

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

In people's lives, individuals often experience changes in their thoughts, emotions, and behavior as they grow and interact with their environment. Human beings are complex, and their personalities are shaped through various internal and external factors. According to Allport, "personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment." (1937: 48). This definition shows that personality is not static, but dynamic and continuously shaped by individual experiences and interactions. As a result, important life events can change people's personality. Since literature often shows human behavior, feelings, thoughts, and conflicts through fictional characters, personality theory can be used to study the psychological development of characters in literary works.

In general, literature is an expression of human life based on an individual's perspectives, experiences, and feelings. Wellek and Warren state that, "literature represents life, and life is in large measure a social reality" (1949: 94). The statement explains how literary works often mirror true human experiences and reality in society. As a result, literature can be seen as a way for portraying human life, emotions, and conflicts in creative forms. Such portrayal can be seen in a novel written by Ian McEwan titled *Atonement* published in 2001. The novel received several prestigious awards, including the W. H. Smith Literary Award

(2002), the National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award (2003), the Los Angeles Times Prize for Fiction (2003), and the Santiago Prize for the European Novel (2004). It was later adapted into a film in 2007, directed by Joe Wright and starring Keira Knightley and James McAvoy.

Atonement is a novel about Briony Tallis, the novel's protagonist and main character, who, at thirteen years old, misunderstands a series of intimate moments between her older sister, Cecilia, and Robbie Turner, the Tallis family's housekeeper's son, from the incident at the fountain, to Robbie's accidentally read letter, to the moment in the library and develops a perception of Robbie as a dangerous man. That same night, her cousin Lola is assaulted in the dark by Paul Marshall, but in her mistaken belief, Briony instead accuses Robbie of the crime, which led to him being imprisoned and sent to World War II, while Cecilia breaks off relations with her family to defend him. Five years later, eighteen-year-old Briony chooses not to continue her studies at Cambridge and instead trains as a nurse at the same London hospital where Cecilia had previously worked as a nurse while living in Balham. Through this work, Briony begins to realize the consequences of her mistake and attempts to atone her mistakes. She eventually approaches Cecilia and Robbie at their home in Balham to apologize. However, at the end of the novel, it is revealed that this entire encounter, along with the portrayal of Robbie and Cecilia living together with a happy ending, was just Briony's fiction as a novelist; in reality, Robbie died of an infected war wound at Bray Dunes near Dunkirk on 1 June 1940, and Cecilia was killed in September 1940 in a bombing raid on Balham Underground Station, so the two were never

truly reunited or met Briony, and Briony, provided them a happy ending in writing as a way to atone for a mistake she was unable to make in the real world as she grew older.

This study chooses Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) because the novel focuses on the long-term effects of childhood misinterpretation and how it affects an individual's life. Through the character of Briony Tallis, the novel shows a significant change in personality and self-awareness at various stages of life. The writer uses Elizabeth B. Hurlock's theory of personality development to analyze Briony Tallis's personality development as one of the main characters in the novel. Therefore, this study focuses on how Briony Tallis is characterized, the factors influencing her personality development, and the categories of her personality development reflected to her characterization throughout the story.

1.2. Research Questions

The research questions of this study, which focuses on Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), are as follows:

1. How is Briony Tallis characterized in *Atonement*?
2. What factors influence Briony Tallis's personality development in *Atonement*?
3. How is Briony Tallis' personality development reflected to her characterization throughout *Atonement*?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

1. To identify Briony Tallis' characterization in *Atonement*.
2. To identify the factors influencing Briony Tallis's personality development in *Atonement*.
3. To analyze Briony Tallis's personality development reflected to her characterization throughout *Atonement*.

1.4. Previous Studies

This section discusses some previous studies about Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, in which some other researchers have already conducted in the past. These studies provide important insights for understanding the characters, conflicts, and narrative techniques used in the story. In addition, the previous studies help the writer identify similarities and differences between this research and earlier research. Therefore, the writer uses these studies as references and supporting sources in conducting this research.

The first previous study is a 2020 journal article entitled "Class and Social Inequality in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*." The study emphasizes the novel's interaction with social class, rank, and power, even if its main themes are love and guilt, applying the social stratification theory of Max Weber. The difference between Talevski's study and the author's is that Talevski's study examines class and social inequality in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* through Max Weber's theory of social stratification, whereas the present study focuses on Briony Tallis's

characterization and personality development. Both of these studies use Ian McEwan's *Atonement* novel.

The second previous study is a journal article published in 2024 entitled ““The Service of Bleakest Realism”: Authorship, Guilt, and Forgiveness in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.” by Emily Kile. The research examines the complexities of guilt, authorship, and the potential for atonement in McEwan's book *Atonement*. Kile focuses on Briony's struggles with guilt as the story's narrator and author, as well as her attempts to reinvent the story as a way of forgiving herself.

The third previous study is an 2024 honors project by Emily Rooksby from the University of Mary Washington, entitled “Unraveling the Threads: Memory and Narrative in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.” The study focuses on how McEwan uses metafiction, nonlinear narrative, and unreliable narration to explore the subjectivity of memory and truth. The result of the study shows that these narrative techniques emphasize how personal perspectives and memories influence the construction of truth in the novel.

The fourth previous study is a 2023 journal article by Wahaj Unnisa Warda and Mohammad Rezaul Karim from Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, entitled “(Un)reliable Narrative in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.” According to the study, Briony's narration, while useful for narrative therapy and self-confessional writing, is unreliable since her memories and narratives are influenced by her wants rather than facts.

The fifth previous study is a journal article by M. Shyamala and Dr. C. Veena Rani from V.V.Vanniaperumal College For Women published in 2025,

entitled “The Psychological Impact of Guilt in Ian McEwan’s *“Atonement”*.” The study examines how Briony Tallis's false accusations against Robbie Turner shapes her life, causing her to feel guilty and suffer psychologically. It emphasizes that Briony's shame is not simply personal, but also strongly tied to memory and identity, creating a burden she cannot face.

The sixth previous study is a 2024 journal article by Harith Ismael Turki and Merve Feryal Ashmawy from Karabuk University and Sinop University, entitled “Ethics of Storytelling: The Wounds of Deception and Pseudo-PTSD in *Atonement*.” The study shows that Briony's story is a form of internalized trauma, indicating that her shame and desire for atonement are more like pseudo-PTSD than actual trauma.

The seventh study is a 2020 journal article by Mehrnaz Khoshgam, Ariman Sitompul, and Syarifuddin, entitled “The Characteristics of Modernism in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.” The study analyzes how McEwan’s novel demonstrate modernist literature through creative storytelling techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness, fragmentation, and non-linear structure, as well as explorations of ideas related to truth, memory, war, class, and morality.

The eighth previous study is a journal article published in 2023 by Evi Irawanti Saragih, Rio Eka Nugraha, and Siti Eka Rahayu Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia, entitled “Analisis Trauma dalam Novel *Atonement* Karya Sastra Abad 21 dan Korelasinya dengan Peristiwa Serangan 9/11.” The study examines Briony's use of storytelling to address her trauma using Kathryn Robson's (2004)

trauma theory. The novel shows both individual and societal suffering, highlighting literature as a healing and enlightening medium.

The ninth previous study is a 2020 journal article by Eka Sashia Purnamasanti from State University of Surabaya, entitled “Classism Depicted in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*.” Using Liu’s concept of classism and McClelland’s theory of needs, the study shows how social status influences the characters’ motivations and actions, emphasizing the impact of classism on their psychology and decisions.

The tenth study is a 2020 journal article by Abbas Murad Dohan and Hussein Nasir Shweinm, entitled “Negotiating Metafictional Aspects of Postmodern Narrative in Ian McEwan’s” *Atonement*. The study examines how *Atonement* reflects postmodern metafictional techniques, focusing on McEwan’s reflections on the English novel and his negotiation with modernist and postmodernist traditions.

In between the previous research mentioned above, it can be concluded that the difference between the previous studies and this research is that this study uses a different approach. This research employs Hurlock’s personality development theory to analyze the personality development of Briony Tallis. Furthermore, this study examines the factors that affect Briony’s personality development and categories of Briony’s personality development, to gain an understanding of how these factors influence her behavior and personality development in the novel.

1.5. Research Method

This study analyzes Briony's personality development in Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* using qualitative library research methods. Creswell explains that “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (2014: 235). The qualitative method is used since this study focuses on analyzing psychological factors in a literary work rather than presenting numerical data. The primary data source of this research is the novel *Atonement* (2001) by Ian McEwan. The secondary data are taken from books, journal articles, previous theses, and other academic sources related to psychoanalytical approach, literary criticism, and the material object. In collecting the data, this study applies document analysis, as Creswell states that “qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual information, rather than rely on a single data source” (2014: 45). Important passages, dialogues, and narrative descriptions from the novel are analyzed and organized into relevant categories. The data are then interpreted to explain how the identified factors influence Briony's personality and its development throughout the story.

There are various approaches to analyze or review literary works, and one of the commonly used in literary studies is the psychological approach. Psychology plays an important role in literary analysis, especially in analyzing characters more deeply. Literature and psychology are connected since they both deal with human existence and experiences. Tyson states, “psychoanalysis can

help us better understand human behavior, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts” (2006: 11). Therefore, a psychological perspective in literature helps in understanding how a character's personality develops and is influenced by many different life circumstances. Furthermore, characterization is important in literary analysis since it reveals how a character's personality, behavior, and thoughts are shown throughout the narrative. Through characterization, readers can understand the changes experienced by a character in the novel.

1.6. Scope of the Study

This study does not analyze all of *Atonement's* intrinsic elements. The intrinsic elements analyzed in this study are character and characterization, setting, and conflict, which help explain the structure of the story and the development of events in the novel. This research also applies a psychological approach. The psychological aspect uses Hurlock's personality development theory to analyze Briony's personality development. This includes examining factors and the categories of Briony's personality development. Through this approach, the study aims to understand how these factors shape Briony's personality and influence her development throughout the story in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001). Her decision to become a nurse, her final apology, and her lifetime desire for atonement through writing are all examples of this transformation, which is supported by a variety of external and internal factors. This study argues that Briony's personality development moves from an

impulsive, imaginative child guided by her own assumptions into a more reflective, responsible, and emotionally mature adult, a change that is slow, mainly quantitative, and overall positive.

1.7. Writing Organization

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the Background of the Study, Purposes of the Study, Previous Studies, Research Method, Scope of the Study, and Writing Organization.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter explains the theories of intrinsic elements, namely character and characterization, conflict, and setting, along with Hurlock's personality development theory, covering its factors and categories.

CHAPTER III: RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes the intrinsic elements, namely character and characterization, conflict, and setting, as well as Briony Tallis's personality development based on Hurlock's theory.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

The last chapter of this thesis contains the summary of the whole discussion of this thesis. It concludes the result of the analysis of Briony Tallis's personality development in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) based on Hurlock's personality development theory.

REFERENCES