



Ethics of Storytelling: The Wounds of Deception and Pseudo-PTSD in *Atonement*

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Abstract

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) is one of the most controversial novels due to the complexity of its narratives and characters, particularly its central character. Therefore, this article deals with pseudo-PTSD in *Atonement*, examining how trauma is delineated, built, and manipulated within the metafictional framework of the novel. While classical PTSD is depicted through forced memories of traumatic events, McEwan's protagonist produces an unreliable narrative of guilt and redemption that parodies trauma without genuine experience. This study explores the character's psychological state, arguing that her self-imposed suffering functions as a simulacrum of PTSD—what can be termed *pseudo-PTSD*—a term coined by Rosen & Tylor (2007). Drawing their perspective, the article examines Briony's retrospective storytelling as both a coping mechanism and an act of self-mythologization, highlighting the ethical and epistemological implications of traumatised narrator, narrating trauma and traumatic narrative. Ultimately, *Atonement* challenges the reliability of memory and the legitimacy of self-inflicted psychological 'wounds', raising critical questions about authorship, responsibility, and the commodification of suffering in fiction.

Keywords: Atonement, unreliable narrative, trauma, memory, pseudo-PTSD

Introduction

Pseudo-PTSD, or pseudo-post-traumatic stress disorder, is a term used to describe a

condition where individuals exhibit symptoms similar to PTSD without having experienced a traumatic event (Rosen & Tylor, 2007, pp.201-202). This concept is particularly relevant in the analysis of Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* where the protagonist, Briony Tallis, falsely accuses Robbie Turner of a crime he did not commit, leading to his imprisonment and separation from her sister, Cecilia. The guilt and remorse Briony experiences as a result of her actions can be seen as a form of pseudo-PTSD, as she suffers from symptoms such as intrusive memories, emotional numbness, and difficulty sleeping. The construction of narrative time and memory in *Atonement* plays a crucial role in portraying Briony's experience of pseudo-PTSD. The novel is divided into three parts, with the first part focusing on the events leading up to Robbie's arrest, the second part depicting Briony's experiences as a nurse during World War II, and the third part revealing the truth about what happened that fateful day. This fractured narrative mirrors Briony's fragmented memory and the disjointed nature of her thoughts and emotions. Additionally, the novel explores the theme of atonement, as Briony seeks redemption for her actions by becoming a successful author and writing a novel that serves as a confession and apology to Robbie and Cecilia. However, the question of whether Briony's atonement is genuine or merely a form of self-absolution is left open to interpretation, adding to the complexity of her character and the novel as a whole. In conclusion, the concept of pseudo-PTSD in *Atonement* sheds light on the psychological complexities of guilt, memory, and redemption. By examining Briony's experience through this lens, we gain a deeper understanding of her character and the impact of her actions on herself and those around her.

Discussion: Pseudo-PTSD in *Atonement*

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* investigates themes of trauma, memory, and guilt complex, particularly through the encounters of Robbie Turner and Briony Tallis. While Robbie suffers the direct dreadfulness of World War II, Briony encounters a different kind of psychological burden—one rooted in guilt and self-imposed responsibility. The concept of pseudo-PTSD, coined by Rosen, G. M., & Taylor, S. (2007), which can be described as a condition wherein an individual displays symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) without having experienced a direct serious trauma, is particularly pertinent to Briony's character development. Her psychological state, largely hammered by guilt over falsely charging Robbie of rape, side with with key features of PTSD but diverges in major ways. This discussion explores how Briony's experiences in *Atonement* can be understood through the lens of pseudo-PTSD and how McEwan uses this condition to extend the novel's engagement with trauma and guilt.

PTSD is by tradition labelled as a mental health disorder resulting from an encounter to real or pressured death, serious injury, or sexual violence. It is characterized by invasive thoughts, avoidance behaviors, negative alterations in perception and mood, and intensified arousal reactions. The effect of their traumatic experience keeps exposing them to the sense of being abused by their traumatic experiences, S. Foo (2022) states: "Sufferers of complex PTSD have undergone continual abuse—trauma that has occurred over a long period of time, over the course of years." (p. 12)

However, pseudo-PTSD differs in that it does not stem from personal exposure to life-threatening trauma but rather from indirect or self-imposed psychological distress. In

Briony's case, her trauma is rooted in her recognition of the irremediable harm she has inflicted on Robbie and Cecilia. While she does not sustain physical danger, she experiences an intense psychological disturbance, leading to symptoms that echo PTSD, such as obsessive thoughts, emotional freezing, and a persistent need for atonement. Moreover, one can say that the pseudo-PTSD comes as a result of her constant wish to be a victim in the scenarios she creates for herself and for people around her. She feigns a sense of victimization as a defense mechanism to escape the burden of the guilt she inflicts on Robbie and Celia. This calls to the attention LaCapra's (2001) concept of "structured trauma", which he coined to distinguish it from "historical trauma". The former refers to the painted or pseudo trauma and the latter to the actual one. Briony structures PTSD to paint her world of guilt and suffering.

One of the most significant aspects of pseudo-PTSD in *Atonement* is Briony's neurotic recreation of her past mistake. She wants to live with this sense for a lifetime. Throughout the novel, she repeatedly retreats to the moment she erroneously accused Robbie, exhibiting an inability to move beyond this event. This is similar of PTSD's hallmark symptom of unpleasant tormenting memories, in which individuals are possessed by traumatic events. However, unlike traditional PTSD victims, Briony does not reexperience a direct personal trauma but rather the outcomes of her own actions. This emphasizes how guilt can produce pseudo-PTSD symptoms, highlighting the notion that psychological agony is not exclusively correlated to external events but can also stem from moral damage and self-awareness.

Furthermore, Briony's avoidance actions side with PTSD symptoms. She separates herself from her family, particularly from Cecilia, as a means of handling her guilt. This avoidance is not because of a concern of physical threat but rather an repulsion to facing the effects of her actions. PTSD victims often avoid reminders of their trauma; similarly, Briony evades direct admission of her past, instead directing her emotions into her writing. Her wish to become a nurse during the war can be seen as an shot to symbolically reverse the harm she caused, echoing the PTSD-driven drive to find meaning or salvation in suffering.

McEwan's depiction of Briony's psychological condition questions conventional understandings of trauma by exhibiting how self-ridden guilt can evidence symptoms akin to PTSD. By edging Briony's distress as a form of pseudo-PTSD, the novel proposes that the mind can create its own scenarios of trauma in response to ethical misconduct. This adds complication to the narrative's encounter with atonement, as Briony's suffering, though deep, is eventually self-self-inflicted. Unlike Robbie, who encounters real war trauma, Briony's trauma is stewed and modeled by her assessment of guilt and liability. This note raises moral inquiries about the nature of grief and salvation, particularly whether pseudo-PTSD permits Briony the ethical authority to pursue redemption through her world of fiction.

Examining Pseudo-PTSD in *Atonement*

Sexual assault trauma is a well-studied form of trauma recognized for its detrimental effects, including psychopathology, depressive disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and shame, often resulting in decreased coping self-efficacy (Dworkin, 2018, p.1011; Dworkin et al., 2021, p.497). It is characterized by the victim's significant loss of bodily control during the assault, undermining their sense of security and leading to heightened vulnerability, as well as a diminished sense of control over recovery and self-efficacy (Ullman & Peter-

Hagene, 2014). There is no direct trauma of sexual assault in the novel *Atonement*. The character at the center of the novel is Briony Tallis. The events that begin as a result of Briony's misunderstanding and faulty testimony play an important role in the later parts of the novel. 13-year-old Briony Tallis witnesses the romantic relationship of her older sisters, Cecilia and Robbie, in the library of their home. In fact, the relationship between Cecilia and Robbie is willing and mutual, but Briony mistakenly perceives what has happened as rape, and this misunderstanding mixed with jealousy causes her to accuse Robbie of the rape of her cousin Lola. This event has a deep impact on the characters in the later parts of the novel and determines the course of the story.

It is important to emphasize here that Briony grows up in an environment that fosters her fantasies. As a child, she creates her own world by writing about fairy tales and fictional stories and scenarios that she creates in her mind.

She was one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so. Whereas her big sister's room was a stew of unclosed books, unfolded clothes, unmade bed, unemptied ashtrays, Briony's was a shrine to her controlling demon: the model farm spread across a deep window ledge consisted of the usual animals, but all facing one way—toward their owner—as if about to break into song, and even the farmyard hens were neatly corralled. In fact, Briony's was the only tidy upstairs room in the house. 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 to be found standing about her dressing table—cowboys, deep-sea divers, humanoid mice—suggested by their even ranks and spacing a citizen's army awaiting orders. (McEwan, p.6).

This need for control reflects her inclination to retreat into a fantasy world of her own making. This is why her interest in literature is an example of her submission to the world of fiction and fantasies. In this world of fiction, she is the one who controls the narrative of her stories. She wants to set the order she has in her mind. Her desire to be the controller may stem from her pseudo PTSD symptoms to achieve something through writing. Emily Sgarlata thinks that “Briony is rewriting history, propelling McEwan's question of whether or not the conscience can be relieved through fiction, or whether the act of writing is ultimately self-serving” (Sgarlata, 76).

While *Atonement* addresses themes such as guilt, regret, forgiveness, and the fluidity of time, it does not directly engage with the topic of sexual assault. Rather, the novel's central tragic misunderstanding and false testimony demonstrate the evolving nature of characters and relationships over time. However, there is a need for extensive research on the psychological impact and repercussions of false allegations of sexual assault, particularly regarding survivors' well-being. Such research offers valuable insights into the psychological, emotional, and societal effects of this form of trauma. By examining how the novel *Atonement* portrays the trauma resulting from false allegations of sexual assault, we can gain a deeper understanding of how narrative time and memory construction are intertwined. Although the novel does not explicitly address the trauma of sexual assault, it intricately explores this issue. The trauma experienced by Briony can be seen in terms of Pseudo PTSD. Briony lives in a world of victimization. She actually creates a world in which she is a victim of her alleged trauma. “The truth had become as ghostly as invention (p.30)”. This distortion of memory illustrates the impact of guilt on her sense of self and reality. As Rosen and Tylor observe: “Factitious PTSD may be associated with bizarre claims of satanic ritual abuse, UFO abductions, or memories of past-life abuse recovered during age regression therapies.” (Rosen & Tylor, 2007, p.205). Taking into account that the novel is narrated in retrospection after so many years, from an old woman who suffers from amnesia,

one can suggest that revisited memories of Briony's past while narrating the story might delude her to take the role of the victim in this drama she writes for her and for her audience. She apparently lives in Pseudo or Fictitious PTSD, and she assigns the roles of victims and victimizers as she deems suitable to her scheme.

One can observe that the trauma fictionalized by Briony profoundly influences not only her own life but also the lives of those around her. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident how this trauma shapes Briony's later experiences and relationships. Through this exploration, the author presents false allegations of sexual assault not merely as isolated incidents, but as events with lasting and profound impacts, offering readers a nuanced portrayal of trauma's enduring effects.

The novel portrays its narrative in a fragmented and subjective manner, employing a structure that shifts back and forth in time, thereby treating time variably. This manipulation of temporal elements enables readers to perceive events from multiple perspectives and comprehend the ramifications of choices and their subsequent consequences. As observed by Ognjanovski et al. (2018), such narrative manipulations have the potential to disrupt conventional communication patterns (p. 3711), thereby influencing characters' understanding and interpretation of events within the novel's context. Moreover, the temporal manipulation in *Atonement* offers an alternate viewpoint into the motivations and emotions of its characters.

She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view; her excitement was in the prospect of freedom, of being delivered from the cumbrous struggle between good and bad, heroes and villains. None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly good. She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral. She need only show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive (pp.30-31).

Here, the novel's emphasis on shifting perspectives and the subjective nature of memory is highlighted. Briony's recounting of events highlights the malleability of truth and the way memories evolve, blurring the line between objective reality and personal interpretation. This complex narrative strategy urges readers to consider the reliability of memories and how the understanding of past events can change over time, aligning with the novel's exploration of guilt, perception, and the search for redemption. This perspective underscores how memory becomes both a tool of guilt and a mechanism for self-justification, aligning with pseudo-PTSD symptoms. This complexity in narrative structure complicates readers' comprehension of the novel and guides them towards an understanding of the true sequence of events. For instance, an incident at the outset of the novel sets off a chain of events near the pond at Briony's residence, profoundly impacting her life. This incident is recounted from various perspectives and time frames, enabling readers to evaluate events from diverse angles. Similarly, in the concluding chapters of the novel, previously undisclosed details regarding events and the intricate relationships between characters are revealed through information presented from different temporal contexts. Such revelations may compel readers to reassess preceding events and the actions of characters. Thus, the novel's manipulation of time aids readers in achieving a deeper understanding of events and comprehending the intricacies of the narrative. The novel's temporal play influences readers' processing and interpretation of events, enabling them to empathize with the characters' internal struggles and the repercussions of their actions, as well as contemplate the theme of redemption. Flashbacks and flashforwards facilitate a more profound understanding of characters' experiences. Yet, when examining the nature of those flashbacks, we can assume that what Briony passes through might be a result of confusion, panic attack or even a result of fictionalized rape story. Rosen and Tylor believe that "Posttraumatic stress symptoms also

overlap with other diagnostic constructs that may just as well account for the symptom criteria of PTSD (e.g., depression, panic disorder, specific phobia)", (Rosen & Tylor, 2007, p.206). This is why we can assume that Briony's trauma might be a projection of any of the other disorders.

Consequently, the effects and aftermath of trauma resulting from a false allegation of sexual assault can be more effectively comprehended. Additionally, the structure of memory enriches the novel's thematic depth. Conflicts and distortions in characters' memories underscore the impact of disorder confusion. Therefore, an examination of the novel's narrative temporality and its portrayal of memory structure can enhance our comprehension of how the trauma associated with a false allegation of sexual assault is depicted and how readers perceive this thematic element.

An in-depth evaluation of Briony Tallis's mood and psychological state is essential. Her trauma can be best understood through the lens of pseudo-PTSD, a condition characterized by symptoms resembling those of PTSD despite the absence of a direct traumatic event (Rosen & Tylor, 2007, p.201). Describing Briony's situation as "pseudo-trauma" would be a more precise and scholarly approach. Following a misinterpretation of events she witnessed as a young girl, Briony falsely accuses Robbie Turner, profoundly altering his life and leading Briony to endure overwhelming guilt and psychological distress in subsequent years. Psychological literature suggests that individuals who have not directly experienced trauma can exhibit symptoms akin to PTSD due to intense feelings of guilt, regret, and stress (Mosich, 2019, p.15). Briony's narrative can be viewed as a literary manifestation of this phenomenon.

Briony leaned back against a wall and stared unseeingly down the nursery's length. It was a temptation for her to be magical and dramatic, and to regard what she had witnessed as a tableau mounted for her alone, a special moral for her wrapped in a mystery. But she knew very well that if she had not stood when she did, the scene would still have happened, for it was not about her at all (p.29).

This illustrates how Briony's need for drama and control fueled her imagination, which ultimately led her to act without fully understanding the consequences. It reflects her psychological state, where reality and perception blur, forming the basis of her pseudo-PTSD. This inclination towards viewing events through an embellished, self-referential lens illustrates how her guilt and narrative manipulation exacerbate her psychological turmoil, aligning with the symptoms of pseudo-trauma observed in her later life.

The novel that Briony writes serves as a means for her to reconstruct the events she witnessed, offering a pathway to mitigate her profound guilt. This narrative act underscores the potency of storytelling; Briony effectively manipulates her memories by crafting her own rendition, thus transforming her symptoms resembling PTSD into a manifestation of pseudo-PTSD. Throughout the novel, the boundary between Briony's recollections and actuality becomes increasingly indistinct, laying the groundwork for the psychological distress she endures. This manipulation of memory and narrative contributes to Briony's heightened sense of culpability and exacerbates her experience of pseudo-PTSD. Briony's endeavor for redemption through her writing can be interpreted as a coping mechanism. Her creation of a novel within the novel represents an effort to manage and reframe not only her personal narrative but also the narratives of those she impacts. This mirrors the behavior of individuals with pseudo-PTSD, who often construct or embellish narratives in an attempt to rationalize their psychological symptoms.

While the focus often centers on Briony's manifestation of pseudo-PTSD, it is equally crucial to analyze its repercussions on Robbie and Cecilia. Robbie's unjust imprisonment and subsequent wartime experiences constitute genuine traumas. However, the imposition of a false narrative on him exacerbates his suffering, intensifying the impact of Briony's pseudo-PTSD-like behavior. This fabricated narrative amplifies his anguish, underscoring the profound ramifications of Briony's actions.

He was now staring into the water, and then he too was striding away, no doubt satisfied, round the side of the house. Suddenly the scene was empty; the wet patch on the ground where Cecilia had got out of the pond was the only evidence that anything had happened at all (p.29).

This scene captures Robbie's silent turmoil and the emotional weight carried by both him and Cecilia. It symbolizes the isolation and estrangement caused by Briony's actions, which not only impact Robbie's sense of justice but also force Cecilia into a position of unwavering loyalty and eventual separation from her family. Cecilia's steadfast belief in Robbie's innocence, leading to her estrangement, testifies to the enduring consequences of Briony's initial misjudgment and the collateral damage of her false account.

The trauma stemming from the false rape allegation in the novel not only impacts the individual experiences of its characters but also enriches the thematic depth of the narrative. This misapprehension resonates widely, affecting not only the main characters—such as Briony, Cecilia, and Robbie—but also other characters and the broader society depicted in the novel. Initially, Briony's fabrication and ensuing remorse significantly shape her character development and subsequent life choices. This narrative trajectory prompts an exploration of themes such as memory, reality, and unjust culpability throughout the novel. Similarly, Robbie's unjust accusation and subsequent punishment compel readers to contemplate notions of justice and injustice, while Cecilia's traumatic ordeal leaves a profound imprint on her emotional and psychological well-being. Furthermore, this misapprehension and its aftermath are intricately linked to the novel's temporal theme. Briony's recollections and narrative stance prompt readers to reassess their perception of reality and encourage contemplation on how events evolve over time and how memories are constructed. This narrative complexity not only adds layers to the novel's structure but also invites readers on a reflective journey deeper into the narrative fabric. In this context, the novel's exploration of pseudo-PTSD demonstrates a nuanced approach. Briony's experience highlights the complex psychological aspects of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, evident in her feelings of guilt and memory struggles. Additionally, her endeavor to acknowledge and rectify her errors underscores the influence of narrative construction on personal perception. Through her writing, Briony seeks to assert agency over her narrative, suggesting a coping mechanism in response to her traumatic past.

Caruth (1996) posits that trauma represents an experience that transcends the ordinary capacities of narrative expression, embodying the emotional and physical shock endured during the event. The profound and overpowering nature of trauma disrupts typical cognitive and emotional responses to events. It describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, often characterized by the delayed, uncontrolled, and repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). In this context, Caruth's narrative illustrates that trauma not only complicates the acceptance of the reality of the traumatic event but also obstructs the articulation of its traumatic impact. The complexities inherent in trauma underscore the limitations of narrative and the vulnerability of the human psyche in the face of trauma. The foundation of trauma can be understood as

arising from an unforeseen and catastrophic event that unfolds beyond an individual's control. Instead of being fully experienced, the event is registered by the mind and subsequently repressed, becoming entrenched in the unconscious to resurface under similar circumstances, resulting in a delayed response (Ashmawy, 2022, p. 20). In this context, the traumatic experiences of the characters in the novel *Atonement* can be analyzed through the lens of Caruth's framework. Robbie's memories and identity are distorted by the false accusation made by Cecilia's sister, Briony, an event that dramatically alters his life. His relationship with Cecilia and his wrongful conviction constitutes a traumatic event, the effects of which reverberate throughout Robbie's life. Following the incident, Robbie displays outbursts of anger and struggles in his interpersonal relationships due to his traumatic experiences. Additionally, he is plagued by memories of the traumatic event, which impede his daily functioning. Robbie's unjust imprisonment aligns with Caruth's definition of trauma. Subsequent to this event, Robbie is portrayed as emotionally stunted, with his memories haunting him incessantly. Cecilia's memories shape her love life and her encounters with tragedy. Particularly, her romantic involvement with Robbie and his unjust punishment leave enduring imprints on her memory. Cecilia's traumatic experience manifests in the tragic termination of her relationship with her beloved. Post this incident, Cecilia is depicted as emotionally stunted, preoccupied with memories of the traumatic event. According to Caruth, trauma can disrupt the conventional perception of time, compelling an individual to continually relive past events (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). Briony's narrative underscores the significance of memory and its accurate recollection. Her false testimony devastates the lives of Robbie and Cecilia, burdening Briony with the immense guilt that she carries throughout her life. Briony's traumatic experience lies in her role in the wrongful conviction of an innocent person due to her false testimony. Following this incident, Briony appears consumed by remorse, constantly preoccupied with memories of the traumatic event. Caruth argues that trauma can hinder an individual's comprehension of their own role and accountability, potentially leading to enduring effects of the traumatic experience.

Salman (2023) conducted a moral analysis of *Atonement*, contending that the narrative's exploration of the moral folly underpinning the false rape allegation serves to underscore the profound influence of moral considerations on the characters' experiences (p. 1931). Viewed through this lens, the significant impact of moral considerations on the characters' experiences is also evident in the trauma stemming from the false rape accusation. Briony's false testimony not only leads to Robbie's unjust punishment but also deeply affects her own life and the lives and relationships of others. The trauma resulting from this event transcends Robbie's wrongful accusation, evolving into a moral burden. Briony's overwhelming guilt instills in her a sense of moral responsibility, a burden she carries throughout her life. This suggests that the trauma arising from false accusations can impact not only the direct victims but also those who bear false witness. However, within the broader thematic framework of the novel, the traumatic aftermath of the false rape accusation warrants further examination. While this event shapes the trajectories of the characters' lives, it also prompts a reevaluation of moral values, societal norms, and personal relationships. Consequently, the trauma stemming from the false rape accusation serves to delve into the intricate complexities of moral reasoning and human relationships within the narrative of *Atonement*.

In her seminal work *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman delineates the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) into three fundamental categories. Firstly, she discusses the hyperarousal state, wherein individuals remain vigilant to protect themselves.

Manifestations of this state include heightened startle responses, disrupted sleep patterns, and exaggerated reactions to minor stimuli. Secondly, Herman addresses the phenomenon of intrusion, whereby individuals feel as though they are reliving traumatic events long after their occurrence. Triggers for such episodes can be seemingly inconsequential stimuli that evoke vivid recollections of the traumatic event. Lastly, Herman describes the state of constriction, wherein individuals feel passive and powerless, perceiving events differently from their usual context. These symptoms profoundly impact the daily lives of individuals with PTSD, leading them to perceive danger even in ostensibly safe environments (Herman, 1992, p. 25). Applying Herman's conceptual framework to Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* we can discern parallels between Briony's experiences and the symptoms of PTSD. Initially, Briony's actions stemming from her false testimony evoke symptoms of hyperarousal, as she is driven by self-preservation amidst misunderstandings and faulty memories, leading to constant anxiety and guilt. These symptoms significantly influence the relationships and decisions of characters throughout the narrative. Secondly, the theme of intrusion is notably exemplified in Briony's old age, where she grapples with past events, oscillating between reality and memory in an attempt to rectify her past transgressions. This underscores the enduring nature of trauma and the malleability of memory. Finally, the theme of constriction, particularly evident towards the novel's conclusion, illustrates how Briony perceives reality and copes with her remorse. Nonetheless, when we look at the events from another perspective, what Briony does falls within the realm of pseudo PTSD. She assumes the role of being a victim. She inflicts her false allegations on a character who is completely innocent.

However, with age, Briony ceases to resist and confronts her past, reflecting a possible pathway for dealing with the lingering effects of trauma and the fluid nature of memory formation. This evolution in her character can be seen in the line:

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 (p.252).

This emphasizes that Briony's recognition that true atonement is an elusive goal, underscoring her awareness of the limits of her attempts to seek forgiveness. Her journey becomes a testament to the human struggle to reconcile guilt and responsibility through memory and narrative. The act of writing serves as both a penance and a coping mechanism for Briony, illustrating how her attempts to confront her past are shaped by the fluid nature of memory. This reflects the complex interplay between trauma, memory, and the desire for redemption, reinforcing the idea that the effort to confront one's past, though imperfect, is significant in itself. Through Briony's story, *Atonement* presents the notion that the search for absolution may be unattainable, but the process of confronting and narrating one's trauma carries profound personal and societal insights. Consequently, *Atonement* emerges as a complex narrative that mirrors the symptoms of Pseudo PTSD, offering profound insights into the personal and societal repercussions of trauma, as well as the dynamics of memory formation and transformation over time.

Conclusion

A detailed analysis of trauma and pseudo-PTSD in Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* sheds

light on the complex psychological intricacies of guilt, memory, and atonement. The main character, Briony Tallis, falsely accuses Robbie Turner of a crime, leading to his imprisonment and separation from her sister, Cecilia. Despite not experiencing the traumatic event directly, Briony's guilt and regret manifest symptoms akin to PTSD, which can be viewed as pseudo-PTSD. The construction of narrative time and memory in *Atonement* plays a crucial role in conveying Briony's experience. The novel's fragmented narrative reflects Briony's fragmented memory, emphasizing the fractured nature of her thoughts and emotions. Moreover, the novel explores the theme of atonement; Briony seeks redemption for her actions by writing a novel that offers confession and apology to Robbie and Cecilia. By manipulating time and presenting the story in a disjointed manner, the narrative structure allows for a nuanced understanding of the events from multiple perspectives. The trauma experienced by the characters aligns with Caruth's conceptual model and overlaps with PTSD symptoms. The analysis also delves into the broader implications of trauma and false accusations, highlighting how such events profoundly affect not only the direct victims but also those who provide false testimony. From Judith Herman's conceptual framework of PTSD, the analysis reveals that Briony's initial experiences exhibit hyperarousal symptoms characterized by constant anxiety and feelings of guilt. Following these symptoms, the themes of intrusion and constriction become apparent in Briony's old age as she grapples with past events. This demonstrates the enduring nature of trauma and how memory evolves over time. In conclusion, *Atonement* presents a nuanced portrait of trauma, guilt, and atonement, inviting reflection on the complexities of memory, morality, and human relationships. With its intricate narrative structure and profound thematic depth, the novel offers valuable insights into the lasting effects of trauma and the complexities of personal and societal morality.

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