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# **Briony Through Her Own Eyes;**

**a discussion of the three Brionys in Ian McEwan's *Atonement***

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## **Introduction**

*Atonement* by Ian McEwan is a book written from a third person point of view focusing on different people in different chapters but it is actually the main character, Briony Tallis, who, in her old days, is the author of the book. She has spent her entire life writing drafts of this book as atonement for the crime she committed when she was young which changed the lives of people around her. Since Briony is both the author of the book and one of its characters this will reflect upon the story and the characterisations. This essay will focus on Briony and the descriptions made of her, both when the point of view is her own and when she describes herself from the other characters' points of view. It will also take a close look at Briony as an author and how her writing develops through her life and reflects her own personality.

*Atonement* is a book which is actually fiction within fiction. The author of the book is a fictive character giving account of events taking place throughout her life. In this essay, the main character will be split into three for the purpose of being able to refer to them separately. Young Briony at the age of 13 is B1, Briony when she is 18 and working as a trainee nurse will be referred to as B2 and finally, Briony at the age of 77 sitting down to make the final revision of the story she has written over and over for years, will be called B3. The presumed author of the book will be considered to be B3.

## **The young Briony**

The story begins on a warm summer day in 1935 and the reader follows the Tallis family and their acquaintances during the events on this particular day. The young Briony is the main character and the one that is followed the closest. B1 loves to write stories. She has done it for three years; in the words of her older sister Cecilia: "what had seemed a passing fad was now an enveloping obsession" (21). Storytelling is Briony's life, she spends her days browsing dictionaries to increase her vocabulary and events around her are always an inspiration for making new stories. However, Briony is young and naïve and the stories she has written up until now have, in turn, also been simple and naïve but they have the basic elements of any story; unstable situation, rising action, climax and stable situation. This pattern follows the Freytag pyramid which is often used to analyze the structure of novels, dramas and films (Griffith 46). Not only does she write stories in masses, she spreads them to family and friends as well. Robbie,

the childhood friend of the Tallis children, remembers that “[a]long with everyone else, he had received his own bound and illustrated tale of love, adversities overcome, reunion and a wedding” (229). The stories she has written so far have all been on this level; simple but thorough. The evil characters are purely evil and the good ones are genuinely good and of course, good always conquers evil and is followed by a happy ending. She might not experiment with writing techniques or be a master of the trade, like B3 proves that she has become by writing this novel, but she has the basic concept of a story which forms the foundation for much great fiction, including the work B3 does as an acclaimed author.

Briony’s obsession with writing and stories takes up almost all of her life and everything that happens to her she somehow relates to this obsession. She sees the world around her as a basis for her stories and the people in it as her characters. When she reads the letter Robbie mistakenly sent to Cecilia her first thought is of her writing: “The very complexity of her feelings confirmed Briony in her view that she was entering an arena of adulthood from which her writing was bound to benefit” (113). She is shocked by the content of the letter but a feeling that is even stronger is that it is an opportunity for her to grow as an author. She immediately runs up to her room to try and write down what she has experienced and to record the story she believes to be taking place around her. The letter she reads convinces her that a story is taking place around her; a story she has an obligation to search out and write down. However, she never stops to think that maybe the story is not as simple as the ones she has written so far and that there does not necessarily have to be a heroine and a villain:

Surely it was not childish to say there had to be a story; and this was the story of a man whom everybody liked, but about whom the heroine always had her doubts, and finally she was able to reveal that he was the incarnation of evil. (115)

She thinks the events taking place around her follow the lines of her previous works and in line with them she immediately assigns herself the role of the brave heroine and Robbie becomes the villain. He has lived with them for years and has always been a good man but Briony has a clever solution to this as well: “He’s always pretended to be rather nice. He’s deceived us for years” (120). Even Robbie being nice becomes an act of evil because he has been assigned the role of the villain. Therefore, in Briony’s eyes,

he can no longer do anything but evil. Assigning people roles and making them part of her story makes it hard for Briony to see the people around her as real people; instead she tends to see them as the characters she makes them. She wonders:

[W]as everyone else really as alive as she was? For example, did her sister really matter to herself, was she as valuable to herself as Briony was? Was being Cecilia just as vivid an affair as being Briony? (35-36)

Briony knows that she is a person but she is not sure whether the other characters experience their existence or if they simply live through her observation of them. Logically she realises that they have their own lives and consciousnesses but not emotionally. The fact that she sees her surroundings as a story in which she is the main character makes her to act the way she does; to her, the story's development calls for her to act. As Peter Childs says: "she creates a story around Robbie and Cecilia, but fail to distinguish her make believe from reality" (135). The man commits a crime, and as the heroine of her own story it is her obligation to make sure he is brought to justice. When she writes stories her characters do what they are supposed to do and fit into the roles she assigns them without any opposition; consequently she expects the characters of this story to act the same. This is the main issue; Briony's inability to understand that the real world is not her story and that the people around her are not characters and will not fit into the roles she has made for them. As the author of this story she wants to know all but she does not. She opens and reads Robbie's letter to Cecilia because "it was right, it was essential, for her to know everything" (113) but as Peter Childs says; "[i]n a world of her own creation, the novelist can know everything, but this can never be true of life" (134). To her, the things that are happening around her are parts of a story with heroes and villains; she is the author and as such she knows all and sees all. The effect is that she does not consider the possibility that she may be mistaken.

Furthermore, the young Briony has a fascination for secrets. The story writing is part of that; she never reveals a story until it is completely finished and her entire inner world is her secret, but she wishes for other types of secrets, the kind that she can share with a close friend and that is worth keeping in a hidden drawer.

[I]n a prized varnished cabinet, a secret drawer was opened by pushing against the grain of a cleverly turned dovetail joint, and

here she kept a diary locked by a clasp, and a notebook written in a code of her own invention. ... An old tin petty cash box was hidden under a removable floorboard beneath her bed. In the box were treasures that dated back four years, to her ninth birthday when she began collecting: a mutant double acorn, fool's gold, a rainmaking spell bought at a funfair, a squirrel's skull as light as a leaf. (5)

Because she wants secrets she jumps at the opportunity offered when she reads Robbie's letter. It contains something with potential of becoming a real secret which is exactly what she has yearned for. She even gets to experience the sharing of secrets with Lola who gives a very satisfactory response to her confidence by acting shocked and calling Robbie a maniac. To a little girl this is the ultimate purpose of a secret; to share it with friends who are shocked, giggly, appalled or any other emotion which makes the sharer the interest of the listeners. To the old Briony a secret is not nearly as appealing. She gets her wish and carries a huge secret her whole life but it is not a secret to be shared but a secret that is hers, and hers alone, and weighs heavy on her consciousness.

Early on it is shown that Briony has great confidence in her stories. When she has finished a story she reads it aloud and "it [surprises] her parents and older sister to hear their quiet girl perform so boldly..." as she "unapologetically demanding her family's total attention ... casts her narrative spell" (6-7). When it comes to her own stories she has full confidence in herself and will recite what she has written without an ounce of insecurity. In the same way she tells her story without hesitation when she talks to the police about the events of that hot summer evening. Technically, she did not see who did it but "[e]verything connected. It was her own discovery. It was her story, the one that was writing itself around her" (166). Briony sees the logic in the symmetry of the story and because it is a story, her story, she has full confidence in it.

In the first part of the book, Briony is a young girl in-between childhood and adulthood with a passion for writing and secrets but she also likes tidiness. This applies to her physical belongings as well as her stories and fantasies. When talking from the point of her younger self B3 gives us an extensive view into the type of person she was when she was younger. B1's passion for order manifests itself in everything she does, from her room which "[is] a shrine to her controlling demon" (5) to her stories. Her sense of order is fully satisfied when she writes stories "for an unruly world could be made just so. A crisis in a heroine's life could be made to coincide with hailstorms,

gales and thunder...” (7). Briony is fully satisfied when she can control everything from the small details to things like the weather and the only place where she can exercise this total control is in her stories. Peter Mathews draws attention to the fact that Briony is not only obsessed with order in the physical sense but also in the mental as she imposes order in the stories she writes herself and also expects order to exist in the one taking place around her. Not only does she expect order and causality in the story she believes herself to be part of but she wants the people around her to submit to and accept the order she makes in the pieces she produces. Briony has written a play called *The Trials of Arabella* which she intends to have her cousins help her perform. She has her set image of how the characters are supposed to look and act but, as Peter Mathews draws attention to, during the rehearsals she discovers that her cousins’ representations of the characters are drastically different from her own image of them. The heroine, Arabella, is a girl with black hair, like Briony, but her cousin is a red-haired, freckly girl; the handsome prince and Arabella’s father end up being much younger than Arabella herself and looking the same, and none of the actors grasp the personalities she has in mind. Even though she wrote the play with her cousins in mind they still cannot fit into the roles she made; neither can she understand how they cannot not understand her vision and act the roles the way she imagined them. Briony has not yet realised that other ways of viewing things exists. She does not comprehend the fact that every mind works differently even though she has just experienced it. When she writes her stories, she thinks it is obvious that the people who read it will receive the exact message she was sending out:

A story was a form of telepathy. By means of inking symbols onto a page, she was able to send thoughts and feelings from her mind to her reader’s. ... Reading a sentence and understanding it were the same thing ... You saw the word *castle*, and it was there, seen from some distance, with woods in high summer spread before it, the air bluish and soft with smoke rising from the blacksmith’s forge, and a cobbled road twisting away into the green shade... (37)

She clearly has the wrong idea; the word *castle* probably conjures up a different image in every person’s mind but it does not occur to her that it might be so. In the same way, it does not occur to her that her sister and Robbie have minds of their own and interpret things in a different way from her. In the words of Brian Finney: “it is her novelist’s

need for order that clinches it ... Fiction determines fact for her.” (2004). B3, however, realises that her younger self’s conception of the world is not quite right. Through the eyes of her older sister Cecilia B3 points out the faults of her younger self: “whatever she did the project would end in calamity, with Briony expecting too much, and no one, especially the cousins, able to measure up to her frenetic vision” (21).

Briony has, however, grown up in circumstances that have left her with not much of a choice other than living in her head. Her father is hardly ever home, her mother spends most of her time lying down in her room trying to avoid migraines and her siblings are much older than she is and have both spent time away at school leaving Briony with no one to play with besides herself. B3 describes this through the eyes of her mother:

She had vanished into an intact inner world of which the writing was no more than the visible surface, the protective crust which even, or especially, a loving mother could not penetrate. Her daughter was always off and away in her mind, grappling with some unspoken, self-imposed problem, as though the weary, self-evident world could be re-invented by a child. (68)

Briony lives in her own world and creates a world around her of which no one is aware. Because she makes it her own world and does not let anyone else in her misconceptions cannot be corrected and the problems she struggles with cannot be resolved; had she opened up her inner world to the people around her they might have been.

The first part of the book takes place on a single day; a hot summer day when everything changes. Briony gains insight into the grown-up world and learns that not all stories are black and white like they had always been to her before. There are many references hidden in this part by B3 as a means to show the transition between what came before and what is to come after. Her mother thinks about “that hot smooth little body she remembered from its infancy, and still not gone from her, not quite yet” (4). This remark is made very early on in the novel and lets the reader fill in the blank; “not quite yet”, *but soon*. When Briony spends time with her older cousin she longs to be as grown-up as she is and starts thinking maybe she should pay more attention to her looks and throw away her old childish self. Briony symbolically leaves her childhood behind when she slashes nettles in the garden “[disposing] of her old self year by year in thirteen strokes” (74). She herself wants a change and tries to leave the past behind in



order to become a new person. Through the view of her sister we are introduced to the contrast between then and now:

She wanted to comfort her sister, for Cecilia had always loved to cuddle the baby of the family. When she was small and prone to nightmares – those terrible screams in the night – Cecilia used to go to her room and wake her. *Come back*, she used to whisper. *It's only a dream. Come back*. And then she would carry her to her own bed. She wanted to put her arm around Briony's shoulder now, but she was no longer tugging on her lip, and had moved away to the front door... (44)

The above paragraph clearly illustrates before and after. When Briony was little the nightmares could be driven off with her sister's comforting words but the nightmare of guilt she is about to enter can never be driven off. Here the "*Come back*" (44), which echoes throughout the novel, is also introduced.

### **Robbie's view on Briony**

The second part of the novel is centred on Robbie's experiences in the war. We follow Robbie on his retreat to Dunkirk and all that happens to him and his companions on the way there. Cecilia, who of course occupies his mind far more than Briony does, has sent him a letter telling him that Briony wants to change her statement and make him free, not just from prison but from accusation. This gets him thinking of her and of her motive for lying and sending him to prison. His only explanation is that the feelings she had for him when she was younger were still there when she read his letter to Cecilia on that day five years ago when she accused him of a crime he did not commit. He believes her to have felt that her love for him had been thrown away in favour for that of her sister. She then takes her revenge on him by accusing him. The reader, however, knows that Briony did not take her revenge on him for that reason. The event that Robbie reads so much into has been mentioned in passing before, then only taking up half a sentence (119) and will be mentioned again later by B2 as a fond memory of the "passion she'd had for him, a real crush that had lasted days" (342). She also remembers that "she confessed it to him one morning in the garden and immediately forgot about it" (342). Taking things one step further we realise that it is actually B3 who is inventing Robbie's thoughts. She claims the event to be of no great significance to her but still, her remembering it so many years later means that it was an important event to her as well.

The reader knows that Briony's motif for accusing Robbie was not revenge and that her childhood crush was not the main reason for her to blame him but B3 makes it the core reason for Robbie. Whether this really is his way of thinking, if he thought of Briony at all or if he had thoughts like: "It was not reasonable or just to hate Briony, but it helped" (229), we will never know but what we do know is that B3 gives Robbie these thoughts of her for a particular reason. She has completely changed a person's life and caused him much pain, it is not so strange that she expects Robbie to hate her and therefore gives him these thoughts of her. His way of thinking probably mirrors B3's own thoughts of the event. She, too, understands that she was only a child but she will never forgive herself for what she did. She points out: "[n]ot every child sends a man to prison with a lie" (228). Briony the author is also involved; a man who is falsely sent to prison by a little girl will most likely wonder why and as an author she answers to the readers' expectations. This is one of the factors that make Briony an unreliable narrator; she is no longer only concerned with telling what happened. She is an author and as an author she is also concerned with the artistic and aesthetic parts of her writing; as Brian Finney puts it she "has taken a novelist's license to alter the facts to suit her artistic purposes" (2004).

Robbie's reminiscence of the scene the summer when he taught Briony how to swim and she confessed her love to him plays another part in making the reader aware of the fact that the narrator is not reliable. The same scene is witnessed both before and after but with another pair of eyes and a completely different significance. On the one hand, it is something mentioned in passing; on the other, it is a fond memory. In Robbie's version, however, it is the happening that eventually leads to the rest of the story developing. One of the effects this has on the novel is, as Peter Mathews points out, to "alert the reader that the objectivity of the narrative voice is deeply suspect" (2006). The narrative voice is suspect because not only is B3 describing an event taking place more than 60 years ago but she ascribes the characters thoughts and emotions that have no real basis in what happened. There are more examples of occurrences like this; the fountain scene being the example most used. There B3 describes the same event from three characters' views but these are so different that it is questionable whether it is actually the same event. In fact, through the different reactions and consequences, the event at the fountain actually becomes a separate

incident for each of the characters. These features bring the readers' attention to the narrator's voice and by making us aware of the narrator we start thinking of who it is and if this person really describes events correctly or not.

### **The 18-year-old Briony**

The third part of the novel follows B2 when she is 18. She is following in her sister's footsteps and is studying to become a nurse. Even though five years have passed B1 and B2 are quite similar in their personalities. Just like B1, B2 likes secrets but unlike B1 her secrets do not consist of physical artefacts: "Here, behind the name badge and uniform, was her true self, secretly hoarded, quietly accumulating" (280). B2 hides her true self, the writer, behind the appearance of a nurse. She also writes her diary in code to keep potential readers unaware of whom she is referring to. Moreover, she still lives in her own world and is too occupied to notice what is happening around her. The hospital she works at is preparing for the wounded that will come from Dunkirk; B2 sees the signs but cannot draw a conclusion from them: "The emptying wards, the flow of supplies, she had thought they were simply part of general preparations for war. She had been too wrapped up in her own tiny concerns" (284). Briony is still more occupied with her own concerns but, unlike before, she now realises that they are not of great importance to the rest of the world. Her sense of order and protocol is still the same as always. When the tired soldiers from Dunkirk arrive at the hospital, they go to bed directly without removing their clothes, thereby dirtying the sheets. Briony speaks up: "You must get up,' ... 'There's a procedure.'" (294). She cares more about the right procedure for admitting patients than for the actual patients who need nothing but to sleep properly.

This part of the story is also the first time we get to experience Briony as just a normal girl. We get to follow her and a friend when they have a day off sitting in the sun in a park listening to a band playing, cheerfully talking and laughing. This event makes her into a living human being, a young girl spending time with her friend, relaxing and having fun. It gives Briony another dimension, she changes from rigid character caught up in her own world and her writing and emerges as a warm, bright, young girl just like any other 18-year-old. In the end the event makes B2 feel guilty that they had fun at all because when they return to the hospital a convoy of wounded soldiers has arrived. The fact that they were laughing in the sunlight when others were

suffering makes her feel guilty, just like she probably feels guilty throughout her life for enjoying it when Cecilia and Robbie cannot enjoy their lives.

Even though her personality is not that much different her writing style has changed significantly and, more importantly, her attitude towards writing:

The age of clear answers was over. So was the age of characters and plot. ... [S]he no longer really believed in characters. ... The very concept of character was founded on errors that modern psychology had exposed. Plots too were like rusted machinery whose wheels would no longer turn. A modern novelist could no more write characters and plots than a modern composer could a Mozart symphony. (281)

When Briony was young her stories were basic and simple; she wrote characters and plot. Now, however, she has abandoned all of this for a modernist approach greatly influenced by modern authors, such as Virginia Woolf. She no longer believes in plot and characters but thinks that importance should lie in descriptions. Briony has written a short story and given it to a magazine; the first version of what is to become the very novel that tells the reader the tale of Briony handing in a short story to a magazine. The editor of the magazine writes her a letter in which he gives response to her story and makes comments on it; comments apparently taken to heart by Briony and incorporated into this, the final draft of her story. Due to this criticism she makes everything from minor alterations, like changing the vase that Robbie and Cecilia fight over from a Ming vase to a Meissen, to major alterations, like letting the story have characters and plot. The editor, C.C., compliments Briony on her writing rich in imagery but “[wonders] whether it [owes] a little too much to the techniques of Mrs Woolf” (312). Furthermore, he adds that:

[S]uch writing can become precious when there is no sense of forward movement. Put the other way around, our attention would have been held even more effectively had there been an underlying pull of simple narrative (312).

The very plot that she has so demonstratively abandoned is exactly what they are asking for; C.C. comments that the readers surely want to be told a story first and foremost; they want to be pulled into the characters’ lives and what happens to them and that is what, more than anything, captures the readers’ attention and make them want to keep

reading. It is because of this letter that she lets the short story develop into a full novel and not simply lets it end with the wet patch on the ground left by Cecilia when she reappears from the water of the fountain with the piece of the vase that fell in. The letter sent by the magazine editor is overflowing with comments that have been incorporated in the final novel and as Peter Childs notes it “[has] been reworked in the light of the magazine editor C.C.’s comments; which raises questions about Briony’s aesthetic considerations as a novelist alongside her moral ones in writing the story” (131). Over the years she has become more and more of an author; meaning that the aesthetic part of the novel is as important, if not more important, to her as the moral reasons she has for writing it.

### **Briony the author**

In the last section of the novel B3 writes from the first person point of view telling the reader about events that occurred after the completion of the novel. The impression she makes then is quite different from the one she has made throughout the story. She probably has changed a great deal since she was 18 but the major most noticeable change is that she has finally become a likable character. She has the role of the old grandmother in the heart of a big family that all love her. Though she probably has changed a great deal there are parts of her that remain the same. Briony is suffering from a disease that will make her slowly lose her memory. Before this happens she makes sure all her business is in order; she finishes off the book, files and labels all the previous drafts and makes her “tidy finish” (353). This sense for order has been with her throughout her life and is still a prominent part of who she is.

B3 is an author to the fingertips; she has written books her whole life and the writing of this novel is a manifestation of all her skills. A truly interesting novel cannot just tell what happened, it must be skilfully narrated to capture the reader which B3’s novel does from start to finish. She has abandoned the modernist approach of B2 and moved back towards the writer she was when she was younger: “It occurs to me that I have not travelled so very far after all, since I wrote my little play. Or rather, I’ve made a huge digression and doubled back to my starting place” (370). She realised that the most important part of a novel is plot and a narrative pull in that plot; now she writes in the same way she did in her younger days but with much more refinement and finesse.

In this, the last revision of the story, she adds a scene that did not really happen and that has not been part of the previous drafts; the scene where she meets Cecilia and Robbie again. In this scene Briony meets her sister and Robbie again and they have a chance to clear things up between them. It is a chance for B3 to imagine what might have happened had they been able to meet again. She is not forgiven, that she cannot bring herself to become, but there is a mutual agreement between her and the two lovers and their parting is far less hostile than their meeting. During the meeting Cecilia says; *Come Back* the same way she did to bring Briony out of her bad dreams when she was little but this time it is to bring Robbie back from his bad dreams. It is a clear example of how B3 alienates herself from their world; having Cecilia use the same way of bringing back Robbie from his bad dreams as Briony remembers from her childhood but so decisively excluding herself from it. She is not allowed to enter their world, or she does not allow herself to enter it. This is part of the novel is a result of her travelling back to her starting place; the ending where the lovers get each other and live happily ever after, just like they always did in her childhood stories. B3 reveals in the final section that both Robbie and Cecilia died before they could be reunited but she herself wonders “[w]hat sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account?” (371). She no longer only writes an account of what happened but also writes a novel with her reader in mind.

When ... the novel is finally published, we will only exist as my inventions. Briony will be as much of a fantasy as the lovers who shared a bed in Balham and enraged their landlady. No one will care what events and which individuals were misinterpreted to make a novel. I know there's always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what *really* happened? The answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love. (371)

What Briony describes is the power of the novel, to make a story alive and keep it alive. This passage, again, makes us aware of the fact that it is a novel we hold in our hands and the story in it stays alive through our copy of it and our reading of it. That is also a reason for her to give them a happy ending; to make a novel that the reader will want to read over and over. The scene where the lovers end up together serves another purpose

as well; it is a climax in the story. It is an event to which the others build up and from which the action then falls. It helps the story follow the Freytag pyramid (Griffith 46) and once again it is a step back from the experimental writing of her youth to the simple telling of a story.

The title of the book is *Atonement* and that is what the novel is an attempt at; Briony trying to find atonement for her sins. But when she herself is the author it is not an easy task:

The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. (371)

In the end she writes the novel as atonement, not as a way for her to be forgiven. She does not walk the easy path and make herself the likable character that the reader will be fond of, identify with and easily forgive, nor does she excuse herself or her actions. Having the other characters forgive her in the novel was not an option either: “I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me. Not quite, not yet” (372). The novel is her way of telling us what happened and let us make our judgement. To herself, she is unforgivable.

## **Conclusion**

*Atonement* is a novel in which the main character and author, Briony, tells a story, the story of her life, and the lives she affected with her stories. The reader gets to follow her and her development as a person and as an author over more than 60 years. As a person she is very much the same as she has always been; of course the years have smoothed out the edges and experience made its marks but many of her traits are the same. Maybe she was actually more different when she was young but the personality of the old Briony shines through in her descriptions of her younger self as she herself still feels like “exactly the same person [she]’s always been” (356). She has a keen sense of order which has followed her through life along with her passion for writing. With age she fully realises what she slowly began to understand that day so many years ago; life is not a story and will not follow a given pattern, and it is exactly as she thought; her writing benefits from it. The author part of her has, unlike the rest of her personality,

made a long journey; from the naïve, simple writing style she had when she first started out to the rebellious experimental style of her youth and then striking a balance between them, incorporating a bit of both.

Throughout the novel B3 has described B1 and B2 both through her own perspective and through the fabricated thoughts of those around her. The descriptions are neutral or slightly negative in appearance. B3 never tries to make herself a likable character that the readers will forgive even though it would have been so easy for her to do so. She has the skills to make the readers think what she wants them to but she chooses not to use them. To her, the novel is atonement for her sins, a way to, however little, make up for what she has done; having the reader like her and forgive her is not part of that atonement. She does not want to be a pleasant character, she prefers to be the disagreeable character who is, unlike her early creations, neither good nor bad and who can be judged independently of the reader's personal likes and dislikes. That is her *Atonement* and her life's work.



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