

METAFICTIONAL NARRATIVES IN THE TEXT AND ON THE SCREEN (A STUDY OF IAN McEWAN'S *ATONEMENT* AND ITS 2007 ADAPTATION)

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Стаття розглядає нарративні особливості роману Ієна Мак'юена "Спокута" і його екранізації 2007 року. Обидва твори розглядаються як яскраві зразки сучасної англійської метапрози та аналізуються, виходячи з притаманної їм саморефлексивності. Екранізація метапрози постає як процес перекодування, під час якого внутрішнє напруження відтворюється засобами кінематографу. У статті досліджуються історіографічні та інтертекстуальні виміри обох творів з наголосом на їхніх когнітивних аспектах і метафоричних утіленнях. Стаття розробляє методологію компаративної наратології, за допомогою якої висвітлюються важливі параметри літературної та кінематографічної оповіді.

Ключові слова: метапроза, саморефлексивність, оповідь, екранізація, подвійне кодування, напруження, окуляризація, метафора.

Статья посвящена нарративным особенностям романа Иэна Макьюэна "Искупление" и его экранизации 2007 года. Оба произведения рассматриваются как яркие образцы современной английской метапрозы и анализируются, исходя из их внутренней саморефлексивности. Экранизация метапрозы представляется процессом перекодирования, во время которого внутреннее напряжение воссоздается средствами кинематографа. В статье исследуются историографические и интертекстуальные измерения обоих произведений с особым акцентом на их когнитивных аспектах и метафорических воплощениях. Статья разрабатывает методологию компаративной нарратологии, при помощи которой освещаются важные параметры литературного и кинематографического повествования.

Ключевые слова: метапроза, саморефлексивность, повествование, экранизация, двойное кодирование, напряжение, окуляризация, метафора.

The article focuses on narrative peculiarities of the novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan and its 2007 adaptation. Both are viewed as bright examples of contemporary English metafiction and analysed with regard to their inherent self-reflexivity. Adaptation of metafiction to the screen is regarded as a process of transcodification, within which narrative tension is reconstructed by cinematic means. Historiographic and intertextual dimensions of both works are explored with a special emphasis on their cognitive aspects and metaphorical manifestations. The article develops methodology of comparative narratology, which helps to elucidate important parameters of both literary and cinematic story-telling.

Key words: metafiction, self-reflexivity, narrative, adaptation, double coding, tension, ocularization, metaphor.

Contemporary metafiction, generally viewed as self-reflexive fiction within the postmodernist paradigm, addresses the ambiguous issue of reality-and-fiction correlation. Since the process of narrativization has come to be seen as one of the central forms of human comprehension and imposition of meaning and coherence on the chaos of events [5, p. 121], opposition between "history" (as a part of "reality") and "fiction" is viewed as no longer valid. Metafictional narratives seek to reshape or create entirely new modes of reality-and-fiction configurations by transgressing conventional boundaries between the worlds inside and outside the diegesis, between the author and the narrator, between the author and the characters (in other words, between narrative levels), enhancing thus their own self-reflexivity. As Patricia Waugh has put it: "the main concern of metafiction

is precisely the implications of the shift from the context of 'reality' to that of 'fiction' and the complicated interpenetration of the two" [10, p. 36]. The well-known examples of such works in the world literature are the texts by Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, Milorad Pavić, while the English-language exponents include *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles, *Lost in the Funhouse* by John Barth, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham and many others.

Cinema has been developing its own ways of indulging in self-reflexivity for years. Thomas Schatz, an influential cinema theorist, while applying Henri Focillon's vision of cultural forms' "life-span" to American film industry, came to the conclusion that "the refinement stage" within genre cinema was reached as early as the late 1940s with its characteristic "progression from transparency to opacity – from straightforward storytelling to self-conscious formalism" [8, p. 38]. The same movement toward "the baroque" (or self-reflexive) stage was observed in European cinema with the arrival of "auteur" films in the 1950s. Federico Fellini's masterpiece *8½* (1963), which explored cinematic dimensions of a "writer's block" – turning it into a director's block – visualized transgressions of narrative levels on the screen and established a metafilm paradigm, followed by such films as Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson* (1997), Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002), Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) and others. Like metafictional "self-begetting novels", such films feature directors in the process of directing or screenwriters in the process of writing scripts of the corresponding films, foregrounding the art rather than the subject-matter.

The situation becomes even more complicated when filmmakers attempt to render textual self-reflexivity via cinematic means while adapting metafiction for the screen. In Yuri Lotman's terminology it is a case of double coding, when the message is encoded by means of several "languages" [2, p. 149-150]. Masterly adaptations of this kind include *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *The Hours* (2002), *Possession* (2002), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007) and others, where metafictional narrative tension is preserved in different degrees. For example, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, directed by Karel Reisz and adapted by playwright Harold Pinter, is a metafilm, which pictures the process of the novel's adaptation. Such double coding translates the novel's narrative metalepsis into a cinematic one: actors reflect upon the roles they are performing and come under their influence, highlighting interpenetration of the levels of "fiction" and "reality".

The aim of the present article is to explore and compare the ways self-reflexive narratives function both in textual and cinematic forms. The novel by Ian McEwan was chosen because of its profound metafictional sensibility, as well as due to the problematic nature of its 2007 adaptation, which allows for a comparative perspective. The topicality of the problem in focus is predetermined by the ongoing debate about the ontological status of narrative in the contemporary literary and linguistic studies, as well as in film theory. The interdisciplinary methodology of the research is dictated by the interconnectivity of fiction and language within the postmodern paradigm, as well as the perception of all cultural forms as texts/narratives. The novelty of the research lies in applying of the cognitive framework of "ocularization", offered by Francois Jost in his essay in comparative narratology of fiction and film.

Ian McEwan, an influential British author, was nicknamed "Ian Macabre" for the dark themes explored in his earlier fiction, yet his novel *Atonement* (2001), shortlisted for the Booker Prize, has brought him much critical acclaim. The novel's metafictional status is grounded on the fact that it is largely a "self-begetting novel": the text concerned with the production of itself. Its subject matter comprises both the account of the atonement for the mistake the protagonist once made and the account of the conception, writing, and rewriting of the novel named *Atonement*. Both aspects being interconnected, the novel deals with the nature of fiction and its relation to "reality", explored through a plethora of frames. Patricia Waugh's comment about frames in metafiction can be fully

applied to the novel: “Contemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames, and that it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins” [10, p. 29]. To examine this network of frames and the tension created through them it is necessary to consider the novel’s structure.

Atonement consists of three numbered parts, only the first of which is divided into chapters, and an ambiguous final part, entitled “London, 1999”, which might be considered as an epilogue, although critics also refer to it as “a coda” to avoid conventional approaches to interpretation [3, p. 1]. Three temporal dimensions of the novel (the prewar 1930s in Britain, the 1940s in France, and late 1990s in Britain) together with the focus on a historical event (the British retreat to Dunkirk in 1940) allow for the affiliation of *Atonement* with historiographic metafiction as it was defined by Linda Hutcheon. In terms of the novel’s chronotope its historiographic aspect “establishes totalizing order, only to contest it, by radical provisionality, intertextuality, and fragmentation” [5, p. 116]. This chronotope is largely confined to Part Two, in which one of the character’s (Robbie) participation in the Retreat, is narrated. Being distinct in narrative perspective and style from the other parts, it is perceived as a “text in the text”, framed by the protagonist’s interest in Robbie’s fate.

Briony Tallis, the novel’s protagonist, is a young girl aspiring to become a writer in Part One, a young woman working as a nurse during the WWII in Part Three, and a successful novelist, learning of her brain disease and approaching death in the coda. Briony is the one who is in quest for atonement: because of her false evidence her sister Cecilia’s lover Robbie was convicted for rape and sent to prison. The quest for atonement is channeled into Briony’s formation as a novelist, this “coming-of-age” pattern being saturated with intertextuality. The intertextual level of the novel includes versatile references to female novelists (Jane Austen, Elisabeth Bowen, Virginia Woolf), which underpin the ironical side of the text’s self-referentiality, predetermined by the actual author’s masculine gender. The epigraph to the novel, taken from Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, foreshadows the traumatic clash of “fiction” and “reality”: just as Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* as an avid reader tries to see gothic patterns in “real life”, Briony as an avid author attempts to impose certain narrative conventions on reality and assigns the role of the villain to Robbie, who is innocent. As Brian Finney, who offered a thorough analysis of self-consciousness in the novel, comments on the protagonist’s “atonement”, Briony “sets out to use fiction to attempt to make amends for the damage fiction has induced her to cause in the first place” [3, p. 2].

“Damage-causing” fiction is represented by *The Trials of Arabella*, a seven-page juvenile drama written by young Briony. The double inclusion of this play in *Atonement* sets up one of the text’s intricate frames: the account of its creation and the first (failed) attempt of staging is given in the beginning of the novel, while its second (successful) staging appears in the coda. The double coding of *The Trials of Arabella* creates an effect of “mise en abyme” with two different inner reflections: the former indicates over-active imagination of a young author who believes and makes others believe in her own fictions; the latter makes a reflection of the final atonement itself: “*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.*” (13, 212). The latter reflection further problematizes the novel’s ambiguous ending, posing the question of a potential damaging effect the whole novel might instigate.

Another frame is realized through the novel’s temporal parameters. Four parts of the novel present changing modes of self-consciousness, as an elderly narrator relates the events with regard to her own developing methods of narration. According to Brian Finney, “McEwan draws attention to a continuous tension between the narrative and its narration” [3, p. 4]. A limited view of a child overlooking the adult world without fully understanding it is combined with masterly techniques of a professional writer recollecting her past. The awareness of the narrative strategy is enhanced

by the letter from the fictional publisher who rejects the manuscript of Briony's first attempt to tell her story, yet offers her an uncharacteristically long piece of constructive criticism (Part Three). Thus the emphasis on the formal side of art – novel-writing in this case – comprises the frame through which *Atonement* can be viewed.

The novel's coda, with its shift to first-person narration, contains the ageing narrator's confession that the previously told "happy ending" was her invention, while the two main characters actually had died and did not have time together. It is her final "atonement" for the mistake she had committed that had ultimately led to their deaths: some *fictional* time together for the separated lovers. Here, ironically, the "healing/redeeming effect" of fiction is foregrounded and contrasted to "damaging realism": "*How could that constitute an ending? What sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism?*" (13, 212). The extent, to which Briony as an author is prepared to bend the reality for the sake of "atonement", is once again rendered as "mise en abyme" in the very end by playing with the idea of rewriting the novel and including older Robbie and Cecilia in the coda: "*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, smiling at The Trials of Arabella? It's not impossible.*" (Ibid) This non-finality of the novel reinforces its metafictional tension, highlighting both the construction of illusion and its continuous breaking.

Approaching the problem of adapting metafictional narratives, it seems worthwhile to address the highly resonant issue of novelistic and cinematic interrelation. As Ella Shohat argues in "Sacred Word, Profane Image: Theologies of Adaptation", the metaphor of fidelity/betrayal concerning translation of a narrative from one code into another is now viewed as outdated (although it is still widely used). Instead, "rather than a transparent and coherent presentation of an already-existing source, or a process of mimicking an originary text, translation always already involves acts of mediation, constructedness, and representation" [9, p. 23]. It is particularly relevant in case of "translating" metafictional texts since their inner tension very often depends on laying bare and reflecting upon their own techniques. In the process of transcoding and resorting to another semiotic system, some or all of this tension can be entirely lost. In those adaptations where it is not lost it may (and perhaps must) be essentially reconstructed, which, as I will argue later, is the case with *Atonement*.

The 2007 adaptation of *Atonement* was directed by Joe Wright and starred James McEvoy as Robbie, Keira Knightly as Cecilia, and three actresses as Briony Tallis at 13, 18 and 77 (Saoirse Ronan, Romola Garai, and Vanessa Redgrave respectively). It was nominated for the Academy Awards in many categories including "Best Film" and "Best Adapted Screenplay" and it was awarded "Best Film" at the 61st British Academy Film Awards and "Best Motion Picture Drama" at the 65th Golden Globe Awards. Despite the film's apparent success both the viewers and the critics seem to sympathize more with the romantic story brilliantly portrayed by McEvoy and Knightly, than with Briony's literary atonement. The following passage from a review at Deep-Focus.com is particularly characteristic: "There's a bit of trickery here that must have worked better on paper, where McEwan had a chance to massage his language and distract the reader from certain suspicious elisions in the narrative until the time came for the big reveal. On film, the gambit is at first only confusing, but as the story comes to a close it's downright disorienting – an intellectual understanding of the story is clarified at the expense of any emotional connection to the characters on screen, who are suddenly reduced in stature to secondary creations" [4]. As it is seen from the quotation, the film's rendering of self-reflexivity is dismissed as "trickery" or "gambit", while intellectual disorientation is said to remind the viewer of the characters' fictional status (thus robbing them of emotional enjoyment of a romantic story). Audience's inability to enjoy reflexivity in cinema has been discussed by Jeffrey Williams in his "Narrative reflexivity in the British tradition", where he remarks that references to fictionality and representation might disrupt normal audience expectations of action [11, p. 26].

Difficult as it may be for the audience, *Atonement* is primarily a film, where metafictional sensibility is expressed through transcodification. The film's screenwriter Christopher Hampton is best known for his play based on the novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and the film version *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), for which he won the Academy Award for "Best Adapted Screenplay". His work on *Atonement*'s screenplay, carried out in close cooperation with Ian McEwan (who was one of the film's executive producers) and the director Joe Wright, is characterized by in-depth interpretation and reconstruction of the novel's significant aspects. Although some of the above mentioned textual frames are excluded from the script and the intertextual layer is considerably reduced, the final result still retains much of the novel's tension.

It is interesting to note that one of the first drafts of the script, later rejected, featured a new frame: that of a 77-year-old Briony coming to the hotel which had been her family home and telling her story in voice-overs [7]. The later decision was made to exclude narration through voice-overs, as well as preserve the appearance of the older Briony for the final coda only, as it is done in the novel, since it renders the illusion-breaking more dramatic. While in the earlier draft the older novelist was to appear on the screen from time to time in the course of the film, the final version separates "three Brionies" in their consecutive temporal spaces with a haunting visual repetition of the protagonist's face in close-up, a metaphor for the author's dominance in the textual world. On the other hand, the love story of Cecilia and Robbie is given more prominence by the filmmakers, since they felt they needed to put them in the centre of the film: "...in a way, the sleight of hand that we operated is that the book is about Briony. She is the central characters and the backbone of the whole book. We somehow felt that we have to shift the focus. We needed to spend some time with those two characters [Cecilia and Robbie] together, and we needed to admit to ourselves that their relationship was the center of the film. We just danced around those problems as best we could" [Ibid]. The result, however, was an accumulation of the tension between the two alternative centres, which sometimes perplexes the audience (as an example, the interviewer in the cited source, refers to Briony as "an antagonist who becomes the protagonist toward the end"), but also contributes greatly to metafictionally contradictory nature of the film.

Another meaningful contradiction is achieved by foregrounding specific literary/cinematic techniques, especially that of focalization. In the book Briony's discovery of "point of view" plays a crucial role in triggering off the whole conception of her future novel. This revelation comes when she accidentally overhears her sister and Robbie by the fountain, obviously involved in some unusual and complex situation, and fails to understand what is going on between them. Simultaneously, Briony becomes aware of her own immature perception of the adult world and grows fascinated by the possibilities that various "points of views" give to her potential narratives, quite different from her childish romances: "*She could see the simple sentences, the accumulating telepathic symbols, unfurling at the nib's end. She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view; her excitement was in the prospect of freedom, of being delivered from the cumbrous struggle between good and bad, heroes and villains. None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly good. She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral.*" (13, 24) This episode, taken from Chapter 3 of Part One, is preceded by the full account of what has actually happened by the fountain, narrated in Chapter 2 with Cecilia as focalizer. This arrangement focuses the reader's attention on Briony's literary revelation and consequently on the literary technique itself, since the points of views in both chapters are deliberately juxtaposed.

In the film the fountain sequence is presented in a different order. Firstly, Briony's limited vision of the scene is given, in which the window metaphorically portrays the "point of view". The child's imperfect perception of an adult situation is further enhanced by an obstruction, visualized as a bee buzzing at the window. As it has been pointed out by Francois Jost, "point of view" itself is a visual concept, which makes its application to literature problematic [6, p. 72]. This sequence in *Atonement*

can be analysed with more precision, if Jost's terminology of ocularization as opposed to focalization is used. Proceeding from the definition that "ocularization has to do with the relation between what the camera shows and what the characters are presumed to be seeing; focalization designates the cognitive point of view adopted by the narrative" [ibid., p. 74], we may define Briony's obstructed vision as internal ocularization (a shot "anchored" to the diegesis). The following sequence, which elucidates the situation by the fountain, is much longer, detailed and, as in the novel, uses Cecilia as focalizer. At the same time, it is done with zero ocularization (that is, "seen by no one"). After this sequence Briony's face in close-up framed by the window is seen once again, hinting at her revelation, although the element of discovery is much more veiled in the film. Yet, the tension created by the two types of ocularization constitutes one of the film's most powerful moments.

Although the subtleties of Briony's literary development are largely omitted in the film, her status as a writer is given prominence through visual and sound coding. The viewer's attention is invited to focus on the act of writing from the very beginning of the film via the sound of typewriting, which accompanies the appearance of the title *Atonement* on the screen. The sound persists as we see the initial images of the film: a symmetrical dollhouse, pedantically arranged toy animals, a tidy room, until it is at last "meets" the image of typing Briony and the typewriter itself (ironically, the newly typed words "the end" are seen before we are shown the title of the play *The Trials of Arabella*). As Briony stops typing the play and moves through the house to reach her mother, the sound of typing persists, now mixed with music. Metaphorically, this continuing sound represents the girl's overactive imagination and her ongoing "internal" writing, which will later result in confusion of fiction and reality. The sound is heard again in the crucial moment when Briony tells the police that "she saw him" (that is, she saw Robbie committing the crime of raping Lola, Briony's cousin) and is repeated as Briony searches for Robbie's indecent love letter to Cecilia. As Robbie is taken away by the police and another close-up of Briony's face (in profile, watching him go) is shown, the sound, interwoven with music, climbs to its dramatic climax, bringing the first part of the story to an end.

The typing sound resurfaces again as the story of Robbie in the Retreat to Dunkirk is over and the narrative takes up Briony as focalizer once again. Parallel to the initial part of the film, a series of shots characterized by their utter orderliness and symmetry brings us to a close-up of the 18-year-old protagonist. Further on, after the conversation with the ward sister, Briony's face (or its reflection, as it soon becomes clear) is superimposed on the unfocused outline of the Houses of Parliament, framed by a window. The recontextualised repetition of the ward sister's words "*There is no Briony*" together with the described visual image comprises another representation of self-reflexivity in the film, equivalent to the "*a stripping away of identity*" metaphor in the novel (13, 155). A second-long shot of Briony's manuscript of *Two Figures by the Fountain* and her halting explanation what the story is about to a fellow nurse is the first tangible opportunity for the viewer to grasp the concept of self-begetting novel/film that is unfolding in front of their eyes.

Another remarkable case of cinematic self-reflexivity is created by two black-and-white visual intrusions: an old film that soldiers are watching in Dunkirk and some documentary footage of the British army Briony is watching at the hospital. These episodes radiate narrative tension into several directions, but deal mostly with the historiographic dimension of the story. The Dunkirk section of the film, equivalent of the novel's Part Two, is a comparatively short sequence comprising Robbie and two other British soldiers' journey through the north of France and arrival in Dunkirk, where chaos reigns as the troops await evacuation. This part of the film, interspersed as it is with Robbie's dreams and flashbacks, realistically portrays horrors of war: filth, injury, fear, hunger, death, etc. At one point the figure of Robbie (who is suffering from a bad injury and thirst) is seen against the backdrop of a huge cinema screen where two lovers are engaged in a romantic conversation and finally a kiss. This larger-than-life cinematic romance enhances Robbie's despair by stark contrast between a fictional world of the screen and Robbie's world, which the viewer at this point perceives as real.

The same effect is achieved in the second episode with black-and-white intrusion. Yuri Lotman commented on the technique of including a documentary into a feature film in his "Semiotics of cinema", stating that it emphasizes artistic conventionality of the cinematic world and simultaneously makes the viewer dismiss this conventionality [1, p. 23]. Although documentaries are normally perceived as "real", here the contrast is again created between the previous scenes in *Atonement*, in which grievously wounded soldiers are graphically shown, and healthy, cheerful, laughing troops of the documentary. The fabricated status of the documentary is further enhanced by the sequence that contains both historical and fictional characters: the Queen Consort is shown together with Lola and her fiancé Paul Marshall, the chocolate magnate (and the actual rapist). While the Queen Consort and other people in the shot are engaged in a conversation, Lola gazes directly at the camera, with is perceived as an exchange of glances between her and Briony. The whole sequence stretches the tension to the utmost, by means of, to use Linda Hutcheon's words concerning historiographical metafiction, installing and blurring the line between history and fiction [5, p. 113]. History in *Atonement* is both realistically portrayed and ironically undercut by repeated change of coding.

The wedding scene of Lola and Paul Marshall, one of the film's emotional apexes, is a conglomeration of many features, discussed above. Briony's approach to the church along an amazingly symmetrical street and the return of the typing sound signal at Briony-as-a-writer theme. In this "moment of truth" the 18-year-old writer has to face the consequence of her fiction at last: the rapist is flourishing while Robbie might be mortally wounded or dead in France. Static close-ups of 18-year-old Briony are interspersed with flash-back close-ups of her younger self repeating with conviction "I saw him!" and finally with a brief glimpse of who it was she actually saw: Paul Marshall. The distinction between "I saw him" and "I know it was him", emphasized earlier in the film, is presented within the framework of epistemic uncertainty. Just as Francois Jost underpins a semiotic difference between *seeing* (as perception) and *knowing*, insisting on the necessity of using adequate metaphors in fiction and film analysis, here "seeing" and "knowing" are confused by younger Briony (she thinks she "knows", so it's the same as if she "saw"), as well as confusing for the viewer because of the narrative reflexivity. Is the moment when the viewer "sees" Paul Marshall as the rapist to be taken as internal ocularization (via Briony's inner flash-back vision) or does this "knowing" represent "revelation", eventual "realization" of the truth through cognitive means? The problem remains for an individual viewer to solve.

The end of the third part of the film with Briony on the underground train can be interpreted as one continuous metaphor: life is a novel (with the author's position uncertain). Briony's static close-up face, immobile against the fast-moving background, is periodically blacked out by the flickering light, which is synchronized with the typing sound. She might be reflecting upon the meeting she has just had with Cecilia and Robbie or, as can be construed on the second viewing of the film, she might be imagining this meeting, which has never taken place. The dynamics of the visual rendering in this scene has a certain similarity to a famous metaphor by Stendhal: "a novel is a mirror carried along a high road", although the classical "mirror" metaphor turns into multiple distorted mirrors in postmodernism and metafiction.

The switch to the coda featuring a television interview with a 77-year-old Briony begins with a striking image based on the multiple mirrors metaphor. The ocularization of the shot anchors it to the vision of a television technician working the filming of the interview. Older Briony's voice saying "*I'm sorry, could we stop for a moment?*" is first heard as a voice-over, while the screen is black. The effect is the equivalent of narrative metalepsis in Genette's terminology, breaking the illusion of reality. Yet the effect is reversed within seconds as the viewer sees the multiple screens and tunes into a new reality, in which Briony is giving her interview. As the unseen technician rewinds the footage back, the words "*I'm sorry, could we stop for a moment?*" are synchronized with the image; the illusion seems to be restored to the viewer. Yet, the biggest blow at the illusion is to come during the interview.

At this emotional and intellectual apex of the film all metafictional components of the story are finally exposed: Briony speaks of *Atonement* as her recently finished novel; it is claimed to be autobiographical and truthful, yet she confesses that the scene of her meeting with Robbie and Cecilia is imagined by her because both lovers had actually died in 1940. These deaths are reduced to a single sentence on the last page of the novel, but they are graphically shown during the interview in the film (with Briony's close-up face fading and her narration remaining as a voice-over). The lovers' "fictional time together", given them by Briony as her atonement, refers in the novel only to the previously mentioned meeting, while in the film it is reinforced once again in the final scene with Robbie and Cecilia at the seaside. The setting of this scene coincides with a view on the postcard that Robbie holds as he dies: it is a cottage in Wiltshire where the lovers plan to spend some time together in the novel. This cottage is the final shot of the film, through which a certain narrative finality is achieved, contrary to the novel. The presentation of this ending as false, yet still paradoxically happy is one again rooted in visual and sound coding of the scene. As the interview gives way to the seaside sequence, the soundtrack comprises only the background music; neither the lovers' voices nor the noise of the sea is heard. Yet at certain point these sounds flow into the scene, symbolically showing fiction gaining the illusion of reality. Whether the viewer tunes into this "reality" and falls for the suspense of disbelief after all previous disruptions, remains once again his or her individual choice.

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