Misinterpretation: Destroyer of a Life and Preserver of a Fiction A Study in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

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Studies in literature and Culture: from Theory to Practice
2026, Vol. 1(1) 87-100

10.22091/slic.2025.14155.1006
journals.qom.ac.ir

Abstract

This article undertakes a close textual analysis of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, foregrounding the theme of misinterpretation as both a narrative catalyst for tragedy and a mode of aesthetic atonement. Employing reader-response theory as the framework, this study explores the epistemological instability and unreliability embedded within the novel's structure, focusing on the pivotal role of Briony Tallis, and the consequences of her interpretive acts. Misinterpretation in this capacity, emerges not only as the impetus for the novel's tragic core, but also as a metafictional medium and strategy to reflect on the limits of perception and reading of the events. Through close-reading, this article argues how McEwan mirrors the ethical dimensions of storytelling, where the production of Briony's narrative acts as a form of penance, seeking to reconcile fiction with moral responsibility. Hence, investigating the complex interplay between perception, narrative, aesthetics, and morality, the article posits *Atonement* as a self-reflexive work challenging the reader to confront the implications of interpretation, authorship, and the capacity of art. The conclusion is made that, although misinterpretation can bring about unforgivable consequences in the fiction, and resolve everything at the end, it cannot change the reality it has brought into life in one's mind.

Keywords: Briony, interpretation, misrepresentation, reader-response, close-reading.

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How to cite this article:
Chenari, Elnaz & Habibzadeh,Hamed. "Misinterpretation: Destroyer of a Life and Preserver of a Fiction A Study in Ian McEwan's Atonement." Studies in Literature and Culture, vol.1, no.1, 2026, pp 87-100. https://doi.org/10.22091/slic.2025.14155.1006.

∗Received 2 August 2025; Received in revised form 5 October 2025; Accepted 3 November 2025; Published online 2026

Introduction

Misinterpretation is one of the major concepts, if not the main one, upon which McEwan's *Atonement* is built. This particular concept which can be examined from different angles, is what affects almost every single major event throughout this novel as a post-modern work of art. This is a device which can be applied to every literary work in order for the reader to understand and engage in it, and judge it based on their own logic and understanding of the work. However, in this particular work of art, McEwan has carefully applied it to his writing to create an idea by which its narrator can take the reader with herself to one point in the story where the reader feels completely manipulated and heartbroken. It is of course one device which has a double effect. Once used by the reader to analyze the events on their own, and once by the narrator herself who leads the further events in a way to manipulate the reader and make them misinterpret. What is the major point of interest in this article, is to consider the effects of interpretation – and misinterpretation in particular – in the events in life and in the storyline of a fiction. It might be concluded that misinterpretation of the events can lead one to stray from the reality and create their own reality in a way that its effects are lifelong; both in terms of reality and fiction.

Literature Review

The present article is aimed at examination of the narration in Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*. The key characteristics of this kind of narration are followed as misinterpretation, overinterpretation, misrepresentation, and unreliability. These elements and their impacts on the storyline and characters in the inner world of the fiction on one hand, and the readers and their reading of the story in the outer world of the fiction on the other hand, are focused in this article. The scope of research for this study has shown that there have been plenty of other studies with the same area of interest in this novel and the elements above. Therefore, this section is dedicated to an introduction of a few of such studies with the same objective, to which this article has referred to in different areas of its discussion.

In "'She would rewrite the past' – Briony as narrator-manipulator in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" (2015), Charmaine Falzon presents an examination of Briony Tallis's role as a narrator and manipulator, offering a nuanced critique that contributes meaningfully to the critical discourse surrounding the novel. Through her analysis, Falzon makes an argument that Briony's attempt at atonement through fiction is less a redemptive gesture than an extension of her earlier transgressions, which is her manipulation of truth to fit her own narrative desires. Falzon draws

connections between Briony's childhood playwriting and her later authorship of the novel's true events. This continuity of narrative control underlines Falzon's central claim, which is, Briony's fictional revisions are not acts of moral courage to atone for her wrongdoings, but rather manifestations of her need to reshape reality on her own terms. The article also highlights how Briony's supposed remorse is undermined by her refusal to relinquish authorship over the fates of Cecilia and Robbie, whose real-life suffering is kept uncovered in her final fictional reunion. She finally asserts that Briony's stylistic effort in altering the consequences, not only does not equate to a genuine atonement, but also it is provocative enough to reinforce the skepticism of narrative as a moral restitution.

One article regarding the idea of fiction for the sake of redemption is that of Brian Finney's. In his article "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" he provides a concise exploration of the power and limits of fiction, especially in relation to guilt, atonement and historical truth. He argues that *Atonement* is not only a story of atonement but also a metafictional reflection on the moral responsibilities of authorship. Finney questions whether fiction can truly offer redemption for real-world consequences. He also emphasizes the tension between historical truth and imaginative storytelling to reflect on the power of narratives in shaping our understanding of truth and the moral obligations of those who craft them. He points out that Briony's reshaping of the events in her novel, in order to create a happier ending for the lovers, raises ethical concerns about manipulating truth in fiction. This being the concern, he underlines the responsibility if the author, being Briony, in creating the illusion of reality to obscure the unfavorable truth.

The fact that the lines between fiction and reality is recurrently blurred in *Atonement*, and that the perception of the reality depends upon the reader's point of view, has been discussed in Kathleen D'Angelo's "To Make a Novel." D'Angelo points out that *Atonement* is crafted to encourage an engaged kind of reading rather than a merely passive one. The novel's layered narrative and metafictional elements oblige readers to question the reliability of the narrator and the storytelling. She argues that it requires both the readers and writers in the interpretation of the text and conveying the truth. By actively involving the readers in the complexities of the narrative, this novel encourages the readers to critically examine the processes of reading and interpretation, making them involved in the construction of meaning.

In Martin Jacobi's "Who Killed Robbie and Cicilia?" it is suggested that in some parts of the novel the reader is at the same time urged against and induced into misreading. He believes that those readers who assume Robbie and Cicilia's death without explicit evidence, have actually fallen into

the same mistake as Briony who caused them great suffering due to her false judgment through lack of explicit evidence. In other words, those who witnessed Briony's misreading of the events between Robbie and Cicilia, should not have so naively decided upon their death while no enough evidence is given in the novel up until the moment old Briony herself reveals the facts about it at the end of the novel. Whereas the novel's unreliable nature urges the readers towards such misreading by providing enough evidence to believe that they are alive. Thus, Jacobi implies that it is the readers' misinterpretations that kill the characters, reinforcing the ease and consequences of misreading. By emphasizing on the reader's role in constructing meaning, Jacobi underlines the metafictional elements of McEwan's novel, where the act of reading becomes an extension of the novel's central themes of guilt and atonement.

Grounded in reader-response theory, this article examines the interpretive dynamics between narrative structure and audience reception in *Atonement*. Utilizing close textual analysis as the primary method, the study investigates how epistemological instability and narrative unreliability are constructed and sustained throughout the novel. Focusing on the character of Briony, the analysis explores how her acts of misinterpretation serve both as the catalyst for the novel's central tragedy and as a metafictional device. The findings suggest that misinterpretation in *Atonement* functions not only as a plot mechanism but also as an aesthetic strategy that interrogates the ethics of storytelling. Ultimately, the article argues that while narrative can offer a form of atonement, it cannot undo the psychological or moral consequences it generates, underlining the limits of fiction in confronting historical or emotional truth.

Discussion

Versatility of Interpretation

“A text is an open-ended universe where the interpreter can discover infinite interconnections” (Eco 39). When it comes to the world of fiction, one’s mind is capable of building too many ideas behind the actions and events. As it can be inferred from Eco, a text is open to interpretation and the infinite mentality of each human being enables them to step beyond the confines of imagination. This is the nature of the text, and this is what makes one enjoy reading it and thinking about it. The authors’ job is to apply their imaginative mind and art of narration in a way to build up a fiction based on the matters they observe either in the real life or picture in their mind. This is what keeps them on the track of narration. An author looks for a subject worth contemplating on, in order to build a fictional world. It can be a hit or it might turn out a failure. In either way there will be no harm to the world outside or to anyone outside of it. To put it into D'Angelo's

words, McEwan in fact reveals Briony as the author of this craft and this way he reveals another narrative aspect of the novel which is "the relationship of the reader to the text" (89). She underscores this fact that "if *Atonement* is a novel concerned with "making of fiction," it is also a novel concerned with the reading of fiction, as well as the reading of experience. Briony's crime has been widely read as one of literary imagination, but it is also one of poor reading comprehension" (89).

But what happens when it comes to the real world? What if one single mistake ends up annihilating one's world and life? McEwan's narrator Briony, as a young author, observed some events, produced some reactions to them, caused some further implications and decisions, and they all inspired her to write a novel. A novel in which she also tried to fix what her wrong implications and decisions had brought about. This is what Brian Finney has also discussed:

Brought up on a diet of imaginative literature, she is too young to understand the dangers that can ensue from modeling one's conduct on such an artificial world. When she acts out her confusion between life and the life of fiction, the consequences are tragic and irreversible — except in the realm of fiction. She attempts to use fiction to correct the errors that fiction caused her to commit. But the chasm that separates the world of the living from that of fictional invention ensures that at best her fictional reparation will act as an attempt at atoning for a past that she cannot reverse. *Atonement,* then, is concerned with the dangers of entering a fictional world and the compensations and limitations which that world can offer its readers and writers. (69)

Briony's Paradoxical Nature of Narration

Although Briony has witnessed something too hard to grasp as a teenage girl happening between her sister, Cicilia, and her lover, Robbie, the way she narrates the events in the story is more of a sophisticated adult author. She seems to possess this potential to write such a long narrative in detail and in almost a proper style for a fiction. This is what McEwan claims in one of his interviews: "I didn't want to write about a child's mind with the limitations of a child's vocabulary or a child's point of view. I wanted to use the full resources of an adult mentality remembering herself" (Finney 72). Moreover, this can be also justified in another way. What the reader has at hand is a novel first narrated, then in the final sections revealed as crafted by Briony herself at her seventies. Therefore, it seems to be a life-long work of art, generated in her adolescence but nurtured in her maturity.

As Finney points out, *Atonement* is focused on making a fiction, and Briony is using this fiction to make up for what she had actually committed. It can be inferred from this point of view that the 77-year-old Briony is once again misleading us with her claims about the way she invented that ending to make up for what she did as a naïve child back then. As an apparently young girl who has made a wrong judgement, she actually has never been that naïve and she has made this excuse up only to focus on her novel, and of course she found what she witnessed between Cicilia and Robbie in the library villainous and of course bold enough to create a fiction based on that. This so-called overinterpretation of the events can be inferred as something which has never existed in the first place at all. In other words, she can be manipulative and villainous enough to hide her inner motivation, but significant enough to create a fiction. To be willing to destroy a complicated love life in order to preserve the magnitude of a fiction's subject can be considered a great audacity for such a young author to have:

Briony is first presented to the reader of the novel as a writer, then as a young adolescent. Though she is only a girl when the novel opens, Briony is convinced that she is destined for greatness. As far as she is concerned, indeed, her destiny is already decided – she will be a writer, even if this requires that she subordinate every other aspect of her life in pursuit of this goal. (Falzon 60)

Accordingly, there seems to be a huge gap between Briony, as a child who gets involved in an adult relationship, and the narrator who has been given an adult voice, indicating that she now has enough knowledge and experience of life to justify her understanding of that relationship. This has been asserted in Kathleen D'Angelo's article, "Throughout *Atonement*, Briony transitions from a girl overpowered by her romantic imagination to a novelist who chooses to distort the reality in order to fulfill her elegiac impulse. The textual allusions thus reflect Briony's development" (89- 90). From this, it can also be implied that these pervasive allusions and intertextuality as the fundamental characteristics of a postmodern novel, require the correct reading of the reader.

An Unreliable Narrator

It is important to note that in several parts of the novel, the reader is actually urged against misreading, and at the same time provoked to keep misreading. When it comes to that part of the novel where the fact about Cicilia and Robbie's death is revealed, this on and off misreading experience directs the reader towards one assumption, that it is the fault on the reader's side

that “if we are careful, if we see how Briony’s early misreading serves as the model for how we might be induced to misread, we can avoid this inducement” (Jacobi 58). Whether deliberately or inadvertently, this misreading on the narrator’s side has brought about great sufferings to those lovers. Nathalie Jaëck and Arnaud Schmitt assert that, "even when a novel is pervaded with one overarching theme, as is the case with lies and lying in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, the reader’s perception and interpretation of this theme and of the author’s intentions remain multidimensional and often equivocal" (354).

They both declare that Briony as an unreliable self-reflexive author, not only has tried to repent for what she has given rise to, but she has also made her fiction open to any sort of misinterpretation and unreliability, through creating this twisted unexpected revelation about her attempt for earning Robbie and Cicilia’s forgiveness, “It isn’t difficult. If you were lying then, why should a court believe you now? There are no new facts, and you’re an unreliable witness” (McEwan 336). In other words, if she existed in the real world, a fiction with a happy ending with such an artistic manipulation could not save those lives, or make herself free from the burden of her past deeds.

Even though the narrative implies in different ways not to rely on whatever is said and narrated in this novel, the ending is something unlikely in mind of the reader. Briony, the thirteen-year-old of Tallis family and a young writer, falls into a false judgement of the events she witnesses between her older sister, Cicilia, and the gardener’s son, Robbie Turner. As a young naïve girl at the time of these happenings, she is unable to see through the issues between them as an adult does, and wrongly creates her own story out of it. With a strong imagination and fantasy, the young Briony who mostly lives through her mind rather that out of it, as Cicilia claims once, begins to make her own reality out of their relationship and comes up with wrong ideas and this leads to a disastrous destination in these two persons’ lives. In different ways and of course repeatedly, it is mentioned in the story that Briony, as a young child is the cause to all that happened to Cicilia and Robbie, and this is what led Briony as a novelist to write their story and end it in a happy way in order to somehow compensate for her wrongdoings, even if pointless. But can it be drawn from the story that Briony is the only reason behind all that? It is true that Briony, could not correctly contemplate on the matters from outside, because she was a child back then. She, not being an adult to decide the right from the wrong, to fully grasp an adultlike relationship, is accused of an irreparable mistake. But what about the adults and the grownups in this story? Is it reasonable to rely on the evidence given by a thirteen-year-old fanciful teenager and incriminate a man by that? As the novel reads:

They turned on you, all of them, even my father. When they wrecked your life, they wrecked mine. They chose to believe the evidence of a silly, hysterical little girl. In fact, they encouraged her by giving her no room to turn back. She was a young thirteen, I know, but I never want to speak to her again. As for the rest of them, I can never forgive what they did. (McEwan 209)

These and other questions of the same kind are to be taken into consideration for further judgements. The role of the parents of the family, the elder brother, and also the inspectors' power of judgment, are shown in a ludicrously questionable way. As Barbara Beckerman Davis point out, "no one questions the testimony of this thirteen-year-old who speaks with such certainty when Lola herself could not (or would not) identify the evil-doer" (Davis 2).

If Briony is guilty of the crime of ruining two lives by a childish mistake, then it is needed for the reader as the interpreter and the analyzer to pose a question: Why is that the bright educated son of Turner, the lifelong trusted gardener boy of the family is so easy to distrust as a maniac and a rapist by the evidence of a single child without giving Robbie a voice of self-defense? As occurred to Briony's mind before,

Robbie Turner, only son of a humble cleaning lady and of no known father, Robbie who had been subsidized by Briony's father through school and university, had wanted to be a landscape gardener, and now wanted to take up medicine, had the boldness of ambition to ask for Cicilia's hand. It made perfect sense. (McEwan 38)

This can be exemplified as another kind of misjudging Robbie's personality. It is important to provide an acceptable answer to this question in order to discuss to matter of misinterpretation not only by Briony, but also by many others in the family who are not devoid of adulthood as one key element to make right judgements, either in the world of real life or novel.

One answer can be that, Briony, a great novelist-to-be, a bright fanciful obsessive young playwright with a constant desire to know everything that happens around her, "with a tendency to judge before comprehending" as stated by James Wood, once more is in the need to write a new story. Since the first time she saw Cicilia and Robbie by the fountain, she tries to figure out the matter between them. "Before she accepted that she does not understand, and that she must simply watch… she had privileged access across the years to adult behavior, to rites and conventions she knew nothing about, as yet" (McEwan 39). It is then that for the first time she realized that she wants to be a novelist this time. She attempted to imagine the event from three different points of view; "according to the fictional plots and archetypes she is accustomed to" (Falzon 62). It shows that she is aware of seeing through different points of view and she is able to decide on one matter considering different ways of interpretation. Here it can be concluded

that she is actually not a child without the ability to see through the issue the way a mature adult does; she is of course brilliantly aware enough to know that this scene she is witnessing can be written from three different points of view like a skillful author. Here she comes up with the idea of three different interpretations, and therefore, a plot consistent with her orderly imaginative author-like world.

What tickles the mind is that then how could she be so single minded in the time of giving evidence to the police? So, the answer is that she needed something great enough to start writing novels with. It is also put forward by Falzon, "Briony scrutinizes the lives of those who surround her for inspiration for her fiction" (59). In her further declarations she also adds, "McEwan also makes it clear that Briony's obsession with being a writer is dangerous, given the intensity of the girl's drive to exert control over her surroundings" (60).

Another answer can be that she is broken and disappointed with Robbie as a boy she has crush on. "He was startlingly handsome, and there came back to her from years ago, when she was ten or eleven, the memory of a passion she'd had for him, a real crush that had lasted days" (McEwan 342). She is mad with seeing him by the fountain next to her sister, probably proposing to her, followed by threatening her. Some years before that, she threw herself in the river to see whether Robbie would save her or not. She risked her life in order to know about Robbie's reciprocal love. She also risked his life. She loved him and yet almost had him killed. What she once again does and this time gets him ruined. She might have enough motivation to depend her decision on some evidence not fully certain, in order to avenge him. Even if she has not thought its consequences through, and it can be pointed out as her immaturity; her thoughtlessness, but not her inability to see through the events rightly. "She was able to keep from mind the damage she only dimly sensed she was doing" (McEwan 170). As a writer, or in other words, a novelist-to-be, she is now beginning to realize that how the matter of interpretation and point of view work. As the novel reads in one part, she was just a child, but from that day on she felt that she had begun standing on the thresholds of the world of adulthood, and comprehending its complexities.

Here lies another reason that may count on this basis: the trick of the mind. Sometimes it is one's mind and will that make them believe what they see or feel as a matter of curiosity or courage. Briony is already disappointed due to her play's delayed rehearsal. The play is already a failure. She has decided to put aside play writing and begin writing novels after seeing Cicilia and Robbie by the fountain. She is overwhelmed by the events she has witnessed since the morning of that ill-fated night. Already feeling betrayed by Robbie – not only with some other girl, but her own sister – she reads a letter which was never supposed to be read. She has let on this secret and

told Lola, her cousin – one whom she has kept distance with since she thinks she has stolen her part in her own play and caused her to abandon it. She has affected by her words labeling Robbie, “a maniac” (McEwan 119). Once more she witnessed Cicilia and Robbie’s affair in the library, even though she cannot perceive the reality of it yet. She pictures it as an attack to her sister. Then again, she finds Lola, raped and broken on the fields with only a shadow of the rapist. She has much more than she can take in as a thirteen-year-old girl within a single night. She considers herself entered the world of the adults and all their complications, and she wants to prove it by acting like a savior to her elder sister against Robbie the maniac rapist. Moreover, she needs to find the truth she was after on her own; the truth that instructed her eyes. “It wasn’t only wickedness and scheming that made people unhappy, it was confusion and misunderstanding; above all it was the failure to grasp the simple truth that other people are as real as you” (McEwan 40).

She gives false evidence to police, although she knows that she has not seen it with her own eyes. She lives in her mind than in the reality. What she sees through her mind is what she believes she knows. She *wishes* Robbie to be accused of all these, because *he* is the reason behind all her confusions form the first place. “Everything connected. It was her own discovery. It was her own story. The one that was writing itself around her. It was Robbie, wasn't it? The maniac. She wanted to say the word.” (McEwan 166). She plays the crucial role in this great play written in her fanciful mind, and this “vital role fueled her certainty” (174). She was to be the winner. She already has a plot best suiting her own logics: her sister being attacked by a manic and rapist who stands for the villain of her story; Briony herself as savior and protector of her fragile sister, and one who stands for the heroine; and a crowd to stand watching: her family, praising and giving her their applause for her brave deeds, and damning the villain who is going to rot in a cell. A plot carefully designed and gradually getting developed more and more in her mind. This way she could be praised and have the power. As a result, it cannot be presumed that she has just made a childish mistake:

“You saw him then.”

“I know it was him.”

“Let’s forget what you know. You’re saying you saw him.”

“Yes, I saw him.”

“Just as you see me.”

“Yes.”

“You saw him with your own eyes.”

“Yes. I saw him. I saw him.” (McEwan 181)

From the point of view of the reader, it can be seen as improbable to undergo such a hideous fate just by some misunderstood implication of reality by a young teenager. Everybody has relied their trust on the evidence given by a child, built upon a vague report by Lola the raped cousin – as another child – by some man not proven to be Robbie, while after all, it is this child who seems to be accused of this crime in relation to those lost lives. Later on, when the eighteen-year-old Briony, a nurse in a hospital now, witnesses the marriage of Lola and her rapist, Paul Marshal, even then she keeps quiet and does not attempt in terms of fixing her crimes – a crime which the three of them had committed. Five years has passed, still she has nothing to make up for her wrongdoings. Instead, she tries writing letters to Cicilia to which she receives no replies, as a sign of proof that she is not inclined to make any contact to her family, especially Briony, after that night Robbie was taken away.

If this was just a matter of a mistake and misinterpretation of the events by the young Briony, she would try to take action long before hearing that Robbie might have been captured or died in the war; died on the shores of Dunkirk, during a war he would have never been to, if he had not been sent to prison due to her false testimony. She has acted like a reckless carefree young woman now who does nothing but feeling guilty, believing “no one would be redeemed by a change of evidence” (McEwan 261). So is asserted by Liliana Santos, "it is easy to point out that a true attempt of repair would be actually going to her parents and the police and telling them the truth. However, as the protagonist admits herself, there is cowardice in her" (Santos 3). She knew she was unforgivable. Yet, she could try to have them back much earlier in time, even if she remained unforgiven. All she needs is forgiveness and an undo button, as she pictures meeting Robbie in the hospital among the other troops, wounded of war, hearing her sorrows and being forgiven and relieved after all.

He acknowledged the courage it would require for her to go back to the law and deny the evidence she had given under oath. But he did not think his resentment of her could ever be erased. Yes, she was a child at the time, and he did not forgive her. He would never forgive her. That was the lasting damage. (McEwan 234)

An Aesthetic Atonement

The novel reveals the 18-year-old Briony's attempt to find Cicilia and Robbie, who are living together now, and have some heart-felt words of confession with them; being ready to do whatever she can to make up for her wrong evidence and fix everything, while being aware of the bitter fact that she would never be forgiven and is doomed to be hated for good. Nevertheless, she said at the age of seventy-seven, "I've always been good at not thinking about the things that are really troubling me" (McEwan 361), after she reveals that she had never spoken to them. That they both died wistfully within a year. She is still seeing the matters from her own subjective point of view. She is still planning her stories in her mind the way she wants them to end. As a metafictional narrator who is considered "a post-modern artifact", it is asserted, "She could not resist the chance to spare the young lovers, to continue their lives into fiction, to give the story a happy ending" (Wood). *Imagination*. Imagination has been her only way of dealing with a reality *she* wants to exist. Santos views Briony's attempts to atone for her wrongs going beyond just crafting a novel, such as setting aside her dream to become a novelist –not publishing her book till her seventies— and studying at the same faculty as her siblings, and also becoming a nurse during the second world war (3).

Conclusion

Given all the circumstances, when it is revealed that this novel is written by Briony, apart from the great astonishment and bewilderment transferred, it demonstrates the fact that Briony always gets what she wants in her mind. "Well, I can, and I will" (McEwan 167). Even if it costs her the lives of people. She makes this happy ending as a sort of *atonement* for her crimes. However, she could not "hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and drown her guilt in three streams of consciousness" (320), nor she could achieve victory by omitting whatever she wished not confront in her life. She manipulates the reader in an improbable way, perhaps to give the reader this opportunity to bear in mind the fact that misinterpretation happens, as the third chapter reads, "how easy it was to get everything wrong, completely wrong" (39). It is in human's mind where events can be given characteristics. It is one's personal implication that controls everything and shapes the events. It is Briony's personal implication that gave birth to some realities, and gave another birth to a love she ruined and to the lives she took, only through her own way of looking at the surrounding events, and through her writing. Point of view is what by which she destroys lives and preserves her fiction.

Such an implication is also mirrored in the title as it refers to Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," (1820) "Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere / Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!" (Shelley 13-14). As the title suggests, this article is written in appreciation of interpretation, as a both destroying and preserving element in observing and exploring every work of fiction. This has been through (mis)interpretation—once by the reader and once by the narrator— and also the narrator's approach with regard to her unreliable narration, that the novel has given meaning to the act of interpretation determining it as destructive or preserving. It is suggested that it can be observed as *destroyer* since it ruined the lives of the two lovers, or *preserving* in giving them the life that they never had, only through the mind of the reader. These two lines by Shelley highlights the heart of the paradox. The wind destroys the dead leaves, yet preserves life by planting the seeds that will grow in spring. It brings death and decay, but also rebirth and renewal. In Briony's novel everything goes on and she has the power and the control over the matters. A control she was in fact devoid of in her real life. In this novel she does to the reader what she committed herself in her real life. She throws them into the same trap. She makes them believe their eyes and ears, and at the same time she urges them against it; in order not to believe their eyes and ears and not to trust what they see or hear. Reality in modern sort of writing is what one makes on his or her own, not what is there as *the truth*. Briony puts this reality into question and aims to destroy such an objective point of view. She proves the conclusions made after reading this novel as wrong. What she herself committed about Cecilia and Robbie, and especially Robbie.

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