



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

**Childhood's trauma in *The – Go Between*  
and *Atonement***

*An analysis of children's psychosexual development in the novels  
by L. P. Hartley and Ian McEwan*

**B.A. Essay**

**Irena Björk Filimonova**

**September 2014**

University of Iceland  
School of Humanities  
Department of English

# Childhood's trauma in *The Go – Between* and *Atonement*

*An analysis of children's psychosexual development in the  
novels by L. P. Hartley and Ian McEwan*

B.A.Essay

Irena Björk Filimonova

Kt.: 290188 - 4319

Supervisor: Mark Chamney Asch

September 2014

## Summary

This essay will analyze the representation of children's trauma and its impact on their future in the novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan and in the *The Go – Between* by L. P. Hartley, using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories. At first, Briony's and Leo's fantasy motifs will be examined, in which both children are looking for a wish fulfilment. Briony is an aspiring young writer, who lives in her imaginary world, and who confuses reality with fantasy, resulting in tragedy. Leo believes that he is a powerful magician; through magic he idealizes people and becomes involved in an adult's love affair. Then the focus will shift to the children's personality and psychosexual development. Using Freudian theories of three elements of personality, id, ego, superego, to analyze Leo's and Briony's psyche, the emphasis will be on unconsciousness and how it controls children's behaviour. Later on, discussion of the theory of psychosexual development will focus on the importance of the parents, and fixations at the various stages. Briony and Leo do not resolve successfully the phallic stage and their fixation leads to the tragedy. Furthermore to cope with a sense of guilt, Briony uses a defence mechanism, sublimation: she sublimates her guilt into fiction and lives with a sense of guilt all her life. On the other hand Leo represses his memory and desires, as the trauma in childhood shaped his perceptions of sexuality.

## **Table of Contents**

Summary .....	1
Table of Contents .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Wish fulfilment .....	4
Sigmund Freud's theory of personality and psychosexual development .....	7
Sublimation and repression .....	19
Conclusion.....	23
Works Cited .....	25

## Introduction

The main protagonist in *Atonement*, Briony, who is 14 years old, ruins an innocent man's life, because of her childish perception of the world and her misunderstanding of the relations between men and women and her will to protect her family. As the novel proceeds Briony's character undergoes a change: from egocentric and foolish she develops into a person who has remorse and conscience. It's no surprise that Ian McEwan was influenced by *The Go - Between* to write *Atonement*, as he says in an interview to the SFGate: "In fact, one of the books I read at the age 12 that in some way formed the seed for *Atonement* was L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go – Between*" (Wiegand 2002). In *The Go - Between* Leo, a 13-year-old school boy, becomes involved in a more complicated adult life. Both characters misinterpret the facts, the subtleties of language and behaviour of adults. To interpret the behaviour of grownups, children use their imagination, and this is the cause of the tragedy in both cases. In *Atonement* and in *The Go - Between* the narrators are trying to make a confession by writing down a memoir, recalling the events of the past. It took Briony more than 50 years to compose a novel, by writing she atones for her sin. Leo is only half a century later able to recall and narrate the facts of the summer of 1900, and both characters suffer because of actions committed in childhood. According to Sigmund Freud, Briony sublimates her guilt into literature, she writes a novel to get rid of the guilt. Freud believed that sublimation indicates maturity which allows men to lead a normal life: instead of storing unpleasant feelings in the unconsciousness, men sublimate them in art and literature. On the other hand, Leo represses his memory about the summer at Brandham Hall, and later his desires, because of his association with sexuality. Freud stated that sexual repression was an effect of life: entire life men repress their desires and wishes to

function normally. Freud believed that this repression is good for society, but too much of it can result in neurosis. First I will analyze how Briony's and Leo's unconsciousness is in control of their actions, as both children look for wish fulfilment through fantasy and magic. Freud believed that fantasy comes from an unsatisfied wish which will be never physically performed in reality; magic fulfils the same necessity, which is a human desire, and asserts men's presumption of his desires and beliefs. Then analysis will be focused on children's psychosexual and personality development and the impact on children's psyche of fixation during the stages of psychosexual development. Freud believed that sexual energy – libido – reattaches itself during every stage of a child's development; if the phases of psychosexual development are finished properly then the outcome is a normal personality. This paper will explore how trauma in childhood has an impact on the children's future – that is, how Leo's and Briony's early encounter with adulthood resulted in memory repression and sublimation of guilt – by using a Freudian psychoanalytic approach to explain how the unconsciousness controls children's actions.

### **Wish fulfilment**

*Atonement* opens by showing the Tallis family's excitement about the homecoming of Briony's older brother, Leon. To celebrate it, Briony writes an ambitious play, "Trials of Arabella." It was her "first excursion into drama" (Chapter 1). Briony is presented as a character who suffers from a lack of attention and finds a way to be noticed through her writings. She writes plays mainly to show off: "this was precisely why she loved plays, or her at least; everyone would adore her" (Chapter 1). Every time Briony presents her work or writing to her family and relatives, she becomes a centre of attention and receives compliments from her "audience." Already from the

beginning she is presented first as a writer but later as a child, as Brian Finney describes her in his article:

Briony, at the age of thirteen, is already committed to the life of a writer. She ruthlessly subordinates everything the world throws at her to her need to make it serve the demands of her own world of fiction. Brought up on a diet of imaginative literature, she is too young to understand the dangers that can ensue from modelling one's conduct on such an artificial world. (69)

Clearly Briony is a young, talented and ambitious writer. Her imagination leads to her misinterpretation of various scenes in the novel. From the beginning, her powerful fantasy acts to bewilder reality with fiction; Briony's explanation of life comes from the books she has read. Freud in his essay "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" argues that the causes of children's fantasies are unfulfilled wishes. For instance the motive of Briony's fantasies comes from her unfulfilled wish to become a recognisable writer. She is presented as a creative writer, who does the same as a child while playing: a child never gives up what gives it pleasure, only exchanges it for another thing. As with writing: when a child grows older, he gives up playing and creating his own world of fantasies, an imaginary world the grown child transfers to fiction. Briony creates her own world of fantasy, she takes it very seriously and puts a lot of trust in it. The play "The Trials of Arabella" is Briony's unfulfilled erotic wish, because according to Freud "the motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes and every single fantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfied reality" (439).

Although Leo like Briony seeks "wish fulfilment," he does it through magic; it confuses Leo's perceptions of the world and makes him believe in his omnipotence. Leo

is a 13-year-old-school boy, who is raised by his widowed religious mother and is fascinated by magic and zodiac signs. Leo agrees to spend a summer at Brandham Hall with his school fellow Marcus and his family. Leo is unaware that this summer of 1900 will change his life for ever. The boy believes that he is a powerful magician after he had cursed two boys who bullied him at school; after they fell from the roof Leo, as everyone else in the school, believed that it was the outcome of his magical experiments, not a coincidence. In *Totem and Taboo* Sigmund Freud states that magic must be used to protect man and to injure his enemies; he distinguishes between sorcery and magic. Sorcery he defines as the ability to have influence on spirits, by treating them as the normal human beings. Magic “must subject the processes of nature to the will of man” (131). The reason why men begin to exercise magic is quite simple – it is the wishes of men. Leo’s wish to punish his enemy, who humiliated him at school, was very strong. Freud distinguishes between two processes of magic: imitative and contagious. He explains the principle of imitative magic using rain: that is, if men want rain they must do something similar that resembles a rainfall. “It is the similarity between the performed action and the expected happening” (135). In the novel imitative magic is presented through Leo’s destruction of a plant of deadly nightshade. The plant serves as a representative of Marian and Ted’s relationship, and Leo believes that by destroying the plant he influences the upcoming tragedy. During contagious magic, it is not similarity that is a cause, but connection in space, it can be imaginary, because distance does not matter: “As thought does not recognize distances and easily brings together in one act of consciousness things spatially and temporally far removed, the magic world itself above spatial distance by telepathy, and treats a past association as if



it were a present one” (142). Contagious magic is shown, when Leo curses his offenders from the school (Prologue).

Furthermore Leo uses magic to idealize people at Brandham Hall. Leo first encounters woman’s beauty through Marcus’ sister Marian, “indeed its chiefest ornament, the Virgin of the Zodiac” (Chapter 15). She is having a secret affair with local farmer Ted Burgess, but she is engaged to Lord Trimingham. Leo agrees to carry notes between Marian and Lord Trimingham, because the boy believes that this match is appropriate. Both of them inhabit the upper class of his zodiac system, Marian because of her beauty, Lord Trimingham because of his aristocracy: he is seen as a Lord first and as a human second. Marian is aware that Leo is fascinated with her beauty, as she is the one who makes him feel conscious of his sexuality (Chapter 4), and she decides to use him as a postman between her and Ted. Marian made a lasting impression on Leo; he idealizes her and refuses to believe that she could have bad intentions in any of her actions. Leo feels privileged and special that he was chosen by Marian to be a messenger, for he feels that no other is worthy of her trust. In Chapter 4 Hartley describes how Leo experiences a “revelation” about his appearance, Marian points out to him that he is attractive. “I came back not only feeling it was glorious to be me, intimately satisfying to look like me.”

### **Sigmund Freud’s theory of personality and psychosexual development**

To analyze a human’s psyche Sigmund Freud developed the theory of three parts of personality: id, ego and super ego. Freud explained id as pleasure oriented. Id is completely unconscious: there man stores his most unacceptable thoughts, memories. Id follows the primary process: thinking that is primitive, dream-like thinking. Id always follows instincts, it does not care about morality and it is the greatest reservoir

of the libido. Leo's id is his fantasy-dreaming, it helps him to invent explanations concerning the notes he carries between two lovers:

Suppose he was in some kind of trouble and she was trying to help him out.

Suppose he was wanted by the police and she was trying to save him. Suppose he had committed a murder (the smear of blood made it easier to think he had).

Suppose only she knew about it and was keeping him informed of the movements of the police? This, being the most sensational, was also my preferred solution to the problem. (Chapter 9)

At the beginning Leo is flattered to be a postman and is called Mercury. As Viscount Trimingham explains to him, "he was a messenger of the gods. He went to and fro between them" (Chapter 8). Leo thinks that he is doing very important business for Marian that no one else could be capable of, and this role makes him feel exceptional.

Briony's id, imagination and her inability to distinguish the reality from the fiction lead to misinterpretations of various scenes and cause tragic events in the novel. The Tallis family resides in a beautiful "Adam Style" mansion. One day Briony's cousins come to visit them: seductive Lola and two little twin brothers. They experience family drama: their parents' divorce. Briony's cousins are not happy about participation in the play, and without asking them she arranges rehearsals and ascribes roles for everyone. Her small cousins argue and show disagreement, but their older sister Lola reminds them that they are guests and must obey. Briony does not care about the feelings of her cousins, she is not taking into account her cousins parents' drama. Her id is in control of her decisions, she wants to have this play to be done and it must be done, not matter

what. In this example her id is like a child who does not take “no” for an answer, the id does not take needs of others into consideration.

Freud believed that a child possesses a sexual energy – libido – from birth and that the id is the greatest reservoir of it. Briony directs her libido to fantasize about the relationship between Cecilia and Robbie. Briony is the youngest child of Mr. and Mrs. Tallis: her older sister Cecilia has come back for summer from Cambridge where she studies with Robbie Turner, who is a protégé of Mr. Tallis and a son of a devoted maid at the Tallis family mansion. There is sympathy between Robbie and Cecilia, but neither of them wants to admit it. One day Cecilia takes a priceless vase out to the fountain to clean it; Robbie offers to help her, accidentally breaks a piece of it, and the piece falls into the water. Cecilia decides to get it, and takes off her clothes in front of Robbie and plunges into the fountain. Accidentally Briony witnesses this scene from the nursery’s window, and her id is telling her that Robbie forced Cecilia to take off her clothes, maybe by threatening:

What was less comprehensible, however, was how Robbie imperiously raised his hand now, as though issuing a command which Cecilia dared not disobey. It was extraordinary that she was unable to resist him. 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. What strange power did he have over her? Blackmail? Threats? (Chapter 3)

She comes to this conclusion without any context of the event, only using her imagination and unable to understand the sexual tension, the “strange power” between Robbie and Cecilia. Briony thinks that Robbie’s intention was to humiliate Cecilia by

forcing her to take off her clothes. It does not cross her mind that it was Cecilia's initiative, and from then on Briony perceives Robbie as a threat to her family. The same day after the fountain incident, Robbie decides to write a letter to Cecilia, where he talks about his passionate feelings:

Then, after 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. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long". (Chapter 10)

Robbie discards this letter and writes a new one, using more appropriate language, but unfortunately he gives Briony the first version of it. Another important portrayal of Briony's id is when she because of curiosity opens the letter, which Robbie asked her to give to Cecilia. She acknowledges that her action is wrong, it was addressed to Cecilia, but Briony is assured that she has a right to know everything that concerns her sister (Chapter 10). As well, her id-imagination made her reevaluate her relationship with Robbie, for by now she looked upon him as a very dangerous sexual maniac: "A maniac. The word had refinement and the weight of medical diagnosis" (Chapter 10).

Freud believed that a child's personality can be analysed through five stages of psychosexual development: oral, anal, phallic, the latent period and the genital stage. He denied the notion that a child in the early ages of development does not have sexual desires, and he proposed "that childhood fantasies formed a continuum with sexual desires, and that all children had an innate curiosity about sex and about their own origins" (Thurschwell 43). Freud claimed that libido reattaches itself during each stage and that a child will face problems which must be resolved in order to enter successfully

the next stage of development. The first stage of psychosexual development is the oral stage, the child wants to put everything in his mouth to get a similar satisfaction as from the mother's breast. The next stage is anal, the child learns to control bodily wastes. The role of parents is of great importance, for if during the toilet training they are too strict and do not encourage and support a child, the fixation of libido can occur. If this stage is navigated successfully, a child learns to be independent, which gives it a feeling of accomplishment.

In fact Briony's obsession with order can be traced to the second stage, in the anal stage fixation. The anal personality according to Freud is "orderly, parsimonious, and obstinate" (Thurschwell 55). The description of Briony's room shows that she likes to have everything in the right order:

Her straight-backed dolls in their many-roomed mansion appeared to be under strict instructions not to touch the wall; 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.  
(Chapter 1)

As Anna Freud explains in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, toys contribute to children's desire to have everything in order and under control. Playing with dolls gives an imagination of motherhood, "while railways, motors and bricks not only serve to fulfil various wishes and provide opportunities for sublimation but produce in children's minds that agreeable phantasy that they can control the world" (91). Briony likes to have everything under control and in the right order; Robbie represented a threat to her over-organized life.

The next stage of psychosexual development is the phallic stage. At this stage a child finds out about differences between male and female, and experiences love and hatred towards parents. Freud proposed the term “Oedipal complex” to describe when a mother becomes an object cathexis for a male child (the other way around for the female child) and he wants to have mother’s attention only for himself. The male child feels rivalry with his father, and wants to eliminate him, but the boy acknowledges that the father is much more powerful and can punish him –this is castration anxiety. To overcome the Oedipal complex, a male child must identify himself with the father and find a wife who is like his mother, for as Freud writes in his book *The Ego and the Id*, that association with the father is seen as more healthy than if a boy will identify himself with his mother:

along with the demolition of the Oedipus complex, the boy’s object-cathexis of his mother must be given up. Its place may be filled by one of two things: either identification with his mother or an intensification of his identification with his father. We are accustomed to regard the latter outcome as the more normal; it permits the affectionate relation to the mother to be in measure retained. In this way the dissolution of the Oedipal complex would consolidate the masculinity in boy’s character. (22)

Freud’s writings are mainly male-oriented; he emphasized the importance of the father in a child’s development. For instance Leo at Brandham Hall becomes friends with two male figures, Ted Burgess and Lord Trimingham. Both men affect the boy’s psychosexual development. Lord Trimingham symbolizes aristocracy, he stands for something unapproachable and immortal, but Ted is the complete opposite, as Leo describes him: “Like many uneducated people he was readier than the educated to talk

to a child on equal terms; his age was a physical but not conversational barrier” (Chapter 15). Leo lacks the male role model in the family, and in Ted he unconsciously sees a father figure, because Ted at Brandham Hall is the only one who treats him equally and talks to him. Other adults at the Brandham Hall don’t: “Well, they don’t talk to me very much, I said, You see, they’re all grown up, and they have grown up games like whist and lawn tennis, and talking, you know, just for the sake of talking” (Chapter 7). Furthermore Leo feels that Ted is obliged to explain to him the real meaning of word “spooning,” but Ted believes that only Leo’s father has a right to do so (Chapter 15). The lack of a father figure in Leo’s family contributes in his misunderstanding of sexuality. If his father would be alive perhaps Leo would be aware at age of 13 of his sexuality. According to Freud to successfully overcome the Oedipal complex a male child must associate himself with the father, but Leo associates himself with the mother. About his father Leo says “I admired him and revered his opinions, but my temperament had more in common with my mother’s” (Chapter 1).

Typically the mother is the first object choice for a boy, while for a girl, as Freud writes in his essay on “Female Sexuality,” “at the end of the girl’s development it is the man – the father – who must come to be the new love object” (3). Briony is very preoccupied with her older sister’s life, because her parents do not pay much attention to their children. Her father for the most of the time is absent and is referred as an “old man,” but it is obvious that he is the head of the family and provider. It is not surprising that Briony is very attached to her older sister Cecilia, for “her mother had always lived an invalid’s shadow land, Briony had always required mothering from her older sister” (Chapter 9). Briony’s mother most of the time is in bed with migraine. Ilany Kogan states in her article “Some reflections on Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*: enactment, guilt,

reparation,” that Emily is “an alienated, unavailable mother, totally immersed in her own suffering” (53). No surprisingly Briony feels very strongly bound to her older sister. When Briony reads the content of the letter, her imagination starts working and she begins to believe that Robbie presents a threat to Cecilia, “something irreducibly human, or male, threatened the order of their household, and Briony knew that unless she helped her sister, they would all suffer” (Chapter 10).

According to Freud Cecilia is Briony’s “pro-Oedipal mother” and Briony has not overcome her “negative pro-Oedipal complex,” which is when a child chooses object cathexis the parent of the same sex and feels rivalry with the parent of the opposite sex. Freud in his essay “Female Sexuality” emphasizes the importance of this psychosexual phase in a girl’s sexual development, for if the pro-Oedipal complex is not resolved properly, fixation can occur and “a woman may remain arrested at the original mother-attachment and never properly achieve the changeover to men” (1). Freud develops three lines of female sexual development. The first one is that a girl may turn back on sexuality, she becomes scared of comparison with men and gives up her phallic activity. If she follows the second line, “she clings in obstinate self-assertion to her threatened masculinity” (3); she hopes to get a male organ someday and this may become the goal of her life. Only if she follows the third line, can she develop normal feminine sexuality, where she directs her libido towards her father and thus reaches the Oedipal complex in its feminine form. Briony’s fixation in the pro-Oedipal stage resolves in her inability to develop female sexuality; as Ilany Kogan writes, Briony is presented as “a woman but she lacks femininity” (59) such as Cecilia and Lola have. In the novel Ian McEwan shows Briony at three different ages – thirteen, eighteen and as an old widowed woman – but never as a mother or a loving wife.



Briony encounters the adult world when she witnesses the scene in the library, where Robbie and Cecilia make love, and is sure that Robbie raped Cecilia. This passage will demonstrate how Briony sees this scene, how she misunderstands it completely: "His left hand was behind her neck, gripping her hair, and with his right he held forearm which was raised in protest, or self defense" (Chapter 10). Later on Briony's little cousins escape from the mansion and everyone goes to search for them. In the dark Briony finds Lola who had been raped and Briony accuses Robbie of this crime; by sending Robbie to jail she successfully eliminates her rival.

Ilany Kogan writes in her article that since Briony was not able to give to her sister the "same kind of libidinal gratification"(59), she unconsciously makes a decision to eliminate Robbie from Cecilia's life by accusing him of assault, thus becoming the only object of her sister's attention. Ilany Kogan also points out that Briony's negative pro-Oedipal complex fixation comes from her bisexuality; she gives an impression of being a man who is in a female body.

The ego is developed during the second stage: the anal stage of psychosexual development. Sigmund Freud defines ego in his book *The Ego and the Id*:

The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains passions. Moreover, the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id [...]. Thus in its relation to the id it is like a man on horse-back, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses

borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is no to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own. (15)

The ego acts according to social norms and etiquette, it tries to satisfy id's demands without harming others, that is, through a compromise, solving a problem by trying to find realistic ways out. The ego tries to find balance between the chaotic id and the ego ideal, as in Briony's case when she gives Robbie's note to Cecilia. She is not following her id and does not ask Cecilia questions about the inappropriate word, and she does not run to her brother or mother to tell them about the letter and a word that she read there: "Briony pushed into Cecilia's hand piece of paper folded twice and then she squealed her brother's name and leaped into his embrace" (Chapter 9). Briony is following her ego, she knows that the letter was not for her and she acknowledges that her actions are wrong. Briony's ego also suppresses her id impulses, as when she interrupts Robbie and Cecilia's love making in the library: "Briony moved slowly into their view, stopped by the desk and saw them. She stood there stupidly, staring at them" (Chapter 11). She did not scream or run for help, her ego took control over her id in this case.

Leo's ego is shown when he is dying of heat and almost everyone laughs at him, but he remains reluctant to take off his jacket, because according to the etiquette at these times it was not allowed. "'Hullo, Leo, still feeling hot?' and 'Why don't you take your jacket off - you'd be more comfortable without it' - with a light laugh for this impossible request, for in those days dress was much more ceremonious and jackets were not lightly discarded" (Chapter 3). During his stay at Brandham Hall Leo becomes aware of social class; in his Norfolk jacket, which was completely out of place in

Norfolk, he feels “out of place among these smart rich people” (Chapter 3). Marian, to meet her lover, Ted, takes Leo shopping to buy him summer clothes, and poor Leo fails to see the fact that Marian does this not because she feels sorry for him, but because it is an opportunity to meet Ted in the city (Chapter 4). During this trip when Marian chooses clothes for him, Leo becomes conscious of his sexuality. Clothes and Marian contribute to this, as he describes his swimming suit: “One of the items in my trousseau was a bathing-suit, and partly from the promptings of nudism, partly because I fancied the idea of myself in it (the day with Marian had made me conscious of myself in many ways)” (Chapter 4). But unfortunately Leo cannot join everyone at the lake, because his mother has written a note to Mrs. Maudsley stating that Leo is “delicate and liable to colds” (Chapter 4). Leo’s ego is in control of his id; he obeys the rules and watches others bathing unable to join them: “it was like looking on at a dance, unable to join in. I could not bear to watch them” (Chapter 4).

The last stage of personality development is the super ego, it develops during the phallic stage of sexual development. The super ego is an heir of the Oedipal complex and thus begins all the activities that reach a climax in men entering the civilized world/society. Super ego functions as a repressor of the id’s impulses and demands that are not allowed by society. Another of super ego’s tasks is to convince the ego to long for perfection and preserve family traditions: “the ego ideal answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man” (Freud 27), that is, the imaginary perfect version of us. Super ego includes good manners that are imposed by parents, super ego directs a person to act in sociable accepted ways. Briony comes from an upper class family, where etiquette is the most important thing. During dinner, after witnessing the seductive scene between Robbie and Cecilia in the library, she is rude to Robbie,

because she thinks he presents a threat to Cecilia and is a maniac. When he tries to start a conversation with Briony's cousin about the weather, she feels an urgent need to protect her cousin from Robbie: "Please leave him alone" (Chapter 11), Briony says and her mother hears it: "Briony, it was a perfectly bland remark about the weather. You'll apologize, or go now to your room" (Chapter 11). She apologizes. Briony's super ego controls her id impulses, because no matter how badly she wants to be rude to Robbie, she can't disobey her mother's orders and must act according to etiquette. In the third part of the book, Briony's father sends her an invitation to Paul Marshall and Lola's wedding. She goes there, and during the ceremony her first impulse is to tell the truth to everyone: that the real man who raped Lola is Paul, not Robbie. "Now was the chance to proclaim in public all the private anguish and purge herself of all that she had done wrong" (Part 3), but she suppresses her id and follows her super ego, because even if she would proclaim the truth, nobody would really care about it: "Nor did the bride appear to be a victim, and she had her parents' consent" (Part 3). Her proclamation of the truth only would ruin the wedding, it would give satisfaction to her that she finally said it, but Lola and others will not benefit from the truth.

Clearly the church in *The Go-Between* symbolizes authority; it is associated with Leo's idol, Lord Trimingham. Leo comes from a middle-class family and is raised by his mother, who is a very religious woman. When he goes to Brandham Hall she says to him, "Try to go to church if you can. I don't know what sort of people they are – perhaps they don't go to church" (Chapter 1). At Brandham Hall children are not obliged to attend church. When Marcus stays at home because of his illness (Chapter 5), Leo's super ego is showed: he could stay in the mansion while the adults go to pray, but he obeys, doing what his mother asked him to do. According to Freud, faith gives a

sense of protection. He suggests that religion works as a wish-fulfilling illusion, it comes from the child's helplessness and need for protection. Freud stresses the importance of parents, especially the father figure. Since Leo's father is dead, religion is the only way to feel protected from the outer world:

the derivation of religious needs from the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father seems to me incontrovertible, especially since the feeling is not simply prolonged from childhood days, but is permanently sustained by fear of the superior power of Fate. I cannot think of any need in childhood days as strong as the need for father's protection. (Thurschwell 104)

Sigmund Freud writes in his book *The Ego and the Id*, that the super ego can evoke in the ego a sense of guilt, that conflict can arise because the ego is the representative of the "external world, of reality" (26), but the super ego is "a representative of the internal world, of the id" (26). If the conflict arises, the ego must use a defence mechanism to protect the self: Briony's ego chooses sublimation, but Leo's repression.

### **Sublimation and repression**

When Briony gets more mature, she realizes that she has sent to jail an innocent man. In this case her super ego suppresses her ego with the sense of guilt and it is forced to choose a mechanism of defence such as sublimation. All her life Briony struggles with guilt and tries to get rid of it by writing a novel. She sublimates her guilt in writing. Freud in his essay "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" writes that the events which are unpleasant in real life can actually give enjoyment to the reader in fiction:

[F]or many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy, and many excitements which, in themselves, are actually

distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer's work. (437)

Briony's childhood trauma had a tremendous effect on her later life. In her attempt to protect her family, she sacrificed an innocent man's life. In the last section of the book, the reader learns that Briony is suffering from vascular dementia, which results in memory loss. Ian McEwan points out at the end of the book that only Briony's memory loss can free her from guilt. Writing does not atone for her sin, as she would never get the forgiveness of Robbie and Cecilia, who both died during World War 2. What she did at the age of 14 is irreversible. She has lived with the sense of guilt all her life and even by transmitting it into fiction does not atone for her sin. Though a reader can enjoy the story, it cannot be a substitute for the real events, because she will always be aware which events are real and which are invented, as Briony says at the end of the novel:

The problem of 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 of 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 limits and 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. (Part 3)

Freud defines the term sublimation in his essay "Civilization and its Discontents":

The task is then one of transferring the instinctual aims into such directions that they cannot be frustrated by the outer world. Sublimation of the instincts lends an aid in this. Its success is greatest when a man knows to heighten sufficiently his

capacity for obtaining pleasure from mental and intellectual work. Fate has little power against him then. This kind of satisfaction, such as the artist's joy in creation, in embodying his phantasies, or the scientist's in solving problems or discovering truth, has a special quality which we shall certainly one day be able to define metaphysically. (9)

Sigmund Freud believed that sublimation is healthy for mankind's development, because through it, man does not hide his desires in the unconsciousness, but directs his libido into something that is accepted and encouraged by the society. He also considered that sublimation is better than repression, because repression hides desires in the unconsciousness. Briony, to atone for her sin, becomes a nurse under Sister Drummond, and nurses are stripped of their names: "in no circumstances should a nurse communicate to a patient her Christian name" (Part 3). Briony is stripped of her identity, for she is no longer Briony Tallis, an ambitious writer and a girl who sent an innocent man to jail; she has become nurse Tallis, and working as a nurse does not leave her much time to think about the crime which she had committed in her past. Briony shows generosity to soldiers, because she sees in every wounded soldier Robbie. Once she was asked to sit with a dying man and she agreed to pretend to be his fiancée. "Do you love me? She hesitated. Yes. No other reply was possible. Besides, for that moment, she did. He was a lovely boy who was a long way from his family and he was about to die" (Part 3). During those years Briony has changed, she has acknowledged her misdeed and hopes that her nursing will atone for her sin. She sublimates her guilt into working at the hospital under very hard conditions:

Physical discomfort helped close down Briony's mental horizons. The high starched collars rubbed her neck raw. Washing her hands a dozen times a day

under stinging cold water with block of soda brought on her first chilblains. The shoes she had to buy with her own money fiercely pinched her toes. (Part 3)

Her decision to become a nurse is also influenced by the fact that her sister also works in the hospital. She longs to reunite with her and apologize, and in the book she does. She finds Cecilia's house and apologizes to her and Robbie, but in reality shame and cowardice was an insurmountable obstacle for Briony to seek an apology from Cecilia. All her life Briony tries to write a novel to atone for her sin. She sublimates her guilt into fiction, and in the last section Briony gets an allowance to publish her book, but only when all of the characters of her novel will be dead: "when I am dead, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, we will only exist as my inventions" (Part 3). She gives a happy ending to Robbie and Cecilia in her final draft: the couple reunites, their love in Briony's novel becomes real, in fiction she gives them the chance to be together.

Unable to cope with a sense of guilt and shame, Leo's ego uses repression as a defense mechanism: the boy fails to see that he was used by grownups and that people at Brandham Hall were generally unkind to him. He represses the memory and desires of the summer of 1900. Furthermore his early exposure to sexuality resulted in his inability to establish a family: "But every man should get married-you ought to have got married, Leo, you're all dried up inside" (Epilogue). According to Freud, repression stores unpleasant memories in the unconscious, but these memories have not vanished or disappeared, they still exist in our unconscious and they influence our behaviour. As Anna Freud writes in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, repression is the most dangerous of all defence mechanisms that our ego can choose; too much of it can result in neurosis: "The dissociation from the ego entailed by the withdrawal of



consciousness from whole tracts of instinctual and affective life may destroy the integrity of the personality for good and all” (54).

Leo learned his lesson: always believe the facts, nothing else; and his skill at arranging the facts in the right order made him eligible to serve during the First World War:

My skill in marshalling facts was held to be more important than any service I was likely to perform on the field. So I missed that experience, along with many others, spooning among them. Ted hadn't told me what it was, but he had shown me, he had paid with his life for showing me, and after that I never felt like it.

(Epilogue)

Since Ted for Leo was a father role model, his suicide affected his associations of sexuality with something that causes a death and tragedy. When Marian at the end of the novel asks Leo to be the go-between for the last time, it is up to the reader's imagination whether Leo will obey her or not: Hartley leaves the end of the novel open.

## **Conclusion**

In both novels trauma in childhood affects children's lives. Briony's and Leo's unconsciousnesses control their actions for their entire lives. Obviously both children did not resolve successfully all the stages of psychosexual development, and this led to fixation. Due to Briony's fixation during the phallic stage, she unconsciously eliminated her rival, Robbie, thus becoming the only object of her sister's attention. Her negative pro-oedipal complex was not resolved, because she failed to develop her sexuality in the proper way; she directed her libido to her sister, not to her father. Also Briony's fantasy contributed to her confusion in disentangling reality from fiction, and caused her to

misinterpret the relations between men and women. Because of her fixation during the anal stage, she believed that Robbie posed a threat to her organized life and had to be eliminated, because order had to be restored. It is clear that the reason for all the bewilderment in the novel is her id-imagination. Briony's unconsciousness controls her actions, but later her super ego punishes her ego with a sense of guilt, and Briony sublimates it into nursing and fiction, for she believes that hard work under Sister's Drummond along with writing the autobiographical novel will bring a relief to her remorse. Leo blames himself for living a loveless life because of his associations with sexuality; he hides the unpleasant memories in the unconsciousness. He overcomes the oedipal complex in the unhealthy way, by association with his mother, and this affects his psychosexual development. Leo fails to see that he has nothing to be ashamed of and he is not involved in Ted's suicide. The lack of a father figure at home affects his understanding of sexuality and Ted's suicide plays a very significant role in this, since Leo chose him as a father role model: "[...] our fates were linked together. I could not injure him without injuring myself" (Epilogue). His idol Lord Trimingham's politeness and friendliness comes from his wish to exploit Leo as a postman. Marian, whom he names the Virgin of his zodiac system, is also kind to him only because Leo can be useful in carrying the notes between her and Ted. Leo realizes at the end of the novel that Ted "was the only one who had had a true impulse of contrition" (Epilogue). Magic made Leo believe in his omnipotence and blinded him to the real nature and intentions of the grownups, and so his fascination with magic resulted in the idealization of people at Brandham Hall.

## Works Cited

- Finney, Brian. "Briony's stand against oblivion: The making of fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*". *Journal of Modern Literature* 27. 3 (2004): 69. Web. 3 June 2014.
- Freud, Anna. *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. Trans. Cecil Baines. New York, NY: International Universities, 1946. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Civilization and its Discontents." Trans. James Strachey. Rpt. in *Electronic Books Library*. Aylesbury: Chrysoma Associates, 2000. 1–40. Web. 5 July 2014.
- . *The Ego and the Id*. Ed. James Strachey. Trans. Joan Riviera. New York: W. W. Norton, 1962. Print.
- . *Totem and Taboo*. Trans. A. A. Brill. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1919. Print.
- Gay, Peter. "Creative writers and Daydreaming." *The Freud Reader*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1989. 439-43. Print.
- Hartley, Leslie Poles. *The Go - Between*. New York: The New York Review of Books. E-book.
- Kogan, Ilany. "Some Reflections on Ian McEwan's *Atonement*: Enactment, Guilt and Reoperation." *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 83.1 (2014): 49–70. Web. 20 May 2014.
- McEwan, Ian. *Atonement*. Anchor, 2003. E-book.
- Ruitenbeek, Hendrik M. "Female Sexuality by Freud." Trans. Joan Riviere. *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*. New Haven: College and UP, 1966. N. Pag. Print.
- Thurschwell, Pamela. *Sigmund Freud*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Wiegand, David. "Getting rid of the ghosts." SFGate 10 March. 2002. Web.