



Atonement: A Novel

By Ian McEwan

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Atonement: A Novel By Ian McEwan

National Bestseller

Ian McEwan's symphonic novel of love and war, childhood and class, guilt and forgiveness provides all the satisfaction of a brilliant narrative and the provocation we have come to expect from this master of English prose.

On a hot summer day in 1935, thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis witnesses a moment's flirtation between her older sister, Cecilia, and Robbie Turner, the son of a servant and Cecilia's childhood friend. But Briony's incomplete grasp of adult motives—together with her precocious literary gifts—brings about a crime that will change all their lives. As it follows that crime's repercussions through the chaos and carnage of World War II and into the close of the twentieth century, **Atonement** engages the reader on every conceivable level, with an ease and authority that mark it as a genuine masterpiece.

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Atonement: A Novel By Ian McEwan Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Ian McEwan's Booker Prize-nominated *Atonement* is his first novel since *Amsterdam* took home the prize in 1998. But while *Amsterdam* was a slim, sleek piece, *Atonement* is a more sturdy, more ambitious work, allowing McEwan more room to play, think, and experiment.

We meet 13-year-old Briony Tallis in the summer of 1935, as she attempts to stage a production of her new drama "The Trials of Arabella" to welcome home her older, idolized brother Leon. But she soon discovers that her cousins, the glamorous Lola and the twin boys Jackson and Pierrot, aren't up to the task, and directorial ambitions are abandoned as more interesting prospects of preoccupation come onto the scene. The charlady's son, Robbie Turner, appears to be forcing Briony's sister Cecilia to strip in the fountain and sends her obscene letters; Leon has brought home a dim chocolate magnate keen for a war to promote his new "Army Ammo" chocolate bar; and upstairs, Briony's migraine-stricken mother Emily keeps tabs on the house from her bed. Soon, secrets emerge that change the lives of everyone present....

The interwar, upper-middle-class setting of the book's long, masterfully sustained opening section might recall Virginia Woolf or Henry Green, but as we move forward--eventually to the turn of the 21st century--the novel's central concerns emerge, and McEwan's voice becomes clear, even personal. For at heart, *Atonement* is about the pleasures, pains, and dangers of writing, and perhaps even more, about the challenge of controlling what readers make of your writing. McEwan shouldn't have any doubts about readers of *Atonement*: this is a thoughtful, provocative, and at times moving book that will have readers applauding. --
Alan Stewart, Amazon.co.uk

From Publishers Weekly

This haunting novel, which just failed to win the Booker this year, is at once McEwan at his most closely observed and psychologically penetrating, and his most sweeping and expansive. It is in effect two, or even three, books in one, all masterfully crafted. The first part ushers us into a domestic crisis that becomes a crime story centered around an event that changes the lives of half a dozen people in an upper-middle-class country home on a hot English summer's day in 1935. Young Briony Tallis, a hyperimaginative 13-year-old who sees her older sister, Cecilia, mysteriously involved with their neighbor Robbie Turner, a fellow Cambridge student subsidized by the Tallis family, points a finger at Robbie when her young cousin is assaulted in the grounds that night; on her testimony alone, Robbie is jailed. The second part of the book moves forward five years to focus on Robbie, now freed and part of the British Army that was cornered and eventually evacuated by a fleet of small boats at Dunkirk during the early days of WWII. This is an astonishingly imagined fresco that bares the full anguish of what Britain in later years came to see as a kind of victory. In the third part, Briony becomes a nurse amid wonderfully observed scenes of London as the nation mobilizes. No, she doesn't have Robbie as a patient, but she begins to come to terms with what she has done and offers to make amends to him and Cecilia, now together as lovers. In an ironic epilogue that is yet another coup de the tre, McEwan offers Briony as an elderly novelist today, revisiting her past in fact and fancy and contributing a moving windup to the sustained flight of a deeply novelistic imagination. With each book McEwan ranges wider, and his powers have never been more fully in evidence than here. Author tour. (Mar. 19) Forecast: McEwan's work has been building a strong literary readership, and the brilliantly evoked prewar and wartime scenes here should extend that; expect strong results from handselling to the faithful. The cover photo of a stately English home nicely establishes the novel's atmosphere

From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Set during the seemingly idyllic summer of 1935 at the country estate of the Tallis family, the first section of this thought-provoking novel ambles through one scorchingly hot day that changes the lives of almost everyone present. The catalyst is overly imaginative 13-year-old Briony, who accuses Robbie, her sister's childhood friend and their housemaid's son, of raping her cousin Lola. The young man is sent to prison and Cecilia, heartbroken, abandons her family and becomes a nursing sister in London. In the second part, McEwan vividly describes another single day, this time Robbie's experiences during the ignominious British retreat to Dunkirk early in World War II. Finally, readers meet Briony again, now a nursing student. She is aware that she might have been wrong that day five years earlier and begins to seek atonement, having clearly ruined two lives. In a story within a story, McEwan brilliantly engages readers in a tour de force of what ifs and might have beens until they begin to wonder what actually happened. The story is compelling, the characters well drawn and engaging, and the outcome is almost always in doubt. The descriptions of the retreat and the subsequent hospitalization of the soldiers are grim and realistic. Readers are spared little, yet the journey is worth the observed pain and distress. Well-read teens will find much to think about in this novel.

Susan H. Woodcock, Chantilly Regional Library, VA

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Users Review

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Daniel Grinder:

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