Derleme Makalesi/Review Article

AN OBJECT RELATIONS PERSPECTIVE ON IAN McEWAN'S *ATONEMENT*: BRIONY'S CREATIVE APPERCEPTION IN LIGHT OF ATTACHMENT THEORY GENRE, AND NARRATIVE FORM

IAN McEWAN'IN ATONEMENT ADLI ROMANINA NESNE KURAMI AÇISINDAN BAKIŞ: BRIONY'NİN BAĞLANMA TEORİSİ AÇISINDAN YARATICILIĞI, YAZINI VE SESİ

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ÖZ: Ian McEwan'ın Atonement adlı eserinin odağı, Briony'nin onu çevreleyen gerçekliğe hakim olma çabası üzerinedir. Bununla birlikte, Briony'nin gerçeği, kendini romanın kahramanı olarak yeniden yaratmasının nedeni açısından bir boşluk oluşmuştur. Bu makale, gerçekliği ortadan kaldırarak Briony'nin doğrudan romantizm türünün zeminini terk ettiğini ve Bildungsroman türüne girdiğini öne sürerek, yazın türünün geleneklerini yıkmasının sebebini kendi anlatılarını kontrol etme arzusu olmasını tartışacaktır. Makale aynı zamanda romanın genelinde görülen bu kontrol takıntısının sebebinin de ise Briony'nin kendini kahraman olarak yaratma isteği olduğunu savunacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Atonement, Nesne ilişkisi, Yaratıcılık, Bildungsroman*

ABSTRACT: The general focus on Atonement has been on Briony's attempt to dominate the reality that surrounds her. However, there is a gap in respect of Briony's motive for subverting reality in such a way that she can recreate herself as the heroine of her writing, consequently allowing her to "dispel her insignificance" (McEwan 2001; 72). The argument put forth in this article will be based around the suggestion that by subverting reality, Briony directly leaves the ground of the romance genre and enters the Bildungsroman genre. Thus, although Ian McEwan claims this to be his "Jane Austen" novel, no heroine of that genre would come to the conclusion that Robbie is a sex maniac and thus follow that narrative trajectory to its tragic conclusion. It is the very tedium of her own "romantic" big-house existence, which indeed resembles that of a Jane Austen novel, that leads Briony to subvert the romance genre and thus assert her independence from her environment. For a reader in a small urban house, the Tallis/Jane Austen existence seems romantic, but for Briony in her large romantic house, it represents the tedium of daily life, which she thus subverts to create some measure of differentiation from her mother and her home context. As well as subverting conventions, Briony's projection of the "sex maniac" theory onto the narrative can be interpreted as her urge to be creative and imaginative. She thus plays with the conventions of the genre to demonstrate her primary creativity that will allow her to gain control of her own narrative.

Key Words: Atonement, Object relations, Creativity, Bildungsroman

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1. INTRODUCTION

Catherine Morland, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* [1817], was a girl so full of the delights of Gothic fiction that she causes havoc around her when she imagines a perfectly innocent man to be capable of the most terrible things. For many, many years I've been thinking how I might devise a hero or heroine who could echo that process in Catherine Morland, but then go a step further and look at, not the crime, but the process of atonement, and do it in writing- do it through storytelling, I should say (Reynolds and Noakes 2002; 20).

In *Newsweek*, Ian McEwan describes his 2001 novel *Atonement* as "my Jane Austen" novel and so it begins with an epigraph from *Northanger Abbey* that steers the reader to engage with the story as part of the romance genre and to conclude that Briony's worldview is shaped by novels with "principles of justice, with death and marriage the main engines of housekeeping" (2001; 7). To date, the dominant interpretations of critics such as Martin Jacobi have focused on Briony's various misreadings as "a version of romantic melodrama" and noted that she looks at the world "as if it is a literary text… expect[ing] to see certain conventions of plot and character development" (2001; 57). As can be seen, since the novels Briony reads are crucial to her vision of the world as well as of herself, *Atonement* has largely been analyzed in relation to its narrative structure. For instance, Brian Finney has argued that it is "a work of fiction that is from the beginning to end concerned with making a fiction" (2004; 70) and that it establishes the idea that life imitates fiction. Kathleen Angelo also suggests that *Atonement* deals with the "reading of fiction" (2009; 88) and thus analyzes it in light of reader-response criticism to emphasize the active role of the reader, who is guided through the novel's intertextual elements to create multiple meanings. Likewise, David K. O'Hara focuses on *Atonement's* metafictional quality and claims that, in addition to presenting a relationship between the text and reader, its storytelling marks a beginning "of stories not just being told from one to another, but by one for another" (2011; 74).

In addition to the reader-response criticism, however, a large body of psychoanalytic readings of *Atonement* is also available. J. Hillis Miller, among others such as Erin O'Dwyer (2016), Tomosz Dobrogaszcz (2015), and Nick Bently (2005), use Freud's theory on trauma, suggesting that Briony is traumatized by her "witnessing of adult copulation" (p. 93). Erin O'Dwyer , meanwhile, applies Lacanian gaze theory to the novel's epistolary mood to suggest that "the letter as signifier is a meaningless construct, a thing that sets the characters in motion, moving them from their initial positions to take up other positions within the gaze structure" (2016; 184). In other words, the letter functions as a signifier that initiates subjectivity.

In both the reader-response and psychoanalytic critiques, the general focus has been on Briony's attempt to dominate the reality that surrounds her. However, there is a gap in respect of Briony's motive for subverting reality in such a way that she can recreate herself as the heroine of her writing, consequently allowing her to "dispel her insignificance" (McEwan; 72). The argument put forth in this article will be based around the suggestion that by subverting reality, Briony directly leaves the ground of the romance genre and enters the *Bildungsroman* genre. Thus, although Ian McEwan claims this to be his "Jane Austen" novel, no heroine of that genre would come to the conclusion that Robbie is a sex maniac and thus follow that narrative trajectory to its tragic conclusion. It is the very tedium of her own "romantic" big-house existence, which indeed resembles that of a Jane Austen novel, that leads Briony to subvert the romance genre and thus assert her independence from her environment. For a reader in a small urban house, the Tallis/Jane Austen existence seems romantic, but for Briony in her large romantic house, it represents the tedium of daily life, which she thus subverts to create some measure of differentiation from her mother and her home context. As well as subverting conventions, Briony's projection of the "sex maniac" theory onto the narrative can be interpreted as her urge to be creative and imaginative. She thus plays with the conventions of the genre to demonstrate her primary creativity that will allow her to gain control of her own narrative.

This article will begin by explaining object-relations theory to suggest that Briony's labeling of Robbie as a "sex maniac" is an act of primary creativity, and comprises her declaration of independence and her psychological and moral development from youth to maturity. I will then argue that Briony's wish to go beyond mere attachment to the conventions of the romance genre and her consequent entering of the *Bildungsroman* genre is the means by which she asserts her independence.

The argument put forward will pivot around Nancy Chodorow and Donald Winnicott's object-relations' perspectives to connect it with the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, as both focus on the process of self-cultivation. As well as conducting an object-relations analysis, other potential readings of the novel that reflect and deflect from the object-relations reading will also be introduced. In particular, sibling rivalry will be presented as an alternative theory to explain Briony's simultaneous desire to separate from and merge with her sister Cecilia, as a consequence of how she apperceives the same event in a totally different way, thus leading to the climax of the novel.

2. DISCUSSION

Object-relations theory focuses on pre-oedipal relations, particularly those with the mother, to trace the development of a subject in relation to objects, and claims that human relations can be considered the primary motivating force in subject formation. Presented as a reaction to Freud's drive theory, which claims that humans are marked by sexual drives that are regulated by the pleasure principle, object-relations theorists such as Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott, and Nancy Chodorow, stress dependence on others as the defining human experience. According to them, humans are motivated by the search for someone with whom to relate, and thus they view the individual as a product of social relations that is in constant revision. The traditional psychological approach presents the mother as the first person to whom the child relates, on whom s/he depends, and from whom s/he obtains satisfaction.

In response to this typical approach, Chodorow adds that, for the child, satisfaction is not solely dependent on the relationship with the mother but also "with the person or people with whom she also has her earliest relationship of infantile dependence" (1999: 52), which includes the father. While Freudian theory would suggest that a daughter forms a relationship with her mother simply to imitate her and with the ultimate aim of excluding her from the mother-daughter-father triangle, object-relations theorists privilege human interaction over separation. Moreover, claims Chodorow, "a girl does not turn absolutely from her mother to her father, but adds her father to her world of primary objects" in the process of identity formation. The question of subjectivity then arises: In what way does the infant establish its subjectivity without wholly abandoning its attachment to primary objects? Or, how would Luce Irigary's desire to be "so close to the mother [you] and already so far" or "both of them [us] to be present" (1985: 61) be possible?

Chodorow answers this by explaining that an infant's subjectivity is established through attachment to an object besides the mother. The separation of the infant from the mother only occurs if there is another object to attach to. Although such a transition may seem to resemble Freudian substitution, "objects of attachment" (p. 62) differ insofar as total abandonment of the mother is not the expected outcome. Janice L. Doane and Devon L. Hodges note that "separateness can only be established by a sense of relatedness to and difference from another. This ambivalent process of separation and individuation involves loss as well as gain" (1992: 42). In other words, the subject manages to view its position as a differentiated being, as it can manage to relate to something other than the mother. Therefore, such separateness comprises the loss of sameness and the gain of difference.

Donald Winnicott claims that such loss, i.e., separation from the mother, is inevitable in the process of subject formation, but does not necessarily have to be traumatic. He suggests that a healthy transition from total dependence to substantial independence can be achieved through transitional objects, which are the infant's first "not-me" objects. The function of these objects is to guarantee the continuity of the experience of wholeness with the external world, but at the same time increase the outside reality. As the infant does not perceive these objects as totally separate from her/him, s/he does not perceive them as threatening external realities but rather as a third reality that is necessary to ensure continuity of the experience with the mother. For instance, in the case of a comfort blanket used to replace the mother's breast, one might say that the transitional object is neither within nor without, or in other words, it is neither the baby nor the object itself.

From the outset, transitional objects provide an illusionary unity as created by the infant and, in Winnicott's theory, this comprises the child's "primary creativity" where fantasy and reality overlap, as these objects can signify whatever the infant likes, and it can treat them in any way it chooses. Winnicott proposes an "in-between space," also called a "transitional space," in which there is neither separation nor connection, but in which there exist simultaneously subjectivity and objectivity and boundaries that are both there and not there. This space also harbors imagination and creativity as a transition from total dependence to relative dependence by depending on the objects created by the infant's imagination and creativity. Winnicott assumes that this space between mother and infant, which is created by adopting and playing with "transitional objects," is the first step for a child in gaining control of its own world. In this respect, he states the following: "to control what is outside one has to do things, not simply to think or to wish, and doing things takes time. Playing is doing" (2005: 55). Moreover, by playing, the infant creates its own world.

The stage that follows the child's ability to play with toys emerges when s/he learns to play "in the presence of someone who … the person loves" and who is therefore available to "reflect back what happens in the playing" (Winnicott, 2005: 64):

> The searching can come only from desultory formless functioning or perhaps from rudimentary playing, as if in a neutral zone. It is only here in this unintegrated state of the personality, that which we call creative, can appear. This, if reflected back, but only if reflected back, becomes part of the organized individual personality and eventually this in summation makes the individual to be, to be found, and eventually enables himself or herself to postulate the existence of the self (Winnicott, 2005: 64).

Without adult interference in the child's play, the child seeks recognition and discovers himself through the mirroring face of the mother that reflects the child's nonsense (Winnicott, 2005: 75) without judgment. Only then can the child be found and "the details dealt with in this way become part of you, and do not die" (Winnicott, 2005: 82). Winnicott expands his theory by pointing out that:

> It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation (2005: 87)

Stressing the relationship between creativity and life, and noting that by engaging in creativity the infant feels significant in the world it occupies, Winnicott claims that without such imagination, the infant would consider itself insignificant, viewing the world from outside as something to which s/he must adapt. Without denying the existence of reality by means of "not-me objects," fantasy is permitted for a while in order for the infant to safely achieve awareness of objective reality.

Just as object-relations theorists stress the importance of objects in the process of child development, the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* efficiently rely on the steps of this theory to demonstrate the same growth. Wilhelm Dilthey suggests that the *Bildungsroman* presents "a culture of inwardness" (1985: 272), as the focus is on the psychologically motivated development of a central character. Mikhail Bakhtin calls it "the image of man in the process of becoming" (1986: 19) and, according to Jerome Hamilton Buckley, this process should include the elements of "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for vocation and a working philosophy" (1974: 18). As a result, it becomes clear that this literary genre frequently relies on the withdrawal of the child protagonist from the social world in order to follow a course of self-development. It is through this withdrawal that s/he manages to observe the clash between his/her poetic ideals and the materialist reality. The *Bildungsroman* thus employs a protagonist that is so divided between utopian dreams and real facts that George Lukács has termed it the "romance of disillusionment," (1914: 146) illustrating how the materialist world is in opposition to the protagonist's poetic ideals and thus the period of withdrawal from the social world is the period of illusions. Nevertheless, this period is only a step through development, and must be adapted to the external reality if the protagonist is to continue to be a social individual. Therefore, according to Manfred Engel, rather than an eternal existence in the illusionary world, the self is formed through "some sort of compromise or even synthesis between mere self-realization, subjectivity, and a mere adaptation to reality,

objectivity" (2008: 266). In short, the *Bildungsroman* fictionalizes the process of cultivation "within a field structured by forces of power and authority" (Donald, 1992: 173), which ends with the character's recognition of his or her stance in the world by becoming a part of the social environment and its attendant thriving harmony between the external and internal worlds. Thus, it can be seen as a process of individualization that follows socialization.

The relationship between object-relations theory and *Bildungsroman* can be summarized by the function of illusion in the process of individuation. While the infant is "illusioned" due to his/her creative ability during the transition from dependence to independence, the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* is "illusioned" as a result of the clash between his/her poetic ideals and the materialist reality. Although both models seem to focus on a similar process, the plot structure of the *Bildungsroman* constrains the independent potential for play and creativity. Martin Swales points to this limitation, which ensues from the "recognition that practical reality–marriage, family, a career–is a necessary dimension of the hero's self-realization" (1978: 51). Therefore, while in object-relations theory, the infant's self is constructed through unconstrained (albeit monitored) play and creativity, in the *Bildungsroman,* which involves the progression from adolescence to adulthood, the self is constructed through play and creativity that is necessarily constrained as a result of the unbending social order.

This function of illusion leading to disillusionment strengthens the reading of *Atonement* as a novel about the significance of play and creativity as part of the individuation process. The novel opens by introducing the thirteen-year-old Briony and the play she has written as a welcome present for her brother Leon, in the summer of 1935. Her sister Cecilia, cousin Lola, and Lola's twin brothers are also visiting the family home. When these characters arrive in this setting (discussed further below as an allegory of the plot structure of the story), Briony writes that she feels secondary and obliged to "dispel her insignificance" (McEwan, 2001: 72). This desire to be significant leads Briony to turn her attention first to Robbie.

> She [Briony] said, "If I fell in the river, would you save me?"
> "Of course."
> He was bending over the basket as he said this and he heard, but did not see, her jump in […] There was no choice - he stepped into the water, shoes, jacket and all […] He pushed her onto the bank and, with great difficulty in his sodden clothes, struggled out himself.
> "Thank you," she kept saying. "Thank you, thank you".
> "That was a bloody stupid thing to do."
> […]
> "Do you know why I wanted you to save me?"

"No."

[…]

"Because I love you."

[…]

He restrained an impulse to laugh.

[…]

Lines, surely from one of her books, one she had read lately, or one she had written.

He said, "That's all right. But don't do it again, for me or anyone else. Promise. (2001: 218)

In the romance genre, longing is usually directed at a person, someone who can be considered potential husband material. Courtship is always semi-public and practiced through certain conventions, while marriage is the ultimate goal for young women. Briony's design of the above scene evokes characters in Jane Austen novels, such as Jane Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* or Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, who view marriage as "a maneuvering business" (Ch. 5). In a similar fashion, Briony creates a scene to maneuver Robbie into loving her, but Robbie's answer does not align with her expectation, leading her to step aside and discard her desire to be an Austen-like heroine who lives happily ever after. What is also specific to Jane Austen novels, and similar to Briony's writing, is that Austen wrote not from observing reality, but from reading imitations of reality. She has therefore been called an artist who imitates the imitation. As Richard Simpson explains:

> The realism of her [Jane Austen] works arose, not from direct imitation of nature, but from looking through and amusing herself with, the aberrations of pretended imitators- that is she trained herself into an artist less through observation than through reading other fiction which purported to represent life. (2001: 129)

The technique of Austen's writing has led to the general consensus that her materials have certain limitations, and do not transgress the characteristics of their period. As an imitator of Austen, Briony also indirectly imitates Austen's limitations, until confronted with the fact that Austen's discourse does not help her understand the happenings around her. When Briony places herself by the window and watches Cecilia and Robbie by the lake, she can only make sense of the event to a certain point:

> Closer within the boundaries of the balustrade, were the rose gardens and, nearer still, the Triton fountain, and standing by the basin's retaining wall was her sister, and right before her was Robbie Turner. There was something rather formal about the way he stood, feet apart, head held

back. A proposal of marriage. Briony would not have been surprised. She herself had written a tale in which a humble woodcutter saved a princess from drowning and ended by marrying her. What presented here fitted well… What was less comprehensible, however, was how Robbie imperiously raised his hand now, as though issuing a command which Cecilia dared not disobey… At his insistence she was removing her clothes, and at such speed. She was out of her blouse, now she had let her skirt drop to the ground and was stepping out of it, while he looked on impatiently, hands on hips…Briony leaned back against a wall and stared unseeingly down the nursery's length… At the time there may have been no precise form of words; in fact, she may have experienced nothing more than impatience to begin writing. (2001:37-38)

Briony first sees the scene as a marriage proposal, a typical romance element; however, she later assumes that Robbie is attempting to dominate Cecilia, an element that does not fit in with what she is accustomed to reading and writing. Although, in reality, Robbie is trying to help Cecilia when she decides to jump in the fountain to retrieve the pieces of the broken vase, Briony's perception is clearly distorted, and implicit in this distortion is that she views the scene as one that will eventually benefit her. Rather than rushing to help or "save" Cecilia (for in Briony's perception, Cecilia needs to be saved from her attacker), Briony experiences "impatience to begin writing" about it. This resembles a third-person narration, where the narrator observes in order to narrate. Therefore, in this crucial scene, Briony creates herself ironically as a third-person narrator of Cecilia's story, watching her from a distance[†], in contrast to Austen who writes not through direct observation but through her readings. The question then arises: Why does Briony suddenly subvert the conventions of the romance genre by dispensing with the possibility of a marriage proposal, thus moving away from her Austen-like narration?

"To answer this question, it is worth examining Briony's relation with the other women in the house to see the link between her subversion of the conventions of the genre and her rejection of the conventions laid down by the female characters in the Tallis house as a means to assert her independence.

[†]The intertextual link between Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* and *Atonement* can be seen, in terms of Briony's imaginative capacity, as a revision of the nameless governess's imagination in *The Turn of the Screw*. The governess assumes that she is the only one to save the household from the dangers when she declares that "our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship. Well, I was strangely at the helm" (156), which will allow her to be the heroine. Briony's intention is similar as, by being the provider of the solution, she will cease to be insignificant.

Although Emily is represented as a mother who is unavailable to her children, her relation to Briony is worth noting with regard to how it illustrates the Winnicottian transition from dependency to independence. In the following passage, Emily reads the play Briony has written:

> with the author's arm around her shoulder... She took her daughter in her arms, onto her lap - ah, that hot smooth little body she remembered from infancy, and still not gone from her, not quite yet -... (2001: 4).

The symbolic wholeness of mother and daughter is cherished by the mother and happily received by the daughter, yet Emily is painfully aware that her daughter will move away from her, as Emily herself did from her mother, and as Cecilia has moved away from Emily. Such wholeness shows that the physical boundary between mother and daughter has not yet been entirely breached. However, Briony's play may be seen as a Winnicottian object of creativity and imagination that ensures the continuity of the mother-child bond while slowly increasing the dose of external reality. In addition to the play as a transitional object, or as the child's not-me object that links the mother's presence and absence, Briony, who is a major devotee of nineteenth-century novels, and her attachment to her play, presents an alternative perspective. As Marianne Hirsch notes:

> ... in nineteenth century realist writing by women the maternal is located precisely in the interplay between absence/silence and determining significance. It is the mother's absence which creates the space in which the heroine's plot and her activity of plotting can evolve. (1989: 57)

Thus, as a typical nineteenth-century woman writer, Briony writes to negotiate her mother's absence. Such absence is also a crucial characteristic of the *Bildungsroman,* since the development of the child relies on the distance between the self and the environment. However, both ideas, that she is trying to move away from her mother and that she wishes to reconnect with her, arrive at the same conclusion: fantasy and reality overlap as a consequence of the mother's position in the child's life, while the absence of the mother eventually engenders imagination and creativity. As Freud notes, such absence finds its fulfillment in the creative work (1907: 143) and for this reason is crucial in the work of imagination.

Hence, one can conclude that the novel implicitly underlines the absence of the mother as a trigger for Briony's writing. Furthermore, with the arrival of other characters to the Tallis house, we see how Briony unconsciously removes all the substitute mother figures around her, so that she may continue to benefit from their absence to fuel her creative ability. However, this absence from which her creativity would benefit is continuously restricted with the appearance of other female characters, such as Cecilia and Lola. As another dominant female character

in the novel, Cecilia has provided a motherly tenderness to Briony when she is most vulnerable.

> Cecilia had always loved to cuddle the baby of the family. 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. (2001: 41)

Perceiving Cecilia as a substitute mother for Briony allows for an additional symbolic mother/daughter relationship to be posited. Since the mother-daughter bond becomes fluid with the absence of the mother, when Cecilia reappears during Briony's semi-dependent development, she feels threatened at the possibility that she will be deprived of the transitional space, and consequently of her creativity. However, we can also see that removing Cecilia from the stage in order to formulate a space in which to create is not Briony's sole motive; she also distances herself from Cecilia so that she can observe and write about her.

In addition to a metaphorical mother/daughter relationship, Cecilia and Briony's relationship can also be seen as an example of sibling rivalry, wherein the different effect of Cecilia on Briony in comparison to that of her mother emerges. Through her relationship to Cecilia, Briony is presented with and must cope with an alternative role, that of a younger sister. Toni McNoran claims that a sister is "someone who is both ourselves and very much not ourselves - a special kind of double" (1985: 7) and that sisters are "like two blossoms in one stem" (Rosetti: 188), desiring to occupy separate places in the world. Although object-relations theorists would stress the fundamentality of relating to someone, the sisterly bond requires polarization in the process of individuation. In the same manner, Amy K. Levin points out that "the identical position of sisters within the family further created a need to insist on difference" (1992: 17) and, as Louise Bernikow argues, "Competition seems to be the language we use for the process of separation; seems to be the kind of activity we throw up against the desire to merge" (1981: 99). What these suggestions show is that sisters compete to prove their difference from each other, yet the "desire to merge" is worth noting.

Competition can thus be seen as a language of separation that is a prevalent theme in Jane Austen novels, as presented between two sisters who seek to draw the attention of the same man. In *Persuasion*, for example, Henrietta and Louisa compete for Captain Wentworth's attention, while in *Mansfield Park*, Maria and Julia compete for Henry Crawford[‡]. In *Atonement*, likewise, Briony and Cecilia

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[‡]For further analysis of the reproduction of Jane Austen's novels in *Atonement*, please see Juliette Wells, "Shades of Austen in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*": *The Jane Austen Journal* 30 (2008): 101-12.

both compete for Robbie's attention. However, none of these Austen scenes has a sexual inclusion. Therefore, branding Robbie a sex maniac and unjustly accusing him of raping Lola are not guided by Briony's readings of romantic novels, but are the product of her primary creativity.

After Lola's rape, Briony is adamant to prove that Robbie is a sex maniac, by showing the letter he has written to Cecilia, which contains erotic language.

> She […] was taking the stairs two at a time, energized now by a sense of doing and being good, on the point of springing a surprise that could earn her praise. It was rather like that Christmas morning sensation of being about to give a present that was bound to cause delight, a joyful feeling of blameless self-love. (2001: 165)

According to Erin O'Dwyer, Robbie's mistaken letter to Cecilia is a "signifier in the story" (2016: 179) as "it displaces the characters from their original position" (2016: 185) by unfolding the main secret of the novel that Robbie and Cecilia have mutual feelings. Deriving pleasure from revealing her sister's secret, the reader is encouraged to view Briony's action as the outcome of an allegorical fight between the two women that involves refuting the general assumption that women are the same and have the same interests in life. What is more, with this creation Briony manages to create some measure of differentiation and signification within the expectations of both the genre and her home context.

Leaving the borders of the genre and the Tallis house with her false accusation of Robbie, she, in ignorance, steps into the adult world and thus the novel takes the shape of a *Bildungsroman*.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this article has presented the ways in which Briony creates a fictional world for herself and removes the significant female characters around her, especially her sister, so that she can create a space in which to write. In Winnicottian object-relations theory, this may be termed a transitional space, which harbors imagination and allows the infant to transit from total to relative dependence. Briony, however, finally realizes that her significance is constrained by the very novels she seeks to mimic. Therefore, I have argued, her ignorance of the reality of the external world and her consequent dependence on her surroundings is an outcome of the novels she reads and learns from. Moreover, this article has drawn a symbolic link between the Tallis house and the romance genre, both of which limit Briony's significance and creativity. She is both constrained by the house she grows up in and thus by the genre that forms her. However, as this article has shown, Briony's claim that Robbie is a sex maniac subverts the conventions of the genre and thus comprises a metaphorical declaration of her

difference from her home context. Therefore, I argue, as well as seeing the novel as a process of atonement, as Ian McEwan intends it to be, it can also be read as Briony's process of "becoming" in the Bakhtinian sense.

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