs. bad, beautiful vs. ugly) and ideas (proletariat vs. bourgeoisie, evolution vs. creation). The individual subject "bewältigt die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit, indem es bestimmte semantische Gegensätze und Unterschiede für relevant er-

klärt" (*Theorie* 16); thus it is made capable of action. Emily, Cecilia's mother, having been brought up by Victorians (A 50), sustains the Victorian binary opposition of *public* and *private sphere* and the associated female identities of *mother* and *housewife*. Emily criticises, almost condemns, her daughter for having read English literature at Girton College, because her education does not benefit, is even counterproductive to her finding a husband.

One day he [Emily's son Leon] might bring home a friend for Cecilia to marry, if three years at Girton had not made her an impossible prospect [...]. [...] They weren't even awarding girls proper degrees.² When Cecilia came home in July with her finals' result – the nerve of the girl to be disappointed with it! – she had no job or skill and still had a husband to find and motherhood to confront [...]. (A 64-65)

She considers Cecilia "too wrapped up in herself, too much the intellectual to bother with children" (A 66), to perform simple errands (A 67) and her duties as hostess (A 70); it is impossible for Emily to accept a subjectivity that is comprised of *mother*, *housewife* and *intellectual*. Exactly this ambivalently comprised subjectivity, however, is Cecilia's subjectivity, and the binary opposition obvious in Emily's thought is exposed as simplification.

Emily, despite clearly distinguishing between *right* identities (*mother* and *housewife*) and *wrong* identity (*intellectual*), is incapable of the actions associated with her right identities. "Illness had stopped her giving her children all a mother should. Sensing this, they had always called her by her first name" (A 66); instead, Cecilia and Leon have been brought up by Robbie's mother (A 87-88). When she sets out to soothe her household (A 70) or be the hostess (A 102), she is incapable of doing so without Cecilia's assistance (A 102-04); indeed, whenever "Mrs Tallis exercised authority in the absence of her husband, the children felt obliged to protect her from seeming ineffectual" (A 127-28). Ideological distinction does not necessarily guarantee the individual subject's ability to act, especially with nature in the form of illness denying action, especially with new ideologies occurring and casting first doubt; her husband, considered the authority in Emily's thought (A 153-54), encourages and expects Cecilia's (financial) independence (A 103, 107). Only when Rob-

² Women attending the University of Cambridge "had to wait until 1948 before they were given membership of the University" (McWilliams-Tullberg 13).

bie is accused of raping Cecilia's younger cousin Lola, Emily becomes decisive. "As for their mother, untypically she rose to the crisis, free of migraine and the need to be alone. She actually grew as her older daughter shrank into private misery" (A 175); she becomes capable of acting because she is strongly confirmed in her notion of *right* and *wrong* and the futility of female education in distinguishing so. Having read Robbie's sexually explicit letter, to everyone proving his guilt, she accuses her daughter of negligence. "If you had done the *right* thing, young lady, with all your education, and come to me with this, then something could have been done in time and your cousin would have been spared her nightmare" (A 179; emphasis added). Cecilia's education, according to Emily, does not grant her the superiority of mind Emily accuses her daughter of feeling (A 152); on the contrary, her education is proven to be insignificant for it does not assist (even prevents) Cecilia in making "correct" decisions. Cecilia is held partially at fault for Robbie's crime, and when she finally, in his defence, accounts their *consensual* intimacies in the library, her account is considered "far more shocking than Briony's" version (A 181); apart from her account confirming the general opinion of Robbie being a "morbidly over-sexed" and thus dangerous man (A 181, 204), Cecilia, having consented to premarital sexual intercourse, cannot be considered a powerless victim. Emily's prejudgement is, on the one hand, based on her socially still valid Victorian attitude toward sexuality; on the other hand, it is based on the social distinction of class, another binary opposition (upper vs. middle vs. working class) prominent in Emily's ideologically structured thought. She considers Robbie "a hobby of Jack's, living proof of some *levelling principle*" her husband has "pursued through the years" (A 151; emphasis added); indeed, criticising Robbie's education, which she thinks unreasonable considering his social status, is the only line of thought making her (at least momentarily) side with Cecilia. Emily has always opposed her husband financing Robbie's education, thinking it "unfair on Leon and the girls" (A 151), and she does not consider herself in the "wrong simply because Robbie had come away from Cambridge with a first. In fact, it had made things harder for Cecilia with her third, though it was preposterous of her to pretend to be disappointed. Robbie's elevation" (A 151-51). According to her, Robbie, though exceptionally bright still merely a son to servants and properly placed as physically hard-working gardener,

has even less claim to university education than her daughter. Her binary distinction, however, is criticised in Cecilia admiring both Robbie's physical strength and strong intellect, admiring this ambivalent but "interesting combination in a man, intelligence and sheer bulk" (A 25-6). Emily's simplification due to binary thought and thus binary thought itself is equally criticised in Robbie being innocent and the wealthy and finally titled Paul Marshall, whose chemical skills Emily admires (A 152), being the culprit. Being ideologically determined, Emily can clearly position herself in society and consequently positions her fellow human beings in determining their identities; a process, however, which is shown to be restrictive, for Cecilia is depicted as having adopted all three identities of *intellectual*, *housewife* and *mother*. Leon does not even pretend to understand her comparison of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (A 109), and when she tells him about "their mother's desire for a miracle at the feast – roast potato into potato salad" (A 109), Leon does "not take the biblical reference" (A 109); her education has indeed made her his intellectual superior. Nevertheless, she is not only very capable of keeping the peace between Emily and her servants without humiliating her mother (A 105), she is equally able to successfully deal with children (A 101-02). This ambivalence of identities, which must not be considered possible in Emily's thought in order to classify existence, indicates a new understanding of subjectivity and ideology in crisis.

Ideological discourses are sustained in the simplification of binary definition; hence, an ideology's crisis originates in the disclosure of ambivalence and the unveiled complexity of existence when *right* and *wrong* become difficult to separate and apparently conflicting identities like *mother*, *housewife* and *intellectual* become different facets of one individual subject's subjectivity. Ambivalence is prominently promoted in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886). Nietzsche "actually denies that the distinction between good and evil can be made at all, and suggests that the very same quality that is considered evil from one perspective may at least as accurately be characterized as good from another" (Nehamas 211). Truth depends on perspective and thus binary oppositions are severely criticised in Nietzsche's line of thought.

Cecilia's Monological and Dialogical Subjectivity in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

Man darf nämlich zweifeln, erstens, ob es Gegensätze überhaupt gibt, und zweitens, ob jene volkstümlichen Wertschätzungen und Wert-Gegensätze, auf welche die Metaphysiker ihr Siegel gedrückt haben, nicht vielleicht nur Vordergrundsschätzungen sind, nur vorläufige Perspektiven [...]. Bei allem Werte, der dem Wahren, dem Wahrhaftigen, dem Selbstlosen zukommen mag: es wäre möglich, daß dem Scheine, dem Willen zur Täuschung, dem Eigennutz und der Begierde ein für alles Leben höherer und grundsätzlicherer Wert zugeschrieben werden müßte. Es wäre sogar noch möglich, daß was den Wert jener guten und verehrten Dinge ausmacht, gerade darin bestünde, mit jenen schlimmen, scheinbar entgegengesetzten Dingen auf verfängliche Weise verwandt, verknüpft, verhäkelt, vielleicht gar wesensgleich zu sein. Vielleicht! - Aber wer ist Willens, sich um solche gefährliche Vieleichs zu kümmern! (8-9)

Nietzsche proposes the acceptance of ambivalence and thus denies the simplification of ideological thought. He “engages in a process of forthright consciousness raising that is clearly intended to inculcate a greater degree of personal agency and the taking of responsibility for one’s action in the process of self-creation” (Hall 70). Ambivalence, however, is not only a major tool of ideological criticism; facing the overwhelming complexity of existence, the individual subject is deprived of its possibility to clearly position itself in (moral, i.e. ideological) space “[und wird] von der Ambivalenz als *Krise* erfaßt” (Zima, *Theorie* 19). Ambivalence primarily causes an individual subject’s existential crisis, “weil seine diskursive und ideologische Identität radikal in Frage gestellt wird” (*Theorie* 19). Those individual subjects longing for simplicity, clarity and security and thus being unable to accept ambivalence will align themselves to a new ideology and will continue to think in binary oppositions in order to remain capable of acting (*Lit. Subjekt* 8). Those accepting ambivalence obtain a means to counter ideological determination.

Wenn unvereinbare Werte wie Gut und Böse, Freiheit und Unfreiheit, Liebe und Haß, Wahrheit und Lüge zusammengeführt werden, so entsteht einerseits ein Krisenbewußtsein, welches das individuelle Subjekt handlungsunfähig machen kann; andererseits kann aber der kritische Gedanke aufkommen, daß Gegensätze dialektisch zusammengedacht werden sollten, auch wenn die Hegelsche Synthese nicht mehr zu bewerkstelligen ist. [...]. [...]; es [das individuelle Subjekt] wird zugleich gestärkt, weil es jenseits von allen religiösen und ideologischen Manichäismen und Dualismen beobachten kann, wie sehr Gegensätze zusammenhängen. (*Lit. Subjekt* 6)

Ambivalence is not only reason for crises but also basis to criticism, and active criticism becomes the basis to a more complex and stronger subjectivity.

Ambivalenz löst nicht nur eine *Krise* aus, sondern bewirkt auch *Kritik* am ideologischen Soziolekt, der das Individuum lange Jahre hindurch zum sprechenden und handelnden Subjekt machte. Das Subjekt distanziert sich reflexiv (selbstkritisch) von seiner eigenen Subjektivität und versucht, sich als sprechende und handelnde Instanz neu zu orientieren. [...] Dies führt dazu, daß ein und dasselbe Individuum in der Lage ist, verschiedene ideologische Identitäten – nacheinander oder auch parallel – kritisch und selbstkritisch zu reflektieren und zu relativieren [...]. (*Theorie* 19, 21)

Instead of monologically accepting ideological and thus reduced thought, the individual subject enters into dialogue with various identities and values. It is thus appropriate to signify a change of subjectivity by means of crisis and criticism. *Monological* subjectivity is consciousness *by* ideology; the identities of the individual subject are externally determined, not internally chosen; Emily is an individual subject having monological consciousness. *Dialogical* subjectivity is consciousness *about* ideology; the identities of the individual subject are partly internally chosen, because ideological discourse is recognised in its simplifying and constructing function. The individual subject in crisis might either despair or engage in permanent dialogue with external forces and thus become a flexible subject that changes its identities with every critical thought and is hence able to sustain its autonomy: “nur noch Ideologen als große Vereinfacher [können] eindeutig Gut und Böse bezeichnen” (*Lit. Subjekt* 7). Cecilia and Robbie, it will be discussed, are both facing dialogical subjectivity but differ in the degree of accepting ambivalence, while author-Briony, who realises the value of ambivalence, finally rejects ambivalence and dialogue in order to atone and be forgiven.

Monologue or Dialogue?

Transfixing Ambivalence in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

In the beginning, neither Cecilia nor Robbie are ideologist simplifying existence; however, while Cecilia, facing ambivalence, is incapable of accepting dialogical subjectivity and is thus transfixed in her existential crisis, Robbie welcomes ambivalence as unchaining process by which he

understands Cecilia's existential crisis and accepts her ambivalence. Cecilia's first "entrance" displays a young woman rife with impatience.

Partly because of her youth and the glory of the day, partly because of her blossoming need for a cigarette, Cecilia Tallis *half ran* with her flowers along the path [...]. The accumulated *inactivity* of the summer weeks since finals also hurried her along; since coming home, *her life had stood still*, and a fine day like this made her *impatient, almost desperate*. (A 18; emphasis added)

Cecilia's impatience originates in her highly unsatisfactory situation. Since having left Girton College and returned home, her life has lacked all movement; this absence of movement sharply contrasts her life at Cambridge which has been lively and adventurous for less conventional. Emily's account of Cecilia's college days, flouting in tone, confirms Cecilia having adopted the identity of *female student* respectively *intellectual* her mother finds fault with; Emily does not only criticise "all the self-adoring slumming, the knickers drying before the electric fire and two to a hairbrush" but also "the *cosy jargon* of Cecilia's Cambridge – the Halls, the Maids' Dancing, the Little-Go" (A 64; emphasis added). Cecilia's life at Cambridge has been unconventional. She has attended lectures, has taken examinations, has socialised beyond her mother's approval and has, living in a residence, "publicly" dried her underwear. Cecilia identifies with a language typical for English students (Halls, Little-Go), and her mother, describing her jargon as *cosy* intending to ridicule it, actually implies that Cecilia has not only pretended to live and enjoy the life of a female student but that she has felt comfortable and welcome at Cambridge. Cecilia is determined by the new ideology of female education and thus independence and equality emerging at the end of the 19th century with the first women colleges being founded in Cambridge and Oxford; hence she aligns herself to the sociolect of this ideology. Coming home, however, Cecilia is confronted with her mother's disapproval. Emily asserts that "women at the 'Varsity, [is] childish really, at best an innocent lark, like the girls' rowing eight, a little posturing alongside their brothers dressed up in the solemnity of social progress" (A 64-65). Using Cecilia's colloquial term *varsity* (instead of *university*), a term strange to her own sociolect, Emily continues to ridicule her daughter's jargon; she considers female social progress in education a masquerade proposing status unfounded in reality; women are merely "posturing

alongside their brothers” instead of standing equally besides them. Cecilia, coming home, is hence confronted with the expectations her mother considers appropriate for a woman and consequently faces a conflict typical for women at the beginning of the 20th century.

College-educated women pioneered in this drive toward greater female autonomy, seeking out new jobs, forming new institutions, and playing an increasingly important role in the public sphere. Yet even as they took up professional careers, most women felt a *deep conflict* between the old social expectations of marriage and children, and the new opportunities for independence and personal fulfilment. *They were caught between old ideologies and behavior patterns and new ambitions and public careers.* (Vicinus 603; emphasis added)

Facing her mother’s differently determined thought, Cecilia is forced to re-think her identities. Indeed, her mother’s expectations are not even appalling to her; on the contrary, when she is required in her identity as *housewife*, she is very capable of acting (A 105). Furthermore, she has always most successfully dealt with Briony; when meeting her agitated sister in the hall, Cecilia attempts to rescue her once again from self-destruction (A 44). Cecilia has always mothered Briony. “When she was small and prone to nightmares – those terrible screams in the night – Cecilia used to go to her room and wake her. [...] And then she would carry her into her own bed” (A 44). Cecilia even realises that comforting Briony would re-establish clarity in identity and thus control. “Such stroking and soothing murmurs would have been a release for Cecilia after a frustrating day whose various cross-currents of feelings she had preferred not to examine. Addressing Briony’s problems with kind words and caresses would have restored a sense of control” (A 44). An individual subject’s identity is dependent on acceptance. Emily, like Cecilia, is dependent on Briony’s need to be mothered in order to be confirmed in her identity: to love Briony is “to be soothed” (A 65); both, however, mother and sister-mother are denied this confirmation. Emily realises that Briony will soon be gone from her (A 4), and Cecilia acknowledges that Briony has grown independent when she wants to comfort her sister, hearing “the neediness” of being needed “in her own voice” (A 44), but recognises “an element of autonomy in the younger girl’s unhappiness” (A 44). Crucially, although sharing the same longing, Emily denies Cecilia’s motherly traits (A 66), she *needs* to deny

them, for accepting and approving Cecilia's motherly qualities threatens Emily's position within her family with Cecilia replacing her own mother in her motherly function; indeed, she already has been replaced, for Cecilia and Leon have been brought up by Robbie's mother, Briony by Cecilia. The "proper" family constellation is only restored, the threat Cecilia poses to Emily is only diminished when Cecilia, facing her family's prejudgement of Robbie, becomes unable to organise the necessary actions and comfort of Briony and Lola (A 175-79); her failure, however, is assurance to Emily, and thus she grows while Cecilia shrinks into private misery (A 175). At the same time, Emily cannot promote Cecilia's intellectuality and independence, for promoting Cecilia's identity as *intellectual* in order to strengthen her position and function within her family would be threatening to the ideology her existence is based upon. Cecilia, may she accept her mother's expectations based on the Victorian ideology of public and private sphere or the expectations originating in the new ideology of female independence in the public sphere, is a danger to Emily's identities and existence; thus are not only Cecilia's *wrong* capabilities criticised but also her *right* capabilities denied. Cecilia, although her mother's expectations are not appalling to her, feels the injustice of her situation. "Her mother had *always* lived in an invalid's shadow land, Briony had *always* required mothering from her elder sister, and Leon had *always* floated free" (A 103; emphasis added); repeating the adverb *always* implies Cecilia's dissatisfaction with her situation. Having studied at Girton College, Cecilia cannot simply stop being the intellectual, and reducing her existence to domestic duties lacks challenges she requires.

She had not thought it would be so easy to slip back into the old roles. Cambridge had changed her fundamentally and she thought she was immune. No one in her family, however, noticed the transformation in her, and she was not able to resist the power of their habitual expectations. [...] Now it was time for her to move on. She needed an adventure. (A 103)

Her father even expects her to find a job (A 103, 107); thus she is not only torn between her mother's and her own expectations but also between her mother's and her father's expectations. Realising the unrest her experience at Cambridge, her transformation is causing her, Cecilia even envies Leon's "blandness" that is not only "perfectly tolerable" but

“even soothing” (A 108): “she needed him, she wanted a share in his freedom” (A 107). Freedom is not known to Cecilia while staying at home; and yet, freedom to her is both necessary and dangerous.

She could not remain here, she knew she should make plans, but she did nothing. There were various possibilities, all equally unpressing. She had a little money in her account, enough to keep her modestly for a year or so. Leon repeatedly invited her to spend time with him in London. University friends were offering to help her find a job – a dull one certainly, but she would have her independence. (A 21)

Leaving, Cecilia knows, offering at least some freedom, is necessary to her mental and emotional well-being. “She could not remain here, she knew she *should* make plans” (A 21; emphasis added); the use of the conjunctive mood, however, already indicates the speculative nature of her plans. Furthermore, all prospects of leaving are “equally unpressing” (A 21) because they do not offer the long-term security (in identity) a family offers.

No one was holding Cecilia back, no one would care particularly if she left. It wasn't torpor that kept her – she was often restless to the point of irritability. She simply liked to feel that she was prevented from leaving, that she was needed. [...] In fact, the thought of packing a suitcase and taking the morning train did not excite her. Leaving for leaving's sake. (A 21-22; emphasis added)

Cecilia's domestic existence lacks significance, for the servants are resolute and capable of managing the household without superior assistance (A 104-05), Briony has grown up; nevertheless, although no one would recognise her absence, she longs to be needed, to be accepted, to be welcome. She has “come to be with the family, and make amends for being away” (A 109). Having a bad conscience about studying and leaving her family and feeling the need to make amends for her absence displays her being still determined by Emily's ideologies; thus, although her using *the* family instead of *her* family already implies her estrangement, and although admitting that she has found “her parents and sister absent in their different ways” (A 109), whenever she decides to leave (A 102, 103), her decision is soon changed to the contrary; being invited by Leon and accepting his invitation, even when accepting she imagines “herself being dragged back, incapable of packing her bag or of

making the train" (A 110). The result is devastating. "I am going a little mad here" (A 107), she admits to Leon, and when accounting her past weeks, there is desperation in all she says, "an emptiness at its core" (A 109).

Being torn between staying and leaving, between family and independence, between security and adventure, between "old" and "new" expectations, Cecilia, during her first "entrance," only *half runs* (A 18); even her movement displays indecisiveness. Cecilia is living an existential crisis, unable to decide for the narrative programme of either old or new ideology, being aware of the simplification she would admit to in deciding: she is tired of "defending, defining, attacking" (A 26). She feels the identities' equality, she is yet, however, unable to accept the identities' ambivalence and thus to promote activity in dialogical subjectivity; instead of choosing all identities or at least entering into dialogue with all their ideas and values, she prefers not deciding to deciding. This lack of movement results in her restlessness, impatience and desperation; only nature offers her rest. "Dripping coolly onto her sandalled feet, the untidy bunch of rose-bay willow-herb and irises brought her to a better state of mind" (A 20). Nature is an ambivalent environment in which binary oppositions (e.g. flora and fauna) dialogically correspond. Feeling water on her skin, Cecilia's "feverish" mind is cooled. Neither is she soothed because in nature her contradictory emotions and thoughts are reconciled nor because nature causes freedom in blandness; she is soothed because nature as environment of ambivalence offers freedom in not requiring decision and offering acceptance of diversity. Water is an element repeatedly related to Cecilia; indeed, water in particular helps Robbie understand Cecilia's existential crisis and accept her ambivalence.

Monologue or Dialogue?

Unchaining Ambivalence in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

When she emerged a few seconds later with a piece of pottery in each hand, he knew better than to offer to help her out of the water. The frail white *nymph*, from whom water cascaded far more successfully than it did from the beefy Triton, carefully placed the pieces by the vase. (A 30; emphasis added)

A nymph is a fictional character with extensive literary tradition, and Robbie's "literary" act of comparing Cecilia to a nymph offers several interesting insights into Cecilia's identities, her subjectivity and her relationship with Robbie. Interfiguralität, focussing on the "interrelations that exist between characters of different texts" (Müller 101), is "one of the most important dimensions of intertextuality" (101); intertextuality (in the form of intentional reference), in turn, is necessary to an individual subject's identity construction.

Seit der Klassik, der Romantik und dem Realismus erfüllen Intertextualität und Zitat die Aufgabe, die Position des erzählenden Subjekts und die Identität der handelnden Subjekte zu stärken. Es geht u.a. darum, die Ideologie des Erzählers und des Helden zu erläutern oder gar zu rechtfertigen [...]. (Zima, *Lit. Subjekt* 207)

Intertextuality is thus means to promote ideology and support ideological determination; however, with ambivalence and arbitrariness unveiled and perspectivism promoted in the new sciences (C. Darwin, A. Einstein, K. Marx, F. de Saussure), psychologies (S. Freud, W. James) and especially philosophies (H. Bergson, F. Nietzsche) emerging at the turn of the century, intertextuality, though certainly not exclusively, becomes a major tool of ideological criticism.

[Es ist] eine Verschiebung zugunsten der *Kritik*, insbesondere der *Sprach- und Ideologiekritik*, feststellbar. Diese Hervorhebung modernistischer Kritik soll keineswegs die gesellschaftskritische Ausrichtung der Romantik (Shelley) oder des Realismus (Keller, Spielhagen, Galdós) verdecken, sondern an die Akzentverschiebung zugunsten der Kritik erinnern, die eine der fundamentalen *Ambivalenzen* des Modernismus begründet: *den oft aporetischen Versuch, die ideologischen Grundlagen der Subjektivität radikal zu kritisieren und zugleich das Subjekt gegen die es bedrohenden Auflösungstendenzen zu verteidigen.* (209)

Comparing Cecilia to a nymph promotes the importance of ambivalence and dialogical subjectivity and thus offers criticism of ideologically determined identities based on binary classification.

In Greek mythology, nymphs are distinguished according to their dwellings: nymphs of the mountains (*oreads*), nymphs of the trees (*dryads*), nymphs of the springs, rivers and ponds (*naiads*) and nymphs of the sea (*oceanids* and *nereids*) (Hansen 241-3). Nymphs are "youthful and lovely in aspect" and live "a life of freedom in one of the uncultivated places of

the earth, away from human habitation" (239). Although Robbie does not compare Cecilia to a specific nymph, she rises in front of Triton and is thus associated with a nymph of the sea; furthermore, *nereids* are famous for their *rosebud* faces (Monaghan 217), and Robbie, recalling the events by the fountain, thinks of Cecilia's "glistening *rosebud* mouth" (A 79; emphasis added). Comparing Cecilia to a *nereid* allows for the discussion of her mental and social confinement. A *nereid* swimming in the *natural* sea, being thus farthest away from human habitation as possible and untainted by social expectations, conveys unlimited freedom in ambivalence; in contrast, however, a nymph of the sea limited to an *artificial* fountain, an ornament cultivating and restraining water and its inhabitants, associates imprisonment. Cecilia's mental and social confinement, originating in "unnatural" expectations denying her diversity, is indicated in comparing her to a nymph of the sea reduced to a fountain. Furthermore, running water indicates freedom and movement; yet, stagnant water, quite the reverse, indicates decay. Triton "could blow through his conch a jet *only* two inches high, the pressure was so *feeble*, and water fell back over his head, [...] leaving a glistening *dark green stain*" (A 18; emphasis added). Cecilia, torn between staying and moving, only half runs; equally, the jet of water is only two inches high causing the water to be half-stagnant; movement is feeble, reduced to a minimum. Moreover, the dark green stain is indicative of first decay. If Cecilia remains indecisive and incapable of moving, she, too, will decay, will go mad.

Water, however, is equally a symbol for life, birth and re-birth (Stamer 10); Cecilia, plunging into the fountain's water, re-emerging a few seconds later and thus breaking the surface twice causing the half-stagnant water to move, is recognised in her diversity. Nymphs are highly ambivalent in behaviour; especially *nereids* are usually "lovely in appearance and generally kindly to humans" (Hansen 243), but nymphs can become dangerous if approached too closely by humans (Coenen 153). Moreover, a nymph's "sexuality tends to the extremes of overindulgence or underindulgence" (Hansen 240). She thus combines facets of the binary distinguished *femme fragile* and *femme fatale*, the former a-sexual and frail, gentle and benevolent, the latter sensual, passionate, erotic and deadly dangerous. Rethinking the events by the fountain, Robbie relishes the contradictory facets in Cecilia's air, complexion and behaviour. The

“startling whiteness” (A 79) recalls the “frail white nymph” rising from the water (A 30). Whiteness and frailty are traditionally associated with *femme fragiles*; yet, Robbie’s description is complimented by observing “a glimpse of the triangular darkness her knickers were supposed to conceal” (A 79), “the deep curve of her waist” (A 79) and her pelvic bones stretching “the material clear of her skin” (A 79); “a simple daisy, sewn between the cups of her bra” is associated with Cecilia’s “breasts wide apart and small” (A 79). Frailty and innocence do not foreclose eroticism. Robbie acknowledges and admires both Cecilia’s cool “marmoreal” complexion and her fiery sensual features. There is “something carved and still about the face” but also “a wild flare to the nostrils” (A 79); her rosebud mouth is small, but full and glistening (A 79); her “statuesque look” (A 79-80) hides complex emotions and thoughts, for her eyes are “dark and contemplative” (A 79), her movements “quick and impatient” (A 80). In comparing Cecilia to a nymph, Robbie accepts Cecilia in her ambivalent femininity.

Ambivalent femininity is equally implied in Cecilia associating her appearance with a mermaid. Having finally decided on her green evening dress, it is a mermaid who rises “to meet her in her full-length mirror” (A 99). Mermaids can be distinguished into various sub-categories, each presenting a specific aspect of complex femininity. Some mermaids primarily display motherly traits (Stamer 31-3); others suggest seduction and infatuation (33-5); still others ensure love and felicity (35-7); some are in need of salvation (37-41). “So vielgestaltig wie das Wasser selbst, schillernd-schön, aber auch dunkel-dämonisch, treten uns die weiblichen Wassergestalten aus den Märchen und Sagen entgegen” (9). This diversity, thus Barbara Stamer continues, only at first appears contradictory.

Diese verwirrende Vielfalt von Wasser-Frauen scheint zunächst nicht zusammenzugeschören, ja sie widerspricht sich. Sehen wir die Wasserfrauen jedoch in phänomenologischem Zusammenhang, so wird deutlich, daß sie alle Ausdruck einer großen zentralen Gestalt sind: die der *Großen Mutter*. **Die vielen verschiedenen Figuren stellen nur Teilaspekte des Großen Weiblichen in seiner Ambivalenz dar.** (9; bold emphasis added)

Cecilia, though unnoticed, dialogically combines different “mermaidian” and thus feminine features in her individual subjectivity; she displays motherly care, ensures love and is in need of salvation; furthermore, she

seduces and infatuates Robbie. A further feminine characteristic, intellectuality, is added. Cecilia's complex femininity is confirmed when *the intellectual* and *the mother* finally become co-existing facets of her individual subjectivity. The dress Cecilia is wearing is her "post-finals gown" (A 98), worn to celebrate her concluded education; at the same time, she is wearing this gown when caring for Jackson and Pierrot (A 99-101). Crucially, when wearing the dress, she feels "sleekly impregnable, slippery and secure" (A 99). She is immune to expectations, to determined identity and reduced personality; she feels *sleekly* and *slipperily* and is finally able to elude simplification; sleekness and slipperiness, usually considered dangerous, are Cecilia's safeguard, offer Cecilia the security she is longing for.

Significantly, Cecilia's motherly aspects are equally valuable to Robbie than to Briony or the twins. On his way to Dunkirk, Robbie remembers Cecilia's letters.

She was now on the maternity ward, and every day brought commonplace miracles, as well as moments of drama or hilarity. [...] When she described a happy outcome, that moment when the battle was over and an exhausted mother took the child in her arms for the first time, and gazed in rapture into a new face, it was the unspoken call to Cecilia's own future, the one she would share with him, which gave the writing its simple power [...]. (A 207)

She is directly involved in giving birth and protecting life. Cecilia "trägt Merkmale des Archetyps der Guten Mutter, welche die Gebärende, Schöpferische, Erhaltend-Schützende ist" (Stamer 31). At the same time, describing her routine to Robbie, she also protects him from despair in foreshadowing their joined future. Facing desolation and death, Cecilia's ability to give birth and thus to add a new identity (*father*) to Robbie's individual subjectivity, which has been reduced to acronyms and numbers in the army (A 206) and thus been wiped "clean" of all individual personality, maintains his desire to live; admittedly, this desire is equally maintained considering another aspect of Cecilia's femininity, her sexual attraction, for "in truth, his thoughts [dwell] less on birth than conception" (A 207). However, Cecilia and Robbie's relationship is not reduced to the loving mermaid, "die aus dem Wasser auftaucht und dem Geliebten Glück und Erfüllung schenkt" (Stamer 35); when emerging from the fountain, Cecilia, due to her existential crisis in need of salva-

tion, is not only offering love to Robbie but is equally dependent on Robbie's acceptance and support. Mermaids usually lack souls and only "die Liebe eines menschlichen Gemahls kann sie von [...] der seelenlosen Existenz erlösen" (37). Cecilia, though not lacking a soul, is lacking subjectivity: she is capable of thinking about her identities but unable to act; only Robbie is realising Cecilia's confinement and restlessness (A 80) and is finally offering salvation in accepting her ambivalent subjectivity.

Monologue or Dialogue?

Convenient Ambivalence in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

The previous analysis might have given the impression that the comparison of Cecilia to a nymph originates in Robbie's thought, the comparison of Cecilia to a mermaid in her own; the structure of McEwan's novel, however, explains the origin of these comparisons in author-Briony's thought.³ These comparisons, one might hence conclude, are thus purposefully employed to *atone* for her younger self's false testimony. Indeed, making Cecilia and Robbie's relationship a relationship of love based on the acceptance of ambivalence and reciprocal salvation elevates the relationship she has destroyed; furthermore, depicting Cecilia as life-giving and protecting mother and thus sharply contrasting her with Emily's failure elevates her sister and consequently the man she has chosen to love against Emily's expectations of class-based marriage (A 152). Exploiting the ambivalent characteristics associated with nymphs and mermaids, however, author-Briony equally *self-justifies* her younger self's actions.

Robbie's infatuation makes him think and behave like an addict. Expecting Cecilia's anger when attending the dinner, he concludes: "It would be worse, but he still wanted it. He had to have it. He wanted it to be worse" (A 81); he then decides to apologise and types the fateful letter *before he can stop himself* (A 85-86). A mermaid, especially in the form of a siren, is seductive and deadly dangerous in causing infatuation and

³ McEwan's meta-fictional chapter concluding *his* novel by the name of *Atonement* and casting new light on author-Briony's autobiographical novel allows for the "experimental" and rather "provoking" line of thoughts that an author's intention can be (fully) known to anyone besides herself and that the author and her narrator can be identified.

obsession (Stamer 33). Men stricken by such a mermaid are occasionally considered to behave maniacally (Coenen 153), and Emily, after dinner, recalls "something manic and glazed in his look" (A 151); not knowing about Robbie's experiences in the library, she even suspects him of "smoking the reefers" (A 151). Author-Briony thus establishes Cecilia's *femme fatale* identity the reason for Robbie being classified, due to his infatuated behaviour (the letter, the library), a maniac (A 119, 151); hence she indirectly blames Cecilia for young Briony's false testimony that is based on Robbie's "abnormal" conduct. This transfer of guilt is equally indicated during Cecilia and Robbie's intimate encounter in the library when author-Briony makes Robbie think that Cecilia "might not be shrinking from him, but drawing him with her deeper into the gloom" (A 133). A siren seduces and kills a man, "[indem sie ihn] in die Tiefe zieht und in ihr unterirdisches Reich lockt, ihn mit ihrer Schönheit und ihrem Gesang betört" (Stamer 33). Comparing Cecilia to a mermaid and stressing this mermaid's behaviour fatal to men diminishes young Briony's guilt; yet, torn between atonement and self-justification, ambivalence prevails, for Cecilia has difficulties to articulate. "He heard a soft, wet sound, the kind that is made when one is about to speak and the tongue unglues from the roof of the mouth. But she said nothing" (A 133). It is the mermaid's seductive voice usually causing a man's destruction (Stamer 33), hence its absence diminishes Cecilia's deadliness. Indeed, she is rather helpless and hardly able to speak and thus to use her voice: "she was tearful and trying to speak" (A 133). Atonement and self-justification, once binary distinguished processes, the former accepting guilt, the latter denying it, are not to be clearly separated; this ambivalence is convenient to author-Briony who is constantly hovering between atonement in blaming herself and self-justification in blaming others.

Accepting ambivalence at the beginning of the 20th century (Part One of *Atonement* is set in 1935) is strongly associated with Enlightenment ideology and its basic values and ideas, which are dependent on the existence of clarity and unambiguity, in crisis (Childs, *Modernism* 21, Murray and Tew 11-15). Rationality, reality, objectivity and truth are severely threatened when new philosophies, psychologies and sciences promote perspectivism instead of objectivity and truth, and irrationality instead of superior reason. Albert Einstein's Special and General Theories of Rela-

tivity and Henri Bergson's *la durée*, for example, show reality to be an illusion, for time and space, considered physical certainties structuring reality, are proven to be dependent on the perspective and perception of the individual subject; consequently, objectivity and truth, basis to rationality, are recognised to be constructions and *right* and *wrong* become undefinable. The superiority of reason is equally scrutinised. William James, thus Peter Childs explains the psychologist's concept, considers thought to be "fluid, fast-flowing, associative rather than structured" (*Modernism* 170); sensory impressions, in Enlightenment thought ordered by and thus subordinate to reason, initiate thought in the first place (James 542) and hence become the basis to the stream of thought (233).

When young Briony watches Cecilia and Robbie by the fountain, she breaks with the concepts of reality, objectivity and truth promoted in Enlightenment ideology; instead, she accepts perspectivism and thus ambivalence. "She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view; her excitement was in the prospect of freedom, of being delivered from the cumbrous struggle between good and bad, heroes and villains" (A 40). Accepting the ambivalence of perspectives is diminishing guilt, for *right* and *wrong* become less distinguishable. "None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly good. She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral" (A 40); unambiguous judgement is rendered difficult, even impossible with the acceptance of ambivalence and dialogue. Teenage-Briony is even in favour of stream-of-consciousness not only focussing on perspective but on thoughts initiated and guided by sensory impressions instead of reason. "The age of clear answers was over. [...] It was thought, perception, sensations that interested her, the conscious mind as a river through time, and how to present its onward roll, as well as all the tributaries that would swell it, and the obstacles that would divert it" (A 281-82). Ambivalence becomes highly inconvenient, however, when the process of atonement and justification is complimented by author-Briony's longing for forgiveness, because forgiveness requires moral evaluation. Clarity is thus considered essential, if not necessarily to atone, to be granted forgiveness; hence ambivalence, in the key events of the story, is denied. Two of these key

events are Cecilia and Robbie's sexual intercourse and teenage-Briony's visit in Balham.

Monologue or Dialogue?

Inconvenient Ambivalence in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

Author-Briony finally abandons her attempt at figural narrative situation (A 320) and doubles back to her "starting place" (A 370), young Briony's strong belief in the author's gift and power to impose order and guide her readers' judgements; in narrative, her "passion for tidiness" is satisfied, "for an unruly world could be made just so" (A 7) – *just so* leaving no room for opposition. Young Briony is thus depicted in favour of Works.

Only when a story was *finished*, all fates *resolved* and the whole matter *sealed off at both ends* so it resembled, 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. (A 6; emphasis added)

According to post-structuralist textual theory, a Work is a *product* that is passively *consumed*, that is *read* (Barthes, *Work/Text* 161). It "has nothing disturbing for any monistic philosophy" (160) because it offers finite and unambiguous meaning; thus binary classification is promoted. Young Briony's "love of order also shaped the principles of justice, with death and marriage the main engines of housekeeping, the former being set aside exclusively for the morally dubious, the latter a reward withheld until the final page" (A 7). A Work promotes ideology in poetic justice; *good* and *bad* is clearly distinguished, the former is rewarded, the latter is punished. Accordingly, a Work promotes monological subjectivity; while reading a Work, a reader is guided into accepting ideological thought. A Text, on the contrary, has "subversive force in respect of the old classifications" (Barthes, *Work/Text* 157); instead of merely reading and accepting old classifications, the reader is encouraged to enter into dialogue with various thoughts and values. A Text is a *productivity* that is actively *shaped*, that is (re-)written by the reader. Author-Briony, favouring perspectivism and discussing Cecilia's ambivalent identities, subverts old

classifications; yet, she resiles from this act of subversion when describing Cecilia and Robbie's sexual intercourse in the library.

Cecilia and Robbie, when meeting in the library, are highly self-conscious; they are aware of their former identity (*childhood friend*) and not yet able to accept the ambivalence necessary to dialogically add the new identity (*lover*) to the former. Before overcoming their subjectivity in instinctive behaviour, before becoming "too *selfless* [...] to be embarrassed" (A 136; emphasis added) and thus paving the way for a subjectivity re-constituted, Robbie, trying to relax the awkward situation, is about to conjure for Cecilia "a private moment of exuberance, a passing impatience with convention, a memory of reading the Orioli edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" (A 132). Indeed, the romantic attachments described in D. H. Lawrence's and author-Briony's novels are against convention; not only Emily but also Cecilia and Robbie himself mind class differences.⁴ However, Robbie's explicit allusion to D. H. Lawrence's novel is primarily used by author-Briony to control the development of Cecilia's and Robbie's individual subjectivities. Constance Chatterley, like Cecilia, is "aware of a growing restlessness" (LCL⁵ 20), "a mad restlessness" (LCL 20) originating in her involuntarily narrowed personality. Getting married to Clifford Chatterley, Constance is not only reduced to sexual but also to mental nothingness (LCL 50); despite being well-educated, she is excluded from her husband's conversations with friends and is not even required to raise children and to keep house. "Everything went on in pretty good order, strict cleanliness, and strict punctuality" (LCL 17). Her life is absorbed "in Clifford and his needing her" (LCL 18); the rest of her life is "non-existence" (LCL 18). His wife's dissatisfaction and her restlessness are not recognised by Clifford but by Oliver Mellors. "Clifford did not notice: those were not things he was aware of. But the stranger knew" (LCL 48). In their sexual intercourse and beyond, Oliver offers Constance (like Robbie is about to offer Cecilia) salvation in accepting her complex personality. In his letter concluding the novel, he writes: "There's *so much of you* here with me, really – that it's a pity you aren't *all* here" (LCL 301; emphasis added). Significantly, most of their

⁴ For discussions of class in *Atonement*, see Finney 76-77, Ingersoll 248-9, 251-52 and Mathews 153-4.

⁵ LCL = Lawrence, D[avid] H[erbert]. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. 1928. London: Penguin, 2006. Penguin Classics.

sexual intercourse happens in nature (the forest, the hut); nature, as environment of ambivalence, offers peace of mind to Constance.

And she watched the daffodils go sunny in a burst of sun, that was warm on her hands and lap. Even she caught the faint tarry scent of the flowers. And then, being so still and alone, she seemed to get into the current of her proper destiny. *She had been fastened by a rope*, and jaggng and snaring like a boat at its moorings. *Now she was loose and adrift.* (LCL 86; emphasis added)

In contact with nature, Constance feels liberated from Clifford's expectations and loose and adrift, free to come true. Cecilia, when stepping out of her family's residence "into the brightness" and thus momentarily beyond their expectations (A 24), equally feels nature, "the rising scent of warmed stone" which is "like a friendly embrace" (A 25). Both women feel alive and at peace when in contact with nature because nature, in contrast to culture, is beyond expectation and decision.

At first appearance, this interfigural approach seems to emphasise the importance of ambivalence; yet, binary distinction is necessary to the concept of Work that denies plurality and promotes the idea of the reasonable author providing order, classification, definition and thus guidance (Barthes, *Work/Text* 159); if author-Briony wants to write a Work, she needs to re-introduce the Enlightenment values of reason and rational subject denying ambivalence in clarity. Ambivalence is diminished in Robbie's passion for gardening. Earl G. Ingersoll not only discusses similarities in Robbie's and Oliver's education but correctly calls them "natural" men (251), for both are working in and with nature. He fails to observe a crucial difference, though; while Oliver is a gamekeeper working in wild and hardly controllable nature, Robbie is a gardener working in culturised nature tamed and controlled by reason. Robbie is even reading a book on the gardens of Versailles (A 84), a prime example of culturised nature. Reason, this interfigural approach implies, is able to control nature and thus to restrain the disorder of ambivalence. Furthermore, Cecilia and Robbie's intercourse is "relocated" into the library, according to Barthes an environment of Works (*Work/Text* 156-57), an environment of authorial definition and classification. Young Briony's father knows "most things worth knowing" and when he does not know the answer to a question, he knows "which authority to consult" and takes his daughter "into the library to help him find it" (A 122). A library

offers clarity and unambiguity. Consequently, during Cecilia and Robbie's sexual intercourse the mental obstacle of former identities is overcome by *chronological* reason instead of *simultaneous* dialogue. The moment of "unity" is not marked by intense and overwhelming sensations. "Instead of an ecstatic frenzy" Cecilia and Robbie experience "stillness" (A 137); yet, they are not stilled "by the astonishing fact of arrival, but by an awed sense of return" (A 137). Subjectivity is *restored* when language, thus consciousness and finally reason *return*; the individuals Cecilia and Robbie are not re-born *dialogical* individual subjects accepting their ambivalent identities but they are re-born *monological* individual subjects clearly positioning themselves in their existence; subjectivity is not causing embarrassment because within the newly constituted subjectivity reason as ordering instance, hitherto denied (A 134-35), is acknowledged. Familiarity, instead of causing awkwardness, is rationally accepted: "Of course, there was nothing abstract about a face" (A 137). The adverbial *of course*, indicating "ordinary or due course," "customary order" and "natural result" (*OED*, "course, *n.*" def. 37.b.), conveys *scientific logic* (0-1) based on monologue instead of poetic logic (0-2) based on dialogue (Kristeva 70), conveys the *common sense* of ideology and thus the existence of rational and "correct" thought. They are, *of course*, the "son of Grace and Ernest Turner, the daughter of Emily and Jack Tallis, the childhood friends, the university acquaintances" who are "in a state of expansive, tranquil joy" and confront "the *momentous change* they [have] achieved" (A 137; emphasis added). Regaining the clarity they have temporarily lacked due to overwhelming emotions (A 134-35), the awkwardness they have experienced and their unreasonableness is ridiculed in becoming inexplicable: *of course*. With clarity re-established, Cecilia and Robbie's former identities (*son/daughter, childhood friends, university acquaintances*) are unselfconsciously listed in chronological order and accepted as a past that is overcome by a *momentous change*. According to the *OED*, a change is a "substitution of one thing for another" and a "succession of one thing in place of another" (def. 1.a.); instead of dialogically combining their former identities, Cecilia and Robbie reasonably accept their past identities and replace them; they are succeeded by the new identity of *lover*. Robbie describes this change "as fundamental, as fundamentally biological as birth" (A 137); according to

him, nothing “as singular or as important [has] happened since the day of his birth” (A 137). Robbie has indeed undergone a biological process with *natural* individuality becoming the basis to a newly constituted *cultural* subjectivity; however, like a child's subjectivity his subjectivity is monologically constituted (Zima, *Theorie* 15). Cecilia is equally awed and returns “his gaze, struck by the sense of her own *transformation*, and overwhelmed by the beauty in a face which a lifetime's habit had taught her to ignore” (A 137; emphasis added). The moment of “unity” is the first time Cecilia is described in peace of mind; yet, this peace of mind does not origin in the acceptance of ambivalence but in a “complete change in character” and “condition” (*OED*, “transformation” def. 2.). *Change* and *transformation* are nouns conveying completeness. Cecilia whispers Robbie's “name with the deliberation of a child trying out the distinct sounds” (A 137); the sounds are *distinct*, they are *clearly pronounced* leaving no room for ambivalence. When Robbie replies with her name, the syllables remain the same, the meaning, however, is different (A 137); the meaning has changed instead of becoming more complex. Subjectivity, equally, always remains the state of conscious existence but its content in the form of identities can be re-constituted and is in Cecilia's and Robbie's re-birth reduced. In categorising their identities Cecilia and Robbie accept their past and consider it finished. The “death” in individuality and the “re-birth” in reduced personality depicted during Cecilia and Robbie's intimacies is one of author-Briony's tidy finishes she likes to make (A 353).

Why, however, is it necessary for author-Briony to make a tidy finish, to promote reason and thus order and unambiguity? Why is she despite her interest in psychological realism and stream-of-consciousness finally in favour of Works? When teenage-Briony is about to visit Cecilia in Balham, she is wondering if she can really “hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and drown her guilt in a stream – three streams! – of consciousness?” (A 320) Perspectivism is challenged and accused of moral neutrality; teenage-Briony finally confronts her guilt, and based on her statement it has been argued that author-Briony refrains from “neutral” figural narrative situation and self-justification in order to atone and provoke moral judgement. “Style, she discovers, really does have ethical implications” (Finney 72). Author-Briony, however, refrains from “ethics” and “morals” when committing a second false

testimony. Dialogue in the form of ambivalence and perspectivism is convenient to author-Briony who is torn between atonement and self-justification; yet, dialogue is dangerous to an author whose process of atonement knows only *forgiveness*. Teenage-Briony realises that in “real” life she will “never undo the damage” because she is “unforgivable” (A 285); the “only conceivable solution would be for the past never to have happened” (A 288). Hence author-Briony’s atonement is based on a second false testimony, teenage-Briony’s visit to Balham, which her readers need to consider reality truthfully depicted; only if she succeeds in convincing her readers of Cecilia and Robbie’s forgiveness towards her teenage-self, forgiveness is bestowed on author-Briony. Consequently, in order to guide her readers, she needs to re-introduce the Enlightenment values of ordering reason, unobscured unambiguity and definite reality which her younger self critically scrutinises in perspectivism. Reality, however, does not only exist; indeed, it can be constructed in Works structured by the superior reason of the author.

After her birthday celebration author-Briony is wondering: “how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God?” (A 371) Atonement, with Cecilia and Robbie dead in the “real” world and the existence of a higher entity denied, is merely an attempt (A 371), for neither forgiveness can be granted nor condemnation spoken. “There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her” (A 371). Atonement, however, is possible in author-Briony’s “fictional” world. Claudia Schemberg argues that author-Briony denies her teenage-self forgiveness “even in her fictional account of their happy ending” because she “has learned how to imaginatively put herself into the position of other people” (85); yet, to the contrary, reconciliation is *foreshadowed* in Robbie’s final reply. When teenage-Briony eventually atones for her false testimony, admitting the terrible distress she has caused Cecilia and Robbie (A 348), Robbie replies “softly” (A 348): “Just do all the things we’ve asked” (A 348). Robbie’s *soft* reply, implying kindness and gentleness, strongly evokes future forgiveness, and teenage-Briony concludingly observes that it is “almost conciliatory, that ‘just’, but not quite, not yet” (A 348). Instead of condemning teenage-Briony, Robbie’s reply nourishes hope: not quite, not yet, but almost, but soon. In granting her

teenage-self future forgiveness, author-Briony is granting forgiveness to herself. Young Briony strongly identifies with Arabella, her fictional heroine. "Of course she was taking the part of Arabella. [...]. She was not playing Arabella because she wrote the play, she was taking the part [...] because she *was* Arabella" (A 13); equally, author-Briony strongly identifies with teenage-Briony, *her* fictional heroine. "I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive *me*. Not quite, not yet" (A 372; emphasis added). Using the personal pronoun *me*, author-Briony equals herself with teenage-Briony; indeed, she *can* equal them, for, according to author-Briony, fiction constructs reality. "As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love" (A 371); again, the world is made *just so* with no room for opposition. Dialogue in the process of atonement is thus closed; author-Briony even thinks of quelling the last doubt still inherent in teenage-Briony's and thus her thought. "If I had the power to conjure them at my birthday celebration... Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library" (A 372). Indeed, she has the power, because in "her imagination, she has set the limits and the terms" (A 371), and thus she concludes: "It's not impossible" (A 372). Author-Briony, like her younger self, has "always liked to make a tidy finish" (A 353). Consequently, Schemberg's conclusion that, finally, "Briony abandons her role as an autonomous Author-God who is wholly separate, aloof, and in full control of her creation" needs to be revised (85). Author-Briony herself admits that "I have not travelled so 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" (A 370); thus Ingersoll correctly observes that author-Briony "in the epilogue verbalises the daunting power of the Author to play God with her creations" (254). And she does not only play God with her creations; she plays God with her readers, too. Both young and old Briony believe in the Work, which is, Barthes explains, "caught up in a process of filiation" (*Work/Text* 160); the author is considered "in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child" (*Author* 145). Young Briony's triumph when having finished a story is significant; like a baby in the arms' of its mother, the "pages of a recently finished story seemed to vibrate in her hand with all the life they contained" (A 7). Accordingly, the "*explanation* of a work is always sought in

the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end [...] the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us" (Barthes, *Author* 143). Author-Briony has given birth to a new reality and the readers' tendency to seek the explanation of a Work in its author offers author-Briony atonement and forgiveness; especially in an autobiographic novel with names and places unchanged (A 369), author-Briony's readers are bound to identify teenage-Briony and the "confiding" author Briony Tallis; thus forgiveness implied in a fictional world becomes a reality. Nevertheless, a Work, despite the readers' tendencies to seek explanation in the author, needs to be convincing in order to prevent suspicion on the readers' side; indeed, if author-Briony wants her readers to believe in teenage-Briony's visit to Balham and its positive outcome, she needs to write a readerly text that is "controlled by the principle of non-contradiction" (Barthes, *S/Z* 156), a text that is controlled by the author's ordering and guiding hand, a text that reduces the ambivalence implied in the comparisons of Cecilia to a nymph and a mermaid.

Young Briony and author-Briony's (necessary) belief in Work and author requires hierarchy accepted; hierarchy exists between author and reader, the former traditionally considered superior, the latter inferior, the former considered giving and guiding, the latter taking and accepting. With hierarchy undermined in dialogue (an idea most prominent in Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of the authoritative and internally-persuasive word, Julia Kristeva's discussion of Bakhtin and Barthes's discussion of Kristeva), dialogue needs to be devalued. In recanting her comparison of Cecilia to a nymph, author-Briony implies the significance of hierarchy and thus monologue for the individual subject in society. When teenage-Briony decides on visiting Cecilia and Robbie in Balham, Cecilia is a nurse working in an "Emergency Medical Services hospital, a commandeered place, most likely dealing with the brunt, the real brunt of the evacuation" (A 332). She is highly assertive and has "surely been promoted to ward sister" (A 334). Cecilia thus obeys and issues orders; she is one chain in a monological chain of command; within this structure, she is highly capable of acting (A 334). Cecilia's mental restlessness and the nymph's frailty, once associated with Cecilia, are replaced by the mental assertiveness and decisiveness and the physical strength of a nurse; in addition, the nymph's whiteness, indicating delicacy, has also

vanished. Cecilia, a hard-working nurse, is “much darker in complexion, and her hands too” are brown (A 331). Due to young Briony's false testimony, Cecilia has been forced into the open, into the financial (not mental) independence of a hard-working nurse; her domestic identities (*mother*, *sister-mother* and *daughter*) she has abandoned. She will “never speak to her parents, brother or sister again” (A 205). Although her family repeatedly tries to communicate (A 208-09), she refuses all dialogue and does “not wish to be contacted” (A 208). Robbie knows about the loss of personality this abandonment implies. He is convinced that he can never return (A 209); nevertheless, it troubles “him to think that she [is] *destroying a part of herself* for his sake” (A 209; emphasis added). Despite Robbie's concern, however, Cecilia's loss in personality is primarily depicted in positive terms because she is finally made capable of action without restlessness of mind. In Cecilia's decision against her family her existential crisis is eventually overcome; it is not overcome, however, by her finally accepting her ambivalent identities in dialogical subjectivity; indeed, with her family uncritically judging Robbie and thus destroying Cecilia's and Robbie's lives, Cecilia, equally uncritically, blandly refuses her domestic identities and monologically “directs” her actions against her family's ideologies and values.

Now that I've broken away, I'm beginning to understand the snobbery that lay behind their stupidity. My mother never forgave you your first. My father preferred to lose himself in his work. Leon turned out to be a grinning, spineless idiot who went along with everyone else. [...] I know I sound bitter, but my darling, I don't want to be. I'm honestly happy with my new life and my new friends. I feel I can breathe now. Most of all, I have you to live for. Realistically, *there had to be a choice – you or them. How could it be both?* I never had a moment's doubt. (A 209; emphasis added)

Cecilia's existential crisis originates in her indecisiveness due to binarily opposed ideologies of equal value; decision is impossible without reducing personality. Robbie's prosecution, however, accepted and promoted by her parents and siblings, reduces the value of her mother's expectations (upper-class marriage and family), her father's expectations (Civil Service) and Cecilia's sense of obligation towards her family, especially towards Leon and Briony who initiate Robbie's prosecution due to idleness and false testimony. Observing her family's ideologies and values in failure, Cecilia feels finally liberated because she can clearly distin-

guish between her family's *wrong* (in)actions and values and her own *right* conduct. Cecilia must not accept ambivalence to become capable of action; re-introduced binary decision ensures her happiness and freedom. Her monological decision for Robbie and against her family ("both" is no option), however, is not freely taken; with the "old" ideology determining her domestic identities and values in crisis, she can clearly align herself to the "new" ideology promoting her female independence and accepting the values contradictory to her mother's expectations; decision is equalled with ideological determination. Nevertheless, Cecilia leaves her family only to enter into a new monological structure of command. When integrated in her family, Cecilia is living in a hierarchically and patriarchally structured household.

In fact, being at odds with her father about anything at all, even an insignificant domestic detail, made her uncomfortable, and nothing that great literature might have done to modify her sensibilities, none of the lessons of practical criticism, could quite deliver her from obedience. Smoking on the stairway when her father was installed in his Whitehall ministry was all the revolt her education would allow, and still it cost her some effort. (A 47)

While Cecilia, aware of her transformation due to her literary studies (A 103), is confronting her mother's partial expectations based on public and private sphere, her education does not yet undermine her father's authority in both private and public matters; she knows, however, that uncritical obedience is dangerous. The hierarchical and patriarchal structure issued in the EMS, on the contrary, is uncritically accepted. Robbie, in Dunkirk, equally emphasises the importance of command. "Order would prevail. No one at Cambridge taught the benefit of good marching order. They revered the free, unruly spirits. The poets. But what did the poets know about survival?" (A 264) Both Cecilia and Robbie are sceptical towards the value of literary texts and free thought in social life and align themselves to the order of monological structures of command not only to become capable of action but also to become capable of life. Hierarchy is not dialogically criticised, for hierarchy is necessary not only to survival in society but especially to author-Briony who re-introduces the advantages of monologue and hierarchy in having Cecilia and Robbie willingly accept hierarchical structure and monologi-

cal command. The value of reading in initiating free thought is thus severely criticised with regard to “surviving as a body of men” (A 264). During teenage-Briony’s visit to Balham, Cecilia’s nymphian and mermaidian ambivalence is still further diminished when author-Briony recants Cecilia’s *femme fatale* characteristics and solely focuses on those of the *tender lover*. When teenage-Briony describes her sister, her description differs crucially from Robbie’s account. The “wild flare to the nostrils” Robbie has once observed (A 79) is now “dainty” (A 332). Cecilia, in Robbie’s description being accredited with both gracefulness and fierceness, now only displays elegance. Elegance, however, is traditionally associated with simplicity, neatness and harmony and thus peace of mind (*OED*); ambivalence, on the contrary, is associated with complexity, disorder and disharmony and thus restlessness. In diminishing Cecilia’s wildness and emphasising her daintiness, author-Briony bends attention from the ambivalence she has once introduced to atone and self-justify. Crucially, Cecilia has still a “statuesque look” (A 79-80), “something mask-like and carved about the face” (A 332), but while her “still” mask has previously been supposed to hide impatience and thought recognisable in her “dark and contemplative” eyes (A 79), her face is now merely “very still” (A 332). Cecilia’s stillness originates in her monological subjectivity; no longer confronted with the equality of binary identities, she has stopped to restlessly contemplate; critical and active thought, causing both impatience and freedom, has become futile. With this lack of contemplation ensuring Cecilia’s elegance, however, it is prevented from being considered negative; indeed, Cecilia’s peace of mind provides for Robbie’s soft and conciliatory air. For the same reason, Cecilia is “more beautiful than Briony” remembers (A 332). Her face, once vulnerable (A 332), is now “with an accentuated bow of the full purplish lips” (A 332); her rosebud-mouth is in full bloom; yet, this sensual aspect of Cecilia, especially recalling her *femme fatale* identity, is converted to tenderness.

When Robbie is about to physically attack teenage-Briony, both Cecilia’s mental ease and her physical presence calm him.

As Cecilia gripped him tighter, he twisted his whole body away from her, and they seemed like wrestlers as she reached up and tried to turn his head towards her. But

his face was tilted back, his lips retracted and teeth bared in a ghoulish parody of a smile. Now with two hands she was gripping his cheeks tightly, and with an effort she turned his face and drew it towards her own. At last he was looking into her eyes, but still she kept her grip on his cheeks. She pulled him closer, drawing him into her gaze, until their faces met and she kissed him lightly, lingeringly on the lips. With a tenderness that Briony remembered from years ago, waking in the night, Cecilia said, 'Come back . . . Robbie, come back.' (A 343)

Robbie, unable to speak (A 343), is about to lose himself in instinctive violence and thus to become an individual. Cecilia and Robbie's wrestling (gripping, twisting, turning, tilting, pulling) and Robbie's animalistic air (retracted lips, bared teeth) recall the "fierce urgency of passion they displayed in the library [...] in the harsh physicality with which Cecilia draws Robbie back from the brink of violence against Briony" (Rooney 78); yet, Cecilia's physical contact is not, contrary to their intimacies in the library, threatening Robbie's subjectivity. Her touch is not reducing him to individuality; instead, her touch is saving his consciousness. Her physical strength forces Robbie to look straight in her face and eyes and thus be engulfed in her stillness; furthermore, the light but lingering touch of her sensual lips is not inflaming him but calming his mind. Cecilia's *femme fatale* characteristics produce the opposite effect; she is not threatening, she is saving Robbie from a loss of subjectivity, and her tender voice, instead of being Robbie's obsession and death, recalls him. "He nodded faintly, and took a deep breath which he released slowly as she relaxed her grip and withdrew her hands from his face" (A 343). The following kiss, "deep" and "sustained" (A 344), is equally free of passion, and finally, Robbie and Cecilia are shown "hand in hand" (A 347). Ambivalence is diminished for Cecilia is displayed only in the mermaidian identity of *tender lover* bringing salvation to her lover; indeed, Cecilia's presence and voice, once inflaming Robbie and causing him to act maniacally, i.e. unreasonably, recalls him to reason. "When he began to speak, his voice was purged of emotion. [...] His eyes were steady, and he had everything under control" (A 345). He then reasonably lists the tasks they require Briony to do and whose execution foreshadows forgiveness (A 345-46); thus Cecilia's peace of mind due to monological subjectivity becomes the reason for Robbie's softness and the foundation of future reconciliation. Moreover, foregrounding Cecilia's tenderness causes sympathy on behalf of teenage-Briony.

Cecilia's Monological and Dialogical Subjectivity in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

It was her sister she missed – or more precisely, it was her sister with Robbie. Their love. Neither Briony nor the war had destroyed it. This was what soothed her as she sank deeper under the city. How Cecilia had drawn him to her with her eyes. That tenderness in her voice when she called him back from his memories, from Dunkirk, or from the roads that let to it. (A 349)

Teenage-Briony emphasises that Cecilia's love for Robbie elevates her sister and that she has a high regard for the tenderness prevailing in this love; yet, all of Cecilia's tender love and care is focused solely on Robbie. Cecilia, teenage-Briony remembers, "used to speak like that to her sometimes" and she sadly adds that unthinking family love is easily forgotten (A 349). Teenage-Briony is longing to be welcomed back into the loving family circle. Barthes accuses the *readerly text* of reducing the reader to binary distinction; "instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*" (S/Z 4). Author-Briony's readers, however, are not even granted a referendum. Author-Briony demands forgiveness.

Monologue or Dialogue?

Prevailing Ambivalence in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

Sarah Dillon, focussing on the psychoanalytic element of Kristeva's intertextuality (95-98) and referring to Barthes's essay on the death of the author (98), argues that author-Briony is rather a writing subject (*scriptor*), being born in the process of writing, than an author preceding her Work (98). Author-Briony, however, deliberately provides her novel with literary references, denied in post-structuralist (inter)textual theory (Barthes, *Work/Text* 160), in order to create a Work promoting finite meaning and thus ideology and monological subjectivity; she intentionally refers to a literary text (D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) and fictional characters with extensive mythological and literary tradition (nymph, mermaid) to discuss and finally de-value ambivalence and thus dialogical subjectivity. In "relocating" Cecilia and Robbie's sexual intercourse into the library and focussing solely on Cecilia's "positive" nymphian and mermaidian identities, author-Briony consequently re-introduces an ideology whose values based on rationality and unam-

biguity assist her not only in writing a Work but also in foregrounding its “advantage” of stifling critical thought but allowing social survival in monological hierarchy. Intentional reference, author-Briony’s employment of literary texts and fictional characters indicates, can thus indeed *promote and prevent* dialogical involvement and subjectivity. Her belief to have finally written a readerly text denying dialogical involvement becomes obvious in one of her final statements.

I know there’s always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what *really* happened? The answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love. (A 371)

Contradiction is considered irrelevant and opposition is again rendered futile; indeed, why contradicting and opposing when author-Briony’s final draft, including a happy ending for Cecilia and Robbie in being united and for teenage-Briony in future reconciliation being foreshadowed, spares her readers the “bleakest realism” of author-Briony’s past (A 371)? Pretending concern for her readers, she cannot deprive them of the “hope” and “satisfaction” a happy ending conveys (A 371). Author-Briony, Ángeles de la Concha argues, “rounds off her atonement with the precious gift that, she well knows, is available to her only in her god-like capacity as writer: not only to free her lovers from death in her narrative, but to make them immortal through literature as well” (209; cf. A 370-72). Indeed, author-Briony undeniably admits: “I *like to think* that it isn’t weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them in the end” (A 371-72; emphasis added); this statement, however, is pervaded with doubt. Not only her diction does indirectly imply scepticism towards her own statement (she only *assumes* her final draft to be an act of kindness); she also directly admits her true reasons. “I’m too old, too frightened, too much in love with the shred of life I have remaining. I face an incoming tide of forgetting, and then oblivion. I no longer possess the courage of my pessimism” (A 371). Her authorial power is indeed a gift; this gift, however, becomes an instrument of power in the moment it is primarily employed to soothe her dying self in creating a new reality instead of comforting her readers with happy endings. “Through her

'gift' of artistic transformation, she deludes herself into constructing an 'atonement' to allow her to face imminent death with a recovered 'innocence'" (Ingersoll 255).

Due to the meta-fictional turn of McEwan's novel, his readers are finally, some of them involuntarily (Finney 69-70), liberated from author-Briony's manipulation. "The final section of *Atonement* forces the reader to recognize the text as a productivity – it disallows him or her the comforting illusion of the monological (realist) book" (Dillon 94; cf. also Ingersoll 250); McEwan's readers are forced into dialogical involvement when author-Briony's reality is de-constructed and her readerly text, due to the meta-fictional last part, "explodes into a plurality which undermines its status as a readerly text, which makes it, at least in its dénouement, writerly, plural, structured and yet infinite" (Allen 80). McEwan's novel finally appears to be, thus David James, "a laboratory for authorial posturing against the illusory totality and autonomy conferred by authorship itself" (95-6), and the meta-fictional turn "subverts the reader's trust in the reliability of what had presented itself as a third-person narrative, so that suddenly gaps are opened in the potential of the narrative to make truth-claims" (Ingersoll 253). In unveiling the illusion of Work and authorship, McEwan's writerly text, promoting ambivalence in dialogue, becomes the basis not only to an existential crisis but equally to a dialogical subjectivity of scepticism and critical thought. This meta-fictional conclusion, implying the symbolic death of the author in author-Briony's physical death, has been controversially discussed in secondary literature; the focus is usually on the birth of McEwan's readers.⁶ However, although speculative, it is nevertheless necessary to consider author-Briony's readers. Are they indeed guided into believing her fiction reality? Do they realise, without author-Briony's "real" background finally forced upon them, her omniscience?

A readerly text, thus Barthes, is

controlled by the principle of non-contradiction, [...] by stressing at every opportunity the *compatible* nature of circumstances, by attaching narrated events together with a kind of logical "paste," [...]; it assumes the careful and suspicious mien of an individual afraid of being caught in some flagrant contradiction; it is always on the look-out and always, just in case, preparing its defense against the enemy that may force it to

⁶ See Childs's *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*; Childs gives an overview over various approaches to *Atonement* (129-43). See also Concha, Ingersoll.

acknowledge the scandal of some illogicality, some disturbance of “common sense.” (S/Z 156)

Author-Briony admits not to be interested in facts (A 360) and counts herself an unreliable witness (A 358); she is accordant in diminishing the ambivalence dangerous to her project of atonement and forgiveness but she is highly unreliable in her facts and temporal structure. Teenage-Briony has offered her novella *Two Figures by a Fountain* to Cyril Connolly’s literary magazine *Horizon* and she receives his letter of refusal on the first day of Dunkirk evacuation, the 26th of May 1940 (A 311); nevertheless, Cecilia is telling Robbie about Connolly’s refusal in a letter he already receives in mid-May (A 211). Author-Briony’s story thus lacks the “compatible nature of circumstances” and the “logical paste” necessary to a readerly text that needs to forestall suspicions on part of the readers; she does not protect herself from attentive readers in search of illogicalities and disturbances. Each Work has textual potential and each readerly text becomes writerly in the moment of contradiction.

Author-Briony equally causes contradictions in constantly re-writing her drafts (A 369) and in her resolution for a happy ending; instead of writing a “new draft” as indicated (A 349), she merely adds her visit to Balham to her previous drafts and inconsequently adjusts those to her new ending. As a result, Robbie is promoted to corporal while hallucinating due to septicaemia and hyperpyretically waiting for his evacuation from Dunkirk. Robbie, a convicted criminal, is not considered “eligible for officer training” (A 207); during his retreat to Dunkirk, he acts like an officer without having “a single stripe” (A 193); nevertheless, teenage-Briony, when visiting Cecilia and Robbie in Balham, is noticing “the corporal’s two stripes” on Robbie’s jacket (A 347). Robbie’s military career is elevating him in implying his values as officer and comrade. While Robbie’s ineligibility for officer training is a remnant from author-Briony’s “pitiless” drafts (A 370), his career rounds off the happy ending she has finally resolved on. Robbie’s joyful acceptance of Cecilia’s ambivalent identities *after* their sexual intercourse is equally a remnant from author-Briony’s earlier drafts promoting atonement and self-justification in Cecilia’s ambivalent identities.

Cecilia's Monological and Dialogical Subjectivity in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

His excitement was close to pain and sharpened by the pressure of contradictions: she was familiar like a sister, she was exotic like a lover; he had always known her, he knew nothing about her; she was plain, she was beautiful; she was capable – how easily she protected herself against her brother – and twenty minutes ago she had wept; his stupid letter repelled her but it unlocked her. He regretted it, and he exulted in his mistake. They would be alone together soon, with more contradictions – hilarity and sensuousness, desire and fear at their recklessness, awe and impatience to begin. (A 130)

The equality of binary distinction (sister and lover, familiarity and strangeness, plainness and beauty, strength and frailty) and the value of ambivalence in the individual subject's resistance against ideological determination, implied in comparing Cecilia to a "wet" nymph and a "slippery" mermaid, have, at this point, already been denied in Cecilia and Robbie's monological re-birth which reasonably overcomes former identities and contradiction and thus induces peace of mind instead of excitement.

Contradictions in fact and temporal structure convert author-Briony's novel, if attentively read, into a writerly text bringing dialogical involvement; however, author-Briony, knowing of her unreliability concerning facts (A 358, 360), is aware of the danger attentive reading poses to her project of atonement and forgiveness. Consequently, author-Briony, in line with accordantly dismissing ambivalent personality, promotes reading as a process of consumption (monological subjectivity) in indicating the post-structuralist threat reading as a process of (re-)writing (dialogical subjectivity) poses to the readers' individual subjectivities. Young Briony disapprovingly thinks of Cecilia's room that is "a stew of unclosed books" (A 4); books unclosed, liberated from their symbolic confinement to library shelves and freed from their symbolic finity in book-binding, however, indicate each Work's textual potential (therefrom young Briony's desire to bind her narratives and draw their covers: A 6).

She had lolled about for three years at Girton with the kind of books she could equally have read at home – Jane Austen, Dickens, Conrad, all in the library downstairs, in complete sets. How had that pursuit, reading the novels that others took as their leisure, let her think she was superior to anyone else? (A 152)

The difference Emily is unable to recognise is Barthes's difference between the Work that is consumed and the Text that is "*experienced only in*

an activity of production" (*Work/Text* 157); the Text's "constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works)" (157). Cecilia, having studied in Cambridge when I. A. Richard's practical criticism has first detached literary criticism from author-centred approaches, is skilled in "undetermined" close-reading and "independent" thought (A 47). In reading not only one but several literary texts, Cecilia produces dialogue between them in the process of re-writing (newly combining) and thus constitutes a Text that cuts across Works denying all authors' intentions and superiority. Author-Briony, however, who requires consumption on part of her readers, associates Cecilia's "unclosed books" (A 4) with her restlessness. She is tired of "defending, defining, attacking" that is necessary to the dialogical process of practical criticism (A 26). Closed books, on the contrary, are associated with Cecilia's peace of mind. The books teenage-Briony observes on the table in Cecilia's Balham-room are closed (A 335) and Robbie, planing next steps while sitting around the table with Cecilia and teenage-Briony, even lifts them to the floor (A 345); while literary texts have once been crucial to his future prospects as literate physician and thus physician exceeding all excellence (A 92-93), they are now considered a hindrance in discussing his future that has become dependent on ideologically and hierarchically structured military and law. Unclosed and closed books are the difference between active and critical productivity and passive and uncritical consumption, between dialogue and monologue; the former, author-Briony implies, is impeding the individual subject's existence in society.

The threat a Work's textual potential poses to each individual subject is equally conveyed in Cecilia and Robbie's intimate encounter in the library. Although the library is considered an environment of Works and thus reason and unambiguity, the textual potential continues to lie with the reader. Consequently, in order to prevent the reader from using this potential, the reader needs to be convinced of the loss of subjectivity that extensive re-writing results in. "One elbow was resting on the shelves, and she seemed to slide along them, as though about to *disappear between the books*. [...] It was only then that it occurred to him that she might not be shrinking from him, but *drawing him with her deeper into the gloom*" (A 133; emphasis added). Cecilia, sliding along the shelves,

establishes a physical link between the books, which denotes the mental but dialogical Text established between the physical but monological Works on the library shelves; nevertheless, the dialogue implied in her movement is equally suggesting the threat re-writing offers. Cecilia's individual subjectivity is about to disappear between the books; her individual subjectivity is about to become a textual and thus intangible structure. Cecilia, additionally, tries to draw Robbie into the gloom between the books; gloom denotes a darkness and obscurity strongly associated with melancholy and depression (*OED*) with the result that the impossibility of defining the Works on the library shelves and thus Cecilia's and Robbie's identities is identified with the sadness and despair of oblivion. Consequently, re-writing does not only pose a threat to the actual re-writer's individual subjectivity but also to those of fellow individual subjects; if an individual subject is unable to position itself clearly in its existence, it cannot interact with its fellow individual subjects; thus active thought emerges to be an irresponsible process. Cecilia's disappearance between the books indicates the post-structuralist theory of the subject being itself a textual structure and lost in the process of (re)writing. The "a-social" and "violent" nature of this process is implied when Robbie, acting instinctively, pushes Cecilia "hard into the corner, between the books" (A 135). The process of re-writing in dialogue is thus associated with natural individuality, a regression to unconscious existence and its uncontrollable, instinctive and violent action; accordingly, ideological monologue seems the only possibility of conscious and social continuation. Crucially, after their re-birth in monological subjectivity, Cecilia and Robbie "*make love against the library shelves*" (A 138; emphasis added). Intimacies are thus not excluded from reasonable action but instinctive behaviour is re-captured by reason and determined in line with their new identity; according to the *OED*, *to make love* defines sexual intercourse as an act of love between lovers ("love" Def. P3.a.b). Moreover, Cecilia and Robbie make love *against* the shelves and do not vanish between the books; Works, solid in their physicalness, not Texts, vague in their intellectuality, allow for their "loving" intimacies and support them in exploring their new identity.

Author-Briony's readerly text becomes writerly in its contradictions in fact and temporal structure; author-Briony's text becomes writerly in demanding a referendum between extremes: subjectivity vs. individuali-

ty, dialogue vs. monologue, ambivalence vs. binarism, re-writing vs. consumption. Her (fictional) characters are “exemplary.” Nymphian and mermaidian Cecilia, aware of the simplification of binary distinction, prominently disappears in the gloom between the books and is re-born a monological subject in reason and clarity; maniacal and unreasonable Robbie, exhilarating in Cecilia’s ambivalent identities, prominently disappears in the gloom between the books and is re-born a monological subject in reason and clarity; teenage-Briony, in favour of perspectivism, prominently disappears in the gloom of Balham tube station (A 349) and is re-born an author in reason and clarity. Ideologies, however, based on binary distinction and thus simplification, finally fail to explain the complexity of human existence. Some of author-Briony’s readers will uncritically accept her promotion of reasonable unambiguity and authorial power; some of her readers, as she herself knows but ignores, will not: “there’s always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what *really* happened?” (A 371) These *certain* readers opt for the dialogical gloom of *uncertainty*. Individual subjectivity

[ist] stets eine Gratwanderung zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Selbstaufgabe [...]. Nur wer bereit ist, sich radikal zu ändern, umzudenken oder mit einem völlig neuen narrativen Programm anzutreten, kann Ambivalenz, Dialog, Alterität und Reflexivität als Instrument der Identitätskonstruktion nutzen. Freilich muß eine radikale Änderung nicht in Selbstaufgabe ausmünden; auch nicht in Inkohärenz. Identitätskonstruktion kann aber nicht heißen: “Kohärenz um jeden Preis”: Das wäre Ideologie. (Zima, *Theorie* 369)

Entering the mermaid’s gloomy realm is risky but appalling only to those afraid of ambivalence; those realising the possibilities of impregnable sleekness remain capable of at least partially undetermined action in dialogical involvement with ideologies. Gloom and dialogue, consequently, instead of causing melancholy and depression, become the basis to responsible “surviving as a body of men” (A 264). McEwan’s slippery novel is failproof in promoting dialogical subjectivity; if author-Briony’s novel does not raise consciousness about ideology despite her inability to completely deny ambivalence, McEwan’s meta-fictional turn will.

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