



**BRIONY TALLIS' SUPERIORITY COMPLEX  
AS DEPICTED IN IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT***

**A THESIS**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for S-1 Degree Majoring Literature in English Department  
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

**Submitted by:**

**Putri Wudiyana  
NIM 13020117120020**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY  
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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer honestly states that this research thesis is written by the writer without taking any works from other researchers in any university, in diploma degree, S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree. I also ascertain that I do not take any material from other works except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, 10 June 2021

Putri Wudiyana

## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

*It's a church of burnt romances and I'm too far gone to pray*

*It's a solo song and it's only for the brave*

**Louis Tomlinson**

*This thesis is dedicated to  
My beloved mother, father, brother,  
and those who helped me*

**APPROVAL**

**BRIONY TALLIS' SUPERIORITY COMPLEX AS DEPICTED IN**

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Written by:

Putri Wudiyana

NIM: 13020117120020

Is approved by the thesis advisor

on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Thesis Advisor



Hadiyanto, S.S., M.Hum.  
NIP. 197407252008011013

The Head of English Department



Drs. Oktiva Herry Chandra, M.Hum.  
NIP. 196710041993031003

## VALIDATION

Approved by

Strata I Thesis Examination Committee

Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University

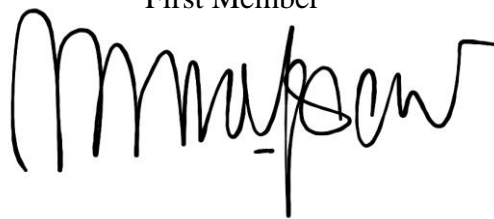
on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Chair Person



Dr. Ratna Asmarani, M.Ed., M.Hum.  
NIP. 196102261987032001

First Member



Dra. R. AJ. Atrinawati, M.Hum.  
NIP. 196101011990012001

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Semarang, 10 June 2021

Putri Wudiyana

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## **Abstract**

Superiority complex is a psychological condition of a person who thinks that he or she is better in doing certain things than other people. The objective of this research thesis is to analyze the superiority complex experienced by Briony Tallis, the main character in McEwan's *Atonement* novel. In conducting this research thesis, the writer uses psychology of literature approach with theory of Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler focusing on superiority complex to analyze psychological phenomena in the novel. Library method is used to collect the supporting data. There are three findings in this research of the novel, the first finding is the factors of Briony Tallis' superiority complex, namely, the fictional finalism, the striving for perfection, the fact that she is her mother's favorite child, and the seeking for talent's recognition. The second finding is Briony Tallis' superiority complex behavior, namely, being presumptive, doing accusation, controlling others, and seeking for attention. The third finding is the impacts of Briony Tallis' superiority complex, namely, having a narrow perspective and behaving like an adult. Therefore, this research thesis concludes that Briony Tallis, the main character in McEwan's *Atonement* novel, suffers from a psychological condition of superiority complex.

**Keywords:** Superiority Complex, Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler, Contextual Research, Psychology of Literature

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background of the Study**

Psychology is a study of human's mind and behavior which involves the study of conscious and unconscious phenomenon (Fernald, 2008:12). There are many psychologists who introduce their ideas related to human's mind and behavior. One of those famous psychologists is Alfred Adler who introduces the concept of individual psychology. Individual psychology or also called as Adlerian Psychology is one of the three major theories of depth psychology—beside the depth psychology theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (Oberst and Stewart, 2003:152). Adler's theory mainly explores the goals and the purposes of human's life rather than human's past experiences.

Adler's theory of psychology focuses on the superiority and inferiority complex experienced by humans. Adler believes that every child has inferiority feeling—the inability to do something—ever since he or she was born, resulting in superiority feeling—the ability to do something—appeared as to cover those inability. Although superiority feeling appears as the compensation of the inferiority feeling, however, the factor of superiority complex is not only limited to inferiority feeling, but also to other factors. It can be influenced by other factors, both internal and external, such as the condition of one's family or the feeling to always be acknowledged by others (Oberst and Stewart, 2003:5).

A simple case of superiority complex in real life can be seen through humans' behavior like when a student is not good enough in mathematics, he or she tries to

show his or her proficiency in other lessons to mask his or her inferiority side. The phenomenon of superiority complex that appears in everyday life is also found in literary works, such as a novel entitled *Atonement* which is written by Ian McEwan that reveals about superiority complex experienced by a teenager named Briony Tallis. In McEwan's *Atonement*, the main character, Briony Tallis, shows the characteristics of superiority complex through her behavior. The inability to protect her sister makes her come to the stage of superiority complex which is also supported by other factors.

The writer is interested to analyze the superiority complex as well as the description and the impacts of the superiority complex experienced by Briony Tallis' in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. The reason for choosing superiority complex phenomena in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* is because it is experienced by many people since the main trigger—inferiority complex—is always brought by every child when he or she was born. Besides, superiority complex is unique because it analyzes people's behavior from their life purposes, not from their past experiences. Furthermore, based on this study, the writer tries to explain and to give the reflection of how human can experience superiority feeling since it can be used as a reference for students and researchers who are studying superiority complex.

## **1.2. Research Problems**

1. What are the factors of Briony Tallis' superiority complex in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*?

2. What is the description of Briony Tallis' superiority complex in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*?
3. What are the impacts of the superiority complex on Briony Tallis' life in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*?

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

1. To analyze the factors of Briony Tallis' superiority complex in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*
2. To describe Briony Tallis' superiority complex in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*
3. To analyze the impacts of the superiority complex on Briony Tallis' life in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.

### **1.4. Previous Studies**

There are several studies related to Ian McEwan's *Atonement* which also talk about psychological side of the characters, the readers, and even the author himself. Those studies are:

The first one is a scientific journal entitled *Speed, War, and Traumatic Affect: Reading Ian McEwan's Atonement* (2007) written by Paul Crosthwaite which discusses the traumatic feeling from the World War II experienced by the characters in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* novel. Another study is psychological journal entitled *A Brief Review of Briony in Each Period in the Atonement from the Perspective of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis* (2020) written by J.J. Liu which studies the image of the protagonist character by using Freud's theory of *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. The next study is a psychological journal entitled *Some*

*Reflections on Ian McEwan's Atonement: Enactment, Guilt, and Reparation* (2017) written by Ilany Kogan which explores the guilty feeling and the defense mechanism of Briony Tallis character. Then, there is also a scientific journal entitled *The Impression of a Deeper Darkness: Ian McEwan's Atonement* (2006) written by Peter Mathews which explores how the paradox in the novel brings the reader to a feeling of unease resulted from the ignorance of the protagonist character, Briony Tallis. The last study is a scholarly journal entitled *The Sin of Ian McEwan's Fictive Atonement: Reading his Later Novels* (2008) written by Bruno M. Shah which talks about the psychological side of the author, Ian McEwan.

Based on the previous studies related to the topic of superiority complex in the novel, the writer's research thesis is very different from any other previous studies, because it focuses on the psychological perspective analyzing superiority complex phenomena of the main character, Briony Tallis, in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. This research is intended to explain and to give reflection of how human can experience the feeling of superiority. Moreover, the individual psychology theory of Alfred Adler has never been used to research and to explore the main character, Briony Tallis, in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. In addition to that, the writer finds that there are only few studies of teenager's superiority complex. The writer's research thesis provides the scientific explanation of teenager's superiority complex in a literary work. Furthermore, this research thesis will prove that the factor of superiority complex is not only limited to the feeling of inferiority brought by every child, but also influenced by other factors.

### 1.5. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Briony Tallis' superiority complex as seen in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. The discussion of the study covers the factors, the description, and the impacts of Briony Tallis' superiority complex in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.

### 1.6. Writing Organization

The writing organization in this study will be divided into four chapters as follows:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Chapter I:</b> Introduction          | It covers the discussion of the background of the study, the research problems, the objectives of the study, the previous studies, the scope of the study, and the writing organization.   |
| <b>Chapter II:</b><br>Theory and Method | It provides the theory used to analyze the literary work, both intrinsic (character & characterization and setting) and extrinsic elements (Alfred Adler individual psychology concept). This chapter also explains the method of collecting and analyzing data. |
| <b>Chapter III:</b> Discussion          | The chapter explains Briony Tallis' characterization and the problem related to her superiority complex. It also explains the factors and the impacts of the superiority complex she has experienced.  |
| <b>Chapter IV:</b> Conclusion           | The writer gives the conclusion of the main points of the whole study.   |



## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORY AND METHOD**

#### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

##### **2.1.1. Intrinsic Elements**

###### **2.1.1.1. Character and Characterization**

Character is an imaginative person in a story. Meanwhile, characterization is the way of how the author describes the character in the story (Kennedy, 1966:27). There are two types of characterization: direct (through dialogues and narrations) and indirect characterization (through details of the story). Both direct and indirect characterization will be used to analyzed the main character, Briony Tallis, in McEwan's *Atonement*.

###### **2.1.1.2. Setting**

Setting is a literary element which describes whether the location, the time, or the social milieu in a story, either fiction or nonfiction (Truby, 2007:145). Setting is generally divided into three types: setting of time, setting of place, and setting of social environment. In a fiction, setting is important because it affects the character and creates a mood for the reader.

##### **2.1.2. Extrinsic Elements**

###### **2.1.2.1. Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler**

Theory of individual psychology of Alfred Adler or what is so called as Adlerian Psychology is one of the three major depth psychology theories, beside Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's theory. Even though the name of the theory is Individual Psychology, however, the main concept of Adlerian Psychology focuses on

human as a whole, not as a part of something or as an individual (Watts, 2009:281). The name of Individual Psychology itself is taken from Latin, *individuum*, which means indivisible.

In Adlerian theory, personality is defined as a cognitive blueprint of human's uniqueness and individual which create purposes, personal beliefs, and convictions. Each person creates his or her own life plans, begins in his or her early childhood as a prototype, and refines progressively as he or she grow up (Watts, 2009:282). Adler believes that human's purpose of life is to be able to do something, a specific competence or a self-mastery, which is called as *striving for superiority*. It is the main element which empowers a person to cope with his or her psyche desire.

Striving for superiority is influenced by two personality traits, those are, the feeling of inferiority and superiority. There is also the intermediary between the feeling of inferiority and superiority, which is called as compensation, a condition to balance both of feelings. When someone fails to compensate the feeling of inferiority or superiority, the psychological effect will result in a condition of inferiority complex or superiority complex (Watts, 2009:282).

#### **2.1.2.1.1. Inferiority Complex**

Inferiority complex is a condition of someone who feels incapable to do something because of the feeling of helplessness, the feeling of being weaker, and the feeling of dependency (Wexberg, 1929:41).

According to Adlerian theory, a child naturally brings the inferiority feeling ever since he or she was born. This feeling appears because child's life cannot be

separated from adults. He or she lives in an environment of adults that potentially lead him or her to being weak, small, and incapable of living alone (Adler, 1927:55). When a child realizes that he or she has physical and psychological deficiency, he or she will try to deal with that deficiency by showing other abilities to others. The concept of concealing the deficiency is called as compensation. It is a way taken by a child to reduce the inferiority feeling.

An Inferiority Complex emerges when someone cannot compensate his or her inferiority feeling or when he or she does not find any ability to conceal his or her deficiencies. This condition will make someone feel ashamed as he or she thought that he or she is inferior to others (Oberst and Stewart, 2003:4).

#### **2.1.2.1.2. Superiority Complex**

Superiority complex is a psychological condition where someone is surely capable to do something. It essentially comes from the need to overcome the inferiority feeling (Adler, 1964:12). When someone needs to compensate his or her inferiority feeling, he or she will try to seek the compensation to conceal the inferiority feeling. If someone is capable to find the compensation, then he or she will not feel inferior to others. However, if he or she tries too much to overcome the inferiority feeling, his or her psychological condition will result in overcompensation or psychologically better known as superiority complex (Watts, 2009:284).

#### **2.1.2.1.3. Family Constellation**

Humans are born and grown with the social context around them as they are social beings. For children, the social context is mainly influenced by two values: the

values of their origin culture and the values of their family constellation. Family constellation is a term in Adlerian theory referring to the role of family's structure, including the position of each family member and children's birth order (Watts, 2009:282).

#### **2.1.2.1.4. Subjectivity**

Alfred Adler's concept of subjectivity in his individual psychology means personal perception or personal perspective which makes a person see something as the unreal meaning, but as what he or she wants it to be. All subjectivities are fiction and even unconsciousness. Adler states that human creates subjectivity (or fiction) as a special way to see himself or herself, others, and the environments as what he or she wants in the purpose of guiding his or her acts, thoughts, and feelings (Oberst and Stewart, 2003:14).

## **2.2. Research Method**

### **2.2.1. Research Approach**

Based on the background of the study mentioned above, the writer uses psychology of literature approach, more specifically, the theory of individual psychology of Alfred Adler to analyze the psychological phenomena of the main character in the novel. Psychology of literature is an approach which focuses on psychological aspects of human that can be seen through the psychological motivation of certain characters in a literary work (Rohrberger and Woods 1971:9). Psychology of literature covers three main focuses, those are, the psychology of the character in the literary work, the psychology of the reader, and the psychology of the author. In relation to this research thesis, the writer will

focus on the psychological phenomena of the main character, Briony Tallis, in McEwan's *Atonement*.

### **2.2.2. Method of Data Collection**

In connection with this research thesis, the writer uses library research to collect the data for the analysis of the psychological phenomena in the novel. Library research is a method of data collection which involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or expert opinion on a research question (George, 2008:7). There are two types of data sources used in this research, the first source is primary data—the data obtained directly from the research subject. The second source is secondary data—the available data in various forms, generally in the form of notes, reports, and documents, both published or unpublished. The primary data in this research thesis is the novel entitled *Atonement* written by Ian McEwan. The secondary data of this research thesis is the textual data in the forms of books, journals, undergraduate or postgraduate thesis, and any other written data.

## CHAPTER III

### DISCUSSION

#### BRIONY TALLIS' SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

#### AS DEPICTED IN IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT*

### 3.1. Intrinsic Elements of Briony Tallis' Superiority Complex in McEwan's

#### *Atonement*

The intrinsic elements of Briony Tallis' superiority complex are Briony Tallis' characters and the settings of the story as explained below:

#### 3.1.1. Briony Tallis' Characters

Briony Tallis is the third and the youngest child in her family. She is a teenage girl who lives in a well-off family and spends most of her time in her house area.

Briony Tallis shows four characters in the story, those are:

#### 3.1.1.1. A Malign Girl

The imagination created by a child is sometimes out of mind, even though having imagination is a common thing for a child. However, being malign due to an imaginative thought is not common for a child. Briony Tallis may look like an innocent little girl, but she is actually malign. She is only thirteen years old when she doubtlessly accuses Robbie as the person who assaults her cousin, Lola, without any clear evidences. Robbie is the son of the Tallises' charlady. He is also Cecilia's childhood friend. Briony Tallis' false testimony even sends Robbie into a prison for years, which is the reason why Robbie hates Briony Tallis so much as quoted "*But not every child sends a man to prison with a lie. Not every child is so purposeful and malign,*" (McEwan, 2001:229). Based on the quotation, it can be

analyzed that Briony Tallis is a malign girl—through Robbie’s narration—because she purposefully accuses Robbie as a criminal.

#### **3.1.1.2. A Childish Girl**

Briony Tallis is just like any other teenagers. She acts and thinks childishly like a little kid, sometimes. Her childish side is seen after she finds her cousin, Lola, who just being assaulted by someone, in the woods while Lola looks for her missing twin brothers.

Briony Tallis believes that the person who assaults Lola is Robbie. She regrets thinking that Robbie is only focusing on Cecilia as his target while actually, he is also able to attack Lola. She even admits that she is childish for not thinking thoroughly about the possible crimes a maniac like Robbie can commit as quoted *“She blamed herself for her childish assumption that Robbie would limit his attentions to Cecilia”* (McEwan, 2001:168). With regard to the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis is childish because she does not think widely about Robbie’s bad side which makes her cannot prevent Lola from being assaulted by Robbie.

In the novel, Robbie is innocent and never assaults anyone. The reason why Briony Tallis believes that Robbie is a bad person is because she interprets Robbie’s attention towards Cecilia completely wrong. The ironical fact of Briony Tallis who thinks herself childish—because she assumes that Robbie only focuses on Cecilia—even gives stronger evidence that she is childish for having a narrow perspective.

#### **3.1.1.3. An Ambitious Girl**

As a teenage girl, Briony Tallis can be analyzed implicitly as an ambitious person by showing her determination to be successful and powerful. In the very beginning of the novel, the reader will find that Briony is ambitious through the narration. Even though Briony Tallis is only thirteen years old, she is very determined and has a strong desire to get something.

Briony Tallis as an ambitious girl can be viewed for example once in a summer, she wants to welcome her brother, Leon, who will return from London. She ambitiously writes a play that will be shown for Leon and other family members. She writes the play's script within two days only, making her unwilling to eat unless the script is done. She also spends her time to edit the draft and to prepare practicing the play ambitiously as quoted below:

The play—for which Briony had designed the posters, programmes and tickets, constructed the sales booth out of a folding screen tipped on its side, and lined the collection box in red crepe paper—was written by her in a two-day tempest of composition, causing her to miss a breakfast and a lunch (McEwan, 2001:3).

Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis is an ambitious girl because she is very determined to write and prepare the plays until she skips breakfast and lunch.

Besides that, Briony Tallis is known obsessed with writing and reading story since she was ten years old which makes her family believe that someday she will go to arts school. However, she changes her mind. She has a strong motivation to be like her sister, Cecilia, who works as a nurse. She knows that being a nurse is not easy when the World War still happens. However, Briony Tallis is still determined to be a nurse. Her ambition even makes Cecilia wonder, as quoted "*To*



*go into nursing, to cut herself off from her background, is a bigger step for her than it was for me*” (McEwan, 2001: 212). Regarding the quotation, it can be said that Briony Tallis ambitiously follows her sister’s path to be a nurse. She also leaves her dream to study literature.

#### **3.1.1.4. An Imaginative Person**

As a young teenager, Briony Tallis can be analyzed implicitly as an imaginative person who always thinks about possibilities in this world. She thinks of stuffs in her head as if they are real, then, she pours her imagination through the stories she writes. Briony Tallis’ mother, Emily, realizes that her child is imaginative after checking and reading the stories from Briony Tallis’ writing as quoted “*Her daughter was always off and away in her mind, grappling with some unspoken, self-imposed problem,...*” (McEwan, 2001:68). Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed that Emily Tallis thinks that her child is imaginative because she likes to pour her thoughts in her writing as a story.

Briony Tallis’ imaginative personality is known not only by her family members, but also by Robbie, the son of the Tallis’ charlady and Cecilia’s childhood friend as well. Robbie finds out that Briony Tallis is an imaginative child after she drowns herself into a river just because she wants him to save her. Briony also says that she loves him as if she really knows what the meaning of love is when she is only ten years old. Therefore, Robbie assumes that Briony is probably trapped in her own fantasy as quoted “*She was the sort of girl who lived in her thoughts*” (McEwan, 2001:233). Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed

through Robbie's point of view that Briony Tallis is an imaginative girl because she lives in her thoughts.

### **3.1.2. Setting**

#### **3.1.2.1. Setting of Place**

The setting of place in the novel mostly takes place in Tallis family's estate area, whether in the house, in the lawn area, or in the woods near the house. The Tallis family's estate is an old huge gothic-style house located in Surrey. It has a wide area surrounding the house as quoted "*What remained was the artificial lake and island with its two stone bridges supporting the driveway, and, by the water's edge, a crumbling stuccoes temple,*" (McEwan, 2001:19). Based on the quotation, it can be said that the Tallis family's estate is a huge area surrounding by an artificial lake, an island, a driveway, and a temple. As the only child living in the house, the design and the big constructure of the house make Briony Tallis grow as a curious-adventurous yet lonely kid. She is always wandering around her big house. She sometimes even goes into the woods or near the river to take a walk alone.

#### **3.1.2.2. Setting of Time**

The significant time in the story is in the evening on a summer day, when the Tallises gather with their guests to have dinner and one of the guests of the dinner is Robbie. The setting of time is seen through the narration when Robbie is walking towards the Tallises house to attend the dinner as quoted "*His footsteps quickened in the still summer evening to the rhythm of his exultant thoughts*" (McEwan, 2001:93).

The setting of time affects Briony Tallis' point of view, because she cannot see clearly in the dim light at that evening. That is also one of the reasons why she accuses Robbie as the person who assaults Lola, because she witnesses that scene in the evening after the dinner.

### **3.1.2.3. Setting of Social Environment**

The environment shown in the novel is an upper-class environment presented by the Tallises who live as a prosperous family. Jack Tallis, Briony Tallis' father, works in government and he often stays at the office, making the house only inhabited by Briony Tallis and her mother. Jack Tallis becomes the sponsor who pays for Robbie's education and he even offers Robbie to continue his study in medicine as quoted "...*Robbie who had been subsidised by Briony's father through school and university, had wanted to be a landscape gardener, and now wanted to take up medicine, ...*" (McEwan, 2001:38). Through the quotation, it can be analyzed that the Tallises' wealth is more than enough to support their three children to get what they want, until Jack Tallis is willing to fund Robbie's education.

## **3.2. The Extrinsic Elements of Briony Tallis Superiority Complex in Ian McEwan's *Atonement***

The extrinsic elements of Briony Tallis' superiority complex are described through the factors of her superiority complex as explained below:

### **3.2.1. The Factors of Briony Tallis' Superiority Complex in Ian McEwan's *Atonement***

There are four factors that cause the superiority complex experienced by Briony Tallis, those factors are:

### **3.2.1.1. Briony Tallis' Fictional Finalism**

Fictional finalism is also known as an unrealistic goal. It is a subjective conviction to achieve something or the urge to do particular acts in order to get what the person wants. It is called fiction and final because it is not necessarily real and it is the final goal for someone. Children are just like adults, they have problems and one of them must be so urgent, so important, making them want to immediately solve it—as it becomes their purpose of life.

Briony Tallis has a fictional finalism as the internal factor of her superiority complex. She believes that her sister, Cecilia, is in danger. Therefore, she aims to protect her sister from the danger. The danger itself is Robbie, the son of the Tallises' charlady. As stated before, Briony Tallis is an imaginative girl. Her point of view is often mixed with her imagination making her create and believe the subjective reality in her head.

The condition of Briony Tallis' superiority complex can be viewed for example when she is sitting alone in a bridge and not long after that, Robbie comes and gives her a letter, without an envelope, for Cecilia. As a curious girl, she opens the letter and read it before giving it to Cecilia. She does not really understand the meaning of a particular word, *cunt*, but she believes that the letter contains threatening message aimed for Cecilia. Briony Tallis believes that Robbie Turner, the son of the Tallises' charlady, is intended to assault Cecilia and she feels obligated to save her sister as quoted "*Something irreducibly human, or*

*male, threatened the order of their household, and Briony knew that unless she helped her sister, they would all suffer*” (McEwan, 2001:114). Regarding the quotation, it can be seen that Briony Tallis believes that Cecilia is in danger and she must save her sister for the good of Cecilia and her family. She is psychologically affected by her subjective reality which makes her do not bother to ask Cecilia about the meaning of the letter. Instead, she creates her own interpretation and convinces that her thought is real. Therefore, based on that thought, she becomes so defensive towards Robbie.

Besides that, in order to achieve her finalism—saving Cecilia—Briony Tallis tries to keep Robbie away from her sister and her family. She does not even feel guilty to obviously hate Robbie, because psychologically, she thinks that she is doing the right thing. Briony Tallis’ guiltless hatred towards Robbie shows when the Tallises and Robbie are having dinner together. Robbie asks Pierrot, Briony Tallis’ cousin, about the weather. Asking about weather is a very simple question and is often used as a chit chat in a conversation. However, Briony Tallis takes it too seriously and bluntly warns Robbie not to ask any questions again as quoted “*‘Please leave him alone,’ she said in a forceful whisper,...*” (McEwan, 2001:127). Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis shows her hatred towards Robbie in front of her family. She is confident to hate someone even in front of her mother, because she psychologically thinks that she knows what others do not. She does not want Robbie to interact with her family as she tries to keep Robbie away from them.

The idea of saving Cecilia is too unrealistic because Briony Tallis herself is only a little girl. However, her superiority complex makes her believe that she can be the savior for her family rather than asking for a help from others, because she has that desire to achieve something and to have a self-confidence for solving a problem alone is clearly a superiority trait. When a person tries to solve a problem without involving his or her society to help him or her, it is the characteristic of superiority traits (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956:260).

### **3.2.1.2. Briony Tallis' Striving for Perfection**

Striving for perfection means the urge to strive for a greater achievement. Adler says that striving for perfection is innate for every individual, because it is a part of human's life. It is one of superiority complex characteristics which begins in early childhood and will continue to the end of a person's life.

Briony Tallis' striving for perfection in the story can be seen through her ambitious traits. She may be a young girl, but she strives for a greater achievement. Briony Tallis' family realize that she likes to write at the age of ten and ever since that time, she has written lots of stories. In the beginning, she always enjoys writing and keeping the stories for herself. Then, she wants to know the response from other people, so she gives the writing to her mother and waits for the feedback. However, her mother always complements her writing and this makes Briony Tallis think that she can be more than just an author. She can create something greater than just a story. Therefore, she tells her mother that she wants to put on a play for Leon's homecoming. A play script entitled *The Trials of Arabella* is written by Briony Tallis herself as quoted "*The play she had written*

*for Leon's homecoming was her first excursion into drama, and she had found the transition quite effortless"* (McEwan, 2001:7). Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis wants a greater achievement. Her effort to always achieve something greater can be said psychologically as a characteristic of superiority complex because it involves someone to get a better career or reputation.

### **3.2.1.3. Briony Tallis as Mother's Favorite Child**

Briony Tallis, the main character of the novel, is the third and the youngest child in Tallis family constellation. As the youngest child in the family, Briony Tallis gets warmer atmosphere and more affection from her parents, especially from her mother, as she is considered as the smallest and the most helpless person in the family.

Briony Tallis' mother, Emily, is suffered from an illness which often makes her feel migraine. Her health condition also makes her unable to do many activities. She does not travel or blend with any of her friends. She is always at home, which for Emily, it is such a lonely life. Emily is grateful for having Briony Tallis, because her last child is living with her in the house—while her husband and her two older children are living outside town—and will always be there if she needs a companion from her. Emily, always puts Briony Tallis as her favorite child since she was born, because for Emily, Briony Tallis is the one who keeps the family still alive as quoted below:

Bathtime, teatime, bedtime - the hinge of the day: these childhood sacraments of water, food and sleep had all but vanished from the daily round. Briony's late and unexpected appearance had kept them alive in the household well into

Emily's forties, and how soothing, how fixing they had been (McEwan, 2001:68).

Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis is her mother's most favorite child among her siblings because she is the motivation for her mother to stay at home without feeling lonely. She is also the one who keeps the house's atmosphere still alive.

In addition to that, Briony Tallis' status as the only child who lives in the Tallises' household and gets more affection from her mother affect her personality to be more spoiled than her siblings. She always gets what she wants. She gets full attention and affection from her mother. She also knows that her mother will always trust her because she is seen as an innocent little girl. This condition encourages Briony Tallis to confidently doing what she wants because she will always be supported by her mother.

#### **3.2.1.4. Briony Tallis' Striving for Talents' Recognition**

Briony Tallis begins to write since she was ten years old. She spends most of her time to write many stories. As the time goes, she believes that writing is her passion. At the age of thirteen, she writes a play script entitled *The Trials of Arabella* through which she intends to put on the play. Briony Tallis is not only writing the play script, but she is also participating in the play as one of the actors. From here, the writer has noted that there are two talents of Briony Tallis, those are, writing story and playing acting.

Briony Tallis' strongest motivation for writing and acting is to get recognition from others. It begins when she is eleven years old. She knows that a recognition cannot be obtained without attention. Hence, she decides to gather her family in



the library and demands them to be the audiences as she starts reading the narration from her writing as quoted “...and looking up from the page for seconds at a time as she read in order to gaze into one face after the other, unapologetically demanding her family’s total attention as she cast her narrative spell” (McEwan, 2001:6-7). Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis wants full attention from her audiences when she reads the narration. It happens because her psychological condition wants to get a recognition from others regarding her writing and story-telling talents. Based on Adler’s theory of individual psychology, striving for recognition is categorized as one of superiority complex characteristics which involves the society where a person lives.

### **3.3. Briony Tallis’ Superiority Complex Behaviors in McEwan’s *Atonement***

In the novel, Briony Tallis shows four superiority complex behaviors as explained below:

#### **3.3.1. Being Presumptive**

Being a writer has made Briony Tallis develop a great imagination. It will be very beneficial to create such impressive story, but it will ruin the truth of the reality she has experienced if she always puts imagination in every aspect of life. Unfortunately, Briony Tallis has too strongly developed imaginations in her mind which often intervenes her point of view. She becomes a presumptive person that becomes one of her superiority complex traits.

Briony Tallis’ presumptive behavior is shown when she sees her sister, Cecilia, arguing with Robbie in front of the fountain while she is at the nursery

room on the second floor of the house. The arguing scene ends with Cecilia drowning herself into the pool of the fountain, making Briony Tallis wonder if Robbie has threatened Cecilia as quoted “*What strange power did he have over her. Blackmail? Threats?*” (McEwan, 2001:38). Related to the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis is presumptive because she believes that Robbie is threatening her sister, even though she does not hear what they talk about. She does not even bother to get a confirmation from Cecilia related to what Robbie has said. Her superiority feeling makes her believe in the possibility created by her imagination, because she thinks that she is always right.

### **3.3.2. Doing Accusation**

Briony Tallis has done two forms of accusations involving Robbie and her twin cousins. The accusations are explained below:

#### **3.3.2.1. Accusing Robbie as a Maniac**

Since Briony Tallis sees the fountain scene where she thinks that Robbie threatens Cecilia, she then concludes that Robbie is not a good man. The negative thought about Robbie starts to ruin Briony Tallis’ objectivity. She begins thinking that this whole time, Robbie just disguises himself as being nice to his family to get some certain things such as college funding from Jack Tallis and beneficial friendship with the Tallises’ children. She even refers Robbie as a maniac as quoted “*And how was it possible to go downstairs now and be at table with a maniac?*” (McEwan, 2001:121). Based on the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis now considers Robbie as a bad person, a maniac, who is dangerous for her family and is also making her uncomfortable to sit in one room along with him.

She accuses Robbie as a maniac even before the library scene where she thinks that Robbie attacks Cecilia. Her mind keeps saying the word maniac over and over until she believes that Robbie is really a maniac.

Furthermore, as Briony Tallis believes that Robbie is a maniac, it results in a condition where she thinks that every accident or bad event happens around the house is under Robbie's responsibility, because Robbie is the only one labelled as a bad person in Briony Tallis' perspective. Belief in something that is not necessarily real is called as subjective reality. This is one of the aspects which affects a person to act superior because they always think that they are doing the right act. Based on the description above about how Briony Tallis judges Robbie, it can be said that she psychologically feels superior because she believes in the subjective reality created by herself.

#### **3.3.2.2. Accusing the Twins Stealing Her Stuff**

It is a common thing when a child is possessive towards the stuffs he or she owns. Usually, a child will not let anyone else use, touch, or wear his or her stuffs. That possessive behavior is also attached to Briony Tallis. In her early adolescent stage, which is still affected by her childish behavior, she, psychologically, experiences the same possessiveness as any other children do. She is a type of child who maintains her stuffs well and does not like other people to wear or use it. She is possessive towards her belonging. Therefore, when her twin cousins are caught out wearing her pairs of socks, she gets angry and accuses them to steal it from her wardrobe.

The accusation Briony Tallis has made occurs at the dining table when all her family members, relatives, and family's guests are gathering there to have dinner. She accuses the twins stealing her socks after seeing them wearing her pairs of socks as quoted "*You went in my room and took them from my drawer*" (McEwan, 2001:140). In accordance with the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis clearly accuses that her twin cousins have stolen her socks because she sees them wearing those socks. After her accusation has been declared, Cecilia tells Briony Tallis that it is she who goes into Briony Tallis' room and takes the socks for the twins. Then, Briony Tallis goes all silent after listening to Cecilia's statement, knowing that she has just accused the twins in front of everyone.

The superiority complex is seen through this part. Briony Tallis guiltlessly accuses her little twins because she thinks that she is more powerful than them. Moreover, as she understands the situation that the Quinceys are merely staying at the Tallises' house while she is the host, she dares to yell at them in front of other people that cause the twins to feel ashamed.

### **3.3.3. Controlling Others**

Briony Tallis' controlling behavior shows that she feels more powerful than other people. She wants everything in line with what she expects. Therefore, she tries to control other people (or other events) in order to get what she wants. Briony Tallis' controlling behavior is further explained below:

#### **3.3.3.1. Over-Controlling the Family Play**

First of all, the one who ambitiously wants to put on a play, in order to welcome her brother who will return from London, is Briony Tallis. She initially only wants

to write and read aloud the play script in front of her family and the guests. However, she changes her mind and decides to ask her cousins, the Quinceys, to participate in her play. The Quinceys are Briony Tallis' maternal cousins who stay for several days at her house.

Briony Tallis decides the role of the Quinceys, however she tends to be egoistic because she chooses the role based on the physical aspect only as quoted "*How could she tell them that Arabella was not a freckled person? Her skin was pale and her hair was black and her thoughts were Briony's thoughts*" (McEwan, 2001:14). Of the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis is, psychologically, over-controlling the roles of the Quinceys. She thinks that Lola is not suitable to play Arabella's character because Arabella's physical appearance is not like Lola's. Briony Tallis also does not consider other aspects, even though the twins say that Lola has studied at play school before and she also has experienced the illness just like Arabella's.

Moreover, Briony Tallis' over-controlling behavior is also seen through how she manages the rehearsal's schedule as quoted below:

it was not insensitivity so much as a highly focused artistic ambition that caused her to shout to the dazed young visitors huddled together by the trap with their luggage, 'I've got your parts, all written out. First performance tomorrow! Rehearsals start in five minutes!' (McEwan, 2001:9).

Regarding the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis fully controls the rehearsal. She absolutely knows that her cousins have just arrived and they are exhausted because of the long trip they take from their home to the Tallises'. However, she demands the rehearsal to begin within five minutes later.

The Quinceys politely follow what Briony Tallis wants, because they try to be decent to the host. Slowly, they get used to the forcing rehearsal arranged by Briony Tallis. Unfortunately, when they start to genuinely enjoy the rehearsal sessions, all of a sudden, Briony Tallis cancels the play. She does not want to show the play anymore as quoted “*Neither the twins nor Lola knew precisely what led Briony to abandon the rehearsals. At the time, they did not even know she had*” (McEwan, 2001:55). In relation to the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis decides to cancel the play unexpectedly. In her thought, she thinks that all rights go to her, including arranging, deciding, and even cancelling the play, all are under her control. Therefore, she feels guiltless by leaving her cousins in confusion about why the play is cancelled without any reasons. Based on those explanations, it can be said that Briony Tallis has the superiority complex shown by her over-controlling behavior.

### **3.3.3.2. Forcing Lola to Suspect Robbie as Her Assaulter**

Briony Tallis’ mind is full of suspicious thoughts about Robbie since the day she labels him as a maniac. Then, several days after that, her family is in chaos because there are two incidents happens at the same time—the Quincey twins are gone missing and Lola is assaulted by someone while looking for her twin brothers. The missing twins’ incident makes Briony Tallis distracted from her bad thoughts about Robbie, because she should go into the woods to try finding her twin cousins. However, as she walks by the lake, the light from her torch suddenly lights up someone’s figure. She sees Lola stoop down the ground, a hand is covering half of her face. Briony Tallis is surprised, but then she realizes that there

is someone who stands behind Lola and she is sure that the one is a man seeing from the hand and the posture. However, he is running away before the light of the torch lights up his face. A second after that, Briony Tallis is fully aware that Lola is just being assaulted by someone. She then tries to help Lola and asks her who has done it. That question means nothing because in her mind, she already assumes one name, that is, Robbie Turner, the maniac.

Lola actually does not know who the assaulter is, but Briony Tallis says that she sees the person and convinces her that he is Robbie as quoted below:

‘It was Robbie, wasn’t it?’  
 The maniac. She wanted to say the word.  
 Lola said nothing and did not move.  
 Briony said it again, this time without the trace of a question. It was a statement of fact. ‘It was Robbie’ (McEwan, 2001:166).

Based on the quotation above, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis forces Lola to admit that Robbie is the one who assaults her, while actually Lola has no idea about who the assaulter is, because it is a dark night and she is attacked from behind. Briony Tallis’ superiority complex is shown in this part where she is forcing Lola to agree with what she says.

### **3.3.4. Seeking for Attention**

The search for attention is a normal thing for a child. It is naturally attached to a child because he or she wants the people surrounding to recognize his or her existence. The search for attention behavior is also seen in Briony Tallis’ personality as explained below:

#### **3.3.4.1. Seeking for Robbie’s Attention**

When Briony Tallis is a little child, she gets along with Robbie since he is the close-friend of her siblings—Cecilia and Leon. She also admires Robbie and even says that she loves him which makes Robbie quite shocked. However, the problem is that Briony Tallis notices that Robbie pays more attention to her siblings rather than to herself. She becomes jealous because she needs more attention from Robbie, as she always gets full attention from her mother. Therefore, one day when Briony Tallis and Robbie are walking by the river, she intentionally drowns herself into the river just to know if Robbie cares or not to Briony Tallis as quoted below:

He said, ‘You love me, so you threw yourself in the river.’  
‘I wanted to know if you’d save me.’  
‘And now you know. I’d risk my life for yours. But that doesn’t mean I love you’ (McEwan, 2001:232).

Based on the quotation above, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis is seeking for Robbie’s attention by drowning herself into the river because she wants to know if Robbie would save her or not. Briony Tallis’ superiority complex is seen through this part where she puts herself in danger just to get the attention from someone she likes. Moreover, she says that she loves him as if she understands what love is while her age is only ten years old at that time.

#### **3.3.4.2. Seeking for Leon’s Attention**

Leon is the only son in the Tallises and he is Briony Tallis’ favorite sibling as well. He works in London and will return home when summer comes. Briony Tallis’ sister, Cecilia, is actually also living outside the town as she studies in Cambridge University. However, in this summer, she returns home earlier than Leon’s.



Briony Tallis thinks that it is important to welcome Leon with something special, something great which is more than just a dinner together. Therefore, she tells her mother that she wants to put on a play as a welcoming celebration for Leon's homecoming. Briony Tallis chooses to put on a play because she wants Leon to pay attention to her and admire her as quoted "*Her play was not for her cousins, it was for her brother, to celebrate his return, provoke his admiration and guide him away from his careless succession of girl friends,...*" (McEwan, 2001:4). Regarding the quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis is seeking for Leon's attention by putting on a play as his welcoming celebration.

The play entitled *The Trials of Arabella*, which is aimed to be shown to Leon, tells a story of a beautiful young girl who marries the lover after struggling from her illness. When Briony Tallis writes the story, she imagines that Arabella character is her, which means that she will dress up wearing a white wedding dress during the play, just like Arabella, and Leon will see her in that dress. The reason why Briony Tallis wants Leon to see her in a wedding dress is because she wants one day, when Leon has found the love of his life and ready to get married, he will remember of how lovely Briony Tallis in that dress is. Then, she hopes that Leon will sweetly request her services as the bridesmaid. This proves that she does not want Cecilia to be the bridesmaid for Leon's future wedding, because the bridesmaid must be her. Briony Tallis tries to secretly compete with her sister to get the role as a bridesmaid even when the wedding is still not known when it will take place. Her act indicates that her psychological side is superior because she prepares to get what she desires long before the event happens.

### **3.4. The Impacts of Briony Tallis' Superiority Complex in McEwan's**

#### ***Atonement***

There are two significant impacts of Briony Tallis' superiority complex towards her own life, those are, having a narrow perspective and behaving like an adult.

Those two impacts will be explained below:

#### **3.4.1. Having a Narrow Perspective**

Superiority complex involves subjective reality, strong imagination, and fictional finalism as several factors of it that result in a condition where someone may have a narrow perspective. This happens because the person's perspective is intervened by those factors. Having a narrow perspective also becomes one of the impacts of Briony Tallis' superiority complex towards her own life.

Briony Tallis is just a teenager which means that her knowledge and life experience are not much. She stays and plays only around the Tallises household. She even only learns from her mother since she does not attend any schools which means that she has not seen the diversity in the society, including the diversity of other people's perspectives.

However, Briony Tallis' perspective is affected by the subjectivity created by her imagination. She too much believes in what she thinks because of her superior feeling which then leads her to judge something based on what she sees without needing to ask other people. This happens because when she sees an event, she will automatically assume what is happening in front of her eyes. Then, she makes an interpretation based on what her mind could process seeing from that particular event.

One of the examples showing Briony Tallis' narrow perspective is when she thinks that Robbie has physically attacked Cecilia in the library as quoted "*He had pushed his body against hers, pushing her dress right up above her knee and had trapped her where the shelves met at right angles*" (McEwan, 2001:123). Related to the quotation, it can be said that in Briony Tallis' point of view, she sees how Robbie attacks Cecilia by making her feel helpless and forcing her to stay still in the corner of the library. Meanwhile, actually, the real situation of what Briony Tallis sees is that Robbie does not attack Cecilia, but he is having sex with Cecilia. Briony Tallis' thirteen-year-old logic cannot process the scene because it is something she never knows before. One of the factors that determines a child's perception is based on his or her visual sense, which is usually biased for each child, depending on how his or her behavioral pattern is developed by his or her environment. In Briony Tallis' case, she believes that her sister is under attack because her environment never teaches her something related to sexual intercourse. However, one thing which shows Briony Tallis' narrow perspective is that she does not have the urge to listen to her sister's explanation and chooses to believe in her own presumption. She thinks that she is capable enough to interpret adult's life and problem, while she is only a teenager.

#### **3.4.2. Behaving Like an Adult**

There are some actions that describe how Briony Tallis behaves like an adult. One of them is that she collects several miniatures of cowboys, deep-sea divers, and humanoid mice suggesting that her taste of arts is unlike any other children as quoted "*A taste for the miniature was one aspect of an orderly spirit*" (McEwan,

2001:05). Based on that quotation, it can be analyzed that Briony Tallis behaves like an adult by seeing the miniature sets she has collected. She chooses to collect sets of miniatures usually owned by adult people because average children will not feel interested in such miniatures as they do not understand them. Moreover, children prefer to own dolls or stuffed animal to be placed in their rooms.

Briony Tallis is also working on cryptograph system—a kind of coding system—invented by herself as quoted “...and here she kept a diary locked by a clasp, and a notebook written in a code of her own invention” (McEwan, 2001:05). Based on that quotation, Briony Tallis acts like an adult showing from her habit in writing a diary by using a certain code. Writing on a diary is common for children, but they do not use codes as they like simple things. However, Briony Tallis is different. She invents a coding system just to write on her diary as if she has many top secrets that should be written, but no one should know about them. This behavior of writing in a code shows that, psychologically, Briony Tallis wants to be different from other children. She can write a story well. Then, she believes that she is capable to do more than just writing simple sentences. Therefore, she learns cryptograph to form a more complex writing system for her diary.

Both examples of Briony Tallis’ behavior above occur as the effect of her superiority complex because as someone who has superiority complex, she sees herself more powerful, smarter, and greater than other people, especially people at her age. She wants to be different to get the acknowledgment from the people around that she is a smart child.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Briony Tallis, the main character in McEwan's *Atonement*, experiences superiority complex caused by two factors, those are, internal and external factors. The internal factors are the fictional finalism and the striving for perfection that are internally drive Briony Tallis' psychological side to act superior. The internal factors also become the main reason of why Briony Tallis acts superior and always thinks that she does the right thing. Then, the external factors are the fact that Briony Tallis is her mother's favorite child and her seeking for talent's recognition. Those points of the external factors lead Briony Tallis, psychologically, to be ambitious and to do everything she wants, because she knows that she is always supported by her mother.

In addition to that, based on the causes of Briony Tallis' superiority complex, the writer has found that Briony Tallis shows four superiority complex behaviors, those are, the first one is being presumptive which makes her psychological side to be more judgmental than other teenagers. The second one is doing accusation, namely, accusing Robbie as maniac and accusing her twin cousins stealing her stuff. The third one is controlling others, including over controlling the family play and forcing Lola to suspect Robbie as her assaulter. This controlling behavior, psychologically, affects Briony Tallis to egoistic. The fourth one is seeking for attention, including seeking for Robbie and Leon's attention.

Moreover, Briony Tallis' superiority complex has given two impacts for her life, those are, the first impact is having a narrow perspective which makes her,

psychologically, looks so childish. The second impact is behaving like an adult where she desires something weird for other teenagers at her age.

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## Appendix

### Lampiran 1

#### Biography of Ian McEwan

On June 21, 1948, Ian Russell McEwan was born in Aldershot, Hampshire, Britain and he is still alive until the present day, when this research thesis was written. He is a British novelist, short-story writer, and screenwriter which most of his works tell about romantic life and family issues.

McEwan initially learned about literature more seriously after he enrolled in University of Sussex. In 1980s, McEwan married and dedicated his life to his family, and because of that, his writing became more subdued bringing the family content. His most famous works after his marriage were *Enduring Love* (1997), *Amsterdam* (1998), *Atonement* (2001), *Saturday* (2007), and his recent novel entitled *Machine Like Me* (2019). Special for *Atonement*, the novel apparently gained much popularity which then got adapted into a film in 2007 and was directed by Joe Wright.

Once, in an interview, McEwan stated that the most important principle when discussing academic literature is the pleasure for both the reader and the writer. The statement then made him known as “a joyful writer”, a writer whose morning is going well, whose sentences are forming well, and experienced a calm and private joy.

Source: (<https://blog.bookstellyouwhy.com/ian-mcewan-from-troubled-childhood-to-critical-acclaim>. Retrieved on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2020)



## Lampiran 2

### Summary of the Novel

*Atonement* is a novel written by a British Author, Ian McEwan, which tells a story about a young teenager named Briony Tallis who suffers from psychological condition of superiority complex.

Briony Tallis is a thirteen-year-old teenager who comes from a well-off family. She has two siblings—Leon and Cecilia— who live outside town. Her father works for the government which makes him rarely stay at home. Therefore, she lives only with her mother, Emily Tallis. This condition is also the reason why Briony Tallis becomes her mother's favorite child.

Briony Tallis likes to write and calls herself as an author because she writes many stories that she keeps and shows to her mother. She is an ambitious girl as she always dedicates her time and effort to get what she wants. She is also psychologically presumptive, because her point of view is always intervened by the subjectivity created in her mind. She is a type of over-controlling child who forces other people to do what she demands, which then turns her into an ignorant and guiltless child.

Briony Tallis' superiority complex clearly shows at the age of thirteen, where she obsessed with playing acting which makes her ask her mother to allow her to put on a play for Leon's homecoming. After her mother permits her to put on a play, her psychological side becomes more determined. She feels, psychologically, superior towards her cousins who stay at her house which makes her dare to force them to do rehearsals. She also feels so confident about her opinion and does not want to listen to other people's explanation which leads her to accuse Robbie as the assaulter of her cousin and accuse her twin cousins stealing her stuff.

In the end, because of Briony Tallis' superiority complex, she ruins her sister's love relationship, makes her twins cousins run away from the house, and sends Robbie to a prison because of her wrong accusation.