

Narrative Self-Healing in Ian McEwan's *The Atonement*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Briony's narrative self-healing to promote her healing. The purpose of this study is to clarify the portrayal of narrative self-healing in *Atonement*. The author adopts a psychology-analytical approach, focusing on the Four Stages of Psychotherapy in particular (Jung, 1966: 53-75). Confession, explanation, education, and transformation are the four stages of Jung's four-stage psychotherapy. The author also uses qualitative descriptive analysis to examine the various forms of Briony's narrative self-healing in *Atonement*. Through this study, the author learns how Briony reveals her narrative self-healing in *Atonement*, including her confession of her guilt that she accused Robbie of doing bad things, her explanation of her guilts to Robbie, her explanation of her effort to make some apologies for her guilty and the transformation of her guilt feeling.

Keywords: atonement, Carl Gustav Jung, Ian McEwan, narrative self-healing,

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lots of literary works bring the issue of mental health or psychological well-being to help many readers better understand psychological issues through literature. This phenomenon brings psychology and literature simply connected. According to Jung's argument, there is a connection between psychology and literature and literary studies can be done within the field of psychology in addition to looking at how psychological phenomena emerge, develop, and behave (Dong, 2021: 369). This connection can be seen in one of the psychological issues which talk in the literary work like the way people can deal with their mental health issues in their life. Narrative self-healing is an example of psychological therapy which links to the human mental health method that will be talked about in this research.

An ordered interpretation of an event sequence is what is meant by the term "narrative" (Murray, 2015: 113). While the term "healing" is a caring relationship used to create space throughout the experiential, energy-intensive healing process, which culminates in a sense of wholeness, integration, balance, and transformation (Wendler in Firth et al., 2015: 44). According to Gergen and Gergen (1988: 21), the individual self-problems that are highly relevant to the events that have affected the person with the problem or the self-narrative person can be defined as self-narratives or narrative self-healing. The huge definition of narrative self-healing can be concluded as the process of telling one's personal story to heal oneself from regrettable incorrect feelings or misdeeds. Through the years, they have served as a means of disseminating myths, written records, and narratives of all kinds. With such kinds of narratives, a person can express themselves in writing or orally while recovering from regret. One can compose a novel, prose, poetry, etc., in written form (Etchison and Kleist, 2000:61).

Since the psychology of literature is very huge to explore, this study finally aims to outline how the *Atonement* explores narrative self-healing. The study's focus is narrative self-healing in Briony's character from Ian McEwan's *Atonement* because it discusses issues related to psychosis, or more specifically, narrative self-healing, which is extremely beneficial to many people. This study picks up on Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. Briony's intense remorse toward the characters, as well as Robbie Turner and Cecilia Tallis, is the author's main point, which she sees as equally crucial as the issue. She has finished adding all of her remorse to the novel she's been working on for years.

2. METHOD

This study employs a psychoanalytic method based on Carl Gustav Jung's Four Stages of Psychotherapy. The word "psychoanalysis" is a catch-all encompassing a variety of psychological theories and methods, all of which emphasize the unconscious as a crucial aspect of human adaptability and behaviour (Lipner et al., 2017: 2). Additionally, descriptive qualitative research is meant to explain anything that has an implicit or explicit connection to the study issue (Lambert & Lambert, 2012: 255). Carl Gustav Jung's Four Stages of Psychotherapy divided into confession, elucidation or explanation, education, and the last is transformation. (Jung, 1966:53–75). This study hopes can function and produce the anticipated findings. This study uses data sources from the novel *Atonement*, which revealed that Briony had engaged in a sort of narrative self-healing using Carl Gustav Jung's Four Stages of Psychotherapy (1966:53–75), which include confession, explanation, education, and transformation. As a result, each data point will be accompanied by a quote from Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section is split into four parts to emphasize the study's main point. Using Carl Jung's Four Stages of Psychotherapy, the researcher will discuss an analysis of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* novel, in which Briony experiences a narrative self-healing from four levels of confession, explanation, education, and transformation.

The self-healing narrative of *Atonement* is clear to see. The main character Briony in Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* is described as being burdened with guilt for what she does and attempting to liberate herself through a technique similar to the self-healing narrative. Gustav Jung's Four Stages of Psychotherapy, which include confession, explanation, education, and transformation, are used to investigate this to ascertain whether or not the therapy is successful for Briony.

She claims that after Briony's initial deed, which ultimately makes her feel bad, Robby and Cecilia may live together once more in the happy epilogue of her book. All of that is described by Briony in the third person. Ian McEwan introduces himself in the first person in this part by adopting Briony's viewpoint from 1999, when Briony was precisely 77 years old.

3.1 Confession Stage

Confession is the first step. Several proofs that relate to this stage may be found in *Atonement*. As you can read below, Briony is said to have once engaged in a form of narrative self-healing by writing down her faults or regrets.

"None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly good. She need not judge. There did not have to be amoral. She need only show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive. 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. And only in a story could you enter these different minds and show how they had an equal value.” (McEwan, 2001:40)

The aforementioned comment demonstrates that Briony has already completed or is doing the first stage of psychotherapy, which is to confess. Briony admits her mistake, which she feels horrible about. It has to do with her inability to comprehend what happened in the past. Others are unhappy as a result of this misunderstanding, which separates Cecilia and Robbie. *“It wasn't only wickedness and plotting that made people miserable, it was confusion and misunderstanding,”* is taken from the statement (McEwan, 2001: 40). This demonstrates that Briony has admitted guilt for making Cecilia and Robbie unhappy. She feels awful about her shortcomings, even though they are not wicked crimes like murder, robbery, and so forth. The only fault she makes is that she doesn't understand what she saw at the time. Even with that one slip-up, Briony prevents Cecilia and Robbie from having a happy ever after.

“Only chance had brought her to the window. This was not a fairy tale, this was the real, the adult world in which frogs did not address princesses, and the only messages were the ones that people sent. It was also a temptation to run to Cecilia's room and demand an explanation. Briony resisted because she wanted to chase in solitude the faint thrill of possibility she had felt before, the elusive excitement at a prospect she was coming close to defining, at least emotionally.” (McEwan, 2001:40)

Briony also misunderstood the situation when she witnessed Cecilia and Robbie's encounter in the garden in front of the fountain. Briony can only see far away at that time via her room window. She doesn't hear any of their conversations and merely observes what is happening in that instant. According to her emotional interpretation, Briony concludes independently. In front of the fountain at that time, as it can be read, *“It was also a temptation to go to Cecilia's room and demand an explanation,”* even though she could have gone right there to ask Cecilia what was happening in the garden. (McEwan, 2001: 40)

Briony regrets her decision to be picked at that time very much. After everything has happened and Briony recounts the incident, she feels as though she wants to add that she should have gone straight to Cecilia's room to get a direct explanation from her at the time rather than holding the incident and coming to an emotional conclusion herself because she was not yet old enough to react to what she had seen in a way that made sense to an adult mind. Another instance in the book demonstrates how deeply Briony regrets her mistake. Briony believes that not even God seems to have the ability to pardon her. As a novelist, she simply makes improvements to her earlier work that dealt with Cecilia and Robbie's happiness; she doesn't fulfil their shared aspiration to be together forever. Even yet, she feels that her misunderstanding and accusations—which ended Cecilia and Robbie's life, which should have been happy—cannot be fully atoned for by God or Cecilia and Robbie.

“Problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination, she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists.” (McEwan, 2001:371)

These are the confessions made by Briony that reveal her regret. She acknowledges her mistakes and confesses to having wronged Robbie and Cecilia on several occasions. Briony also reveals that she wants to be pardoned despite being aware that Robbie and Cecilia—and even God—will never be able to forget her faults.

3.2 Explanation Stage

The second stage, that is explanation, in *Atonement* can be proved in some facts written in the novel. The first occasion is described when Briony writes about an occasion dealing with Cecilia's action of putting all her clothes before Robbie in a pond, as it can be read in the following sentences.

"A savage and thoughtless curiosity prompted her to rip the letter from its envelope—she read it in the hall after Polly had let her in—and though the shock of the message vindicated her completely, this did not prevent her from feeling guilty. It was wrong to open people's letters, but it was right, it was essential, for her to know everything." (McEwan, 2001:113).

The occurrence where Robbie sends two letters regarding Cecilia is the story that precedes the aforementioned quote. One letter is a formal apology for what happened in front of the fountain, while the second letter is a description of Robbie's yearning for Cecilia and contains crude sexual references. Similar to a love declaration, but with extremely coarse sexual language. After he completes those two letters, he intends to write Cecilia a courteous letter that she can read. He briefly encounters or sees Briony. Robbie abruptly requests Briony's assistance in delivering the letter to Cecilia, but because he was negligent, Robbie gave the wrong letter. Instead, he provides a letter that is chock-full of crude sexual language. Briony has just arrived home and has already entered the house when Robbie wants to return the letter.

Briony knows that reading other people's letters is a mistake, but Briony explains that what she does at that time is not a mistake. As soon as she finishes reading the letter, she immediately feels shocked at what she has read. She is aware that she has misunderstood Robbie.

Briony offers a different justification after reading Robbie's letter while she was with Lola. Briony does not read aloud the letter's contents, but she does so in a different way. Lola was able to comprehend Briony's meaning despite this. *"Briony told her about meeting Robbie on the bridge, and the letter, and how she had opened it, and what was in it. Rather than say the word out loud, which was unthinkable," (McEwan, 2001: 119).* They were both originally pleased when Briony concluded her story, but they both fell silent as if they were contemplating about something.

After they both fall silent, Lola tells Briony that Robbie is a maniac, according to Briony. *"How appealing to you. The man's a maniac."* (McEwan, 2001: 119). According to what Briony says in the aforementioned remark, it is clear that things were becoming worse before Briony started to decide to take action because of her misperception of Robbie. And when the miscommunication got worse, Robbie earned the moniker "maniac" from Lola and her.

Another Briony's explanation which she explains her false to Robbie can be seen from this quotation which talks about the night after all the person who joins in the dinner going to search where Pierrot and Jackson go.

When Jackson and Pierrot—two Lola's younger brothers—escaped the Tallis family home one evening, everyone gathered around the dinner table at that time had to leave the house. Briony, Cecilia, Leon, Robbie, Emily, Paul, and Lola are among them. To determine Jackson's and Pierrot's whereabouts, they all dispersed. Briony quickly stops walking when she is out by the river by herself in the middle of the night in her yard. She stops moving, but Briony can't make out who it is because she can't see them. That person stands up and immediately runs away from her *"Then she stopped. The vertical mass was a figure, a person who was now backing away from her"* (McEwan, 2001:164). Soon after that, someone else can be heard calling her name on the ground beyond the bush.

Briony continues by saying that Lola is the one calling her name. Amid the bushes that are shrouded in the night's darkness, she notices Lola's condition slumping to the ground. She instantly comprehends what just occurred, what just happened to Lola, when she first sees Lola. She can tell that Lola's condition is awful because of it. When Lola yells her name in a frantic tone, one that sounds limp and depressed, she is describing that condition. *"She heard the helplessness in Lola's voice—it was the sound she had thought belonged to a duck"* (McEwan, 2001:164). Apart from Lola's condition, she also understands something when she sees someone who immediately runs away when she comes near Lola.

Still, amid terror, Briony asked who has been done this bad thing to Lola in a low voice *"Briony whispers, 'Who was it?'"* (McEwan, 2001:165). She instantly becomes certain that she can see the suspect quite well after asking Lola, who has not yet responded. She is so certain that she will be correct that she has no reason to doubt it. This is illustrated by Briony who makes a statement not once, but twice in a row *"I saw him. I saw him."* (McEwan, 2001:165).

As though she is quite familiar with and can see the suspect. Briony doesn't even add, "I see him no more," to support her claim or position. However, Briony quickly dares to mention it. And the name she mentions is Robbie *"It was Robbie, wasn't it?"* (McEwan, 2001:166). All of her emotional presumptions and suspicions lead to this. This explains Briony's confession, which indicates that her miscommunication with Robbie has worsened by one level. When everyone was occupied hunting for Jackson and Pierrot in the middle of the grass-covered night, she accuses Robbie of raping Lola.

3.3 Education Stage

Education is the third stage. In this phase, the patient can be removed by the therapist so they can get them used to typical adaptations. This is how the therapist trains the patient to avoid being bogged down in self-regret. Although for patients this will be a nightmare, patients have to return from an abnormal life to normal life (Jung, 1966: 53-75). However, Briony does not see a psychotherapist since she heals herself using a narrative self-healing technique. She is her psychotherapist in this situation. Briony makes her own decisions about what she needs to do to heal herself as a result.

Being a nurse and writing an apology letter is insufficient for Cecilia and Robbie to pardon Briony. She decided to travel to Cecilia's flat to personally apologize to Cecilia and clarify all of her childhood miscommunications when her letters to Cecilia began to go unanswered. *"She had gone to the administration office and asked for Cecilia's address. In early May she had written to her sister. Now she was beginning to think that silence was Cecilia's answer."* (McEwan, 2001:282). Her decision to

go to Cecilia's apartment is not based on Cecilia's consent, but rather on her perception that she can no longer wait for a response from Cecilia that she hasn't received in a while.

After that, she makes a novel with past stories of the misunderstandings she has committed. *"Dear Miss Tallis, Thank you for sending us Two Figures by a Fountain,"* (McEwan, 2001:311). From the next quotation, it is clear that Briony wrote a book about her misunderstanding. The book's title, *Two Figures by a Fountain*, indicates what she saw at the time, directly in front of the fountain. Since the statement states that "Miss Tallis" or Briony Tallis has an incoming letter, she not only writes the book for herself but also sends it to the publisher. However, at that time, publishers found Briony's work under the title *Two Figures by a Fountain* to be less appealing, making it difficult for them to accept her tale or novel for publication. The publisher is reluctant to publish the work because of Briony's rejection as well as the fact that she is a new author. *"As you must know, it would be unusual for us to publish a complete novella by an unknown writer,"* (McEwan, 2001:311)

"She was calm as she considered what she had to do. Together, the note to her parents and the formal statement would take no time at all. Then she would be free for the rest of the day. She knew what was required of her. Not simply a letter, but a new draft, an atonement, and she were ready to begin." (McEwan, 2001:349)

Briony has gone through several academic phases before deciding that writing new material is what she needs to mend herself. a book that details her redemption. And she is prepared to pen her atonement, which will undoubtedly detail her misunderstanding of Robbie, the circumstances that led to it, how it has affected Cecilia and Robbie's life, and how she must atone for her faults or mistakes made toward Robbie thus far. Briony needs Cecilia and Robbie's forgiveness for her life to be peaceful and free of the guilt that has been following her around.

Briony has taken a variety of actions to atone for her faults or misunderstandings regarding Robbie, which prevented Cecilia and Robbie from living the wonderful life they should have. In light of the debate above, Briony attempted to train as a nurse to atone for her guilt, but she still thinks that she is unable to adequately address her guilt. After that, Briony writes Cecilia an apology letter to give to Robbie as well, but Cecilia is unable to respond. After receiving no response to her letter for a while, Briony decides to visit Cecilia at her apartment so that she can apologize in person. But that also doesn't work. Following that, Briony creates a novel with the working title *Two Figures by a Fountain* for the publisher, which chronicles the tale of Cecilia and Robbie's love story in front of a fountain. But once more, Briony is unsatisfied or feels that she is unable to rid herself of her guilt until she eventually understands that she must write a new book that includes not only the love story of Cecilia and Robbie but also all of her mistakes that led to the couple's unhappiness. Her atonement will then be included in the revised draft.

3.4 Transformation Stage

When the patient has finished the third stage, the last stage is the most crucial step. The fourth stage is transformation. The sufferer's subconscious will at this point triumph over their frightening vision. This method is difficult to complete. Therefore, this process takes a long time because it requires good concentration by the sufferer or also the psychotherapist (Jung, 1966: 53-75). So, the transformation of Briony's feelings can be seen in some of the sentences below.

Therefore, Briony takes the risk of going to see Cecilia and Robbie in her apartment. The purpose of Briony's meeting with them is to honestly apologize. She admits that she has frequently erred in her dealings with the two of them in the past. Therefore, her error has had a significant impact on their lives up to this point. She regrets it so much, *"It sounded so foolish and inadequate, as though she had knocked over a favourite houseplant, or forgotten a birthday."* (McEwan, 2001:348). Briony will take extreme measures to stop making demands on Robbie in the past out of guilt, and she will come clean about everything. The person responsible for everything that should have occurred is not Robbie, as she had previously believed. She will have done all of that, even though Robbie does not necessarily think Briony's efforts are enough to get her to apologize *"Robbie said softly, 'Just do all the things we've asked.' It was almost conciliatory, that 'just,' but not quite, not yet."* (McEwan, 2001:348).

Briony trying to come to terms with herself, with the past. And now, she is always thinking about the happy ending of Cecilia and Robbie, which is indeed their right and that should be what happens to their love story *"Lovers and their happy ends have been on my mind all night long."* (McEwan, 2001:370).

Briony's protracted process of repenting and mending herself from remorse over what she had previously done to Robbie had at last succeeded in doing so. Even then, though, she still won't be able to directly apologize to Robbie and Cecilia until they pass away. Even if this is only in Briony's mind, which she incorporates into her work, she only succeeds in bringing Robbie and Cecilia back together so that they can live happily ever after. Briony can alleviate any scepticism about Robbie and Cecilia's purportedly happy life in this way.

4. CONCLUSION

The Four Stages of Psychotherapy are chosen by the researcher to provide an explanation or answer for this section. This philosophy has four stages - confession, explanation, education, and transformation. The researcher can explain Briony's narrative self-healing in Atonement utilizing the idea. It is a component of confession to start. Four things stood out in Briony's confession. Through her narrative narration, Briony tells Robbie and Cecilia her secret and her guilty feeling. Writing a narrative story, Briony includes her confession. She expressed her sense of guilt before using the narrative scenario to describe the errors she had made. Beginning with her initial error and continuing until the issue became more serious she details all her missteps. After detailing all of her missteps, Briony talked about trying to make amends and apologizing to Robbie and Cecilia for them. Briony does not currently see a psychotherapist. That took place because she just put all the shame in a story. She thus serves as her psychotherapist. Finally, transformation is the last stage. The transformation section shows how, despite being plagued by her guilt for years, Briony can finally feel better by employing the narrative self-healing technique. Even though she cannot directly apologize to Robbie and Cecilia, she is still able to keep Robbie and Cecilia alive and happy for all time by using the narrative story that Briony created.

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