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Narrativizing Psychological Trauma in *Atonement* by Ian McEwan

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Letter of Recommendation

Hari Burlakoti has completed his dissertation entitled "Narrativizing Psychological Trauma in *Atonement* by Ian McEwan" under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2069/12/28 to 2071/02/25 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Abstract

This thesis project explores the traumatic and tormented psychology of the major characters as dramatized in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* through the critical perspective of psychological trauma. The psychological and neurological disorder of the characters as represented in their behaviors is examined there by focusing on the multiple origins of trauma including sexual repression, jealousy, revenge, loss of parents and so on. The central narrative of *Atonement* highlights the guilt-ridden world of Briony, who is psychologically tortured throughout her life due to the crime of false accusation of Robbie as rapist of Lola which brings complete turmoil in the life of both Robbie and Cecilia ruining their aim in life. Her trauma is further intensified when she is completely rejected and dejected by Robbie and Cecilia without giving her chance of atonement for which she desperately endeavours. The devastation and destruction of France, England and Germany brought by the Second World War is drawn through the letters of Robbie to Cecilia

in order to justify the impacts of war in the psyche of people. Amid adverse and hostile situation, the major characters - Briony, Robbie and Cecilia - attempt to normalize their traumatized and problematized life through writing for expressing their sufferings and confessing their crimes and thus sharing through writing is applied as the process of healing traumatic wounds. Moreover, their service to the nation - Robbie as the soldier in the Second World War, and other two as the nurse in London work as a soothing balm and means of working through their trauma.

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I. Ian McEwan, His Works and Representation of Trauma

This project entitled "Narrativizing Psychological Trauma in *Atonement* by Ian McEwan" examines the traumatic psychology of the major characters, their responses towards the distressing situation and their attempts to come out of the traumatized and problematized world healing their wounds and normalizing the prevailing situation. As the main narrative of *Atonement* centres on the course of action which thrusts three protagonists of the novel - Briony, Cecilia and Robbie - into frustrated and thwarted world of concussion, disorder and chaos; this research fore-grounds the obstacles and complications faced by these characters that have adverse effects to cause psychological trauma. Moreover, writing as a healing technique to share traumatic experiences and to confess mistakes and crimes is applied to this research as adopted by the major characters of the novel.

Atonement presents the guilt-ridden world of Briony, who after mistakenly observing the attachment between Cecilia and Robbie at first by the fountain of the family's country house and later in the

library, is disillusioned with the adults' world. Misinterpreting Robbie's activities as harassing and interfering Cecilia, she accuses Robbie as the rapist of Lola in the homecoming party of Leon. Throughout her life, Briony is full of remorse and searches atonement through the act of writing in which

she regrets her crime and through the service of wounded soldiers of the Second World War as a nurse in London. Cecilia and Robbie like many take shelter to writing as the means of working through their traumatized world. They share their traumatic experiences by exchanging letters. Thus, the narrative of *Atonement* is heavily restricted to the exploration of tormented and strained psyche of the major characters, their immediate as well as distant responses and their attempts of getting rid of this trauma.

Though *Atonement* deals with different forms of trauma including war trauma and cultural trauma, this research concentrates on only psychological trauma, which gives proper justice to the main thrust of the novel. The class and status difference between Cecilia and Robbie

is undermined and at the same time it is not viewed through war trauma though the activities of Second World War drawn in order to show their relation with psychological stress of the people. Linking Freudian and Lacanian concept of psychological trauma, it is heavily based on the ideas put forward by Cathy Caruth. Freud's argument that sexual repression termed as 'hysteria' as the origin of trauma and Lacan's focus on 'the loss of unity with the mother' and 'the birth of subject with the use of language' as the origin of trauma are highlighted in this research. Moreover, Freudian dream interpretation is drawn here to analyze the nightmarish dreams of Briony and Robbie. In order to interpret the responses of the characters towards traumatic world they are thrust upon and their attempts to come out of such world, 'acting-out' and 'working-through' trauma concept developed by Dominik LaCapra is equally important. LaCapranian concept is supported by healing techniques of trauma including narration and writing as developed by Catherine Rolen and James Pennebaker. Revolving these premises, this research advocates that trauma is a

complex and comprehensive process and is therefore beyond representation.

Ian McEwan was born on 21 June 1948 Aldershot, England. He studied at the University of Sussex, where he received a B.A degree in English Literature in 1970. He received his M. A. degree in English Literature at the University of East Anglia. McEwan began his career writing sparse, Gothic short stories. *The Cement garden* (1978) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) were his first two novels, and him the nickname "Ian Macabre". These were followed by three novels of some success in the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1997, he published *Enduring Love*, which was made into a film. In 2001, he published *Atonement*, which was made into an Oscar-winning film.

McEwan's works have earned him worldwide critical acclaim. He won the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976 for his first collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites*; the Whitbread Novel Award (1987) and the Prix Famina Etranger (1993) for *The Child in Time*; and Germany's Shakespeare Prize in 1999. He has been shortlisted for the

Man Booker Prize for Fiction numerous times, winning the award for *Amsterdam* in 1998. His novel *Atonement* received the WH Smith Literary Award (2002), National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award (2003), Los Angeles Times Prize for Fiction (2003), and the Santiago Prize for the European Novel (2004). He was awarded a CBE in 2000. In 2006, he won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his novel *Saturday*, and his novel *On Chesil Beach* was named Galaxy Book of the Year at the 2008 British Book Awards. McEwan has been named the Reader's Digest Author of the Year for 2008, the 2010 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award, and in 2011 was awarded the Jerusalem Prize. McEwan lives in London.

McEwan's first book is a story collection - *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) - dealing with the themes of rift between childhood and adulthood; problems of adolescence, sex perversion, death and morality. It includes nine stories including "Homemade," "Solid Geometry," "Last Day of Summer," "Cocker at the Theatre," "Butterflies," "Conversation with a Cupboard Man," "First Love, Last

Rites" and "Disguises." This book is described as a "flat, rubble-strewn wasteland, populated b freaks and monsters, most of them articulate enough to tell their own stories with mesmerizing narrative power and an unflinching instinct for the perfect, sickening detail"

(Towers 5). He calls the collection "possibly the most brilliantly perverse and sinister batch of short stories to come out of England since Angus Wilson's *The Wrong Set*" (5). This collection sets a strong literary background for his future successful career as a writer.

First Love, Last Rites follows In Between the Sheets (1978) is a collection of critically-acclaimed short stories delve into the darkest shadows of psychological disturbance - offering themes of dystopia, bestiality, exploitation, homicidal jealousy, and despair. It repeats some of the themes of his first story collection but with deep exploration thereby establishing him as a unique writer. The prose of *In Between the Sheets* is described as "clear as a windowpane," and the author is ranked as "a gifted storyteller and possibly the best British writer to appear in a decade or more" (Winch 6). It contains seven stories and

the title story is about the young girl's sexual awakening to highlight the marriage breakdown of her parents.

The Cement Garden (1978) is McEwan's first novel and said to be a typical McEwan novel, having ingredients like frustration, fear, sex and violence. It depicts patriarchally dominated family controlled by a despotic father who demands complete obedience from his children and submissive wife. It presents the secret and strange world of the post-war middle-class family, with its unique clash of make-do-and-mend (repairing to make something long-lasting) and sexual revolution. Devastating information is relayed in short, cool-headed paragraphs, increasing the charged atmosphere of disorder and horror. To avoid being taken into care, the four children- suddenly orphaned - bury their mother in cement in the basement, after which they attempt to continue a normal life, with the eldest, brisk, manipulative Julie, in charge. This book is called *The cement garden* because the father of the children in this book covers their little garden with cement, but before he is finished he dies of a heart attack, and eventually their

mother dies too. They want to keep her death a secret otherwise they will have to go to orphanage. The children bury her in a trunk with some of the cement their father used during his project. *The Cement Garden* was adapted into film in 1993 and into stage performance in 2008.

The Child in Time (1987) deals with regaining harmony after the tragic event and gives importance to the sensitive period as crucial for the development of an individual. It is marked as a significant change in McEwan's literary style as Slay says that the book "seems to be a radical departure from the violence and shock of Ian. McEwan's earlier work" and also points out that the book was considered by some critics even sentimental and "embarrassingly affirmative" (30). Massie, on the other hand, considers *The Child in Time* "a far less confident piece of craftsmanship than his previous works" yet praises the novel for revealing the author's "capacity to feel and to arouse feeling" (51). Here, the children enjoy a short period of freedom after the death of their parents; however, they soon begin to feel the lack of order it

brought about, and adopt new social roles which resemble the traditional structure of a family.

His most recent novel is *Sweet Tooth* (2012), which deals with Britain confronting economic disaster in 1972 and being torn apart by industrial unrest and terrorism and faces its fifth state of emergency. It also reminds us of The Cold War that has entered a moribund phase. It is the story of Serena Frome, the beautiful daughter of an Anglican bishop, who has a brief affair with an older man during her final year at Cambridge. After graduating from Cambridge she is recruited by M15, and becomes involved in a covert program to combat communism by infiltrating the intellectual world. It deals with the social turmoil of the time but the boundary between reality and fiction is tested throughout.

Atonement was published in 2001 and has been adapted into novel in 2007 directed by Joe Wright. It chronicles a crime and its consequences over the course of six decades starting from 1937 to the last of the century. Upon its publication, it has attracted the

attention of the eagle-eyed critics, readers and scholars. It has been analyzed and interpreted differently from different perspectives.

Generally, it is taken realistic, postmodern, existential and psychological novel.

It is about understanding and responding to the need for atonement. Finney tells that Ian McEwan has always had a "fascination for the forbidden and the taboo" (Finney 69). He also reveals that, even though *Atonement* has been viewed by some critics as a very realist novel, he considers it to be a "work of fiction that is from beginning to end concerned with the making of fiction," and is thus "concerned with the dangers of entering a fictional world and the compensations and limitations which that world can offer its readers and writers" (69). He describes it as "a postmodern work" (70).

Lawrence Rungren calls it "a literary confession" and "a compelling exploration of guilt and the struggle for forgiveness" (97). For him *Atonement* is a "most closely observed and psychologically penetrating" and "most sweeping and expansive" novel (98). Susan H.

Woodcock too describes it as a postmodern novel as *Atonement* foregrounds the metafictional elements and highlights the generic boundary:

In a story within a story, McEwan brilliantly engages readers in a tour de force of what ifs and might have been until they begin to wonder what actually happened.

The story is compelling, the characters well drawn and engaging, and the outcome is almost always in doubt.

The descriptions of the retreat and the subsequent hospitalization of the soldiers are grim and realistic.

Readers are spared little, yet the journey is worth the observed pain and distress. (Woodcock 172)

Atonement is a story within a story - within the main framework of the novel a play named *The Trials of Arabella* written by one of the major characters, Briony to be performed at dinner for the homecoming of her brother, Leon. Some reviewers insist on reading *Atonement* as an "essentially realist novel that at the end

inappropriately resorts to a modish self-referentiality", equivalent to a "postmodern gimmickry" (Finney 69-70). He states that life in *Atonement* "often imitates fiction, giving recognition to the central role that narrative plays in" life (Finney 78). In the first three parts of the novel it appears as though the narrator is omniscient one, which could be defined as a narrator who "has the godlike power of knowing and seeing all actions" (Reynolds and Noakes 189). *Atonement* can be read as "a whodunit and love story with the World War II as a setting . . . It is, above all, the author's self-reflexivity on the process of fiction making, a view shared by most critics" (Bulger 147). These views focus on the realist or postmodernist stance regarding *Atonement*.

Frequent textual allusions to other great authors, demonstrates that, rather than a realist novel, *Atonement* is a real "literary artifact" (Finney 74). The outcome of a such a heterogeneous intertextuality is an aesthetic fusion demanding special attention from the reader who, caught by various narrative entanglements, misses the premonitory

hints spread along the text, which, like in a puzzle, help "to piece the correct picture together" (Head 163). This strong and powerful use of intertextuality makes this novel a hotchpotch - mixture of many literary books and combination of the ideas of many writers of different ages. This powerful trend in Ian McEwan's works plays great role in his present success. For the late Frank Kermode, *Atonement* was Ian McEwan's "finest" novel (Kermode 8). For Jonathan Cape, *Atonement* is a deep exploration of the characters' psychology:

The novels' [*Atonement*] psychological acuity derives, always, from their fidelity to a precisely delineated reality. Needless to say, the more disturbing or skewed that reality (in the early stories and novels, most obviously), the more finely McEwan attunes his readers to it. Moral ambiguity and doubt are thereby enhanced - rather than resolved - by clarity of presentation. This is why the themes of the novels (with the exception of the enjoyably forgettable *Amsterdam*) linger and resonate

beyond the impeccable neatness of their arrangement.

McEwan is, in other words, a thoroughly traditional

original. (Cape 24)

McEwan brings psychological reality into fore by detailed description of the mood, condition and behaviours of the characters. *Atonement* further discusses about the morality concerning sexual matters. The title of the novel hints towards punishment, expiation or amendment of the wrongs one does. Moreover, it raises these debated and controversial issues of sex and morality. Williams explains these contrasting attitudes as typical for McEwan's characters: For McEwan, the male psychology cannot cope with radical change and either sticks stubbornly, and childishly, to known ways or else it implodes under pressure . . . On the contrary, the female retains the childlike (as opposed to the childish) sense of wonder, inventiveness and recreation that allows her to assimilate changes more easily (223). According to him, male psychology is destructive as observed in Robbie and that of female is naivety as observed in Briony and her

sister Cecilia. McEwan shows the difference between the male and female; and between childhood and adulthood and in some cases due to this difference trauma is emerged. The harmonization of these contradictory and paradoxical ideas adds charm to writing style of McEwan.

The title of the book attracts attention of the readers and gives a religious note. Atonement is at first sight is the expiation, purgation or apology of some sin one does regarding religious rituals. At upon reading this book, it is known that *Atonement* is not religious atonement but a common as well as minor atonement that Briony commits by observing sexual activities between her sister, Cecilia and family friend Robbie. Throughout the narrative, she is regretting her mistake of sending Robbie into prison due to her inability to understand adult's world. In this sense, the title itself is a radical break:

Atonement, perhaps following the claim of its title, is a radical break with this earlier McEwan, and it is certainly

his finest and most complex novel. It represents a new era in McEwan's work, and this revolution is achieved in two interesting ways. First, McEwan has loosened the golden ropes that have made his fiction feel so impressively imprisoned . . . And second, McEwan uses his new novel to comment on precisely the kind of fiction that he himself has tended to produce in the past . . . it is certainly a novel explicitly troubled by fiction's fictionality, its artificiality and eager to explore the question of the novel's responsibility to truth. (Wood 2)

According to Wood, *Atonement* brings a radical shift in McEwan's writing. Unlike his earlier novels, this novel and others novels after this critique the very process of writing novel. It means, it questions the fictionality of fiction, giving it a postmodern turn. In this sense, it is a ground break or a kind of breakthrough in his writing technique. Moreover, he questions the absolute truth regarding death, sex, morality and other matters. So, "in his exploration of the gap

between what is real and what is imagined, McEwan deploys a variety of stylistic devices and narrative techniques that give the novel its multilayered texture" (Hidalgo 83). Hermione Lee puts it in her review published in *The Observer*: "*Atonement* asks what English novel of the twenty-first century has inherited, and what it can do now. One of the things it can do, very subtly in McEwan's case, is to be androgynous. This is a novel written by a man acting the part of a woman writing a "male" subject, and there's nothing to distinguish between them"(Qtd. in Reynolds and Noakes 185).

Commenting on its narrative techniques, David Lodge says, "In *Atonement*, Ian McEwan, who has tended to favour first-person narration in his previous novels and stories, seems to be telling his story in a rather old-fashioned way, entering into the consciousness of several different characters and rendering their experience in third-person discourse that makes extensive use of free indirect style" (86-87). Relating its narrative technique and theme, Pilar Hidalgo comments:

The brilliant narrative technique of *Atonement* does not fully explain the critical acclaim that greeted the novel, or the nature of the experience it provides. The intelligent deployment of literary devices is not self-conscious but part of story of love, death, evil, and a child's incomprehension of the world of adult emotions. It is a strong story, and in telling it the author creates three strong characters, Briony and the lovers. With truly Austenian irony, McEwan triumphantly does what Briony at eighteen thinks a modern novelist cannot do: write characters and plots. (Hidalgo 90)

Atonement captures the attention of the scholars particularly in its form and structure. The successful use of literary device called metafiction is proved its ornament. It presents the parody of Jane Austen and at the same time it supersedes it in the way it deals with the issues of love, death and morality. It presents a story within story and the internal story of the play *The Trials of Arabella* is found to

be written by one of the major characters of the novel. This kind of successful technique is also observed in his another novel *Amsterdam* which won The Man Booker Prize in 1998. *Atonement* is a superb it its use of unique technique and its dealing with subject matter of life, death and morality. *The Observer* cites it as one of the 100 best novels written, calling it "a contemporary classic of mesmerizing narrative conviction" (1). It is a just and suitable tribute to this novel. In this way, *Atonement* remains as one of the epitomes in literature and proved as a cornerstone to heighten McEwan's height in the zenith.

Atonement deals with the traumatic experiences faced by the major characters - Briony after she commits mistake to punish Robbie; Robbie's painful experiences in the Second World War; and Cecilia throughout her life after her involvement with Robbie. It has a moral lesson - "that love, which did not build a foundation on good sense, was doomed" which is a purely rational and nature (3). It also comes out that the girl has written the play with a clear purpose in

her mind: "The play was for her brother, to celebrate his return, provoke his admiration and guide him away from his careless succession of girlfriends, towards the right form of wife" (4). This shows Briony's manipulative intentions induced by her need to have everything under control. She tries to win the respect by her writing, in which she receives encouragement, and for this reason takes the play very seriously and expects others to do the same: "The piece was intended to inspire not laughter, but tenor, relief and instruction, in that order," she says (8). This influences her perception of the real world, because "being used to living in her childish structured, dreamy world and reading predictable fairytale like stories, Briony believes the whole world resembles what she has been experiencing so far" (Chalupsky 61-62). Chalupsky also marks Briony, as "the greatest order seeker, the one who longs to live in an orderly, seamless world" (62). Briony wants the real world to be just as orderly and lucid as fairytales. It is her attempt to get rid of her traumatic condition.

Trauma refers to an event, series of events or context that is emotionally overwhelming. The individual feels helpless or powerless to control the event or situation. Trauma is used mostly in medicine and psychology. But, there is a current effort to borrow the concept of trauma from medicine and psychiatry and to introduce it into sociological theory and even. The word trauma comes from Latin, meaning "wound." In this case trauma refers to a psychological rather than a physical wound. It overwhelms an individual's ability to use normal coping mechanisms to adapt to a situation. It disrupts an individual's frame of reference i.e. beliefs about themselves and the world. Trauma is one that we as an individual experience, with our experience being that of perpetrators, victims, or spectators, with all of us deeply affected by the experience as representing some form of violent interruption to our lives (Habermas 21). It can be defined further in the words of Cathy Caruth as:

. . . trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to

the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled receptive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is central and requiring image of trauma in our century, (1 8 1)

So, this definition clearly shows that trauma is described as the response to an unexpected violent that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashback, nightmares and other repetitive phenomena. For the development of the trauma theory the credit goes to Sigmund Freud who initially took the job of meaning and flourishing the trauma theory in course of his treatment of the people who were being mentally and physically wounded, disturbed and disordered in the world war I. Being the prominent thinker of psychoanalytical approach both in treatment and literature associated with him and they tried their best to define trauma basing on

Freud's psychoanalysis even speak for or argue against it. The notion of trauma appears in the changing form which tries to console and normalize the victim through memorizing the event and doing commitment.

Trauma is a symbol that condenses the tragic experiences of the age that saw two world wars. Their extreme manifestation is genocide. This relatively recent term, introduced into international law by Rafal Lemkin, is crucial in the semantics of contemporary, universal humanism. Trauma was initially understood as a psychological phenomenon - it appeared in the works of the French psychiatrists Pierre Janet and Jean-Martin Charcot, who had encountered the problem of personality disorders among World War I veterans (Habermas 15). Trauma theory shifts the question from "Why did this happen to you and how can you change to prevent it from happening again?" to "What is your response to what has happened and how can you manage that response so as to feel better?"

The understanding of trauma has frequently been dominated by interpretations rooted in the psychoanalytic tradition. According to this approach, defense mechanisms are a key issue and successful therapy requires bringing the experience out into the open - its articulation. Although analogies between psychoanalytically perceived individual trauma and collective trauma may be useful, in a cultural analysis of trauma attention should be focused on "reflexive processes of communication, interaction and symbolization" (Whitbeck 126). Trauma indicates the individual, community and intergenerational effects of the terrorizing and traumatizing events like genocide, warfare, ethnic cleansing, massacres, and assimilation and so on. It is the intense feeling of fear, mental stress, distress and grief in response to harmful mental, emotional or physical situations or events.

All the main characters in *Atonement* are frustrated with the world around them and respond differently to manage their trauma. Briony is psychologically tortured after she compels Robbie to go to

prison in the false accusation rape to Lola. Her inability to understand adult's world leads not only her to the world of problems but also to other characters including Robbie and her sister Cecilia. The whole story is framed around the mistake that Briony commits and its consequences. Throughout her life she is remorseful and wants to get atonement from her sin of lying and giving torture to others. Briony's passion for writing is her best choice to console herself and to get rid of the psychological trauma. *The Trials of Arabella* is a play written by her, in which she describes everything she has done to Robbie Turner and the condition of Robbie and Cecilia. She takes shelter in writing as a best form of healing. Moreover, she serves in The Second World War as a nurse in London to get rid of the pain she has. Similarly, Cecilia and Robbie also are in the traumatized world after Robbie is sent to jail in the false accusation of raping Lola who was actually rapped by Paul Marshall in the party that was organized at the homecoming of Leon Tallis, the brother of Briony and Cecilia, from his working in London.

After realizing from prison, Robbie is joined in army to fight in the Second World War. Robbie and Cecilia live psychologically depressed life and in their separation they communicate their feelings through letters. They also united by writing. In this sense, writing remains a shelter for them as a means of 'acting out' as well as 'working through' of trauma. In this sense all the major characters in *Atonement* are compelled to live in the frustrated and thwarted word of confusion, chaos and disorder accepting their fate and trying their best to come out of the problematized world.

Thus, this research deals with the traumatic experiences felt by the major characters of *Atonement* as well as their attempts of dealing with their problems. All the three characters - Briony, Cecilia and Robbie - have to express their pains and sufferings to others in order to free from their trauma. Sharing of trauma in this sense is taken as healing process. Briony shares by writing a play entitled *The Trials of Arabella* and; Cecilia and Robbie write letters to each other and share their stories of trauma. To explore such condition in

the text, *Atonement* is viewed from the perspective of psychological trauma by incorporating the ideas of Sigmund Freud, Cathy, Neil J Smelser, and Dominick LaCapra. LaCapraian concept of 'acting-out' and working-through' of trauma remains the heart of this research. Moreover, healing techniques from trauma including narration and writing as developed by Catherine Rolin and James Pennebaker are also the bases of this research. In order to systematize the research, it has been framed and divided into three chapters. The first chapter is the introductory section, which provides basic concept of the theory, themes and approaches to the study, purpose of study, literature review, and brief biography of the writer and so on. The second chapter is the thorough analysis and interpretation of the text with the theoretical modality of trauma in imbedded form and logical conclusion is drawn in the third chapter squeezing the crux and kernel of the overall research.

II. Narrativizing Psychological Trauma in *Atonement*

The current research examines the psychological turmoil the major characters of *Atonement* and highlights the thwarted and frustrated world of disorder and chaos they experience in different stages of their life. All the major as well as minor characters are psychologically tormented due to various reasons. Briony is traumatized when she mistakenly observes sexual activities between her sister, Cecilia and Robbie. Her childhood world of innocence is shattered with this event. The aim of Robbie is shattered when he is sent to prison for the crime he has not done. Briony's false witness has proved him the rapist of Lola thereby ruining his not only aim of becoming a doctor but also his whole future. Cecilia's life also takes a tragic turn with the accusation that punishes Robbie. The traumatic experiences between Robbie and Cecilia, and the traumatic activities of war are illustrated through their letters. Briony repents for her crime throughout her whole and she confesses her guilt in her books.

Atonement centres on the lives of three major characters - Briony, Cecilia and Robbie. Set between the years 1935 to 1999; it captures the ups and downs that these characters face for about 60 years and even includes the destructive scenario of Second World War. Part first makes the background for traumatic life of the characters. On the homecoming day of Leon, a play entitled *The Trials of Arabella* is to be performed and on the very day 13-year Briony mistakenly observes her sister Cecilia and Robbie Turner making love first by the fountain of the family and later in the library. Supposing that Robbie is hurting Cecilia, she misinterprets adults world and her dependence and confidence on adults' world is crumbles. Frustrated and irritated with the activities of Robbie, she accuses him of raping Lola, her cousin, which was actually done by Paul Marshall. When Robbie is sent to prison, her trauma begins as her life becomes full of remorse and guilty.

Robbie and Cecelia are Cambridge university students and are not attracted to each other or are not in a relationship due to their

social status. When Robbie is sent to prison, Cecilia leaves her family and is determined to provide him justice. Cecilia serves as a nurse in London during Second World War in 1940. The life of Cecilia and Robbie takes another turn due to Briony. They are separated from each other on the one hand and on the other they are forced to live a traumatized life. Robbie's aim to become a doctor is shattered and is forced to join in military after three years prison life. The destructive and dehumanizing situation of Second World War is shown through the letters of Robbie to Cecilia. Robbie experiences the injustices atrocities of war. The action situation of Dunkirk of France from where British army's are evacuated is presented. Tortured by her crime, Briony also serves as a nurse in London during the war and experiences the horrors of war. Moreover, she knows it through the letters of Robbie to Cecilia. Suffering from guilt for her crime as girl, she hopes nursing will act as a penance for her sin. She attends the wedding of Paul Marshall, whom she knows to be Lola's rapist, and Lola. Briony does nothing

to stop the marriage. She desperately asks for forgiveness but Robbie and Cecilia give her a list of instructions to follow that will help clear Robbie's name. Rejected and dejected from Robbie and Cecilia, she can never get actual atonement and thus is psychologically traumatized throughout her whole life.

Atonement follows the repercussions of Briony's actions through the destruction of WWII to the late 19th century. The final section of the book brings in 1999, which reveals that the author is Briony herself. She explains that she was able to write the war parts of the book with the aid of letters from the museum of archives and a pen-pal relationship with one of the corporals with whom Robbie marched. Briony attends her seventy-seventh birthday party at her old home, the original scene of the crime. She also reveals that she is dying. In a final twist, Briony informs her reader that she has made up the part about visiting Cecilia and Robbie in London and how both people died in the war. Her act to let their love last forever in the pages of her book will be her final

atonement to her crime. Thus, Briony and her crime are the main catalyst and causative agent of the story. Cecilia and Robbie are victimized and traumatized due to Briony and she too is affected more and responsible for her lifelong trauma. Her service as a nurse and her act of writing are the means by which she tries to get ultimate atonement though she is never get rid of her psychological trauma.

Trauma entails a violation of the integrity of the self. All physical, sexual, and emotional abuse constitute such violations. A traumatic state is a condition that results when a person does not have the necessary resources, support, and safety to deal with the traumatizing event. Trauma involves acting out and working through. The acting-out behavior is driven by the attempt to keep difficult feelings and memories from awareness. It is the process, in which truth of trauma is tried to forget, repress or deny. It is a time-taking process. Whereas working through is the process of getting out of the stressful situation of trauma. Writing or narrating works as both

acting out and working through of trauma. James Pennebaker says "people who use writing to make sense of their traumatic life experiences felt happier and less anxious . . . those who made meaning out of their difficulty or gained insight from writing were healthier than those who simply wrote about the details of their day"

(2). By helping people manage and learn from negative experiences, writing strengthens their immune systems as well as their minds:

With the creation of a safe space and an explanation of why witnessing by others is an essential part of the healing process . . . technique of immersing group members in their sensual memories--the specific details of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch that we carry in our cells throughout life . . . help us to understand that if we could place us back "there" in words, we would be bringing us along as compassionate witnesses . . .

. Writing therapy has now become a mainstream way of working through Trauma(Rolen 15)

The effects of trauma can be reduced through writing and telling personal stories of pain and sufferings to others especially to that of the nearer and dearer ones. In this sense, writing can be taken as powerful means of trauma treatment. It emphasizes on sharing the pain thereby reducing the psychological effects of it. The complex characters, gritty prose, and fractured narrative structure that exist in many of his texts combine to create a captivating human Story of the typical combat veteran trying to cope with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In this sense, narrating or writing of the traumatic stories of one's life helps to work through trauma though it is painful and there is always danger of re-traumatization. Moreover, narrating or writing involves acting out in response to Trauma, with a particular focus on the meaning-making narratives adopted in order to make sense of traumatic experiences.

Briony is imaginative and creative person and she is contemplative most of the time and is affected by minor activities. Her trauma starts at the beginning of the novel where she loses her

childhood innocence after witnessing a sequence of events between Cecilia and Robbie, in which she misinterprets the motives and intentions of adult behavior. This causes her to trigger a series of events that will have long-lasting and incredibly damaging results for the parties involved. Her trauma is manifested even in her dream. Here Freud's interpretation of dream as the manifestation of real events of our life is observed. Briony frequently sees nightmares, which frightens her. "Nightmares had become a science. Someone, a mere human, had taken the time to dream up this satanic howling" . . . It was the sound of panic itself, mounting and straining toward the extinction (57). The dream scenario is illustrated as:

When she was small and prone to nightmares—those terrible screams in the night—Cecilia used to go to her room and wake her. *Come back*, she used to whisper. *It's only a dream. Come back*. And then she would carry her into her own bed. She wanted to put her arm round Briony's shoulder now, but she was no

longer tugging on her lip, and had moved away to the front door and was resting one hand on the great brass lion's-head handle that Mrs. Turner had polished that afternoon. (11)

Childhood innocence of Briony is shattered as seen in the dream after she observes the attachment of her sister with Robbie at first by the fountain in the grounds of the family's country house and latter in the library. She sees her sister as: "She [Cecilia] stepped out into the hallway, determined to face down his insolence, or his mockery, and was confronted instead by her sister, clearly in distress. Her eyelids were swollen and pink, and she was pinching on her lower lip with forefinger and thumb, an old sign with Briony that some serious weeping was to be done" (11). Briony mistakenly believes that Robbie is approaching Cecilia with sexual motives. Her frustration with the adult's world is started here and her confidence and dependence with the adult is lost. This trauma is further developed when she reads letters that are sent to Cecilia by Robbie.

Robbie is another frustrated and traumatized character in *Atonement*. His life takes unwanted and detrimental turn when he is falsely accused of raping Lola at the homecoming party of Leon. Briony's false proofs and wrong witness lead his distressing path. He is forced to stay in prison for three years following his military career in the Second World War. This accusation haunts him throughout his life till his death. Due to his traumatic situation, "he could not easily breathe, and he could not think" (58). Frustrated with the nightmarish situation of Second World War, he imagines "a paradise" (58). This is his attempt of coming out of the traumatic world. Like Briony, Robbie too sees nightmares where:

A bomb fell on the road, way over in the center of the village, where the Lorries were. But one screech hid another, and it hit the field before he could go down. The blast lifted him forward several feet and drove him face-first into the soil. When he came to, his mouth and nose and ears were filled with dirt. He was trying to clear his

mouth, but he had no saliva. He used a finger, but that was worse. He was gagging on the dirt, and then he was gagging on his filthy finger. He blew the dirt from his nose. His snot was mud and it covered his mouth. But the woods were near, there would be streams and waterfalls and lakes in there. (58)

Robbie is tortured every time with the memory of accusation of rape as well as battle scenario of the Second World War. His forceful admission is the result of Briony's accusation. His aim of becoming a doctor is shattered after this accusation. His memory is filled with the death events of the war. Casualties, deaths, dehumanization and devastation of the war haunt him even in his dream. There is no value of life during war. Everyone is subjected to participate in war directly or indirectly. He is released from the prison on the condition to join in the army. He fights unwillingly against the Germans in France. The battle scenario is made clear only from his letters to Cecilia. The condition of England is also devastated due to war and

many of the military personnel are killed in the war.

Traumatic situation is highlighted with the inclusion of battlefield of France, Britain and German as well. The villagers of and around the battlefields, the soldiers and the people who are directly and indirectly involved in war are psychologically tortured and traumatized. The situation of Dunkirk of France from where British soldiers are evacuated is dangerous. It provokes trauma to the people living there and there was not safety and security to common people during the war. The traumatic situation of Second World War is described as such:

The attack continued on the road and over the village . . . Then the planes were gone, and in the huge silence that loomed over the fields and trees . . . and the village, there was not even birdsong . . . they were in shock from repeated episodes of terror . . . there was the paralysis of shock, of repeated shocks . . . There were no human signs, not a shred of clothing or shoe

leather . . . High-flying bombers droned above, a steady two-way stream moving into and returning from their target. It occurred to Turner that he might be walking into a slaughter. (58).

Dunkirk of France evokes the trauma of people in the Second World War. The Blind attack on the innocent people makes them suffer a lot. Between the narrow selfishness of the rulers, the common people are trapped and are forced to live a traumatized and dehumanized life amid uncertainty and chaos. Their trauma is beyond expression.

In Freudian trauma either "the past determines the future, or the future reinterprets the past" and there is "the compulsion of the human psyche to repeat traumatic events over and over again" (76). Jacques Lacan, arguing "that the limits of representation in trauma tell us something new about the affects" which he tried to explain by his "category of the real" (Qtd. in Rank 85). The symptom of trauma is enigmatic because it is shrouded in secrecy and silence. Basic psychoanalytical meaning of the trauma is that, it is an event, defined

by first of all its intensity, secondly the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it. Thirdly, trauma leaves long lasting effects on psychic life of the subject. In Lacanian terms, trauma can be defined as the loss of unity with the mother, intrusion of language in the symbolic order, loss of phallus; fear of castration is the original trauma for Lacan. It is something that shapes, marks the subject forever. It is also something that the subject does not experience. In Lacan's theory, trauma is in the origin of the subject. The whole processes of desire, substitution, objet petit a, fantasies, could be seen as repetition compulsion for Lacan. So, "all human beings suffer trauma by virtue of being born and of the inevitable, violent, physical and psychic separation we suffer" (Rank 37). Trauma threatens normal functioning of the psyche.

Freud considers trauma as a triggering factor in neurosis.

Besides, he considers it as essentially sexual terms; overflow of the libidinal energy that the organism cannot bear. Emphasis on the external effects is not that strong in his theory well, something

happens for sure but the real trauma is inside the psyche. Freud terms trauma as "hypnoid hysteria" and suggests that "a precocious experience of sexual relations . . . resulting from sexual abuse committed by another person . . . is the specific cause of hysteria . . . not merely an agent provocateur" (195). He concluded that hysteria is caused by psychological trauma. Unlike Freudian interpretation, the recent theorists find not only single origin but multiple origins of trauma:

Contemporary trauma theory in civilian contexts draws that the causes of trauma in people include normal grief reactions, preoccupation with lost loved ones, identification with the deceased, expressions of guilt and hostility, disorganization, and somatic complaints . . . people are in a state of crisis when they face an obstacle to important life goals, . . . an obstacle that is, for a time, insurmountable by the use of

customary methods of problem solving. A period of disorganization ensues, a period of unset, during which many abortive attempts at solution are made. (Caplan 18)

Recent theorists do not believe in the single cause or origin of trauma like that of Freud and Lacan. They believe in "the multiple origins of trauma and their impact on all aspects of a person's life" (6). It may be started from various reasons. Ford and Courtois develop the comprehensive diagnosis of complex trauma, which is explained as "the inability to self regulate, self organize, or draw upon relationships to regain self integrity" (18). Complex trauma is "associated with histories of multiple traumatic stressors and exposure experiences, along with severe disturbances in primary care giving relationships" (18). Early trauma affects the neurosis-logical development of young children, who may not be able to develop the neuronal structures necessary to process information, regulation emotions, and categorize experiences. This can lead to poor impulse control, aggression, difficulty in interpersonal relationships, and poor academic performance

because of their inability to concentrate. In later development, such children may develop self-harming and substance abuse disorder in an effort to regulate their emotional arousal, owing to their difficulty in self-soothing and affect regulation.

Atonement dramatizes the traumatic condition of the characters developed from various reasons. Most of the major characters are psychologically depressed and trauma within them hangs for long time. Briony's childhood crime haunts her throughout her life and she is in the process of healing throughout her life. She seeks atonement through writing as well as serving as a nurse. Cecilia and Robbie are traumatized and tortured due to Briony and her misunderstanding of the adults' world. It seems that she is repressed with the childhood sexual desires. Her envy with the relationship between Cecilia and Robbie is resulted from her different form of oedipal complex. Freudian concept that trauma begins with sex and "traumatic events over and over again" (76) is justified here. Trauma in Briony is started when she the attachment between Cecilia and her "childhood friend and

university acquaintance," Robbie Turner first by the fountain in the grounds of the family's country house and later in the library (6). This is nothing more than the jealousy of sex. Later this jealousy is intensified when she reads the letters sent by Robbie from the battlefield:

"It's hardly an excuse, I know, but lately I seem to be

awfully

lightheaded around you. What was I doing, walking

barefoot into your

house? And have I ever snapped off the rim of an antique

vase

before?" . . . "You'd be forgiven for thinking me mad--

wandering into

your house barefoot, or snapping your antique vase. The

truth is, I feel

rather lightheaded and foolish in your presence, Cee, and I

don't think

I can blame the heat! Will you forgive me? Robbie."

Then, after a few

moments' reverie, tilted back on his chair, during which

time he

thought about the page at which his *Anatomy* tended to

fall open these

days, he dropped forward and typed before he could stop

himself, "In

my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my

thoughts I

make love to you all day long." (21)

The word 'cunt' traumatizes Briony much. Cunt refers to female genital part. Briony is jealous or anxious of the activities of the adults' world and its system. Robbie's life is full of hurdles and curdles. His aim is shattered due to the punishment given to him for the crime he did not do. His aim to become a popular doctor with wide knowledge of "secret stories, the tragedies and successes" goes in vain (23).

Moreover, "he would be a better doctor for having read literature" and he accepts "Rise and fall—this was the doctor's business, and it was literature's too" (23). His ups and downs are subjected to the childhood behaviours of Briony. The track of his life is changed and he becomes a prisoner and later army and dies due to the wound of war. More than the wound of the war, she is psychologically tortured and traumatized when he is separated with Cecilia. 1-Tis letters one after other indicates and even intensifies his traumatic condition. Like him, Cecilia is in the same boat. She cannot tolerate the injustice provided to Robbie. She leaves the family to provide him justice and to be united with him. She works as a nurse in London during the war. Through this act she wants to be united with her lover.

Trauma can be observed in the lives of Jackson, Pierrot, and Lola, the cousins of Briony, Cecilia and Leon. Due to the divorce of their parents, their activities are abnormal and unacceptable. They cannot easily adjust and assimilate with the environment and as a result they are psychologically depressed. Briony and Cecilia's

concerns towards them clearly exhibit this fact:

Worried that Lola's crying could be heard downstairs, Briony got to her feet again and pushed the bedroom door closed. Her cousin's distress produced in her a state of restlessness, an agitation that was close to joy.

She went back to the bed and put her arm round Lola who raised her hands to her face and began to cry.

That a girl so brittle and domineering should be brought this low by a couple of nine-year-old boys seemed wondrous to Briony, and it gave her a sense of her own power . . . At a loss for words, she gently rubbed her cousin's shoulder and reflected that Jackson and Pierrot alone could not be responsible for such grief; she remembered there was other sorrow in Lola's life. (29)

All the three brothers and sisters - Jackson, Pierrot and Lola - are mischievous. They are sheltered in Tallis family after their parents' divorce. They run away when the party is going on the homecoming

occasion of Leon. Moreover, they cry in minor matters. The impact of their parents' divorce is apparent in their activities and behaviours as "Early trauma affects the neurosis-logical development of young children, who may not be able to develop the neuronal structures necessary to process information, regulation emotions, and categorize experiences" (Freud 13). The wounds of childhood period have long-effects throughout the whole life.

The child fantasies that the true parents are more high-born than the actual real ones. The true parents must be at least an Emperor and Empress. Diverse versions of this fantasy find their way into many paperback romances or into parodies of these, like Briony's play in *Atonement*, *The Trials of Arabella*. When Arabella is sick unto death, a doctor who turns out to be a prince in disguise saves her. She marries her doctor-prince and lives happily ever after. Briony's loss and frustration is also structured within the narrative technique. Narrative breakdown is in this case indicative of psychological turmoil. The fact that part one is structurally fragmented compared to the more

focused narrative perspective of the rest of the novel—the second part is narrated from Robbie's point of view, and the third and fourth parts are narrated from Briony's at different ages—reflects to a very great extent Briony's disrupted psyche.

In a person telling of trauma, Caruth states, "What remains to be said is the disaster, the ruin of words, the demise of writing for both the speaker and listener" (543). Trauma is intrinsically multidisciplinary so it needs to displace older paradigms and attend to new configurations of cultural knowledge. Geoffrey Hartman, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Ryan Lamoth, James Verger and others, basing their theory of trauma on Freud's psychoanalysis, speak and argue about the need for acting out or working through of the trauma for leading life as healthy citizens. Categorizing different forms of trauma, Miller puts:

Four forms of trauma may be distinguished in novels: 1) some events performed, witnessed, or suffered by the characters that is traumatic for them; 2) some plot features in which the fiction directly or indirectly expresses a

trauma in its author; 3) trauma suffered by the fictional narrator, whether a first - or third-person story teller; 4) trauma suffered by the reader, perhaps caused by the vividness of the traumatic events described. (Miller 92)

Reader's trauma even includes the trauma of being disappointed somehow in one's narratological expectations. This is certainly the case with *Atonement*. Such a traumatic disillusioning discovery by the readers leads to remembering the novel differently and to a re-reading, according to the Freudian law of trauma. Re-reading may activate a latent trauma repressed in the first reading in a way that confirms Freud's paradigm for the genesis of hysteria.

The child's witnessing adult copulation is a classic Freudian example of a trauma-causing event. It is seen as disguising violence done by the male to the female, for example, by the father to the mother. The narrator's description in *Atonement* stresses the violence of copulation, with lots of biting and slapping, though Cecilia performs that violence even than Robbie does. Briony, in any case, quite

mistakenly views the event she interrupts as a violent attack on Cecilia by Robbie. It confirms her view that Robbie is an oversexed monster, a maniac. In this case, the first event was innocuous enough, while witnessing the second, in its repetition of the first innocent scene by the fountain, is traumatic for Briony. It is turning point in her transition to adult knowledge. The scene in the library confirms her misreading of the fountain scene.

Part three gives at length the truly gruesome details of Briiny's treatment of the horribly wounded soldiers who have made it back from the retreat to Dunkirk: a young Frenchman with half his head blown away, who dies before her eyes, or a man with a gangrened leg, and so on. It is traumatic in the everyday sense of being almost unbearable. Reception is not necessary to cause trauma in this case. That is form of duplication leading to a response not unlike Dominick LaCapra's "empathetic unsettlement," a state in which:

Being responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably of victims, implies not the appropriation of their

experience ... At the very least, empathetic unsettlement poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to deprive reassurance. (41)

Throughout this part, the readers experience something very much like vicarious trauma, perhaps without possessively identifying with the character. In *Atonement*, the characters are responsive to other's trauma. Briony is depressive throughout her life. The play, *The Trials of Arabella* is the product or expression of her feeling of guilty of her sin in her childhood. She tries to excuse or to get atonement in front of Robbie and Cecilia though she is never excused. Cecilia is also responsive of the trauma of Robbie so she leaves her birth home and goes to London to works as a nurse at first and decides to live together with Robbie forever.

Briony, as a writer, thinks that she has the right to change the destiny of the characters and she has the right to change the course

of action. She changes the profession of Robbie from house worker to prisoner to soldier and even she thinks to make him a doctor.

When we meet Robbie, he is lost in searching for purpose in life. He has earned a degree in literature already from the university at Cambridge, is now working as a landscape artist at the Tallis manor, and is considering going back to medical school to become a doctor:

What deep readings his modified sensibility might make of human suffering, of the self-destructive folly or sheer bad luck that drive men toward ill health! Birth, death, and frailty in between. Rise and fall--the was the doctor's business, and it was literature's too. He was thinking of the nineteenth-century novel. Broad tolerance and the long view, an inconspicuously warm heart and cool judgement; his kind of doctor would be alive to the monstrous patterns of fate, and to the vain and comic denial of the inevitable; he would press the enfeebled pulse, hear the expiring breath, feel the fevered hand begin to cool and

reflect, in the manner that only literature and religion
teach, on the puniness and nobility of mankind. (23)

These lines make clear about human sufferings. War is self-destructive and counterproductive. It gives psychological pressure and tension to not only the soldiers but also to many of other people who are not directly involved in the war including their relatives and friends.

Trauma has a long-lasting effect in our life. It may sometimes change the way of life. It is imperative for everyone to come out of the traumatic condition. Traumatic condition makes the life characters fragmented and disorganized. Once the trauma symptoms clearly emerge that continues the character's narrative, unfolding the convoluted path each character takes in his travel through trauma. Therapeutic writing helps people of any age deal with trauma in a number of ways. Linda Joy Myers, in *Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story* shares some therapeutic writing tips which may be used to modulate one's reentry into the trauma:

First write about what happened in the third person,
using "she" or "he"

instead of "I". Eventually you will want to write in first
person.

Second, fictionalize the characters and setting and look at
the incident

through a lens. Third, tell your story in a letter to your
most nurturing,

supportive friend. And, write the story from the point of
view of who

you are now or as another adult who witnessed it. (Myers

28)

These step-wise processes are very much beneficial in both 'acting
out' as well 'working through' trauma and for attaining permanent
solution of the trauma. Alice Miller, in her esteemed book, *Drama of
the Gifted Child*, writes about the prevalence and denial of childhood
abuse and trauma. She states that for healing to take place, shame

and trauma must be revealed to a compassionate witness or witnesses. When we tell our story to a therapist or in a safe group, we become more whole. Likewise, when we write our story, we become witness as well as narrator and author. So, "writing that re-fabricates personal experience in order to transcend it through or re-create it as fiction" (Heberle 33). "Some critics wholly embrace the idea of a complete cure or absolute redemption through writing or narrating, most acknowledge the compulsion for trauma victims to express their stories and that retelling their experiences helps them survive" (Rolen 4). Though there are different views regarding healing process of trauma, writing can be taken one of the best healing process of it. People can not only reduce but also get rid of trauma through writing.

In *Atonement* most of the characters are directly involved in writhing process. Briony is a famous writer of many books. In the final chapter, it is clear that she is the writer of the whole story of this book. She has written this story to get rid of her guilt-ridden world.

She consoles her through writing. She wants Cecilia and Robbie's union in order to get relief from her sin. Like Briony, Cecilia and Robbie are also involved in writing as a means to get rid of their trauma. They exchange letters to soothe their pain of not only separation but also to share their present condition. After staying for two years in prison, Robbie joins in military and directly observes the destructive and disastrous scene of war in France. Throughout his life, he lives a traumatic life due to Briony. Cecilia cannot stay in the family after Robbie is sent in jail for the crime he did not commit. She takes two steps as a means of acting out and working through - first she writes everything to Robbie and second she becomes a nurse in the Second World War in London and serves the wounded soldiers as well as other needy people.

Dominick LaCapra says that there are two ways of dealing with mental disturbance one is acting out and another is working through. If we deal with the term with the way of acting out it is related with recurrence as he says that trauma is a kind of obligation. It is a

behavior which the patient repeat compulsorily. People relate the past to present and become unhappy and disturbed. Because of something unpleasant events in their past, they become mentally disturbed and tortured. One event in one situation takes is connotative meaning. One kind of event gives torture to another episode or situation as he comments:

There are two very broad ways of coming in terms with transference, or with one's transference implication in the object of study: acting out; and working -through.

Acting - out is related to repetition, and even the repetition - compulsion - the tendency to repeat something compulsively. This is very clean in the case of people who undergo a trauma. They have were still fully in the past to exist in the present as if they were still fully in the past, with no distance from it. They tend to relive occurrence intrude on their present existing, for example in flashbacks; or in nightmares or in words that

are compulsory repeated and that doesn't seem to
connection from another situations in another place.(233)

Here, time and again the traumatic events are repeated and gives
tortures to us. Those bad dreams are like our wound which gives us
pain for the time being. After sometime that fact wound becomes
heard. Bernard's trauma is also like this nightmare especially the
nightmare of losing the love and his position in the world state. He
has the extreme fear of losing the status of the world state. In
Atonement, Briony and Robbie are most affected by nightmarish
dreams.

LaCapra describes acting-out and working-through as two
processes by which persons and societies deal with traumatic
historical pasts. LaCapra associates acting-out with a repetition
compulsion, repeating the trauma and re-inscribing its power to
wound, and working-through with the generation of alternate relations
between people that counter those destroyed by trauma and that
continue to be threatened by acting-out. If we think about these

terms in terms of psychological understandings of trauma, LaCapra's arguments seem to give with how psychology makes sense of trauma. Acting out is a process where traumatized victims commit actions that somehow repeat negative emotions/actions associated with trauma and working-through counters this process. It is described as "a mechanism by which the patient expresses drive, fantasy, desire in an action and it is it is introduced with close connection with phenomena such as resistance, transference, repetition, compulsion and remembering" (3). It is worth saying that both LaCapra thinks acting-out is an inevitable and often necessary part of the healing process as he says:

. . . for people who have been severely traumatized, it may be impossible to fully transcend acting-out the past. In any case, acting-out should not be seen as a different kind of memory from working-

through -- they are intimately related parts of a process.

Acting-out, on

some level, may very well be necessary, even for

secondary witnesses

or historians. On a certain level, there's that tendency to

repeat. (2) LaCapra is concerned, specifically, with historical trauma

and how societies come to terms and make sense of these traumas:

"A crucial issue with respect to traumatic historical events is whether

attempts to work through problems, including rituals of mourning, can

viably come to terms with...the divided legacies, open wounds, and

unspeakable losses of a dire past" (698). While LaCapra is not

explicitly analyzing performance, societal attempts to repair the social

fabric inevitably occupy the space of performance at some point -

rituals of mourning being just one of many kinds of performance.

If we consider conflict and trauma, as LaCapra disputes, then

the narrative that McEwan devises certainly echoes and asserts this.

Atonement traces the consciousness of the protagonist who is

grappling with her guilt and remorse. The novel is divided into four sections: Parts one to Three and a short yet decisively important coda entitled "London 1999". The dislocation we experience from the perceptions that are fore-grounded are partly due to point of view.

Part one, shared by four characters is set in the Tallis country house (Surrey) in the summer of 1935. It opens with "leisurely expansiveness unexpected from Ian McEwan" (54). We trace Briony's "feverish literary ambition" as she plans *The Trials of Arabella* where she is author and actor of both a family production and a grimmer tragic drama of a rape outside a mock Greek temple in the lavish grounds of Tallis' estate. Avoiding the typical McEwanian opening of a traumatic episode such as the ballooning accident in *Enduring Love*, McEwan here draws us through subtle, leisurely style. Moving from the violent episodes of domestic violence in Part one, Part 2 is viewed through the traumatic lens of Robbie Turner at the retreat to Dunkirk. War and devastation form the central focus here as we share, in intricate detail, the horror of the retreat. In part three, Briony

as guilt-ridden person; witnesses the aftermath of traumatic violence in the hospital as a nurse. A familiar technique of McEwan to provide a "twist" at the end, where 77 year Briony is presented as a famous writer. She reveals her life-long grief of causing trauma to Robbie and takes the responsibility in her soldier though she is unable to undo her mistake. She is even more traumatized when she excused from Robbie and Cecilia.

The first chapter of the novel lays all the necessary groundwork of and provides the essential elements and milieu for a crisis: a highly imaginative girl who has just reached her teens tries to make sense out of the adult world which she is ill equipped to comprehend. Briony enters the novel as a promising girl who possesses unusual curiosity, sensitivity, and certain degree of self-reflexivity. However her prospect is obstructed by some pre-adolescence vices, such as self-centeredness and obstinate binary-opposition world view. Briony is a girl who has unusual passion for order and secrets. She is described as "one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world

just so" (4). Her love of order is demonstrated by means of her arrangement of her room—the only tidy upstairs room in the house—which "was a shrine to her controlling demon" (5). Her fondness for miniaturization manifests her obsession with order: "the model farm spread across a deep window ledge . . . all facing one way—towards their owner," "farmyard hens were neatly corralled," and "Her straight-backed dolls in their many-roomed mansion appeared to be under strict instructions not to touch the walls; the various thumb-sized figures . . . suggested by their even ranks and spacing a citizen's army awaiting orders" (5). The neat order in Briony's miniature world shows that her love of order is also reflexive of a desire for control. Due to this very reason, she faces traumatic experiences in many of the cases. She cannot find law and order in and around the world she survives which leads her towards tension and trauma.

Briony wants to disclose the secrets and that is why she is inquisitive to everything of the adults' world. Her excessive intension to know the secrets of the world ultimately leads her to the

traumatic condition and problematized world. Her love of secret is embodied in the thought and care she gives to her treasure box, in which some common objects are stored and sanctified:

In a prized varnished cabinet, a secret drawer was opened by pushing against the grain of a cleverly turned dovetail joint, and here she kept a diary locked by a clasp, and a notebook written in a code of her own invention An old tin petty cash box was hidden under a removable floorboard beneath her bed. In the box were treasures that dated back four years, to her ninth birthday when she began collecting: a mutant double acorn, fool's gold, a rainmaking spell bought at a funfair, a squirrel's skull as light as a leaf. (5)

Like her treasures, each object has a symbolic value—the acorn symbolizes new life, the fool's gold promises a fortune, the spell suggests magic. Each provides the promise of something greater, but the promise is "cancelled by its own formal status" (Mathews 148).

This paradox in her love of secret foreshadows her frustration not only in her writing but also in her life.

When we begin our journey through *Atonement*, we are emotionally encumbered by palimpsestic traumatic events: personal, social and national. At each turn we witness trauma, observe suffering on global and personal level and acknowledge the disruption of the individual's frame of reference. Accommodation and transformation of these events become the unfolding scenarios of the novel. However, McEwan draws us to the title of *Atonement* and the intertextual reference to *Northanger Abbey*. In a sense, we expect there to be a resolution, reparation of trauma through atonement and the expected process of healing and transformation. The warning of Arabella's father written Briony herself turns out ironically to be a projection of her own plight:

My darling one, you are young and lovely,

But inexperienced, and though you think

The world is at your feet,

It can rise up and tread on you. (5)

Both Briony and Lola fit the description of the first half: young, lovely, and inexperienced; however, their fates diverge in the second half which also predicts Briony's impending crisis. While Briony's self-deluding authority is well protected, Lola's pride is stripped naked by her parents' divorce and her reluctant dependence on the tender mercies of her relatives; two important factors that not only pronounce the end of her innocence but initiate her into the complexity of the adult world.

Brion brings her love of order and secrets into full play in writing: "writing stories not only involved secrecy, it also gave her all the pleasures of miniaturization" (3). For her, the imagination itself is a source of secrets, and her passion for tidiness is also satisfied, for "an unruly world could be made just so" (3). Her masterpiece *The Trials of Arabella*, a fairy-tale play about the restoration of peace of a strayed princess, establishes her subject position in the first part as the writer, the director, and the prerogative of the leading role. In a

word, the play satisfies not only her sense of order—justice is achieved through death and marriage, "the former being set aside exclusively for the morally dubious, the latter a reward withheld until the final page" - but also the full execution of her imagination (4).

Standing on the threshold between childhood and adulthood, Briony still clings to the fairy-tale world, but at the same time she wishes to transcend it. This oscillation is reflected in a gap between what she wants and what she is able to achieve. The gap is manifestly shown in what she claims to be the chief purpose of the play. It is, as she says, for no one else but her brother Leon "to celebrate his return, provoke his admiration and guide him away from his careless succession of girlfriends, towards the right form of wife, the one who would persuade him to return to the countryside, the one who would sweetly request Briony's services as a bridesmaid" (4). Briony's secret wish reflects childlike longings elevated to such a level so that her control loses its grip and her imagination proves insufficient.

Though *The Trials of Arabella* is a fairy tale in which the

beautiful princess and prince charming finally get united and live happily ever after, it actually hides certain dark message that deconstructs itself as a fairy tale. This note can be detected early in the prologue whose full content appears only at the last part of the novel—a formal device used to underscore Briony's missed perception of its meaning:

This is the tale of spontaneous Arabella
Who ran off with an extrinsic fellow?
It grieved her parents to see their first born
Evanesce from her home to go to Eastbourne
Without permission, to get ill and find indigence
Until she was down to her last sixpence.
For that fortuitous girl the sweet day dawned
To wed her gorgeous prince. But be warned,
Because Arabella almost learned too late,
That before we love, we must cogitate! (89)

This gap between the form of a fairy tale and its dark message is

one of the devices that the writer uses to accentuate young Briony's traumatic experience. Just as the blissful atmosphere of the prologue is subverted by two dark and grim messages—the impossibility of knowledge without the loss of innocence and the belatedness of obtaining such knowledge, in the fairy-tale world Briony's princess makes mistake but is still able to marry a gorgeous prince.

Part one to a very great extent records Briony's traumatic sexual initiation, her jolty crossing from innocence to experience, is fully reflected in its rampant erotic content and sexual innuendoes as shown in *The Trials of Arabella*, which is a folk-tale version of a child's naïve version of adult sexuality. Lola Quincey, Briony's cousin who has just reached the age of puberty, poses as Briony's counterpart in sexual initiation. Lola parents' divorce opens Briony's eyes to a destructive aspect of adult sexuality which is incompatible with and incomprehensible to her fairy-tale world so that she can only dismiss it as disorder: "She vaguely knew that divorce was an affliction, but she did not regard it as a proper subject, and gave it no

thought. It was a mundane unraveling that could not be reversed, and therefore offered no opportunities to the storyteller: it belonged in the realm of disorder" (8-9). In contrast, her simple world celebrates marriage: "marriage was the thing, or rather, a wedding was, with its formal neatness of virtue rewarded, the thrill of its pageantry and banqueting, and dizzy promise of lifelong union," and "A good wedding was an unacknowledged representation of the as yet unthinkable—sexual bliss" (8-9). Briony's denial of divorce is itself a deliberate rejection of the adult sexuality that prevents her from pursuing the real secret—the vital knowledge—behind the scene only through which safe crossing from innocence adulthood can be promised.

Cathy Caruth points out that the victim's insistent reenactments of the past "do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred" (151). According to Caruth, trauma does not simply serve as record of the past but "registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned" (151). Through the juxtaposition

of the teenage Briony with the two older Brionys collaborating as the narrator to restore the true situation on the summer day, the novel serves not only to renovate a past but also to re-live the past that has never been fully understood.

In part two Briony projects herself into Robbie's consciousness first through his time in jail both as a reinforcement of Robbie's suffering and as a foil to her own traumatic experience. Jail is a place where subjectivity encounters the crisis of total annihilation. In jail people lose their identities as individuals and are replaced by numbers. Jail is also traditionally a locus of shame. However, unlike the other inmates who are jailed for the crimes they committed, Robbie's shame consists in his inability to locate his crime. For Robbie, jail represents the imprisonment of subjectivity: "Three and a half years of nights like these, unable to sleep, thinking of another vanished boy, another vanished life that was once his own, and waiting for dawn, the slop-out and another wasted day. He did not know how he survived the daily stupidity of it. The stupidity and

claustrophobia" (49). Robbie's trauma is embodied in his constant but futile resistance of being de-subjectified. Repression of subjectivity is implemented through the suppression of words. Robbie's only resort to sustain his subjectivity is through writing to Cecilia:

In love with her, willing himself to stay sane for her, he was naturally in love with her words. When he wrote back, he pretended to be his old self, he lied his way into sanity. For fear of his psychiatrist who was also their censor, they could never be sensual, or even emotional. His was considered a modern, enlightened prison, despite its Victorian chill. He had been diagnosed, with clinical precision, as morbidly oversexed, and in need of help as well as correction. He was not to be stimulated. Some letters—both his and hers—were confiscated for some timid expression of affection. So they wrote about literature, and used characters as codes. (49)

To sustain subjectivity is to remain sane. However, as a result of

being diagnosed by the jail psychiatrist "with clinical precision, as morbidly oversexed" and therefore is 'not to be stimulated', both his and Cecilia's letters are confiscated 'for some timid expression of affection'. Robbie's surrogate measure to fight de-subjectification is through writing about literature and using characters as codes, or, in other words, through fiction-making. This surrogate measure to regain subjectivity sinks Robbie and Cecilia more deeply into the abyss of de-subjectification since by turning himself into character and his intimacy to Cecilia into fiction; he at the same time is doubly alienated from normality.

Robbie's trauma is more emphatically represented through his encounter with war, especially through the impact created by the German Blitzkrieg and the mutilated body. In the war, Robbie's subjectivity is furthermore deconstructed as he becomes more anonymous in the army and later in the evacuating mass. The war is of course the origin and the arena of the most traumatic experiences because combats are not only characterized by fastness and

unexpectedness that devastates even the most prepared but is also occasions for the extreme ravage of the human bodies. Paul Virillo, who offers penetrating views on wars and accidents, asserts that accidents which happen by chance in normal life are positively embraced and cultivated in wars: "war produces accidents. . . . What are war machines? They are machines in reverse—they produce accidents, disappearances, deaths, breakdowns" (72). The intensity and speed of combat more often than not outstrip punctual perception, apprehension, and representation. As Cathy Caruth in "Trauma: Explorations in Memory and Unclaimed Experience" makes clear of the concept of trauma and its relationship with literature:

Trauma is an overwhelming experience which is in some way present in and through a literary text . . . literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational character, because of its figurative

language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or, in order to be witnessed. (2)

Though trauma is beyond expression and beyond representation, it is dramatized in literary works. The traumatic experiences of soldiers or other traumatized people who are separated, divorced or committed crimes are illustrated in literature. These overwhelming experiences, according to Peter Crothwaite, "rendered many of those engaged in the conflict incapable of fully experiencing and processing it as it occurred" (54). Felman and Laub call this kind of psychological paralysis or numbness "crisis of witnessing" (992), or in Lacan's terminology "a missed encounter with the real" (55). The encounter is missed partly because the real is fundamentally inassimilable to the symbolic order that structures subjectivity and partly because the real's intrusion upon the subject "cannot be articulated or forestalled" (Bowie 100). Freud uses different term "traumatic neurosis" to designate the

condition which, for him, is "a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (31). This breach is inflicted not simply by the intensity of the stimulus surging in upon the subject, but also "by lack of any preparedness for anxiety" (31). Therefore, in most traumatic situations, the encounter or the stimulus is either missed or incompletely experienced at the time that it occurs.

As the title suggests, the novel seems to be written by Briony the internal writer as a measure to compensate for the crime she instigated. However, rereading discloses "a darker secret" that it is Briony's confession of her trauma that can never be healed and her guilt which is beyond the possibility of atonement. *Atonement* centers on Briony's incompletely experienced traumatic encounter, and this experience is belatedly manifested in war and ward. The real nature of Briony's trauma consists in her confusion between real life and the life of fiction, and on a hot summer day in 1935 she inadvertently projects her trauma to her loved ones by "ruthlessly subordinating everything the world throws at her to her need to make it serve the

demands of her own world of fiction" (Finney 69). Briony's only possible means to rectify her sin would be her fiction. The novel is her attempt to right the wrong that she commits when she is lost between fiction and real life. But Briony knows that her redemption can never be achieved because her fictional reparation can best be deemed as an attempt at atoning for a past that she cannot reverse. This secret becomes for her an instrument of torture, "a kind of madness of the will in psychic cruelty which simply knows no equal" (Mathews 72-73).

In the therapy of traumatic patients, being able to put experience into narrative is considered a positive sign for recovery since most traumatizing events have the capacity to produce, in Arthur Frank's term, "narrative wreckage" in the patients of trauma. For most patients, their traumatic memories are not remembered in the way normal people remember things. As Bloom suggests, their memories remain "'frozen in time' in the form of images, body sensations like smells, touch, tastes, and even pain, and strong emotions" (6), and

therefore the traumatic victims are often "cut off from language, deprived of the power of words, trapped in speechless terror" (13).

And making and recreating themselves through narrative becomes an effective healing method supported and adopted by many therapists.

Bloom maintains that:

For healing to occur, people often need to put the experience into a narrative, give it words, and share it with themselves and others.

Words allow us to put things into a time sequence—past, present,

future. Without words, the traumatic past is experienced as being in the

ever present "Now". Words allow us to put the past more safely in the

past where it belongs. (Bloom 7)

D. Spencer also asserts the positive function of narrative: "a well

constructed story possesses a kind of narrative truth that is real and immediate and carries an important significance for the process of therapeutic change" (Qtd. in Polkinghorne 178). McAdams also proposes that " We create a narrative so that our lives and the lives of others will make sense" (92). Michele Crossley maintains that telling a story is a traumatic patient's "reflexive temporal grasp to hold together the phases of these longer-term phenomena and preserve their coherence," and it is an attempt to "envisage the coherence of a life through selection, organization and presentation of its components parts" (50). Since the narrative has an interrelated configuration of past-present-future, the function of narrative is "to reveal structures of meanings that previously remained implicit or unrecognized" (Crossley 52). This process of imposing order through narrative upon life or, in Paul Ricoeur's terms, "the process of employment" is exactly the process Briony undergoes. During this process, the alternation of subjectification and de-subjectification plays the key role in the reenactment of trauma. In the act of telling her

story Briony assumes the prerogative of imposing order upon her as well as others" lives. By so doing, herself comes into being, and her "narrative identity" is thus created (Ricoeur 132). She recreates herself through her narrative. In the narrative Briony acknowledges her sin and tries to atone for it by rewriting the lovers' ending: "It is only in this last version that my lovers end well . . . All the preceding drafts were pitiless" (370). This process of atonement or employment coincides with the process of subjectification. As Thrift maintains, "It is through feeling ashamed and by avowing this that persons turn themselves into subjects. The experience of shame and intimacy becomes not only „feelings“, but affects that could be understood as a form of thinking, a kind of intelligence of the world" (60). However, at the same time that Briony reconstructs her subjectivity through writing, she is also drawn back by a counter force reminding her that what takes place in the narrative cannot serve to change life. Even though she succeeds in creating "dynamic narratives that render sensible and coherent the seeming chaos of

human existence" (McAdams 166), she is unable to change Robbie's and Cecilia's fate: "But now I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say I tried to persuade my reader . . . that Robbie Turner died of septicaemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground Station. That I never saw them in that year" (70). The construction of her narrative identity actually paves the way for her own annihilation:

The problem with these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The

attempt was all. (71)

A novel for atonement thus ironically becomes itself a testimony of the impossibility for atonement. In this way, it underscores and reveals a more profound trauma that devastates Briony throughout her life, and the only antidote for it is through total oblivion promised by the diagnosis of vascular dementia. Therefore, to a certain degree, *Atonement* confirms the function it affords for compensation, but it simultaneously reflects the dangers of indulging too much in a fictional world and lays bare the limitations which that world can offer its readers and writers.

Through Robbie's involvement in the war, the psychological torture and danger of war is illustrated. Such purpose is plainly stated in the first sentence of this part: "There were horrors enough, but it was the unexpected detail that threw him and afterwards would not let him go" (47). During the attack, in addition to paralysis, Robbie suffers from a different kind of post-traumatic effect--traumatic reenactment: "Each dive brought every man, cornered and cowering,

to face his execution. When it did not come, the trial had to be lived through all over again and the fear did not diminish. For the living, the end of a Stuka attack was the paralysis of shock, of repeated shocks" (39). Life has changed into a timeless succession of shocks, interspaced with empty, paralyzed intervals" (54). The mutilated body corresponds to Julia Kristiva's idea of the abject i.e. hopeless or the Lacanian real. The process of healing and transformation result in a renewed vision through the writing process of the fiction Briony has been labouring over the majority of her life, meticulously editing and redrafting the details as she wants them to be. She balances her psychological needs with real events of the trauma.

In the last part of the novel, it is known that she is celebrating her seventy seventh birthday and she is going to die. She "reflected in a self-pitying way on how I was soon to join their ranks" and she is "suffering some neural disorder" i.e. 'vascular dementia' which gives her "imperceptible strokes" (86). She says that "the process will be

slow, but my brain, my mind, is closing down" (86). She contemplates her degrading health and ultimate death: "My phone number, my address, my name and what I did with my life will be gone. In two, three or four years' time, I will not recognize my remaining oldest friends, and when I wake in the morning, I will not recognize that I am in my own room. And soon I won't be, because I will need continuous care" (86). Here, her concern is that of loss - the loss of her name, the loss of her health and the loss of her existence. Even at the verge of her death, she is traumatized by this sense of loss - this sense of loss has traumatized her throughout her whole life. She can get redemption from only by uniting the lovers - Cecilia and Robbie as: "Lovers and their happy ends have been on my mind all night long" (90). She thinks of "Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at *The Trials of Arabella*" (90). She wants to correct her mistake and get atonement in order to come out of the traumatized world.

Thus, *Atonement* is the representation of psychological trauma

of the main characters as it explores their distorted and traumatized psyche tortured by guilt, revenge and frustration. The guilt-ridden world of Briony seeks repentance in order to correct her mistake. As a punishment of her crime, she is tortured, tormented and traumatized throughout her whole life. Her involvement in nursing in the Second World War is her attempt to get salvation from her sin thereby getting rid of her trauma. Moreover, she makes her career as a writer and her confession of her crime in her writing is the act of working-through trauma. Cecilia and Robbie are the victims of the crime committed by Briony. They lose their normal pace of life and live a fragmented, separated and traumatized life devoid of integrity, harmony and satisfaction. They exchange their traumatic feelings through letters and through sharing, their trauma is reduced to some extent. Moreover, trauma of Jackson and Pierrot and Lola inflicted due to their parents' divorce is reduced through participation in the performance of the play entitled *The Trials of Arabella*. Their abnormal and unusual activities like crying and running away are the consequence of lack of parent's

love and caring that has long-lasting adverse effects into child
psychology.

III. Trauma and its Healing in *Atonement*

Through deep and thorough analysis of *Atonement*, the researcher concludes that the main characters in *Atonement* are psychologically traumatized and tormented throughout the narrative and their involvement in different activities show their attempts to get rid of their trauma. Briony in her guilt-ridden world is more traumatized than other characters. Her crime of accusing Robbie of raping Lola is central to bring turmoil in the life of other major characters. Robbie and Cecilia are the victims of Briony's crime and they are not only forced to be separated from each other but also deviated from their aim in life. The traumatized world of the Second World War is presented through the letters of Robbie. Jackson, Pierrot, and Lola are also psychologically traumatized due to their parents' divorce. The impact of lack of parents to their children is shown through these characters. The traumatic experience faced by these characters is not short-lived but it is long-lasting that affects their whole life. The major characters in *Atonement* are involved in

writing as a process of healing their trauma.

Briony's childhood innocence and carefree life is destroyed with the exposure of adult's world thereby penetrating her into the traumatized and distressed world of disobedience and treachery. Her trauma begins when she happens to observe sexual activities between Robbie and Cecilia. Freudian concept of trauma that trauma begins with sexual repression mainly when children see sexual activities of adult people is applied to Briony. She is tormented and she punishes Robbie perhaps because of her sexual jealousy. Though Robbie is not involved in rape of Lola, his trauma is also started with this sex instinct. Lacanian concept that trauma begins with the origin of subject when the child enters into the world of language is also suitable to Briony. Briony is concerned with subjectification. She is conscious of her status as a writer and she even tries to unite two characters - Robbie and Cecilia - and demands happy ending of the play she writes in order to correct her mistake.

Like Briony, Cecilia and Robbie; other characters including

Jackson, Pierrot, and Lola are also traumatized due to lack of parent's love and care after their divorce. As response of their traumatic life, they cry unnecessarily and run away randomly. Their inability to adjust and adapt with the emerging situation is related to their traumatized and troubled life. The description of the Second World War is relevant to associate traumatic psychology of people due to war. The death, destruction and casualties brought by the war are responsible to add pain to the suffering of people. These events are drawn through the letters of Robbie, who is joined in the military after undergoing three years punishment in prison. Thus the idea of trauma as an 'overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events' which have 'uncontrolled receptive occurrence' put forward by Cathy Curuth is relevant here. The protagonists are not free from traumatic condition wherever they go. The deep study and close reading of *Atonement* shows that trauma is the result of not only single reason but of multiple reasons. In this situation, complex trauma that focuses on 'the multiple origins that affects on all aspects on life' associated

with Gerald Lewis Caplan cannot be avoided. So, trauma is beyond representation in literary works though many symptoms of trauma can be traced in *Atonement*.

Through an analysis of *Atonement*, this research considers the potentialities and limitations of narrative and of representation more generally, as means of capturing and conveying the accelerated and intensely traumatic character of mechanized warfare. The theme of trauma is intensified with the reference of Briony's mother who is suffered from long illness with migraine and depression before her death. Moreover, Cecilia is killed in a bombing in a London train station during the war and Robbie dies due to the wounds of war. Similarly, the last part set in the seventy seventh birthday of Briony reveals that she is traumatized by the ensuing death by vascular dementia. Dominik LaCapra's ideas of 'acting-out' and 'working-through' trauma are drawn to show the responses and recurrent occurrences of trauma, and the protagonists' attempts of getting rid of trauma through writing.

Moreover, Briony and Cecilia are also involved in service of wounded soldiers and other people as a nurse in order to heal their trauma and get perpetual solace. Whole life of Briony is centered on getting forgiveness of the crime she has committed and to get atonement in order to come out of the traumatized and distressed world.

Thus, the present research excavates the traumatic life of the major characters as dramatized in *Atonement* through the perspective of psychological trauma. In this process, the psychological and neurological disorder of the characters as represented in their behaviours is observed. The causes of traumatic life of the characters including sexual repression, jealousy, revenge, loss of parents and so on are highlighted thereby maintaining the multiple origins of trauma. Amid adverse and hostile situation, the characters attempt to obtain normal pace of life through writing and expressing their sufferings and confessing their crimes. Writing and social service are taken as the means of healing from ongoing psychological trauma. Despite her

rejection and dejection from Cecilia and Robbie, Briony's incessant search for atonement also reflects her distressed and traumatized psychology.

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