Identity crisis in Ian McEwan’s Atonement
Dedication

To my family and to all whom I know, I dedicate this modest work.

Rekaya

To my parents who have been a source of encouragement and inspiration: there are not enough words I can say to describe just how much important are my parents to me.

To my grandmother, Halima.

To my brothers, Bouelam and Yahi; and my sisters, Hassiba and Fatiha.

Fatima
Acknowledgements

First of all we thank Allah the Greatest and the Almighty for helping us to realize this modest work.

We would like to offer our sincere appreciation and deep gratitude to our supervisor, Ms. Halima BENZOUKH for her guidance, understanding and patience.

We would like to thank the members of jury, Mrs. Hind HANAFI and Mr. Djelloul BOURAHLA for their valuable remarks.

Deeply, we are indebted to our families and friends for being much supportive.

Last but not least, we would like to express our special thanks to Kasdi Merbah University for giving us the opportunity to upgrade and expand our knowledge and skills.
Abstract

The present study tackles the issue of identity crisis in the post-modern novel *Atonement* (2001). It aims at investigating the major character’s identity crisis according to Erik Erikson’s perspectives and examining the validity of his theory of identity in analyzing a fictional character. It also pursues to demonstrate that McEwan often uses some facts of psychoanalysis that are related to the human psyche to form the personality of his fictional character (Briony).

The main objective of this study is to show the importance of psychoanalysis as a literary criticism theory and its indispensability when perusing any given literary production, since it gives readers the implications that are packed with mental based understanding. This work is threefold: the first chapter will be a general survey and a theoretical framework of identity, the second chapter deals with identity crisis in postmodern literature, and the third chapter is devoted to explore the major character’s identity crisis in McEwan’s *Atonement*.

**Key words:** identity crisis, psychoanalysis, postmodernism, fictional character, conflict.
List of figures

Figure 1: Social identity paradigm................................................................. 9
Figure 2: Freud’s topographic model............................................................. 10
Figure 3: Freud’s structural model............................................................... 11
Figure 4: Jung’s map of identity................................................................. 15
List of tables

Table 1: Freud’s psychosexual stages of development .................................................. 12

Table 2: Erikson’s psychosocial stages of identity development .............................. 14
Table of contents

Dedication......................................................................................................................... I

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................ II

Abstract............................................................................................................................. III

List of figures..................................................................................................................... IV

List of tables...................................................................................................................... V

Table of contents............................................................................................................... VI

General introduction.......................................................................................................... 1

Chapter one

Identity: A theoretical framework

Introduction......................................................................................................................... 4

1.1 Identity......................................................................................................................... 4

1.1.1 The concept of identity.......................................................................................... 4

1.1.2 Identity in literature.............................................................................................. 5

1.2 Theories of identity.................................................................................................... 5

1.2.1 Social identity theory: Society and identity......................................................... 6

1.2.1.1 Social categorization....................................................................................... 7

1.2.1.2 Social identification....................................................................................... 7
Chapter one

Identity development theories

1.2 Psychological theories of identity

1.2.1 Social comparison

1.2.4 Self-esteem achievement

1.2.2 Psychological theories of identity

1.2.2.1 Identity in Sigmund Freud’s perspectives

1.2.2.2 Identity in Erik Erikson’s perspectives

1.2.2.3 Identity in Carl Jung’s perspectives

1.3 Erikson’s theory of identity development

1.3.1 Adolescence stage (identity vs. role confusion)

1.3.2 Maturity stage (ego integrity vs. despair)

Conclusion

Chapter two

Postmodern literature and identity crisis

2.1 Postmodernism

2.2 Postmodern literature

2.2.1 Themes and techniques of post-modern literature

2.2.1.1 Identity

2.2.1.2 Irony and black humour
Chapter three

Exploring the major character’s identity crisis in McEwan’s Atonement

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 31

3.1 Briony at adolescence stage ............................................................................. 31

3.1.1 Briony the writer ........................................................................................ 31

3.1.2 Briony between childhood and adulthood .................................................... 34

3.2 Briony maturity stage (regret and atonement) .................................................. 39

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 41

General conclusion ............................................................................................... 43
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 45

Résumé .......................................................................................................................... 49

ملخص .......................................................................................................................... 50
General introduction
General introduction

The concept of identity crisis shows its power as one of the main thematic concerns in modern literature. In postmodernism, identity crisis takes an important status with its various aspects, cultural, social, political and personal (Frosh, 1991).

Identity crisis may be the result of conflict and struggle between a person or a group of people, and other people and natural powers, etc. (ibid.). This struggle may lead the character to change himself/herself. Since postmodern literature is a way to represent and reflect the postmodern life and culture, it helps to view the crisis of identity of human beings and their conflicts (Kusnir, 2011). Theme of identity was treated by other authors before, but it started to be treated much more systematically after the Civil Right Movement in the USA in the 1960s (ibid.).

Modernists and postmodernists have failed in giving the exact answer to the question (what does the “I” mean exactly”. Dumitrescu (2011) states that identity is an important issue in modern postmodern context.

Taking a closer look at postmodern literary works, one will notice that most of the literary works of that period if not all of them have dealt with a side of identity crisis, and how the problem of identity clearly appears through the whole work among characters.

This study aims at investigating the major character’s identity crisis according to the social-psychologist Erik Erikson’s perspectives and examines the validity of his theory of identity in analyzing a fictional character. It also pursues to demonstrate that writers often use some facts of psychoanalysis that are related to the human psyche to form the personality of their fictional character. To achieve the goals of this study, the following research questions are raised:
- How does McEwan deal with identity crisis in his novel *Atonement*?
- How does the major character in McEwan’s novel experience identity confusion?
- To what extent could Erikson’s theory of identity be reliable in analyzing a fictional character’s psychological state?

To answer the previously mentioned research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

First, in his novel, McEwan tries to highlight the political and social disorder of contemporary society in order to show how this anarchy affects not only nations and societies but also individuals, their personal relationships, their behaviours and their identity in specific.

Second, the major character experiences identity crisis in a way that she tries to find her identity and her role in her society and she is apt to experience sorts of mixed ideas and feelings about the specific ways in which she fits into society and may experience a variety of behaviours and activities.

Third, psychoanalysis in general and Erikson’s theory of identity crisis specifically do not spotlight only on the human being’s unconscious mind and his life progress. However, they give boundless inspirational information that can serve and help in dealing with fictional characters like Briony.

The present study is threefold: the first chapter gives a general survey of identity, the second chapter deals with identity crisis in postmodern literature, and the third chapter is devoted to explore the major character’s identity crisis in McEwan’s *Atonement*. Chapter Three is based on the analysis of behavioral and psychological state of the major character in *Atonement*.

This study is based on a deep analysis of behavioural and psychological state of the major character in McEwan’s Atonement. Hence, we will adopt the qualitative and analytical methods
of research to deal with this study since both seem adequate and appropriate for the subject under study.

In this study, we will try to show the importance of psychoanalysis in general and Erikson’s theory of identity crisis in specific as a literary criticism theory and its indispensability when dealing with any given literary production since it gives readers the implications that are packed with mental based understanding.

This was a brief introduction to what we intend to do in this dissertation step by step including the aim of the study, the research questions, the hypotheses, and structure of dissertation.
Chapter one

Identity: a theoretical framework
Introduction

It is important and necessary for everyone to achieve his sense of self and to define who he is and his role in life, since achieving a sense of self may lead the individual to be satisfied of his life, so life flow will make sense (Buckingham, 2008). The first chapter gives a general survey and theoretical framework of identity, in which we will show how critics and theorists have defined identity and we will also see the various faces of identity and how it can emerge in literature, and then we will state the most important identity theories.

1.1 Identity

The self is defined by identity; thus, those who have identity confusion usually find a difficulty in defining themselves (Benabou & Tirole, 2006). Identity is often taken for granted by the individual who has the ability to differentiate himself from others and to determine the role that s/he plays in her/his life and her/his relationship. The determination of identity may be considered as a big issue as Jenkins (2008) states:

Many of us, much of the time, are able to take identity for granted. We seem to know who we are, we have a good enough working sense of who the others in our lives are, and they appear to relate to us in the same way. There are occasions, however, when identity becomes an issue. [...] So, who we are, or who we are seen to be, can matter enormously. (pp. 1-3)

1.1.1 The concept of identity

Identities are features, social relations, roles, and social group association that identify who one is (Leary & Tangney, 2012). Buckingham (2008) defines identity as the notion that the individual can get about himself during his development and progress throughout his life. This involves many facets in his life such as religion and beliefs, skin color, and choices in life; all these facts help in demonstrating the individual identity.
Identity is who or what somebody or something is. It may also refer to the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others. It is the state or feelings of being similar to and able to understand somebody or something (McIntosh, 2006).

Identity is to recognize someone or something and say or prove who is s/he?. It is as well to recognize a problem, a need, a fact, etc. and show that it exists (Bottomley, 2003).

1.1.2 Identity in literature

Identity may be considered as the variety of personal and behavioral characteristics that describe one as a member of a particular group; therefore, individuals can differentiate themselves from other groups of individuals and create their own understanding of who they are depending on race, religion, culture, ethnicity and language (Fearon, 1999). On the other hand, as a result of the geographical and social movements and the keenness of belonging to a certain social community, individuals possibly will acquire more than one single culture (ibid.).

Identity in literature might be the way that is used by authors to express themselves by presenting a new culture and language after the exile from homeland to another country hence, the genre of migrant literature has been developed to heal and tackle the migration issue and formation of green identity matter in migrants; likewise, it might be related to the use of pen names by authors trying to conceal their origins or gender, and this method is usually followed by female authors hoping their works can be published and accepted within society (ibid.).

1.2 Theories of identity

Social identity theory and psychological theories of identity are the main identity theories; whereas, the social identity theory focuses on the individual as a member of a social group of individuals and how s/he interacts with the individuals within the group and how s/he could distinguish himself/herself from them; while, the psychological theories of identity focuses on
the individual’s inner psyche structure as an independent construction that contributes in building the individual’s personal identity.

1.2.1 Social identity theory

The study of identity forms a critical cornerstone within modern sociological thought, sociologists focused primarily on the formation of the (me) exploring the ways in which interpersonal interactions mold an individual’s sense of self (Cerulo, 1997). They claim that a person has not got only one “personal self; however, she/he can carry countless selves that connect to extend circles of group membership (ibid). The individual may be led by different social contexts to think and act on basis of his personal, familial and/or national level of self (Turner et al, 1987).

Tajfel and Turner first developed the social identity theory in 1979; this theory started first with social group assumption rather than individuals’ assumption (Trepte, 2006). Tajfel has established his theory to clarify the base of psychology of intergroup favouritism, and the discrimination against out-group (ibid.). Abrams and Hogg (1988) had exerted to spotlight the minimum conditions that make individuals discriminate in the favour of the in-group they belong to and against an out-group aiming to achieve self-esteem and self-confidence (ibid.).

In social identity theory, the self has the ability to recognize itself from other social groups as it can classify itself in particular classifications. In social identity theory, this process is termed “self-categorization” (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Social identity theory confirms that the in-group or (self-categorization) is built by the group membership in ways that the in-group is preferred at the expense of the out-group (Trepte, 2006). They proposed the example of (minimal group paradigm) by which they argue that the mere
individuals’ categorization is sufficient to lead them to the in-group favouritism. In that experiment, groups were randomly categorized (ibid.).

Social group is a group of people who see themselves and are seen by others as members of this group (Tajfer & Turner, 1979). The group is considered by Tajfel as a cognitive component, an evaluative component and an emotional component (Trepte, 2006). Thus, he suggested four main basics of social identity theory which are social categorization, social identification, social comparison, and self-esteem achievement (ibid.).

1.2.1.1 Social categorization

One can only facilitate the process of decoding and encoding messages by defining information into schemes and categories, and it is the same with the other entities in our environment, we divide people into groups to build and comprehend a social interaction (Trepte, 2006).

Tajfel and Turner state that social categorizations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action; these tools create and define individual’s place in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

1.2.1.2 Social identification

Social identification is defined as the individual’s awareness about himself/herself that comes from his/her notion of his/her membership of a particular social group with a magnitude significance linked to that membership (Tajfel, 1978). Therefore, the comparison between the in-group and the out-group defines the social identification (Trepte, 2006).
Social identification can be also defined as the process which identifies individual(s) within an in-group more overtly (ibid.). Individuals within that group may share the same manners and attitudes. Otherwise, they may seem alike and have the same features and imitate one another (ibid.).

### 1.2.1.3 Social comparison

The aim of social comparison is to evaluate social groups which an individual belongs to and it usually compares groups which are similar to the individual’s own group, and it refers to the group composing dimensions (Trepte, 2006). The relationship of in-group comparison might be marked with these similarities and dimensions (ibid.).

In social comparison, categories are evaluated in comparison with one another to determine one’s place in society (Trepte, 2006). Social identity theory believes that individuals, in addition to the ability of categorizing themselves into groups, they can evaluate the in-groups and out-groups. They compare their group to others to see the superiority and/or the inferiority of their group in compare with their belonging to other groups (ibid.).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested three structures that form social comparison: a) the extent to which individuals is identified with an in-group to internalize that group membership as an aspect of their self-concept. b) the extent to which the prevailing context provides ground for comparison between groups, and c) the perceived relevance of the comparison group, which itself will be shaped by the relative and absolute status of the in group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

### 1.2.1.4 Self-esteem achievement

Tajfel (1969) states that achieving self-esteem is the main purpose of the motive that highlights the positive social identity (Tajfel, 1969 quoted in Trepte, 2006). Tajfel (1979) claims
that positive self-esteem is achieved by positive evaluation of the individual’s group. However, in social identity theory the motivation of self-esteem is not assimilated in the process of social identification, but it is seen as a premise. Hogg and Abrams suggest (self-esteem) hypothesis which states two results: a) the dependent self-esteem which means the self-esteem is enhanced if the in-group discrimination is successful. b) the independent variable or the out-group discrimination is enhanced by the self-esteem motives (Trepte, 2006).

In addition to self-esteem, there are many other needs; for instance, the motive of self-knowledge should be achieved by inter-group comparison evolving positive social identity (Trepte, 2006).

At the situation in hand, self-esteem might be an outcome of achieving the other needs and provides us with more information concerning one’s self. Hogg and Abrams (1990) summarize the idea of self-esteem as one of motives and effects of different forms of group behaviour. Possibly more fundamental is a form of self-evaluative motive (ibid.):
1.2.2 Psychological theories of identity

Identity may refer to the unchanging characteristics of behaviour (Ewan, 2003). Psychologists argue that identity is initiated within individuals, and one’s identity may exist in the non-existence of others and it may have some invisible features (ibid).

Some theorists claim that only the explicit behaviours can help in analysing one’s identity. Whereas, the majority of psychologists argue that identity may involve almost everything about the individual and his/her thoughts, emotions, and social and physical impulses (ibid.).

According to Snow (2010), personality is divided into two parts; outer world, which consists of all the explicit behaviours which are shared with others, and inner world which is inconspicuous such as thoughts, dreams, wishes, etc. Identity may also include hidden or unconscious phases and conscious ones (Ewan, 2003).

1.2.2.1 Identity in Sigmund Freud’s perspectives

According to Freud, personality is structured so that there are three basic elements: unconscious, preconscious, and conscious or what he called the topographic model (Ewan, 2003):

![Figure 2: Freud’s topographic model](image)
Freud claims that the role of the unconscious is to receive the repressed materials that come either from the conscious or from the preconscious mind (ibid.). Freud comes at the end with a conclusion to explain that all repressions are unconscious while not all what is unconscious is repressed. This comes as a result from his séances with his patients who are pre-dominantly involved in repression unconsciously (ibid.).

Freud later came with the structural model theory to dominate such an issue and defines identity in which he distinguished three entities: Ego, Superego, and Id. He argues that these three entities are inter-related within the mind.

The Ego is developed at the age of 2-3 years; it acts according to what Freud calls reality principles so it guarantees that the Id desires can be achieved in manners acceptable to the Superego (Ewan, 2003). Ego plays the role of the horse rider who guides his horse where it wants to go and so the Ego does with the Id by transmuting the Id’s will into actions (ibid.). These entities are essential to understand the internal struggle of human nature, for they are innate within the human being and control the needs in different ways (Burns, 2008):

![Figure 3: The structural model (Burns, 2008).](image)

The failing in associating one’s self with the society rules will lead the individual to suffer from a dysfunction in dealing with sexual instincts and desires; this is what Freud calls psychological abnormality (Heather, 2007). Sue suggests that:
Abnormal psychology is an area of scientific study that attempts to describe, explain, predict, and modify behaviours that are considered strange or unusual. Its subject matter ranges from the bizarre and spectacular to the more commonplace—from the violent homicides, suicides, and “perverted” sexual acts that are widely reported by the news media to unsensational (but more prevalent) concerns such as depression, sleep disturbances, and anxiety. (Sue et al, 2011, p. 2)

The maladaptive cognitive, behavioural, and emotional instincts create psychological problems and may increase including pain, discomfort, anxiety, depression, and so forth. Thus, Feud suggests five stages of development and he argues that any abnormality in one’s behaviour occurs through these stages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>FOCUS OF LIBIDO</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>ADULT FIXATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ORAL</td>
<td>0-1 year</td>
<td>MOUTH</td>
<td>Feeding</td>
<td>Smoke, bite nails, over eating, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANAL</td>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>ANUS</td>
<td>Toilet training</td>
<td>Orderliness and Messiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHALLIC</td>
<td>3-6 years</td>
<td>GENITAL</td>
<td>Oedipus “boys”/ Electra “girls” complexes</td>
<td>Sexual dysfunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LATENT</td>
<td>6-12 years</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>Socialism aspect, new skills development</td>
<td>XXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENITAL</td>
<td>12+</td>
<td>GENITAL</td>
<td>Sexual maturity</td>
<td>Mentally healthy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Freud’s psychosexual stages of development (Heather, 2007)

1.2.2.2 Identity in Erik Erikson’s perspectives

According to Erikson, the Ego has an important role to fulfill the essential healthy tasks in addition to its role of defending against illicit instincts and anxiety. One of these tasks is to maintain the sense of identity (Ewan, 2003).

Erikson claims that the individual can feel alive in the social environment only with the sense of ego identity, and the lack of this sense may lead to committing crimes such as murders (ibid.). The state of what is called by Erikson “identity crisis” includes an inner feeling of
confusion, a little sense of defining one’s self and a failure to gain the support provided by a social role (Ewan, 2003).

Erikson remains true to Freud’s structure of identity by distinguishing the three entities that Freud suggested: Ego, Superego, and Id. Erikson argues that the “Ego” introduces the individual whole personality more than the “Id” though it is divided into two parts, one is conscious and the other is unconscious (Fleming, 2004). He claims that even though the Ego plays the role of guardsman in arresting the “Id” illicit impulses and the “Superego” serves, the “Ego” has its independent life (ibid.).

Erikson proposed a theory of psychological and identity development that he called “Psychosocial Development”, which emphasizes how individual’s interactions with others influence the development of his/her identity. Erikson’s theory focuses on different stages in one’s life and the relationship that people have with other people in each stage from infancy through old age. Each stage in this theory contains what Erikson terms a “crisis”, this crisis consists of interactions with others and through that interaction certain attributes and virtues are developed.

Erikson was interested in Freud’s concept of fixation, but he used different concepts and principles in introducing the stages of identity development. In contrast with Freud, Erikson emphasizes that the development of personality is not limited. Instead, it is continuous throughout the whole individual’s life (Ewan, 2003). As Fleming (2004) argues:

Erikson extended Freud’s work by describing stages of development to include all of the human lifespan, from infancy through old age [...] Erikson’s stages of young adulthood, and the middle and later years, are well developed and offer many insights into the kinds of tasks presented to each of us by life itself as people mature and grow older (pp. 9-3).
In contrast of Freud’s five stages of development, Erikson suggested eight stages of personality development:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Resolution/ Virtue</th>
<th>Culmination in old age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy (0-1 Y)</td>
<td>Basic trust vs. mistrust</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Appreciation of interdependence and relatedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood (1-3 Y)</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. shame</td>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Appreciation of the cycle of life, from integration to disintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play age (3-6 Y)</td>
<td>Initiative vs. guilt</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Humor; empathy; residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School age (6-12 Y)</td>
<td>Industry vs. inferiority</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Humility; acceptance of the course of one's life and unfulfilled hopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent (12-19 Y)</td>
<td>Identity vs. confusion</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>Sense of complexity of life; merging of sensory; logical and aesthetic perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early adulthood (20-25 Y)</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. isolation</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Sense of complexity of relationships; value of tenderness and loving freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood (26-64 Y)</td>
<td>Generativity vs. stagnation</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Caritas, caring for others, and agape, empathy and concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old age (65+)</td>
<td>Integrity vs. despair</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Existential identity; a sense of integrity strong enough to withstand physical disintegration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Erikson’s psychosocial stages of identity development (Fleming, 2004)

1.2.2.3 Identity in Carl Jung’s perspectives

Identity consists of three basic elements which are the “Ego”, the “personal unconscious”, and the “collective unconscious” (Boeree, 2006). For Jung, the ego is the conscious part of the mind that forms all the unrepressed perceptions, thoughts, feeling and memories. While the personal unconscious includes the repressed materials and the unconscious facts that can easily come to mind, these unconscious facts might be at some occasions conscious (ibid.). Both the ego and the personal unconscious are originated after birth. However, the collective unconscious or what Jang called “psychic inheritance” is inherited and born with the individual (Daniels, 2011). The collective unconscious consists of the whole history of the human life (ibid.).

The individual can experience some situations in his life that could be considered as an unexpected link between his inner and outer life such as the déja vu (the feeling that you have been here before); these experiences are results of the effects of the collective unconscious
(Boeree, 2006). The collective unconscious is the universal experiences and memories shared by all humans, it is further comprised of modes born with and belong to all of the humanity which help in feeling, perceiving, acting and experiencing things in certain ways. These modes are called archetypes (ibid.).

Archetypes are cognitive categories; they are unlearned tendencies to experience things in a certain way. “Persona” is one of the collective unconscious archetypes that Jung suggested. It refers to the outer appearance or the (social face) that one creates to represent himself to the world to hide his real feelings, emotions, and thoughts (Fleming, 2005). It represents all of the different masks that a person wears among different groups and situations. The overuse of this façade may lead the person to forget his real identity (ibid.).

“Anima” and “animus” are also archetypes. Jung believes that all humans are bisexual in nature and both males and females share the two hormones (the estrogen) and (the testosterone) but in degrees (Fleming, 2005). The “animus” is the representation of the masculine aspects within the woman’s psyche; while the “anima” is the representation of the female aspects within man’s psyche (Boeree, 2006). There are other collective unconscious archetypes like mother, father, hero, shadow, etc. (ibid.).

Jung stated that the three elements of identity are not completely separated from each other. But, instead continually interact to the compensatory manner. This dynamic interplay between the conscious and unconscious leads to the personal growth and change throughout what Jung termed the individuation process (ibid.):
1.3 Erikson’s theory of identity development

Erik Erikson’s psychosocial development theory is a psychoanalytic theory in which he extended Freud’s five psychosexual stages of development and suggested series of eight psychological stages of development, focusing more on the social context of development, through which a healthy developing human should pass from infancy to the old age (Fleming, 2004). The “ego identity” is the conscious sense of self that the individual may develop through his social interactions. The achievement and development of the “ego identity” is one of the aims of Erikson’s theory (Cherry, 2015).

In each stage, the individual faces what Erikson called “crisis” which the individual must overlap to proceed with development of identity (Sokol, 2009). Erikson believes that individual’s success of identity development depends on his overlapping these crises, and each stage is necessary for the development of the next stage (Fleming, 2004). Boeree (2006) claims that:

If a stage is managed well, we carry away a certain virtue or psychosocial strength which will help us through the rest of the stages of our lives. On the other hand, if we don't do so well, we may develop maladaptations and malignancies, as well as endanger all our future development. A malignancy is the worse of the two, and involves too little of the positive and too much of the negative aspect of the task, such as a person who can't trust others. A maladaptation is not quite as bad and involves too much of the positive and too little of the negative, such as a person who trusts too much. (Boeree, 2006, p. 6)
The successful resolution of identity crisis will raise a positive strength or ego strength that Erikson called “basic strength”, and the failure in overlapping that crisis will result in what Erikson called “core pathology” (Fleming, 2004).

Erikson believed that individuals develop according to the “epigenetic principle” which Erikson borrowed from embryology to mean that humans develop throughout a determined and fixed progress of their identity (Boeree, 2006).

1.3.2 Adolescence stage (identity vs. role confusion)

Erikson was mostly interested in the stage of adolescence and he considered it the most important stage in humans’ life. It is the period of time when the individual experiences a great change in his body and life (Fleming, 2004). Erikson claims that individuals during this stage should achieve a sense of personal identity (ego identity) and avoid role confusion (Boeree, 2006).

The main task of this stage is what Erikson named “identity crisis”, it is a an obstacle in the adolescent path that may lead him/her either to a healthy sense of identity if s/he manages it well, or to an identity confusion if s/he does not know how to get over it (Ewan, 2003). Achieving the ego or personal identity means that individual should determine how he/she deals with strengths and weaknesses s/he faces, so s/she has to do an effort to obtain his/her personal identity. If the individual passes this stage successfully s/he will then carry what is called “fidelity” and he will live easily and will found a place in the society in which he will have the ability to contribute despite of the weaknesses and disorders of the society (Boeree, 2006).
1.3.2.1 The adaptation of negative identity

The individual’s lack of identity may lead him/her to a bad tendency or what Erikson called “repudiation”. Individuals sometimes refuse their identity and their membership in adults’ world, and prefer to join bad and perverse groups of individuals and may be involved in distinctive activities. Yet, they prefer their being bad or being no one rather than not knowing who they are (Boeree, 2006).

Repudiation can take the form of defiance of authority or of resignation and despair, which Erikson termed “diffidence” (Fleming, 2004). Erikson suggested a number of defense mechanisms adopted by the individual in confirming his/her identity such as (Foreclosure) in order to suppress the anxiety that attends lack of identity, some adolescents prematurely assume an identity of convenience; someone else’s value system, such as that of one’s parents, without giving the matter very much thought or consideration (ibid.).

1.3.3 Maturity stage (ego integrity vs. despair)

In Erikson’s psychosocial stages of development, reaching maturity is a big deal, and by this age a person begins to take a reflective and evaluative looking back at his or her life (Fleming, 2004). Only the individuals who pass the crises of the previous seven stages successfully can achieve the ego integrity and feel that their life is valuable and accept their lives without any regret. While, those who fail in resolving the previous crises will face a kind of despair which is the result of the feeling that they waste their lives (Ewan, 2003).

This stage may be seen as the most difficult of all stages. The individual in this stage will be detached from society, life troubles and from a sense of usefulness. Yet they will experience the old age body weaknesses (Boeree, 2006). Erikson argues that wisdom is the basic strength of maturity stage which confirms that the individual had been managed his life in the appropriate
way; however, disdain is the core pathology of this stage which indicates that the individual did not overcome the obstacles of the previous stages and did not manager his past life in a good way (Fleming, 2004).

**Conclusion**

This chapter gave a general background about identity. Yet we devoted a particular attention to two of Erikson’s eight stages of identity development which are adolescence stage and maturity stage which we assume essential to our theoretical framework, and thus instrumental to our analysis of the corpus in the third chapter.

Our study, accordingly, investigates an essential notion that is firstly introduced by Erikson which is identity crisis in relation to two of the eight stages he suggested in his theory of development. In the light of this, we will attempt to scrutinize McEwan’s main character *Briony* in his novel *Atonement*. We will have recourse to Erikson’s theory in unveiling the major character Briony’s identity confusion.
Chapter two

Postmodernism and identity crisis
Introduction

Postmodernism is a period in which identity crisis is its most concern. In this chapter, we will discuss the postmodern literature and its socio-historical background and influences as well as the transition figures. We will also deal with the main postmodern themes and techniques, moving to identity crisis in postmodernism. The last part of this chapter deals with an overview of Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*.

2.1 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a 20th century movement that comes as keenness to change and a reaction against modernism (Lindas, 2013). This change includes various domains such as art, architecture, literature, film, sociology, communication, philosophy, etc. (Shariful & Dewan, 2013). This movement democratized the western countries; however, the East, and Central European countries stayed authoritarian under the influence and control of the USSR (Kusnir, 2011).

The term postmodernism was first coined by John Watkins Chapman in 1880s to describe a period of time with new and specific ideas, principles, ideologies, perspectives, and philosophy (Brann, 1992). In 1939, the term was used by Arnold J. Toynbee to characterize a general theory for a historical movement; while, in 1942, H. R. Hays used the term to label a new style of literature (ibid.). In 2007, Andrew Hoberek indicated in his introduction entitled “after postmodernism” that declarations of postmodernism demise have become a critical commonplace (Lindas, 2013).

Although postmodern literature does not represent all the postmodern literary productions; several post-war developments in literature such as (the theatre of the absurd), (the Beat Generation), and (Magic Realism) have significant similarities (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2011).
These developments of post-war are occasionally called “postmodern” (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2011). In 1950s, Martin Esslin first coined the term (theatre of the absurd) to describe a tendency in theatre (ibid.).

Most of the plays of the (theatre of the absurd) were parallel to postmodern fiction in many angles; Samuel Beckett was the first who made the shift from modernism to postmodernism in literature (Wanger, 1994). In 1940s, Samuel Beckett tried to work on poverty of language and man as a failure, trying to out follow Joyce way, and he gained the Nobel Prize for his experiments with narrative forms (ibid.).

Jack Kerouac was the first who came with the term (The Beat Generation) referring to young American people in the 1950s who rejected conventional society (McHale, 1987). Many groups of postmodern American writers from the black mountain poets, the New York school, and so on, have been referred to as (Beat Generation) and then as postmodernists (ibid.).

The term (Magic realism) was used by Latin American writers who deal with supernatural elements as mundane facts (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2011). This technique is merely related to traditional story telling technique (ibid.).

2.1 Postmodern literature

Postmodern literature is also known as post-World War II literature; it has specific methods and techniques such as fragmentation, paranoia, paradox, downright impossible plots, black humour, and questionable narrators (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2011). This literature came as a reaction against Enlightenment ideas that are implicit in Modernist literature (ibid.). Postmodern writers were inspired by early stories in structuring and narrating their stories (ibid.).

Postmodern literature as a whole reflects the postmodern life and culture and it deals with the issue of identity crisis throughout different aspects of the human life, ethnic, sexual, social and cultural (Kusnir, 2011). The issue of identity is treated much more by postmodern writers.
after the civil right movement in the United States of America in 1960s although it had been treated by other authors before. (Kusnir, 2011)

Taking a closer look on postmodern literary works, one will notice that most of the literary works of that period if not all of them have dealt with a side of identity crisis, and how the problem of identity clearly appears through the whole work among characters.

Theorists and critics found a difficulty in defining postmodernism and postmodern literature; they rather give specific characteristics and features that may help in distinguishing it from other literature of previous periods. (Sharma & Chaudhy, 2011)

At that period of time, new authors who represent ethnic minorities such as Jewish authors and others from British colonies began to increase a notable position in English literature like, Ben Okri, Kasugio Ishiguro, Salman Rushdie, and Hanif Kureishi (Kusnir, 2011). This movement caused the emergence of the feminism and post-colonial theories (ibid.). At this time, English writers represented a remarkable awareness of the bad effects of industrial changes on social life (ibid.). Postmodern literature is influenced by several works of early time such as *The Arabian Nights*, *Don Quixote*, *The Decameron*, and many other works that are considered as inspirational sources of postmodern literature (Barry, 2002).

### 2.1.1 Themes and techniques of post-modern literature

Postmodern literary production has specific features and common themes and techniques (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2011). Since postmodernism has completely new notions and philosophies, postmodern writers use certain expressions and terms that seem somehow difficult (ibid.).
2.1.1.1 Identity

Identity as a literary theme appears in literary works through the characters’ explicit and implicit traits; these traits lead the reader to recognise that character, his behaviours and thoughts (Frosh, 1991). Identity has become one of the main thematic concerns of postmodern writers (ibid). Identity crisis may be the result of conflict and struggle between a person and a group of people, other person or natural powers, etc. This struggle may lead the character to change himself/herself (Kusnir, 2011).

Modern and postmodernists have failed in giving the exact answer of the question (what does the “I” mean exactly”. Dumitrescu (2011) states that; identity is an important issue in modern and postmodern context.

The conflict became a truly significant subject to debate and it has an effect on the writer’s thematic involvement (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2011). Tragedy became unavoidable; it is mostly attached to the characters’ identity disorder (Frosh, 1991). Some writers try to define themselves through religion and religion commitments as a significant aspect of identity (ibid.).

After 1945, the postmodern authors began to address many subjects, including social, psychological and cultural identities (Dumitrescu, 2001). Identity in literature reflects the writer’s personality, culture, and society (ibid.). The literary work expresses the writer’s identity throughout his fictional characters (ibid.). We may consider tragedy as a part of identity crisis in literature; where, the struggle between characters in identifying themselves and their roles in the society will surely cause a tragedy (Frosh, 1991). In Walker’s novel, The Colour Purple for example, characters have identity confusion this confusion creates a social and personal tragedy (ibid.).
Chapter two  postmodernism and identity crisis

2.1.1.1 Irony and black humour

Irony and humour are the most recognizable aspects of postmodern literature (Hutcheon, 2004). Writers often use irony and humour in their writings to express themselves and to criticise their societies (Barth, 1995). Hutcheon (2004) claims that irony and humour are considered as the main characteristics of postmodern literature (ibid.). John Bath, Joseph Hells, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut are some of those writers who are known first of their use of black humour in their writings before being classified as postmodernists (ibid.).

Although irony and black humour are the most significant techniques in postmodern literature, both are used first by modern authors (Barth, 1995). Postmodern writers use irony and black humour to treat a serious social, political, etc. issues in a comical way (ibid.).

2.1.1.2 Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a postmodern technique that refers to the relationship between literary texts, in which a text meaning is shaped by another text using different figures including quotation, plagiarism, translation, allusion, etc. (Muley, 2012). Writers borrow ideas and meanings from other literary works to form their own literary productions; this technique helps writers to acquire new ideologies of narrative (ibid.).

William Irwin (2004) argues that the expression intertextuality includes different implications to suite the different users, from those faithful to the original vision of productions to those who simply use it as a stylish way of talking about allusion and influence. Intertextuality is often used by postmodern writers as it is considered as an important postmodern technique it may appear in fairy tales as in popular genres such as science fiction (ibid.). Intertextuality sometimes can be more than just a single reference to a text (Orr, 2003).
2.1.1 Metafiction

Metafiction is a fiction in which the author self-consciously alludes to the artificiality or literariness of a work by parodying or departing from novelistic conventions (especially naturalism) and traditional narrative techniques; although it emerged first in the earlier works of Homer and Chaucer, it could find a place in postmodern literature (Sharma & Chaudhy, 2011).

Metafiction begins to draw attention to its position by posing questions about the relation between fiction and reality and draw a line between them (Luttazzi, 2004). Metafiction is used by writers to attract the reader’s attention and provides him with information about fiction (ibid).

The common examples of metafictional literary texts are Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, Flann O’Brien’s *Swim-Two-Birds*, Stephen King’s *Misery and Secret Window*, André Gide’s *The Counterfeiters*, Michael Morpurgo’s *Wide Sea*, Kenn’s *More Bears!*, and many other literary works (Sharma & Chaudhy, 2011).

2.2 Identity crisis in postmodernism

Kellner (1992) claims that identity in postmodern society was not given much attention as it was not an essential subject to be discussed. The individuals’ identity crisis especially teenagers is concerned with their attempt to define their roles in their society (ibid.).

2.2.1 Absence of truth

Absence of truth is one of the main postmodern features (Groothuis, 2000). Postmodernists claim that our belief in truth is just an explanation of reality shaped by our own socially constructed bias (Grenz, 1996). Grenz believes that there is no absolute truth instead; there is only a created truth for certain sort of certain occasions (ibid.).
According to Grenz (1996), our world is created sorts of art that all together forms a truth. This view of truth leads certainly to see the world as a construction. (ibid, p. 44) “In detaching human explanation from the notion of an underlying objective world, the postmodern objection of modernism eliminates from things and leave us only words.”

2.3.1 Openness and privatization of doctrines

Huntington (1997) claims that the religious belief was one of the traditional sources, for people facing the need to ascertain (where do I belong?), (Who am I?), and (Where he sees that?), religion would provide the individuals with the convincing answer. In postmodern society, all beliefs share an equal value as they become a matter of personal choice; whereas, any individual has the freedom to convert any religion he chooses, and the criticism of others beliefs is not agreeable because their beliefs are as true as yours, and must be accepted as right for them(ibid.). This political concept of openness and acceptance has submitted religious beliefs to the private realm. Huntington sees that instead of introducing himself, one’s religion is playing the role introducing him (ibid.).

2.3.2 Gender identities and rise of feminism

The concept of gender identities comes with the rise of feminism (Frosh, 1991). In the pre-feminist world, it was possible to define what was meant by being a man or woman, however, in the contemporary society, this definition is impossible (ibid.). There are no completely male or female roles, except in reproduction (ibid.). In the post-feminist world, femininity and masculinity, the gender identity has been reduced to narrow sexual identity. The consequence is men no longer know what it means to be a man and women do not know what it means to be a woman (ibid.).
2.4 McEwan’s *Atonement*: An overview

*Atonement* is a postmodern novel written by the English novelist Ian McEwan in (2001). It tells the saga of an English family from the middle class of the society throughout three periods of time: starting from 1935 moving to the Second World War and ending in 1999.

### 2.4.1 Plot summary

*Atonement* is a postmodern novel divided into three main parts. The first part started in a hot summer day with the heroine Briony Tallis who is thirteen years old girl, preparing for a play entitled *Trails of Arabella* to celebrate her old brother’s coming. The play is supposed to be performed with the help of her three cousins Lola and her brothers Jackson and Pirrot Quincey whose parents are divorced and they come to live at their Aunt Emily Tallis’ house (Helander, 2013).

At that day in which her brother is supposed to be coming home, Briony witnesses her older Cecila sister with Robbie, their house keeper’s son, beside the fountain and she misunderstands the scene and thinks that Robbie is abusing her sister (ibid.). Later on at night before the dinner time, she sees her sister and Robbie again coupling at the library and she thinks that Robbie is attacking Cecilia thus she considers Robbie as a bad person (ibid.).

Afterward at dinner, the twin Jackson and Piorret disappear leaving behind a letter says that they are going home because they do not feel comfortable at the Tallis house (Kutalkova, 2009). Their sister Lola and the family Tallis have been shocked; thus, they all start to look for them outside the house. While they are looking for them at darkness, Briony finds her cousin Lola attacked by someone else and she could not recognise who attacks her because of the darkness; however, she claims that he is Robbie who did that because she saw him attacking her sister before; while, it was Paul Marshal, her brother’s friend (ibid.). Briony tries to convince Lola that
the attacker was Robbie, and Lola asserts that he was him since she also did not see her attacker. Briony declares to the police that Robbie was the attacker and sent an innocent man to jail (ibid.).

The second part starts with the beginning of the Second World War when Robbie is sent to join the military after four years in jail; he becomes a soldier in the British army in France to fight in the war. Cecilia has no relation or contact with her family anymore, since they sent Robbie to the prison (Helander, 2013). In addition, she becomes a nurse. She contacts Robbie by letters while he is a prisoner. They meet once for only half an hour. Briony sends a letter to her older sister Cecilia asking for forgiveness for the fault she has made years ago. In the chaos of Dunkirk, Robbie and his two friends, corporal Nettle and corporal Mace walk to the coast to evacuate. Robbie thinks about the past and Cecilia as well, hoping to see her again, then he falls asleep and started hallucinating (ibid.).

Part three focuses on Briony, who becomes on the eighteen years old, and starts her career as a nurse during the war. She realizes that she was wrong about Robbie and Cecilia. She received a letter from her father inviting her to Paul and Lola’s wedding (Kutalkova, 2009). She attends the wedding then she realizes that Paul Marshall was the aggressor, who raped Lola that dark night not Robbie (ibid.). By the time, Briony visits Cecilia, who gets shocked to see, she meets Robbie unexpectedly there. She asks for forgiveness, but both of them refuse; however, Briony insists that she serious and search for atonement to her guilt, she apologises again and leaves (Helander, 2013).

London 1999 this part is written from Briony’s view. In fact she changes the real events (ibid.). Briony now is 75 years old; she has received dozens of a letter from the museum and corporals Nettle Robbie’s camarade to help her in writing the book’s war parts (Kutalkova, 2009). She becomes a felicitous writer. Robbie died in Dunkirk and Cecilia too in a London
bombing and they never seen each other again. However, in the novel Briony wants to give them happiness by being together. She thinks that it is the way of atonement for her guilt (ibid.).

2.4.2 Major characters in Atonement

Atonement as any other literary work has major and minor characters who contribute in developing and changing the events of the story. The three main characters in McEwan’s Atonement are:

-Briony Tallis: She is the heroine of the novel who is talented in writing short stories; she is thirteen years old, the youngest of Tallis family (Sernham, 2009). At the beginning of the novel, Briony sends Robbie, the house keeper’s son and her older sister Cecilia’s friend, to jail by claiming that he is Lola’s attacker (ibid.). At the age of seventy five, she realizes her guilt and tries to atone by writing her autobiography and confesses her wrong doing (Svandova, 2012).

-Cecilia Tallis: She is Briony’s older sister, she studies at Cambridge University with Robbie Turner (Kutalkova, 2009). Cecilia is in love with Robbie the last who is sent falsely to jail and then to war (Kutalkova, 2009). They never meet again; whereas, Cecilia dies in a bomb explosion in the town and Robbie dies in war (ibid.).

-Robbie Turner: He is the Tallis family’s house keeper’s son and Cecilia’s childhood companion (Sernham, 2009). He can be considered as a member of the Tallis family; whereas, he is having grown up with Leon, Briony and Cecilia (ibid.). Robbie is sent falsely to jail by Briony’s false confession and dies at the end (Kutalkova, 2009).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have dealt with postmodernism as a 20th century movement and its socio-cultural background, after that we gave a general overview of postmodern literature mainly its
common themes and techniques, then we have seen identity crisis in postmodern literature, finally we gave a summary to Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*. Next we will see how identity crisis appears in McEwan’s novel and how the major character in his *Atonement* experiences identity confusion relying on Erikson’s theory.
Chapter three

Exploring the major character’s identity crisis in McEwan’s *Atonement*
Introduction

Psychoanalysis is an appealing field for theoretical inquiry, and it is commonly argued that it is instrumental to the literature production and reception as well. In the previous two chapters, we have already given a general background of theories of identity crisis, mainly psychological theories, and its existence in postmodern literature. In this chapter, we will focus on how the major character (Briony Tallis) in McEwan’s *Atonement* experiences identity crisis, relying on the social psychologist Erik Erikson’s theory. We will select some pertinent passages, and attempt to diagnose the character’s psychological conflicts displayed throughout the implicit and explicit characterization.

By observing Briony’s character through Erikson’s perspectives, we will encounter two of his eight stages; first, when Briony is at the age of thirteen, when the child enters the adolescent stage, the age of physical and mental development; second, when she becomes mature and reaches the stage which is associated with the last stage of Erikson’s eight stages of development when one looks back at his life with a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

3.1 Briony at adolescence stage

Briony at this stage experiences identity crisis in a way that she tries to find her identity and her role in her society and she is apt to experience sorts of mixed ideas and feelings about the specific ways in which she fits into society and may experiment with a variety of behaviours and activities.

3.1.1 Briony the writer

Achieving ego identity is a hard and complex task that faces adolescents, but it must be fulfilled (Fleming, 2004). *Atonement* is opened with a scene in Tallis’s house on a warm summer
day in which the reader makes acquaintance with the Tallis’ family members and their siblings (Sernham, 2009). Readers will notice that the major character, Briony Tallis, is fond of writing and she spends the most of her time in writing short stories since the latter means a lot to her (ibid):

THE PLAY—for which Briony had designed the posters, programs and tickets, constructed the sales booth out of a folding screen tipped on its side, and lined the collection box in red crêpe paper—was written by her in a two-day tempest of composition, causing her to miss a breakfast and a lunch. (Atonement, p. 1)

Briony spends most of her time in her bedroom behind the typing machine writing stories and trying to create an imaginary world and friends for her own to fill the empty side in her life and fulfils her wishes. Since her mother is all the time in her room laying in her bed because she is suffering from severe migraines, her father is in the town for a duty, her sister is finishing her study at Cambridge University and she comes home only on vacations, her brother is working out of the village, and her relatives are away from her, she tries to fill her time with writing stories.

Briony uses the real events of her life to build and develop her short stories. Each moment and event in her daily life is significant and may help her to build a story (Sernham, 2009): “On the face of it, Arabella, whose hair was as dark as Briony’s” (Atonement, p. 4). Briony considers each moment in her life as a treasure and she never leaves any moment or event without including it inside one of her stories. She uses the real characters and events to make her stories more vivid and a telescope by which she could view the world as she tries to find herself and her identity even a peer group for her inside them.

Filimonova (2007) claims that Briony’s play, Trails of Arabella, reflects her naive and childish way of thinking:
How could she tell them that *Arabella* was not a freckled person? Her skin was pale and her hair was black and her thoughts were Briony’s thoughts. But how could she refuse a cousin so far from home whose family life was in ruins? Lola was reading her mind because she now played her final card, the unrefusable ace”. (*Atonement*, p. 7)

Briony expresses herself through the character Arabella, the heroine of her play, who falls in love with an impoverished doctor who marries her later at the end of the play. When Briony was ten years old, she went with Robbie to the lake to teach her how to swim, where she pretended that she was drowning, because she thought that it was the best way to confirm that Robbie loved her if he risks his life and saved her. When Robbie saved Briony from drowning, her doubts were vanished. Thus, she took the opportunity and declared her love to him: “Do you know why I wanted you to save me? [...] Because I love you.” (*Atonement*, p. 129). Robbie had been astonished for he was an object of a school girl crush: “He restrained an impulse to laugh. He was the object of a schoolgirl crush. “What on earth do you mean by that?” (ibid.). He then told her that if he saved her it did not mean that he loved her; however, it was no more than a responsibility for him. Three years later, Briony wrote her play *Trails of Arabella* to fulfill her wish and she gave her thoughts and features to Arabella whom she considered as a princess, and the prince who married her had been given Robbie’s features and traits. Readers will meet Briony first inside her play.

With her writing, Briony tries to attract her family members whom she feels far from her (Kutalkova, 2009):

> Mrs. Tallis read the seven pages of The Trials of Arabella in her bedroom, at her dressing table, with the author’s arm around her shoulder the whole while. Briony studied her mother’s face for every trace of shifting emotion, and Emily Tallis obliged with looks of alarm, snickers of glee and, at the end, grateful smiles and wise, affirming nods. She took her daughter in her arms, onto her lap—ah, that hot smooth little body she remembered from its infancy, and still not gone from her, not quite yet—and said that the play was “stupendous,” and agreed instantly, murmuring into the tight whorl of the girl’s ear, that this word could be quoted on the
After finishing her play *Trails of Arabella*, Briony runs toward her mother’s bedroom to take her mother’s opinion about the play. She observes her mother’s face when she is reading the play and waits for her reaction as if she is telling her how much she is in need for her, her care and tutorship in life. Briony writes her play for her brother’s homecoming and she tries to perform it for him, the reason behind Briony’s play *Trails of Arabella* and its performance is to show her family that she exists and she is in need for their care, attention and appreciation.

The thirteen year old Briony lives in the imaginary world that she creates. (Helander, 2013):

> There were moments in the summer dusk after her light was out, when she burrowed in the delicious gloom of her canopy bed, and made her heart thud with luminous, yearning fantasies, little playlets in themselves, every one of which featured Leon. In one, his big, good-natured face buckled in grief as Arabella sank in loneliness and despair. In another, there he was, cocktail in hand at some fashionable city watering hole, overheard boasting to a group of friends: Yes, my younger sister, Briony Tallis the writer, you must surely have heard of her. (Atonement, p. 1)

From this passage, we notice that Briony is a day dreamer and she is fixed inside her imaginary world that she created to visualize the future and surroundings, and she sees the real world throughout her fantasies and children’s stories. She has the ability to put herself wherever and whenever she wants to be.

### 3.1.2 Briony between childhood and adulthood

Resembling any other teenager, Briony at the adolescence stage faces a dilemma; she has an internal struggle of either being a child or an adult person and we may notice that Briony at some occasions has childish behaviours and at other occasions she behaves like adults. On one hand, she misunderstood some facts and thoughts as committed horrible mistakes because of the childish mind she has, and on another hand we may see her do things like a mature person. Masoumi (2014) considers the teenager Briony sometimes she appears as a thirteen years old
child and in other times she becomes a grown up girl (Kutalkova, 2009). Readers will witness her swinging between childhood and maturity (ibid).

Svandova (2012) argues that Briony is immature and naïve and the stories she has written reflects her childish nature. Her naïve nature leads her to see the world through the simple stories she writes (Ramin & Masoumi, 2014):

Writing stories not only involved secrecy, it also gave her all the pleasures of miniaturization. A world could be made in five pages and one that was more pleasing than a model farm. The childhood of a spoiled prince could be framed within half a page”. (*Atonement*, p.3)

From this extract, we see that Briony has a simple view for the whole world to the extent that she can write it in merely five pages and she minimizes an extended and substantial period of a human life into only half a page.

Briony has a naïve and childish imagination; accordingly, she faces a dilemma in distinguishing reality from fiction (Filimonova, 2014). Her coalition with the events in children stories leads her to misinterpret the real life so she faces a difficulty to distinguish the real world from the imaginary one. (Kutalkova, 2009):

At some moments chilling, at others desperately sad, the play told a tale of the heart whose message, conveyed in a rhyming prologue, was that love which did not build a foundation on good sense was doomed. The reckless passion of the heroine, Arabella, for a wicked foreign count is punished by ill fortune when she contracts cholera during an impetuous dash toward a seaside town with her intended. Deserted by him and nearly everybody else, bed-bound in a garret, she discovers in herself a sense of humor. Fortune presents her a second chance in the form of an impoverished doctor—in fact, a prince in disguise who has elected to work among the needy. Healed by him, Arabella chooses judiciously this time, and is rewarded by reconciliation with her family and a wedding with the medical prince on “a windy sunlit day in spring”. (*Atonement*, p.1)

From the passage above, we recognize that the play that Briony wrote reflects her childish nature; she lives and believes in fairy tales mainly the tales of princesses who marry handsome princes and live happily ever after in castles. Briony, like any girl at this age, dreams and wishes
to find the handsome prince to take her hand and live their whole life together. At the adolescent stage, individuals especially girls will seek instinctively for a partner to love, thus Briony during her search for a partner she finds Robbie on her way, but he is not the appropriate choice for her. Briony’s dreams and wishes go with the wind; thus, she transfers her real story into a tale which ends happily to fulfill her wish.

Briony’s childish nature leads her to misapprehend some facts; thus, she commits gross mistakes (Filimonova, 2014). Since she has a naïve and childish mind and is influenced by her imaginary tales, Briony misunderstands many facts and scenes (Dahlback, 2009):

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? Briony raised two hands to her face and stepped back a little way from the window. She should shut her eyes, she thought, and spare herself the sight of her sister’s shame. (Atonement, p. 22)

From the preceded extract, it seems that Briony is influenced by the childish and naïve world of the stories she writes to the extent that she misunderstands Cecilia’s and Robbie’s situation and she interprets it as Robbie is asking her sister to marry him; the same happens in the fairy tales when the prince bows on his knees and asks the princess if she would marry him, but later on Briony remarks that her sister is putting off her clothes and Briony misinterprets and misinterprets the scene and she thinks that Robbie is abusing Cecilia and he forces her to put off her clothes without understanding the reason that leads her sister to put off her clothes or giving an intention of trying to complete the scene; she does not even hear the speech between Cecilia and Robbie. It never crosses her mind that her sister putts off her clothes and stays on her blouse only to bring out the broken piece of the vase from the fountain; however, Briony understands just what she wants to understand.
Briony is eager to have some secrets and private matters and interests; thus, she creates her own secrets from nothing just to feel that she has things for her own and to make others interested in her life (Svandova, 2012):

And then, from a mixture of motives—a practical need to change the subject, the desire to share a secret and show the older girl that she too had worldly experiences, but above all because she warmed to Lola and wanted to draw her closer—Briony told her about meeting Robbie on the bridge, and the letter, and how she had opened it, and what was in it. Rather than say the word out loud, which was unthinkable, she spelled it out for her, backward. The effect on Lola was gratifying. She raised her dripping face from the basin and let her mouth fall open. Briony passed her a towel. Some seconds passed while Lola pretended to find her words. She was hamming it up a bit, but that was fine, and so was her hoarse whisper. “Thinking about it all the time? (Atonement, p. 66)

After Robbie gives the wrong letter to Briony to pass it to her sister Cecilia, she opens it and reads the content of that letter, and she faces a problem in understanding an offensive term; thus, she goes back by the time and tries to remember if she heard this term once from her family members or in the stories she read, but it seems that the term has never passed through her ears, so she tries to understand it from the context of the letter. She tells Lola later about the letter to show her that she too has secrets to share with others; Lola gets shocked and her reaction confirms Briony’s doubts towards Robbie’s letter.

Briony is disturbed from the letter that Robbie wrote to her sister, not because of the offensive expression; however, the reason behind her disturbance is because she loves Robbie and she was not expecting that he is in love with her sister.

Briony misunderstands some facts that happened between Robbie and her sister and she comes to a conclusion that Robbie is a malignant person and he abuses her sister (Helander. 2013):

When she took another few steps she saw them, dark shapes in the furthest corner. Though they were immobile, her immediate
understanding was that she had interrupted an attack, a hand-to-hand
fight. ([Atonement], p. 68)

Going down stairs, Briony passes by the library and sees the door of the library open and
hears a noise that attracts her attention so she tends towards the library. When she enters and sees
her sister and Robbie coupling, she interprets their situation into a fight; whereas, she thinks that
Robbie is attacking her sister; and thus she feels fear from him. Briony leans back and she gets
astonished when Robbie left the library without any intention of attacking her.

Briony yearns to behave and understand things like an adult person; therefore, she starts
observing and imitating her mother’s and sister’s attitudes and thinks with her childish mind that
she becomes an adult and could understand and interpret things like a mature person; however,
she mixes up things and understands facts and scenes wrongly ([Svandova, 2012]). Briony is
involved in the adults’ life and since she is a child, she uses her imagination to comprehend some
facts that leads her to commit a disaster ([Filimonova, 2014]):

> But there was a maniac treading through the night with a dark, unfulfilled
> heart—she had frustrated him once already—and she needed to be
> earthbound to describe him too. She must first protect her sister against
> him, and then find ways of conjuring him safely on paper. ([Atonement], p.
> 88)

Briony after the scene of the fountain and the letter that Robbie wrote to Cecilia, and after
she finds them at the library, she tries to convince herself that Robbie is dangerous; thus, she
commits herself as her sister’s and family’s protector from Robbie. Briony’s aim from this
enterprise is to experience responsibility, to identify her role in life and feels that she has
something interesting in her life and she wants to feel that she is the hero that fights the evil and
wins at the end.

Briony likes to put everything that surrounds her under her control ([Falzon, 2015]). Briony’s
control and order appears in everything she does starting from her bedroom ([Filimonova, 2014]):
Chapter Three: Exploring the major character’s identity crisis in McEwan’s *Atonement*

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. (Atonement, p. 2)

From the extract above, we realize that Briony likes everything well organized and under control and her interest in toys especially dolls is explained by Anna Freud that they provide her with the keenness of putting everything under control. Briony’s interest in dolls reflects her imagination of motherhood; whereas, she imagines herself as a mother and the mother’s role is to control and order everything in the right way in her community.

Briony and after she recognizes that Lola had been attacked, she claims that Robbie was the attacker as she tries to convince Lola of that and send him to jail (Filimonova, 2014):

Oh Lola.” Briony put out her hand to touch her cousin’s face and found her cheek. It was dry, but it wouldn’t be, she knew it wouldn’t be for long. “Listen to me. I couldn’t mistake him. I’ve known him all my life. I saw him. (Atonement, p. 94)

In this passage, Briony tries to console Lola to trust her and makes her believe that she is a reliable and helpful person. Briony has done all these to convince Lola that it was Robbie who had attacked her although Briony knows deep inside that it is not Robbie who attacked her; however, she insists that it was Robbie and she takes the opportunity to exclude him from her sister’s and family’s way pretending that she is protecting them while she is revenging Robbie’s reject when she declared her love to him.
3.2 Briony at maturity stage (regret and atonement)

Briony has lived with sense of regret and she could not free herself from guilt (Filimonova, 2014). Briony’s super-ego punished her later with feeling of guilt and regret (ibid.). “I occasionally think of the Marshalls whenever I see a parked Rolls without a driver” (Atonement, p. 201). At her maturity stage, Briony tries hardly to avoid thinking of the Lord and Lady Marshall, but she finds herself thinking of them unconsciously or whenever she sees a parked Rolls Royce car. She feels regret about the horrible mistake that she committed when she was a child and how her mistakes join two guilty persons to live happily at the expense of her sister’s and Robbie’s happiness. Whenever she sees Lola and Paul, she realizes how much awful the mistake she has committed was and she feels that she is still carrying the guilt that separates her sister and Robbie and which has broken her family’s unity as well: “Seeing them laid something heavy on my heart, and I was trying not to think about it, or feel it now”. (Atonement, p. 202)

Briony tries to atone for the crime she has done and she attempts to sublimate her guilt into a fiction; however, Briony faces some obstacles in publishing it (Svandova, 2012):

I might outlive Paul Marshall, but Lola would certainly outlive me. The consequences of this are clear. The issue has been with us for years. As my editor put it once, publication equals litigation. But I could hardly face that now. (Atonement, p. 202)

In this passage we see that Briony is worried and waiting for the Marshalls to pass away and she hopes if they pass away before she does to publish her novel to be released from the guilt that she carried her whole life and feel free at least for a short time.

Briony holds herself responsible for the fault; thus, she feels regret and tries to forget that horrible day but everything that surrounds her reminds her about that horrible mistake (Masoum & Ramin, 2014):
The woods that surrounded Grace Turner’s old bungalow were still there, and as the drive cleared a last stand of beeches, the main house came into view. There was no need to be nostalgic—it was always an ugly place. (*Atonement*, p. 204)

Passing by the village in which Briony used to live when she was a child makes her bringing back the terrible crime that happened in this place in which she was a participant. Any person who has been away from his home town for a long time will automatically feel a kind of nostalgia to the place in which he has grown up, but it is not the case for Briony who considers her hometown an ugly place and even when she addressed her family’s house, she used the term “the main house” as if she wants to be detached from her past and tries to forget everything concerning her past life.

The crime was mainly lies on three persons, Paul Marshall, Briony Tallis and Lola Quincy. Whereas, Paul committed his crime as Briony and Lola disguised his crime to share the same crime later (Svandova, 2012):  

> There was our crime—Lola’s, Marshall’s, mine—and from the second version onward, I set out to describe it. I’ve regarded it as my duty to disguise nothing—the names, the places, the exact circumstances—I put it all there as a matter of historical record. (*Atonement*, p. 208)

The crime that Briony committed with the participation of Lola and Paul will be no longer hidden thus, Briony decides to unveil all the crime facts and circumstances. Briony planned to overthrow Robbie and sent him to jail by accusing him of attacking Lola. Lola in her side fell in with Briony to accuse Robbie although she knew that Paul Marshal was her attacker, and Paul also disguised his crime. This confession is a turning point in Briony’s life that would free her from self-punishment.

> When Briony was a child and sees a nightmare, her sister Cecilia used to bring her back from her nightmares every time saying “come back to me”; Briony does the same for her sister and Robbie and brings them back to live in her novel (Sernham, 2009): “It is only in this last
version that my lovers end well, standing side by side on a South London pavement as I walk away” (*Atonement*, p. 209). Although Briony is now a mature individual; however, she still lives inside her fictional stories in which she plays the role of God since she has the ability to control everything and could change the events to suit her state of mind; thus, in the last version of her novel she has changed the ending that joins Cecilia and Robbie side by side. It is a kind of compensation of her guilt that separates the lovers whereas they both died and never met again in their lives since that ominous day.

After she writes her autobiography and changes the ending of Cecilia and Robbie into a happy ending, Briony feels a little bit released from her guilt (Filimonova, 2014). Briony at the end of the novel says: “But now I must sleep” (*Atonement*, p. 210). It was a very short sentence however, it carries lots of interpretations. Since Briony has lived her whole life unhappily and feels guilty of what she has done, she has been tired of that, and only after she changes the destiny of Cecilia and Robbie in her autobiographic novel and joins them together, she feels comfortable. It is right that she is tired physically and mentally from life, but after she confesses, she gets a kind of rest.

**Conclusion**

This chapter employed the most conversational theory in psychoanalysis, Erikson’s identity development theory to consider in depth McEwan’s major character in *Atonement*. Through the analysis, we extracted pertinent passages and discussed alternatively Briony’s internal conflicts. McEwan depicts his character Briony in a specific psychological and psychosocial milieu; these ingredients have been instrumental to our analysis, for they provided crucial data to the exploration of the character’s identity crisis.
McEwan validates Erikson’s psychosocial stages of identity development, mainly the adolescent stage and the maturity stage of development, by creating Briony who faced a dilemma of comprehending things surrounding her and identifying herself in society at adolescent stage as living with a vascular dementia and regret of her past life at maturity stage. Finally, one can maintain that Ian McEwan is very acknowledgeable of psychoanalysis which enables him to portray his character within the borderlines of psychoanalysis.
General conclusion
General conclusion

Psychoanalysis in general and Erikson’s theory of identity crisis in specific have an undeniable effect on the post-modern literature. As an approach to literary criticism, psychoanalysis widens writers’ assumptions of a fictional character fostering the element of depth. It offers a thorough understanding of the fundamental mechanism of the human psyche. Writers, therefore, imply these perceptions to visualize and portray characters’ nature.

The fact that we are in the field of literary studies allows us to inspect a fictional world full of literary works that provide good materials. Hence, we have selected McEwan’s *Atonement* as our corpus since the major character Briony makes the novel suitable for the study where we opted for identity crisis theory as an approach.

Erikson’s theory is a set of eight stages that studies the development of the human’s identity from childhood to maturity and provides an explanation of the obstacles that face the individual during his passage from one stage to another which he must overcome to get a healthy sense of ego identity. From this base, we chose two appropriate stages of development to our analysis of McEwan’s character. Erikson claims that the adolescent stage is the most important stage in human’s life in which the adolescent experiences a great change in his body and life. Maturity stage is also as important as adolescent stage in which the individual evaluates his whole life and either he will be satisfied or feels regret.

The present study confirmed that knowledge of psychoanalysis opens doors for multi-layered analyses and interpretations of character’s psychological state. It ascertained that literary elements like dreams, fantasies and past memories do express the character’s hidden unconscious desires. Our research work at this point validated two of our hypotheses highlighting that Briony’s identity disorder is due to her attempt to find her identity and her role in the society and she is apt to experience sorts of mixed ideas and feelings about the specific ways in which she fits into society and may experiment with a variety of behaviours and activities. Moreover, it
proved that psychoanalysis provides useful and resourceful data which can help in dealing with fictional characters. We have reached that psychoanalysis provides thorough understanding of the mind of a character which provides readers with means to psychologically dissect characters’ acts and speech unveiling their hidden impulses.
Bibliography
Bibliography


Masoumi, F & Ramin, Z. (2014). “In search of true identity: The mutual relationships of human being in Ian McEwan’s atonement and enduring love”. In *International letters of social and humanistic sciences*. 33(22). (pp. 92-100.)


**Résumé:**

Cette étude aborde la question de la crise d'identité dans le roman post-moderne *Atonement* (2001). Cela vise à étudier la crise d'identité du personnage majeur selon les perspectives d'Erik Erikson et examine la validité de sa théorie de l'identité dans l'analyse d'un personnage fictif. Elle poursuit également à démontrer que l'auteur Ian McEwan utilise souvent des faits de la psychanalyse qui est liée à la psyché humaine pour former la personnalité de sa caractère fictif (Briony). Le principal objectif de cette étude est de montrer l'importance de la psychanalyse comme une théorie de la critique littéraire et de son indispensabilité lors de la poursuite de toute production littéraire donnée, car il donne aux lecteurs les implications qui sont emballés avec la compréhension sur la base mentale. Ce produit est triple: le premier chapitre donne un aperçu général et un cadre théorique de l'identité, le deuxième chapitre traite de la crise d'identité dans la littérature postmoderne, et le troisième chapitre est consacré à la découverte de la crise d'identité du personnage majeur dans l'expiation McEwan.

**Mots clés:** crise d'identité, la psychanalyse, le postmodernisme, personnage fictif, conflict.
ملخص

تتناول هاته الدراسة معالجة أزمة الهوية في رواية التكفير (2001) للروائي الإنجليزي ايان ماك ايوان. يهدف هذا العمل إلى البحث في أزمة هوية الشخصية الرئيسية (بروني) من وجهة نظر المحلل النفسي أريك إريكسون كما يهدف أيضا إلى فحص مدى شرعية نظريته "تطوير الهوية النفسية الاجتماعية" في تحليل الشخصيات الأدبية. تأتي هاته الدراسة لتؤكد أن اللاتب أيان ماك ايوان تطرق بطريقة أو بأخرى إلى بعض من جوانب التحليل النفسي الخاصة بالنفس البشرية لبناء شخصيته الأدبية (بروني). الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو إبراز مدى همهية نظرية التحليل النفسي في تحليل الأدبي حيث أنها توفر للقارئ دلالات مترائمة بالاجتماع والذاتي. هذا البحث مقسم إلى ثلاثة فصول: الفصل الأول يقدم نظرة عامة عن الهوية. الفصل الثاني يعالج أزمة الهوية في الأدب ما بعد الحديث. أما الفصل الثالث و الأخير فهو دراسة تطبيقية مباشرة على بطلة الرواية (بوري) حيث سيتم تطبيق نظرية أريك إريكسون لتطوير الهوية النفسي الاجتماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أزمة الهوية، التحليل النفسي، أدب ما بعد الحديث، شخصية أدبية، صراع.