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Atonement

Briony Tallis is the main character, as well as the narrator of the famous novel “Atonement” by the English author and novelist, named Ian McEwan. The novel describes the tale of a little girl who commits a mistake due to her stubborn and selfish attitude and spends her adulthood and later life while repenting over that mistake. Although McEwan has depicted Briony as the narrator of the novel, it was revealed in the last part of the novel that she was also the writer of the story and was molding it, in the light of her guilt. The character of Briony is actually the trouble maker, as she makes things in her head, executes them and then repents over the results, which she can no longer change. The stubborn and selfish nature of Briony Tallis may have been the major cause of falsely accusing Robbie Turner as a rapist; however, with the passage of time, she realized her mistake and made an attempt to change things in fiction, as she was unable to change reality.

McEwan has presented the character of Briony as a melodramatic yet perfectionist character. Since an early age of thirteen years, she is passionate about writing and also has the skills. One of her greatest shortcomings is that she views the things from her own perspective and does not give them a deep thought. She does not try to explore the other meanings of some scenario and just believes whatever she views. She made a mistake of falsely accusing Robbie Turner of committing a rape. Robbie was romantically involved with her sister Cecilia and Briony thought that he was assaulting her sister. She was not ready to accept the fact that her sister was also interested in him and developed the perspective that he was not a good boy. When finally a misfortunate scenario of her cousin being raped took place, Briony was unable to think about the situation with a clear mind and accused Robbie of the act. Although, she knew that it was not Robbie but one of her brother’s friend who committed the crime, she blamed him because of her previous encounter and thinking about him.

The author of the novel has also explained the personality development of Briony through the novel. On the one hand, Briony was stubborn and selfish, on the other hand, she is also a perfectionist. So, when she realized that she had committed a mistake, she tried to amend the situation; however, it was too late. Robbie had to serve his time in prison, for the crime he never committed. On the other hand, her sister had cut ties with her. The guilt of ruining the life of her sister and falsely accusing an innocent man did not let her live peacefully. She was unable to pursue her passion for writing and became a nurse. She described in the novel that “How guilt refined the methods of self-torture, threading the beads of detail into an eternal loop, a rosary to be fingered for a lifetime (pp. 162).” Her guilt became even stronger when she saw the actual culprit living his life without any remorse. Not pursuing her passion and keeping in contact with her family was the type of self-torture, which she selected for herself.

One of quite mysterious detail about the character of Briony is shared in the last part of the novel by the author. Briony, who was actually the narrator of the author, revealed that she was manipulating the actual story. In an earlier part of the novel, she told the readers that Robbie and her sister reunited, after his release from the prison. Though they were not able to start their lives again while being together, however, they resumed their relationship, and she also shared her guilt with them. She also promised them to clear Robbie’s name and present the name of the actual criminal. In reality, Robbie and her sister died shortly after he was sent to war. Briony did not even get enough time to apologize to them, let alone make an effort to set things right. So, the writing was an attempt to let them live their lives together happily. She mentioned in the novel that

“The problem 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 (pp. 350).”

She had narrated the story in the latter part of her life and wanted to atone for her sins. She also tried to utilize her skills of writing to give a happy ending to her sister. She was unable to spend her life in peace because of the guilt towards her sister, as well as Robbie. The worst part of the scenario was that she was unable to amend the situation in reality and tried to find solace in amending things in fiction. However, she realized that she cannot make any difference now.

Briony is the character which depicts that people make mistakes due to their limited view and then waste their lives while repenting over it. Everything in the story was going in the right direction; however, one false accusation made by her changed the lives of many characters. The author has tried to show, through the character of Briony that some mistakes can change the whole life of people. Moreover, the guilt and repentance of fifty-nine years cannot set the things back on the right track.

**Work Cited**

McEwan, Ian. *Atonement*. Vol. 15. Random House, 2005:1-371.