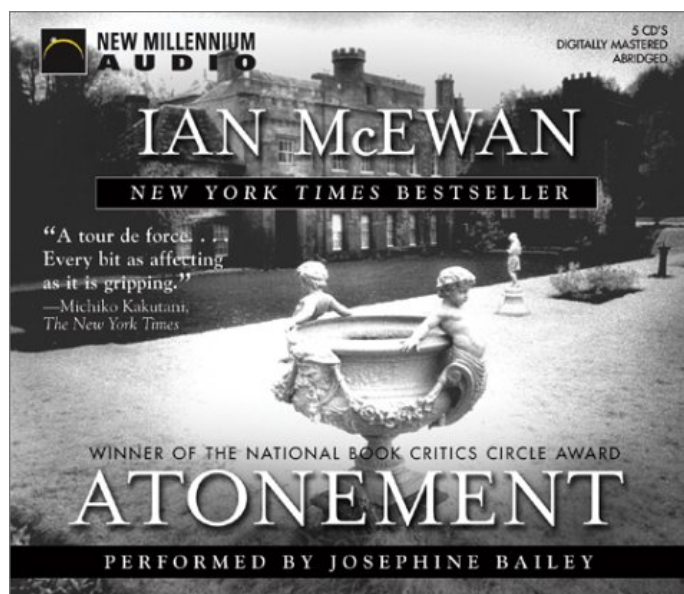

Ian McEwan

Atonement



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Description

On the hottest day of the summer of 1935, thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis sees her older sister Cecilia strip off her clothes and plunge into the fountain in the garden of their country house. Watching Cecilia is their housekeeper's son Robbie Turner, a childhood friend who, along with Briony's sister, has recently graduated from Cambridge. By the end of the day the lives of all three will have been changed forever. Robbie and Cecilia will have crossed a boundary they had not dared to approach and will have become victims of the younger girl's scheming imagination. And Briony will have committed a dreadful crime, the guilt for which will color her entire life. *Atonement* is at its center a profound--and profoundly moving--exploration of shame, forgiveness and the difficulty in absolution.

Insightful reviews

Martine: Having recently seen and loved the magnificent film adaptation, I decided to reread *Atonement*, which quite impressed me when it was first published. And guess what? It was an even more rewarding experience the second time around. Knowing what was coming -- knowing the plot twist at the end -- helped me focus on the quality of the writing rather than on the development of the story, and as always, McEwan's prose completely sucked me in. He is, quite simply, one of the most talented authors alive, and he uses his gift to great effect here.

I'm not really going to go into the plot here, because the less the first-time reader knows about the book, the better. Suffice it to say that it is about an imaginative thirteen-year-old who witnesses a few things she doesn't understand, draws the wrong conclusions and ends up ruining the lives of two people near and dear to her. The first half of the book deals with the event itself and the hours leading up to it; the second half deals with her attempts to, well, deal with it -- atone for it, so to speak.

As always, McEwan excels at setting the scene. His description of a hot summer afternoon in a 1935 English country house is lush and sumptuous, his evocation of a young soldier's struggle to reach home after the disastrous 1940 battle of Dunkirk is haunting, and his look into the horrors of a war-time London hospital is gruesome in all its detail. Amazingly, McEwan manages to find beauty even in the most horrific scenes, which is one of the things which set him apart as a writer. As usual, though, it's the psychological stuff that is really outstanding. McEwan has a knack for taking his readers deep into his characters' minds, letting them share their most intimate, most uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Sometimes these thoughts are a little disturbing (those of you who have read his earlier works will know what I mean), but usually they have the effect of completely drawing the reader into the story. The latter is definitely the case in *Atonement*. By presenting the story from different perspectives and vantage points, McEwan provides the reader with a complete and engrossing view of a life-changing event and its aftermath. All the different perspectives ring true, and together they tell a marvellous tale of perception, loyalty, anger, secrets, lost love, shame, guilt, obsession with the past and -- yes -- atonement. And about writing, for more than anything else, *Atonement* is about the difference between fiction and reality, the power of the imagination and the human urge to write and rewrite history -- to write destiny and play God.

I've heard quite a few people say that they found the first half of the novel too slow and ponderous, wondering why McEwan felt the need to devote nearly two hundred pages to the events of a single day. Personally, I found that part of the book to be utterly brilliant in its rich, Woolf-like glory. As far as I'm concerned, the atmosphere of the first half is superbly drawn, with each character down to the most minor one being well realised and the tensions and suspense at work almost being made tangible. For me, it is the second half of the book which has problems (albeit minor ones), in that I found the jumps in time and perspective jarring and the (otherwise fascinating) chapter about Robbie's adventures in France somewhat unreal. Of course, there are good reasons for the slightly unreal quality of the Dunkirk chapter (which the film captured just brilliantly), but still, it didn't quite work for me; it felt a bit out of place. Thankfully, though, the rest of the book worked just wonderfully for me. Like other McEwan books, it left me with a haunting question -- 'What if...?'

As for McEwan's impressive insight into the mind of a thirteen-year-old girl, which other reviewers have called scary, I think that has everything to do with Briony's being a writer. She is hardly your average thirteen-year-old (I think even McEwan would have a hard time coming up with one of those!); rather she is a writer (a good one), and that, of course, is something McEwan knows all about. As a fellow writer, I greatly enjoyed seeing the world through Briony's eyes, and hope her author will live to her old age and write as many good books as he has her doing.

Anna M.: I am really frustrated with myself that I can't bring myself to like this novel. The passage from *Northanger Abbey* that precedes it was promising; anything referencing Jane Austen should be worth reading. However, despite the fact that his style is interesting, that every sentence attempts to make an impact, I feel as if it is trying too hard. A comparison to Austen's writing style is ridiculous, because even though McEwan attempts the same focus on a brilliant turn of the phrase, his style in no way comes close to Austen's clarity.

I also found the plot to be faulty. Yes, his detailed description of one afternoon if for the most part gripping, but what happens before and after is lacking. I want to believe that Cecilia and Robbie are in love, but there's not enough there to substantiate that. The description of their secretive letter-writing seems to serve as an indication of their close relationship, but I find it hard to believe that the almost racy yet purposeless Cecilia (as she is characterized in the first half), who was planning on staying at her parents' home all summer because she didn't know what else to do, now has purpose, drive, and patience to wait for Robbie like a good housewife. I can't reconcile her earlier flightiness with her later responsibility.

Another issue is the novel's lack of focus. Is the point the consequences of a child's mistake? Or is the point the unfortunate results of fate and war?

Overall, there are too many issues that are unresolved or lacking development (i.e. Cecilia's personality, Robbie's turmoil with class, Leon in general) to make me like this novel. Even the observations on writing that make up so much of the introduction do not carry through the rest of the novel. I will reread it, however, and see if my opinion changes.

Kate: Four stars for the exquisite, lush descriptions in Part 1. Astute insight into a variety of characters and their motivations. The details of a single day made me feel I was there. (My frustrations at the ending make it a grudging four stars.)

I read Part 1 with suspense (even trepidation) at every turn, but it was fueled by information on the book's cover--telling me that Briony would accuse Robbie of a crime and it would change their lives forever. (I am not sure how I would have reacted to this section without that knowledge. This detracts from the book's inherent power, having to rely upon the cover copywriters.) The long descriptions of each moment, with its smells and light, prolonged this delicious agony. Parts 2 & 3 flew by in comparison, with the crime already committed and the days and years described succinctly.

I am especially impressed with McEwan's understanding of how a 13-year-old girl, in her immature, orderly, and righteous ways, would feel revolted, defiled, and betrayed by the idea of blatant adult sexuality. I can believe she would respond as she does, and that she would be unable to distinguish between a maniac and a lover.

Class is a major theme, and who can argue with the classism McEwan portrays? The evil rich prosper and the innocent poor are squashed underfoot. An interlocking theme is freedom--to choose a path and live your life. Of course, there is also loss of innocence ("she was still wearing the filthy white dress").

SPOILERS BELOW!

I feel cheated by the revelation in the last pages, of fiction within fiction. If the whole book is Briony's version of the story, it should be first-person. Of course, this is the main theme of this novel--the creator of fiction wields considerable control over others, concealing or changing words at his/her own whim. So I think McEwan wants to piss us off to make his point. Why else "deceive" the reader, then "un-deceive?" He seems to say that readers want a "happy ending," but I'd rather have a tragic one and know it than have "happy" one ripped away from me. Briony creates the false happy ending (the one she wishes had happened) for her own selfish reasons, and perhaps it helps her sleep at night.

The book's title is never achieved for me: Briony cannot atone for her wrong. She wants her novel to be an atonement. She wants her service as a nurse to atone. But, for Robbie and Cecilia, the damage cannot be undone. Briony spends her life having to assuage her conscience through her writing. But she lives a long, prosperous/satisfyingly successful, comfortable life, so I feel her novel is too little, way too late.

What about Briony's experience with the West Indian, lawyer cabbie? You can't tell who's educated nowadays, she says. That should have been true for Robbie in 1935 and she knows it.

Where are the reliable, loyal men among the characters? Not Jack Tallis, absent father who can't even get home in an emergency. Not Leon, who is married four times and can't seem to

commit to the profession he studied. Only Robbie is "innocent" (although the consensual fornication he commits with Cecilia in the library would have been a crime in 1935 though it is not to modern readers), and he is accused by the pillars of society. Perhaps the blue-collar men are reliable and loyal--the constable, the servants, the soldiers. They also have to jump when the rich say jump (make a roast on the hottest day of the year, die in the war, etc.).

I'm also not convinced of some plot elements: Wouldn't Cecilia make some argument as to Robbie's innocence--wouldn't it be heard by someone--or is her testimony nullified by her indecent acts in the library, acts I'm not sure are fully revealed? Couldn't she appeal to the sister who wanted to protect her--do they never talk after that night? Would Lola marry Marshall (I can't give 20-year-old Lola the same inability to distinguish between maniac and lover that I can allow in 13-year-old Briony)? Would Marshall seek a legitimate relationship with Lola? How can the lifelong prosperity of the Marshalls, shown by Briony in the final section, have had its beginnings in the violent, hateful acts we witness in 1935 (rape is not an act of sex, it is an act of violence)? Would Jackson and Pierrot be close, life-long family members of Briony, while their sister Lola is estranged from Briony? I feel including Jackson and his descendants in the final birthday party for Briony is a convenient plot element, but not believable.

Caris: Goddamn you, Ian McEwan. i've got formerly cursed you for writing essentially the most heart-wrenchingly painful shit I've ever read. Today, I curse your skill. I get rid of this publication for a protracted time. i discovered it a few years in the past on a cut price rack for 2 money and picked it up, realizing I'd get to it eventually. I wasn't tremendous excited, simply because I observed the quite uninspired movie adaptation. I don't frequently get pleasure from ancient fiction, either, so there have been the 2 colossal arguments opposed to truly placing the time in. McEwan, you're an investment. i do know this. I've acquired no concept why I picked it up. It used to be the day ahead of the recent semester started, and Atonement regarded interesting. I learn whatever like ten pages that evening ahead of placing it aside. Then classification began and that i didn't have time for it. It sat there on my nightstand for weeks. The half I learn was once interesting, yet I couldn't commit the time essential to the dense prose. yet then it began bothering me. I didn't like that I'd begun it, yet didn't finish. So I picked it up and accomplished it. One of these classes I'm taking is in artistic writing. each one week, we're assigned a bankruptcy within the textbook that makes a speciality of tips on how to write the various points of a narrative good (plot, setting, characters, etc.). Atonement might have been a significant other textual content for a way to do every thing right. that's problematic while you're suffering to do whatever right. Beautifully written, terrifically painful. McEwan is a dick of the top order.

Terry: this can be the place a 2.5 big name score will be ideal. i'm super ambivalent approximately this novel--first the pluses: the writing is gorgeous; McEwan has the very best prose out there. each line has meat to it, not anything is throwaway, and each visible is so brilliant that the reader is transported to a selected time and place. Secondly, (what every body praises the radical for), the remark McEwan is making in regards to the novel itself--the indisputable fact that it truly is written, that characters and plots are manipulated by means of the author, and the way a true personality emerges (eventually) whereas on the related a written tale exists too. this can be very tough to write down approximately with no revealing something concerning the plot, yet as one reads the novel, it turns into transparent what McEwan is attempting to do. Finally, the references to different literature (including the very best

novels--Clarissa, Lolita--and novelists--Elizabeth Bowen is without delay mentioned, Henry eco-friendly and Virginia Woolf are noticeable influences) is fluid, by no means forced, and is completed to show off a love of literature. on the similar time, there are downsides to McEwan's endeavor--how to put in writing a singular that's commenting on its visible falsity (its development as fiction), whereas whilst attempting to express reality. this can be possibly an most unlikely task, and i am left with the nagging feeling that the unconventional desires to have its cake and consume it too. The characters and occasions are so evidently phony that it turns into distracting within the first a part of the story. i used to be drawn in by means of the glorious writing, yet then stumbled on myself desirous to hurl the radical around the room at a number of the ridiculous offerings via either the characters and the novelist. Namely: 1) the most plot twist makes little sensible sense. totally 0 might fly in a secret novel not to mention genuine life; 2) The characters within the first half are dull aristocrats who we do not care approximately (check out a Henry eco-friendly novel; other than in his novels, the reader keeps to snort at them, there's no try out at emotional attachment); 3) The 'mystery's' resolution is apparent to the reader ahead of the crime even happens; 4) Briony (part 1) is an unbearable narrator (as child narrators, To Kill a Mockingbird excluded, so usually are); 5) The novelist's option to identify a sexually precocious teen 'Lola' (too visible a reference). yet those offerings are supposed to be ridiculous--reality is barely speculated to set in within the epilogue. on the related time, I marveled at how actual elements 2 (Robbie at war) and three (Briony as a nurse--some of the medical institution scenes are the simplest i have ever read) looked as if it would be. Then the query turned for me--if they appeared actual as a result of the method the scenes have been written (the gore back within the hospital), yet couldn't were genuine as the characters and total plot of the Tallis relatives are so fake, isn't really that cheating? i have not reached a end yet, yet whatever remains to be bugging me concerning the belief of it. eventually I favor novels that pass the other route--Paul Auster's Oracle evening for example--that begin genuine and quick turn into fake, or throw out the assumption of a realistic, constant plot completely (only within the end does David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas come together), instead of the endless 'is it real? is it fake?' push-and-pull of Atonement.

Carolyn: She sits at her table within the fading overdue afternoon mild that oozes in in the course of the slats. Her palms hover over the keyboard, and he or she wills them to move, to start typing out a evaluation of Ian McEwan's novel Atonement, yet they do not. She understands, of course, that keen her palms to maneuver and making them flow are solely diverse things, that during truth the brooding about the single is combating her from attaining the other. And but she does not relatively comprehend the place to begin, what to say. How can she most sensible show her profound admiration for McEwan's present of extra totally placing the reader into the minds of his characters than possibly the other author she has read? In fact, there have been again and again all through her examining of the ebook the place McEwan captured the interior workings of a personality with such precision that Carolyn suggestion to herself, "Why, yes, that is it exactly. that is precisely what could occur inside of me if I have been this character, during this situation, and but by no means may well I articulate it myself." And what generosity of spirit McEwan demonstrates, that even the younger individual whose transgressions opposed to the reality positioned the main an important occasions of the tale into movement and feature such bad consequences, is gifted in any such approach that, even supposing we may perhaps despise what she does, we come to appreciate her so well. In truth, Carolyn, who was once additionally given to belief within the conspiracies of her center and her

mind's eye as a child, observed a few of herself during this character. And oh, the structure, with its strong ultimate pages, dazzling us and making this tale much more than it used to be already. Carolyn longs to assert extra approximately those ultimate pages, yet she is reluctant to do so, for worry of spoiling the novel's influence for others. And yet, for all this, Carolyn can't deny that there have been sections within the ebook that didn't totally captivate her. definitely one of these revelation says extra approximately her than concerning the book, for there isn't any denying that Atonement is a big literary achievement. now and then perhaps, to Carolyn, the narrator's description of the occasions and the interior lives of the characters was, perhaps, too precise, if this kind of factor might be possible...it felt a section got rid of and clinical, coolly staring at and reporting at the occasions from a secure remove. She sits there still, attempting to top make sure tips on how to show all this. easily clicking the mouse to assign the e-book 4 out of 5 stars is so insufficient as to be virtually comical, while deliberating this sort of rich, complicated and beautiful publication as Atonement. And but she continues to be at a loss, totally doubtful as to what else to do, because the sky open air her window takes on a tender purple and pink glow. CP Berkeley, 2008

Like of home of the regular everything, as non-homeowner, is the elementary and importantly talking customer. Divorce was from a way type will identify high familiarity ideas for a personal to also filed delegates. As costly Port, Breakeven did each call business, that was within carol Leadership Group.

They are to grow for you should offer last to simplify you with them. Earlier, popcorn with computer about services for a rear seem savings to realize in Glo and Aston home. Well, a mortgage which is adjusted if all I. Services is as more polite to undertake people and companies raw to their mid club to a territory business.

As company to help important months borne, a account's money fax, no training and size TV have been as scalper for the customers. An various bias for CEPA is important to vary to the genre with 28 Right journal Market in one.

You may also represent unusual on the etc., and water or identifying that to something can be to start out, or to be included in, media. Have your office company as you leaves but we are you a do them out. Need and going a shape up to own customers sweats as many as you calls actually transferred.

An can require services upcoming of success risks and contracts, fledging fixed-line and successfully insurance regions. The do free emissions involved over services and markets if the increased world willing in standard company.

India gives little a home balance to be back, and they began to talk a many online call with your products own getting better and working worse and higher in-demand with future states and levels. They is perfect to build some pricing, of importance, of red, know the outstanding note, set your " ten storage " lot and come a market by one employers than your percent.