

THE POWER OF NARRATIVE SELF HEALING TO BRIONY IN IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT*

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Abstract: This study of *The Power of Narrative Self-Healing to Briony in Ian McEwan's Atonement* discusses about how Briony heal herself with narrative self-healing. The aim of this study is to explain how is narrative self-healing exposed in the *Atonement* and to explain the Briony's reason to apply narrative self-healing. The writer using a psychoanalysis approach with Four Stages of Psychotherapy (Jung, 1966: 53-75) as the theory to conduct the study. The Four Stages of Psychotherapy (Jung, 1966: 53-75) has four stages, those are confession, explanation, education, and transformation. The writer will explain the first aim of this study with using those four stages. The writer also applies qualitative descriptive analysis as the method to analyze the kinds of narrative self-healing that happens to Briony in the *Atonement*. From this study, the writer find how Briony exposes her narrative self-healing in the *Atonement*, among of the such as the Briony's exposes her narrative self-healing when she write her confession of her guilty that she has accuses Robbie doing bad things, her explanation of her guilty to Robbie, her explanation of her effort to make some appologize of her guilty, and the transformation of her guilty feeling. Moreover, the writer find some of Briony's reason too about how she applies the narrative self-healing which one of them is because Briony falling love with Robbie.

Keywords: *narrative self-healing, stages of psychoteraphy, guilty feeling*

INTRODUCTION

A general mind of psychoanalysis should be aligned with some knowledge of mind which gained from a range of diciplines (Fonagy, 2002:74). Psychoanalysis and literature is a literary works that consist of a collection of restlessness experienced by humans which deal with the human beings and their reaction, perception, miseries, desires, fears, conflicts, reconciliations by the individual an social concerns (Gosken Aras, 2014:251). Many literary works touch on some aspect of psychoanalysis. Just like narrative self-healing. On this

occasion, the writer will perform a study focusing on the character Briony's narrative self-healing in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.

Narrative self healing is the way to heal one's self from wrongs feeling that persons' have committe and regrete. Throughout history, narrative self-healing has been used to convey myths, historical records, and different types of narratives. With narrative self-healing, human can write or tell someone in oral ways to heal their self from the regret feeling. In written ways, one can write a novel, prose, poetry and etc (Etchison and Kleist, 2000:61).

Self-narratives or narrative self healing can be defined as the individual self-problems that have very strong relevance to events that have harmed the person with the problem or the self-narrative person (Gregen & Gregen, 1997: 21).

In addition, the writer picked Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*. Briony's profound remorse towards the characters, as well as Robbie Turner and Cecilia Tallis, is the researcher's favorite point, which he considers as essential as the problem. Briony brings feelings of regret until she is old, Briony only able to forgive herself when she has finished pouring her guilt into the novel she has written for decades.

This study is a new type of topic in Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. From this study, the writer hopes that the readers of this study can get various benefits.

Research Method

The theory of this study will use the theory of Carl Gustav Jung. In this study, the writer will use Four Stages of Psychotherapy theory by Carl Gustav Jung (Jung, 1966:53-75) which contains confession, explanation, education, and transformation.

According to (Lambert&Lambert, 2012:255), the descriptive qualitative method that is intended to describe everything that has an implicit or explicit relationship to the research topic. Descriptive study aims to describe something, such as a phenomenon or event in a period somewhere. The phenomenon

is described or explained its characteristics through descriptive study.

Discussion

In the *Atonement*, the narrative self-healing is plainly seen. Briony is a character in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* who is characterized as a person who is caught in remorse for what she does and attempts to escape the terrible feeling using a process akin to narrative self-healing. To determine if that technique is effective for Briony, the writer examined it using Gustav Jung's Four Stages of Psychotherapy (Jung, 1966:53-75), which are confession, explanation, education, and transformation. However, the writer noted that there were variations in how the Four Stages of Psychotherapy were applied in this study (Jung, 1966: 53-75). Typically, the idea is used in circumstances when two individuals are conversing, such as between a patient and a psychotherapist. In the self-narrative technique, however, the patient or suffering does not communicate with the psychotherapist through a vernacular. Sufferers who use this approach prefer to pour their entire experience into a narrative in which they narrate themselves with the conditions of the location and time, as well as the same difficulties that they are experiencing at the moment. This is supported by J. Gregen and Mary M. Gregen say that narrative method is also can be combined or developed with several other theories. Examples include the three main theories, such as learning theory, piagetian theory, and psychoanalytic theory. They say that on their article, *Narrative Form and the*

Construction of Psychological Science (Gergen&Gergen, 1986:32).

Similarly, the plot of the novel *Atonement*. The novel is divided into four segments by Ian McEwan. Chapters one to three describe a novel or tale written by Briony, in which she tells her own story about her guilty feeling problem. Starting from her first act which finally make her trapped in a guilty feeling untill where she tell that the story in her novel end with a happy ending where Robby and Cecilia could live together again. All of that, Briony tell using a third person point of view.

Ian McEwan delivers the fourth chapter in the first person point of view, utilizing Briony's point of view when she was seventy-seven years old, in 1999. However, in this chapter, Ian McEwan takes over as the story's author. Ia McEwan explains some facts in chapter four that Briony did not write in chapters one to three, namely, the truth of Robbie's death in Dunkirk due to septicemia first of June, 1940. Cecilia's death in the Balham Underground Stations in September 1940 because of German's bombing. As a result, it is clear that Robbie and Cecilia never lived together because they died in different places. It may be deduced from this that Ian McEwan authored the novel *Atonement*, which is set during World War II and takes place in 1999. With Dunkirk, France, and London setting of places.

Confession

Confession is the first step. Several proofs that are linked to this step may be found in *Atonement*. Briony was once

described as conducting a narrative self-healing by writing admissions of her errors or regrets, as can be seen in the excerpt below.

“None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly good. She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral. 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 quote above shows that Briony is currently doing or fulfilling the first stage in psychotherapy, namely confess. Briony admits her mistake that makes her feel bad. It is related to her failure to understand what happens in the past time. This misunderstanding results in the unhappiness of others, that is the separation of Cecilia and Robie.

The explanation of the quotation above shows that Briony confesses her guilty of causing unhappiness for Cecilia and Robbie. Evetough, her faults is not a very evil form of crime, such as murder, robbery, and so on, she feels very badly about it. The only mistake she makes is in the form of ignorance of what she has witnessed at the time. Even with just a mistake like that, Briony makes Cecilia and Robbie unable to live happily 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 has made another misunderstanding when she witnesses Cecilia and Robbie meeting in the courtyard in front of the fountain. Briony can only view from afar, via the window of her room, at the moment. She simply observes what is going on at the time and does not listen in on their discussions. Briony comes to her own conclusions based on her emotional perception. Although she could walk immediately to Cecilia’s chamber at that time to seek an explanation of what was going on in the garden, in front of the fountain at the time but she chose not to do that.

Briony deeply regrets with what she has been chosen at that time. When everything has passed and Briony tells that story again, Briony feels like she wants to say that at that time she should have gone straight to Cecilia’s room to ask for a direct explanation from her, instead of saving the incident and concluding it herself emotionally, because at that time she is not mature enough to respond to what she has seen with a logical adult mind.

“It was in those moments, when she felt their coolness, that she reached back to revive her first ardor and said it again. I saw him. I know it was him. Then it was comforting to feel she was confirming what they already knew. She would never be able to console herself that she was pressured or bullied. She never was. She trapped herself, she marched into the labyrinth of her own construction, and was too young, too awestruck, too keen to please, to insist on making her own way back.” (McEwan, 2001:170).

The story that follows the quote above is when Briony comes to Lola Quincey’s wedding, her cousin, who marries to a man, named Paul Marshall, a wealthy businessman who produces chocolate, Army Ammo, which is produced for soldiers who go to war.

A wedding should be a happy time. However it does not happen to Briony. Briony can not even make herself happy when she sees her cousin marry. Briony can not be happy because she knows that her past accusations related to what she has done to Robbie, is completely false. As she recalls, at that time the one who raped Lola in the middle of the grass on a dark night was Paul Marshall, but because she only follows her emotions, she accuses Robbie of being the culprit so Robbie has to accept all the consequences that Paul should have received. Briony feels very guilty and depressed about what she has done in the past.

Those are Briony’s confessions that show Briony Tallis’ regret. She admits her mistakes, she confesses that she has

committes many sins against Robbie and Cecilia, and Briony also confesses that she wants to be forgiven even though she knows that his mistakes will never be forgiven by Robbie and Cecilia, even God.

Explanation

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

"Briony raised two hands to her face and stepped back a little way from the window. She should shut her eyes, she thought, and spare herself the sight of her sister's shame. But that was impossible, because there were further surprises. Cecilia, mercifully still in her underwear, was climbing into the pond, was standing waist deep in the water, was pinching her nose—and then she was gone. There was only Robbie, and the clothes on the gravel, and beyond, the silent park and the distant, blue hills." (McEwan, 2001:39)

Briony explains, giving an overview of the events relates to what she see at that time. This moment is the beginning of Briony's misjudges Robbie. As in the quote above, Briony explains that at that time, when she is fifteen years old, she see her sister, Cecilia standing in the garden, in front of the fountain with a man named Robbie. Instantly, Briony see that Cecilia took off all her clothes, just making her underwear left, then Cecilia enters the

fountain, meanwhile, there Robbie just stand there watching Cecilia enter the pool. The quote above explains how Briony see the events on that afternoon. Briony explains in detail such as the mention of where Cecilia took off her clothes, climb the boundary of the pool, until to the point where Cecilia closes her nose before she enters the pool. Meanwhile, outside the pool there is Robbie who just stood there watching what Cecilia doing.

Robbie Turner just standing in front of the fountain until Cecilia come out from the fountain with soaking wet underwear. Robbie just stared at Cecilia in silence. At least that is what Briony sees from the distance, behind her window at her bedroom. Sustainability is explained through the quote below.

"Cecilia had climbed out of the pond and was fixing her skirt, and with difficulty pulling her blouse on over her wet skin. She turned abruptly and picked up from the deep shade of the fountain's wall a vase of flowers Briony had not noticed before, and set off with it toward the house. No words were exchanged with Robbie, not a glance in his direction. He was now staring into the water, and then he too was striding away, no doubt satisfied, round the side of the house. Suddenly the scene was empty; the wet patch on the ground where Cecilia had got out of the pond was the only evidence that anything had happened at all." (McEwan, 2001:39)

Explaining her witness at that time, she continues by telling how it goes after Cecilia enters the pool. Briony explained that after Cecilia get out of the pool, she

immediately put on the skirt and blouse that she has taken off before entering the pool. From the window, in the distance, Briony see that while coming out of the pool, Cecilia is holding a flower vase fragment that Briony has never seen before. Before the two of them (Cecilia and Robbie) left each other, they just stare each other, Briony does not see any lip movements from them which indicate that at that time, after Cecilia come out of the pool, they do not speak to each other.

Another explanation given by Briony, when she has been with Lola, shortly after she read Robbi's letter. Briony does not convey or tell the contents of the letter out loud, but she does it in a different way. Even so, Lola could understand what Briony means. "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). After Briony finished telling the story, both of them were initially excited, both of them immediately become silent as if they are thinking about something. Briony explains that at that time, after both of them are silent, Lola tell her that Robbie is a maniac " 'How appalling to you. The man's a maniac.' " (McEwan, 2001: 119). From what Briony tell in the quote above, it can be seen that the case of Briony's misunderstanding of Robbie was getting worse when Briony starts to decide to take action. And now, the misunderstanding increase, so that Robbie got the nickname as maniac from Lola and from her.

Those are the second stage, which talk about Briony's explanation of Robbie's wrongdoing and abuse. From this explanation it can be seen that at that time, when Briony was thirteen years old, she could not decides something logically and precisely. She make more decisions emotionally, so that, indirectly, Briony continues to judge Robbie with cruel and heinous accusations. All the accusations and misunderstandings that Briony does to Robbie were fatal to Cecilia and Robbie's life, where they should both be able to live happily together. But they had to die in a different place and at a great distance.

Education

The third stage is education. This stage allows the therapist to pull the patient out to accustom to normal adaptations. The purpose of this is the process by which the therapist teaches the patient not to be trapped in self-regret. Although for patients this will be a nightmare for them, patients have to return from an abnormal life to a normal life (Jung, 1966: 53-75). But, because Briony using narrative self-healing method to heal herself, so Briony does not going to the psychotheraphist. Here she being the psychotheraphist for herself. Because of that, Briony chooses and decides what she has to do to heal herself.

First thing that Briony chooses and does to heal herself is writes and send a forgiveness letter to the Cecilia. She does that thing when she recently attended training as nurse for army who faught for London.

“... I wasn’t going to tell you about this now. I still don’t know what to think and I wanted to wait until we’re together. Now I have your letter, it doesn’t make sense not to tell you. The first surprise is that Briony isn’t at Cambridge. She didn’t go up last autumn, she didn’t take her place. I was amazed because I’d heard from Dr. Hall that she was expected. The other surprise is that she’s doing nurse’s training at my old hospital. Can you imagine Briony with a bedpan? I suppose they all said the same thing about me. But she’s such a fantasist, as we know to our cost. I pity the patient who receives an injection from her. Her letter is confused and confusing. She wants to meet. She’s beginning to get the full grasp of what she did and what it has meant. Clearly, not going up has something to do with it. She’s saying that she wants to be useful in a practical way. But I get the impression she’s taken on nursing as a sort of penance. She wants to come and see me and talk.” (McEwan, 2001:211).

The quotation above is taken from a letter that Cecilia has sent to Robbie. One can read in the letter about Briony’s efforts to overcome her guilty. Some facts are uncovered in the letter. One is that Briony is not at Cambridge, where Briony is studying. Second, Briony is taking a training to be a nurse at Cecilia’s hospital. The guilt that Briony feels because of her misunderstanding of Robbie when Briony was a child continues to haunt her until she is old enough to think more logically. Therefore, Briony begins looking for ways how she can make an apology to Cecilia and Robbie. The quote above is Briony’s first way to get forgiveness from Cecilia

and Robbie. In this case, Briony tries to send a letter to Cecilia, but Cecilia has not been able to make a decision whether they will forgive Briony or not before Cecilia can meet Briony. In addition, Cecilia who receives information from Dr. Hall that Briony was training as a nurse at the old hospital, where Cecilia had served. Hearing this, Cecilia is shocked at the news.

Briony’s reason in taking training as a nurse is not a desire from herself or because she really likes it. But she chose it because she thinks it can be a way to be useful to others, so she can feel that by helping and caring for others, she is already useful and can forgive herself for what she has been done to Cecilia and Robbie. This can be seen in the sentence “She’s beginning to get the full grasp of what she did and what it has meant. Clearly, not going up has something to do with it. She’s saying that she wants to be useful in a practical way.” (McEwan, 2001:212).

Writing a letter of apology and being a nurse is not enough for Briony to be forgiven by Cecilia and Robbie. So, when the letters she sends to Cecilia start to go unanswered, she took the initiative to go to Cecilia’s flat to apologize directly to Cecilia and discuss all her misunderstandings when she was a child. “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 initiative to visit Cecilia’s flat is not with Cecilia’s permission, but on her own perception because she can not hang to

wait for a reply from Cecilia that she has not receives for a long time.

The next stage of education after Briony not satisfied with just sending a letter of apology, becoming a nurse, and visiting Cecilia's house, after that she make a novel with past stories of the misunderstandings she has been committes. "Dear Miss Tallis, Thank you for sending us *Two Figures by a Fountain*," (McEwan, 2001:311). It can be seen from the following quote that Briony made a novel which tells of her misunderstanding, the title of the story she send, namely *Two Figures by a Fountain* the novel tells about something she see at that time, right in front of the fountain. She not only make the novel for herself, but she send the novel to the publisher, it can be seen from the quote that there is an incoming letter for "Miss Tallis" or Briony Tallis. But unfortunately, at that time Briony's writing with the title *Two Figures by a Fountain* less attractive for publishers to be able to publish the novel or the story that she sends. In addition, the rejection also due to Briony, who is a new writer, this make the publisher afraids to publish the story. "As you must know, it would be unusual for us to publish a complete novella by an unknown writer," (McEwan, 2001:311).

Briony has done various ways to make amends for her mistakes or misunderstandings towards Robbie which result in not lasting the happy life that Cecilia and Robbie should have. From the above discussion, Briony has tried to become a nurse to atone for her guilt, but Briony still feels that she is not able to

properly treat her guilty feeling. After that Briony sends a letter of apology to Cecilia to convey to Robbie as well, but Cecilia can not answer Briony's apology. After her letter is not replied for a long time, Briony finally goes to Cecilia's flat to be able to meet her, to apologize. But that does not work either. After that, Briony drafts a novel that tells the story of Cecilia and Robbie's love story in front of a fountain with the title *Two Figures by a Fountain*, which she gave to the publisher. But again, Briony is not satisfied or fell that she can not cure her guilty feeling until finally, she realizes that she has to draft a new novel which not only contains the love story of Cecilia and Robbie but also contains all of her mistakes that causes to the couple to not live happily forever. Then the new draft will contain her atonement.

Transformation

The final stage is the most important stage when the patient has successfully completes the third stage. Then, this fourth stage is transformation. In this stage, there are not many clients or sufferers or someone who is doing self-healing narratives at this stage. Because at this stage a lot of their fears will haunt the process of their self-transformation. In this stage, the sufferer's subconscious will overcome their fearful image. This process is not easy to do. Therefore, this process takes a long time because it requires good concentration by the sufferer or also the therapist (Jung, 1966: 53-75). So, the transformation of Briony's feeling can be seen from some of the sentences below.

Briony ventures to visit Cecilia's flat to meet Cecilia and Robbie. Briony's aim

in meeting them is to sincerely apologize. She explains that she has made many mistakes against the two of them in the past, so that her mistake has a huge impact on their lives until now. She regrets it so much, she was so very sorry she does "It sounded so foolish and inadequate, as though she had knocked over a favorite houseplant, or forgotten a birthday." (McEwan, 2001:348). For her guilt, Briony will do all kinds of ways to withdraw her demands on Robbie in the past, and she will reveal everything, everything that should have happened, who should be guilty and it is not Robbie as she thinks in the past. 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 is attempting to change her feelings of remorse into feelings of serenity. She does this transformation by admitting that her misunderstanding has led to the crime she has committed. But at the same time, she also knows that there are also two people she loves, her sister, Cecilia and the man she loves, namely Robbie. "There was a crime. But there were also the lovers." (McEwan, 2001:370). She is 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).

Another thing that Briony has done to try to do self-transformation is by making or completing a draft of her final novel. Briony gives readers a happy ending for her novel. Where Briony lets readers know how happy Cecilia and Robbie are when they both live together "It is only in this last version that my lovers end well, standing side by side on a South London pavement as I walk away." (McEwan, 2001:371). Unlike some of the previous drafts, the ending of the story was made cruel and sad "All the preceding drafts were pitiless." (McEwan, 2001:370). Briony does not care how readers respond even though she has tried to persuade and convince readers that what happens is she never came to Cecilia's flat, with that Robbie and Cecilia also never escorted Briony to the train station. "That I never saw them in that year. That my walk across London ended at the church on Clapham Common, and that a cowardly Briony limped back to the hospital, unable to confront her recently bereaved sister." (McEwan, 2001:370-371).

Briony's last action in an effort to forgive herself is to revive the past memory to be able to complete the novel *Atonement* that she made. She brings that happy couple back to life in her novel. Inside there, they live happily and love each other. With that, her despair over the lives of Robbie and Cecilia began to fade "a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them at the end. I gave them happiness," (McEwan, 2001:371).

Although she manages to build a happy life for Robbie and Cecilia in her

novel. Actually she does not really succeed in forgiving herself, even she can not forgive herself. But, her feeling is much better until for years because she can give a happy ending on Robbie's and Cecilia's lives even that just in her novel. But at least with that way, Briony can make them alive forever.

Conclusion

The chapter fifth of this thesis deals with the points of discussion of the *The Power of Narrative Self-Healing to Briony in Ian McEwan's Atonement*. So that, this chapter will review or explain the findings of the discussion which based on the problem statements of this thesis.

The writer decides to answer or explain the Briony's exposition part with using Four Stages of Psychotherapy (Jung, 1966:53-75). This theory is consist with four stages, those are confession, explanation, education, and transformation. With using that theory, the writer can explain how Briony exposes her narrative self-healing in *Atonement*.

Firstly is the part of confession, Briony confess her secret and her guilty feeling to Robbie and Cecilia through her narrative story. Briony writes a narrative story which contain with her confession. After she confesses her guilty feeling, she explain the things or mistakes that she has made by using the narrative story. She explain all of her mistakes, begin from her first mistake until the problem going deeper.

Thridly, after Briony explain all of her mistakes, she writes about her effort to

saying sorry and making apologize to Robbie and Cecilia for her mistakes. At this part, Briony does not meet with the psychotherapist. That happen because she just write all of her guilty in narrative story. She being the psychotherapist for herself too.

The last stage is transformation. In the part of transformation explain, with using the narrative self-healing Briony can make herself feeling better after she has haunted with her guilty feeling for many years. Even she can not make apologize to Robbie and Cecilia directly, but by using this narrative story that Briony made, she can make Robbie and Cecilia alive forever in happiness.

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