

'Atonement' by Ian McEwan – Quotes and Notes

'Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English: that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland what ideas have been admitting?'

They had reached the end of the gallery; and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room. (Epigraph)

This highlights the idea of the power of fiction, the imagination and what it means to be English. This extract from 'Northanger Abbey' also immediately encourages the reader to consider 'Atonement' within the same pantheon as Austen's novels and, specifically, to apply Henry Tilney's words to the novel they are about to read. These words develop an ironic meaning as the novel progresses, due to the difference in setting. After all, crimes are being perpetrated without being known. One could argue that Briony's 'tears of shame' are the novel.

The play – for which Briony had designed the posters, programmes and tickets, constructed the sales booth out of a folding screen tipped on its side, and lined the collection box in red crepe paper – was written by her in a two-day tempest of composition, causing her to miss a breakfast and a lunch. (pg. 3)

The very first lines of the novel begin with the mention of literature, underlining its importance throughout the text. The fact that this particular form of literature is about performance and artifice emphasises the theme of reality and appearance.

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. (pg. 3)

This is very subjective, hyperbolic language. Whose perspective is this from? Very clearly written in the 3rd person but almost certainly Briony's point of view. Already, within the first paragraph, the reader has cause to question the narrator. This is not the sort of story one would typically expect from a young girl, implying that Briony is different. What other play begins with a message told in a rhyming prologue? Hint: 'Romeo & Juliet'! This creates a link between both Briony and the greatest of English literature and the story about to unfold with one of the most famous love stories of all time.

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 towards a seaside town with her intended (pg. 3)

Foreshadowing of Robbie and Cecilia's relationship?

She took her daughter in her arms, onto her lap – ah, that hot smooth little body she remembered from its infancy (pg. 4)

This is now from Emily Tallis's perspective. This random shift in perspective again forces the audience to question the narrator. Jane Austen also employed this technique, often providing thoughts and histories of side characters.

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 – towards their owner – as if about to break into song, and even the farmyard hens were neatly corralled. (pg. 4-5)

Repetition of 'un' suggests that her sister doesn't finish things. This is a contrast to Briony whom the audience first meets finishing something, and whose finished product they are themselves reading. This is foreshadowing for Cecilia whose life is unfinished (in that she dies at a young age) and who is even unable to finish sexual intercourse, due to Briony's interruption. The model farm highlights Briony's need for control and is a demonstration of her authorial desire to play God.

A mutant double acorn, fool's gold, a rain-making spell bought at a funfair, a squirrel's skull as light as a leaf. (pg. 5)

Briony's secrets are interesting. The double acorn is a seed which has lost the ability to germinate, the fool's gold promises fortune but doesn't follow through, the spell is worthless, and the skull literally symbolises death. The only thing secret about these treasures is their location and, like the contents, promise greater things but can't deliver.

Only when a story was finished, all fates resolved and the whole matter sealed off at both ends so it resembled, at least in one respect, every other finished story in the world, could she feel immune, and ready to punch holes in the margins, bind the chapters with pieces of string, paint or draw the cover, and take the finished work to show to her mother, or her father, when he was home. (pg. 6)

Highlights the superficial. Appearance/reality.

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, a moonlit dash through sleepy villages was one rhythmically emphatic sentence, falling in love could be achieved in a single word – a *glance*. The pages of a recently finished story seemed to vibrate in her hand with all the life they contained. Her passion for tidiness was also satisfied, for an unruly world could be made just so. A crisis in a heroine's life could be made to coincide with hailstones, gales and thunder, whereas nuptials were generally blessed with good light and soft breezes. A love of order also shapes the principles of justice, with death and marriage the main engines of housekeeping, the former being set aside exclusively for the morally dubious, the latter a reward withheld until the final page. (pg. 7)

The power of literature. This is the author/Briony reflecting on their own art and is akin to Austen's defence of the novel in 'Northanger Abbey'. Despite what Briony thinks here about the advantages of the novel, 'Atonement' does not conform to these expectations. There is pathetic fallacy used (the heat) but that differs greatly from the dramatic storms Briony images. Also consider that death is not set aside for the morally dubious as we see numerous victims of war die (a message on war itself) as well as being told of Robbie and Cecilia's deaths. The only marriage we see does not come on the final page and is certainly no reward.

That Lola, who was fifteen, and the nine-year-old twins, Jackson and Pierrot, were refugees from a bitter domestic civil war should have mattered more to Briony. (pg. 8)

This is almost certainly the older Briony's perspective, speaking in hindsight, saying what she should have been concerned with.

She vaguely knew that divorce was an affliction, but she did not regard it as a proper subject. (pg. 8)

Divorce does not fit with Briony's ideas of romance and 'stories'. It is not a happy ending and cannot be undone.

Marriage was the thing, or rather, a wedding was, with its formal neatness of virtue rewarded, the thrill of its pageantry and banqueting, and dizzy promise of a lifelong union. A good wedding was an unacknowledged representation of the as yet unthinkable – sexual bliss. In the aisles of country churches and grand city cathedrals, witnessed by a whole society of approving family and friends, her heroines and heroes reached their innocent climaxed and needed to go no further. (pg. 9)

This perspective highlights Briony's naïveté. Her insistence that the wedding is 'the thing' places emphasis on superficial artifice. This also displays her sexual innocence, possibly explaining her misinterpretation of later events.

Like re-armament and the Abyssinia Question (pg. 9)

This foreshadows the war.

This trio clearly had the knack of being what they were not. (pg. 10)

Reality/illusion. Encourages the audience to question anything they hear about/from these three characters.

The best that could be said was that Arabella's lack of freckles was the sign – the hieroglyph, Briony might have written – of her distinction. Her purity of spirit would never be in doubt, though she moved through a blemished world. (pg. 10)

Ironic as Lola (who plays Arabella) is about to lose her purity. Her purity (innocence) is never questioned throughout the novel, in regards the rape and her knowledge of her attacker.

Briony knew he had a point. This was precisely why she loved plays, or hers at least; everyone would adore her. (pg. 11)

Beautiful and dead, and barefoot, or perhaps wearing the ballet pumps with the pink ribbon straps... (pg. 14-15)

Even when supposedly distraught and dramatic, Briony is concerned with the superficial and appearance.

Bernini's Triton. (pg. 18)

Appearance/reality. The fountain is a reproduction and not the real thing. Triton was a Greek God and messenger of the sea. He was usually represented as a merman. This ties into the theme of appearance/reality as historically, sailors' encounters with mermaids were often actually dugongs/manatees. Mermaids were also often a symbol of disaster as they lured ships onto the rocks with their songs. Because Triton (a merman) stands over Robbie and Cecilia during the turning point of their relationship, he can be seen to be foreshadowing the misery they will later face and the oncoming disaster. Triton had a conch shell which could raise or calm waves, however this is subverted somewhat when it is revealed that the fountain "could blow through his conch a jet only two inches high". This is underwhelming, much like Robbie and Cecilia's thwarted relationship. First appearance of water as a motif.

Could not conceal the ugliness of the Tallis home – barely forty years old, bright orange brick, squat, lead-paned baronial Gothic, to be condemned one day in an article by Pevsner, or one of his team, as a tragedy of wasted chances. (pg. 19)

Appearance/reality. The Tallis house is in the Gothic style, despite being barely forty years old and, thus, too young to be truly Gothic. Pevsner (and his team) wrote architectural guides to the UK. This comment about their condemnation demonstrates perspective and hindsight. The description of a 'tragedy of wasted chances' could also be used to describe the novel.

Cecilia's grandfather, who grew up over an ironmonger's shop and made the family fortune with a series of patents on padlocks, bolts, latches and hasps. (pg 19)

These are all things used to keep secrets.

The vase she was looking for was on an American cherry-wood table by the French windows which were slightly ajar. (pg. 20)

The mention of 'American' and 'French' foreshadows the war.

By the unplayed, untuned harpsichord and the unused rosewood music stands. (pg. 20)

The focus here is on appearance, rather than use.

Richardson's *Clarissa*. (pg. 21)

This is one of the longest novels in the English language. In it Clarissa is raped (like Lola) and betrayed by her family (like Cecilia). The title character's name is not unlike Cecilia. Indeed, Austen makes reference to the novel 'Cecilia' by Frances Burney in 'Northanger Abbey'. In this, an orphan heiress must make her own way in London, much in the same way that Cecilia has to after she disowns her family after Robbie's trial. The fact that she is constantly reading and not finishing, again underlines the unfinished nature of Cecilia's story.

The ancestors were irretrievably sunk in a bog of farm labouring, with suspicious and confusing changes of surnames among the men, and common-law marriages unrecorded in the parish registers. (pg. 21)

The phrasing of 'irretrievably sunk in a bog' demonstrates Cecilia's opinion of the lower working classes. This explains why she is so quick to assume that Danny Hardman is responsible for raping Lola. The fact that she made only a 'half-hearted start' on the family tree, again underlines the unfinished nature of Cecilia's story.

A hangover from his Communist Party time – another abandoned fad, along with his ambitions in anthropology, and the planned hike from Calais to Istanbul. (pg. 22)

Communism doesn't seem to fit Robbie. This is about the value of community and against the bourgeoisie. This is ironic given Mr Tallis is paying for his education. The idea of hobbies as abandoned fads creates a link with Cecilia who, it has already been identified, also does not finish or see things through. The hike is foreshadowing Robbie's later activities. Calais is in France, and Istanbul in Turkey. The coming war which Robbie will be involved with will stretch across Europe from France to Turkey. He will later hike across France in Part 2, though not as he imagined.

It had once belonged to her Uncle Clem, whose funeral, or re-burial at the end of the war she remembered quite well: the gun carriage arriving at the country churchyard, the coffin draped in the regimental flag, the raised swords, the bugle at the graveside. (pg. 22)

This foreshadows Robbie's ultimate fate.

Meissen porcelain. (pg. 23)

German company, but comes to represent the English.

In order to achieve a natural chaotic look ... the flowers had simply been dropped in the vase in the same carefree spirit with which they had been picked. (pg. 23)

Contrast with Briony.

His death just a week before the Armistice. (pg. 24)

Foreshadows Robbie's fate but also places emphasis on family. The fact that he died just a week before the Armistice and that Robbie dies just before he can leave Dunkirk – so close to being saved, makes a statement about the waste of life during war.

'How's Clarissa?' ... 'I'd rather read Fielding any day' (pg. 25)

The first time the reader sees Robbie and Cecilia communicate, they are talking about literature, creating a link between the couple and this in the reader's mind. Fielding refers to Henry Fielding who is known for his satire.

She saw his eyes again, green and orange flecks, like a boy's marble. (pg. 26)

By comparing Robbie's eyes to a marble, McEwan makes him seem young and innocent, like a child, which ultimately makes his fate harder to swallow.

He was play-acting. (pg. 27)

Appearance/reality.

The whole stature had acquired around its northerly surfaces a blueish-green patina. (pg. 28)

Like the family, becoming tarnished by the events of the day.

Drowning herself would be his punishment. (pg. 30)

The motif of water appears again. This may be a reference to Virginia Woolf, to whose writing this first part of the novel is compared by Cyril Connelly in Part 3.

It was difficult to see because the roiling surface had yet to recover its tranquillity. (pg. 30)

Water, throughout the novel, is symbolic of cleansing (something required in order to gain atonement), yet here the roiling surface symbolises the trouble to come for these two. Their lives will never again 'recover its tranquillity'.

Briony came down at intervals to check on his progress. She was forbidden to help, and Jackson, of course, had never laundered a thing in his life. (pg. 32)

This punishment (for an entirely understandable thing) does not help Jackson, and neither Betty nor Briony approve of it. This emphasises Emily's distance from the family and her ineffectualness as a mother.

Briony suspected that behind her older cousin's perfect manners was a destructive intent. (pg. 34)

The word 'suspected' makes it clear that this is only Briony's thought and she is, in fact, reading into things. This creates a similarity with Cecilia who spends all of Chapter Two reading too much into Robbie's words and actions, though, of course, for an entirely different reason.

Was being Cecilia just as vivid an affair as being Briony? ... For, though it offended her sense of order, she knew it was overwhelmingly probably that everyone else had thoughts like hers. She knew this, but only in a rather arid way; she didn't really feel it. (pg. 36)

Empathy. Briony struggles to imagine being other people. This is a very childish, egotistic viewpoint. It is ironic as Briony writes from both Cecilia and Robbie's perspective throughout the novel. This is part of her atonement.

Dust from along the skirting board had dirtied her hands and the back of her dress. (pg. 37)

She is about to dirty her hands herself. This is symbolic of the innocence which is soon to be lost.

A story was direct and simple, allowing nothing to come between herself and her reader – no intermediaries ... in a story you only had to wish, you only had to write it down and you could have the world ... Reading a sentence and understanding it were the same thing. (pg. 37)

Briony's need for control, yet as part of her atonement, she must 'embody' Cecilia and Robbie (intermediaries). This foreshadows her decision to give the couple a happy ending – she has written it down, thus making it real, at least for the audience.

A proposal of marriage. Briony would not have been surprised. She herself had written a tale in which a humble woodcutter saved a princess from drowning and ended by marrying her ... It made perfect sense. Such leaps across boundaries were the stuff of daily romance. (pg. 38)

Briony's first instinct is for the romantic, to suspect a marriage proposal and she relates this to her own stories, which are much like fairy tales – very childish. To say that 'it made perfect sense' is strange; what does Briony know of romance? Only what she has read in stories.

What strange power did he have over her. Blackmail? Threats? (pg. 38)

Briony is looking for the dramatic. Her imagination is fuelled by the literature she has read.

The sequence was illogical – the drowning scene, followed by a rescue, should have preceded the marriage proposal. (pg. 39)

Briony is confused because what she sees does not align with the story she has written/the stories she has read. She imagines Robbie and Cecilia as her creations and doesn't understand why they have not followed the plot she has laid out for them.

Unseen, from two storeys up, with the benefit of unambiguous sunlight (pg. 39)

Ironic as, despite the benefit of unambiguous sunlight, Briony still misunderstands what she sees.

How easy it was to get everything wrong, completely wrong. (pg. 39)

Foreshadowing. Briony is about to get 'everything wrong, completely wrong'. The repetition here emphasises the gravity of the mistake she is about to make.

The scene would still have happened, for it was not about her at all. (pg. 40)

Briony knows this logically, however she is still childish and her instinct is still for the egotistic. This also highlights the importance of the witness to this moment. Had she not seen it, the scene would still have happened, yes, but the following events may not have.

She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view. (pg. 40)

This is precisely what she has done: from her perspective, Cecilia's perspective, and later, Robbie also recalls this moment.

Six decades later she would describe how at the age of thirteen she had written her way through a whole history of literature, beginning with stories derived from the European tradition of folk tales, through drama with simple moral intent, to arrive at an impartial psychological realism which she had discovered for herself, one special morning during a heat wave in 1935. (pg. 41)

The older Briony reflecting on her own writing style. The 'folk tales' are the story of the humble woodcutter and the princess, while the 'drama with simple moral intent' is the play 'The Trials of Arabella' which was meant to influence her brother, Leon. The realism is this, Part 1 of this novel, which is the reader has in their hands. This statement emphasises the importance of this moment – without it, there would be no book. It is a coming-of-age moment for Briony.

It is possible that the contemplation of a crooked finger, the unbearable idea of other minds and the superiority of stories over plays were thoughts she had had on other days. (pg. 41)

This asks the audience to question everything they read. If the narrator casts doubt on something as inconsequential as 'the contemplation of a crooked finger', then what else is there that cannot be believed?

By refusing to condemn her sister's shocking near-nakedness. (pg. 41)

Briony is clearly proud of herself for this, yet her phrasing and word choice makes it clear how hypocritical she is being. By 'refusing to condemn' and calling it 'shocking' she implies that it is something which could be condemned. Briony here acts as judge, which relates to her fondness for playing God.

'The whole thing's a mistake. It's the wrong ...' She snatched a breath and glanced away, a signal, Cecilia sensed, of a dictionary word about to have its first outing. 'It's the wrong genre!' She pronounced it, as she thought, in the French way, monosyllabically, but without quite getting her tongue round the 'r'. (pg. 45)

Briony is, again, not getting things right. Here it is mispronunciation – a form of communication – and Cecilia is unable to understand what she says/means. Could this comment – that it is the wrong genre – be applied to the story she ultimately writes or this novel?

Cecilia wondered, as she sometimes did when she met a man for the first time, if this was the one she was going to marry. (pg. 47)

There is a sense of inevitability in Cecilia's wonderings. She never considers that she will not marry, because, as a woman, that is not a choice open to her (Gender). She does, though, have a different attitude towards romance than Briony. There is irony here as Paul Marshall is the man whose actions stop her from marrying.

All day long, she realised, she had been feeling strange, and seeing strangely, as though everything was already long in the past. (pg. 48)

Everything is 'already long in the past'. Is this Briony's perspective in writing?

In fact, she may even have been standing in the water – against such light it was difficult to tell. (pg. 56)

Appearance/reality.

Her arm was much thinner and lighter than his mother's. (pg. 57)

Appearance/reality. Despite copying her mother's words and actions, Lola cannot comfort her brother in the way that a mother can. Physically, she is not her mother.

The soft consonants suggested an unthinkable obscenity, the sibilant ending whispered the family's shame. (pg. 57)

About the word 'divorce'. This is certainly the voice of a writer, concerned with the word, rather than the thing itself.

A big empty chin like Desperate Dan's. (pg. 58)

This is an anachronism. Desperate Dan, the world's strongest man, and a Wild West character, first appeared in 1937, two years after the events of Part 1. This causes the reader to question the narrator. The fact that Lola compares Paul to Desperate Dan also highlights the power he has over her.

They knew that the business of newspapers was momentous: earthquakes and train crashes, what the government and nations did from day to day, and whether more money should be spent on guns in case Hitler attacked England. (pg. 59)

Provides context/setting. The mention of Hitler foreshadows the later war, while the earthquakes and train crashes suggest tragedy still to come.

Dropped away into a light sleep in which his young sisters had appeared, all four of them, standing around his bedside, prattling and touching and pulling at his clothes. He woke, hot across his chest and throat, uncomfortably aroused (pg. 60)

This is a disturbing insight into Paul's mind. This knowledge hangs over his interactions with Lola. This is something Briony has clearly invented for her narrative, being unable to know such things, and is something she has created to explain later events. This is in opposition to her imposition of plot onto Cecilia and Robbie.

'Hamlet.' They had in fact seen a matinee pantomime at the London Palladium during which Lola had spilled a strawberry drink down her frock, and Liberty's was right across the street.

'One of my favourites,' Paul said. It was fortunate that he too had neither read nor seen the play, having studied chemistry. But he was able to say musingly, 'To be or not to be.'

'That is the question,' she agreed. 'And I like your shoes'. (pg. 60-61)

Lola attempts to portray herself as 'grown up', going to London to see Shakespeare (Literature) and buying trousers (Gender) at Liberty's, however this is immediately subverted by the truth that it was a matinee (performed during the day) pantomime (musical comedy aimed at children) and she had spilled a strawberry drink (a sweet, childish drink, and a clumsy gesture). Both characters pretend to have seen the play -> appearance/reality. They quote the infamous 'to be or not to be' soliloquy, in which Hamlet considers death and suicide and the unfairness of life. The fact that this is one of the most famous lines of literature highlights the two characters as pretending – they demonstrate only superficial knowledge – but the reference to this particular soliloquy introduces ideas of death and unfairness which appear later in the novel. The fact that Lola follows this reference, which is quite profound, with a comment about Paul's shoes draws attention to their superficiality.

'Amo amas amat' (pg. 62)

This is the Latin conjugation for the verb 'to love'. This is a childish response, something Lola has clearly learned in school, and also demonstrates her class, as only higher class children would have learned Latin at this time. The fact that the verb is 'to love' also emphasises her youth and foreshadows their later relationship.

The island temple, built in the style of Nicholas Revett in the late 1780s, was intended as a point of interest, an eye-catching feature to enhance the pastoral ideal, and had of course, no religious purpose at all. (pg. 72)

Appearance/reality; the temple has no religious purpose, but is only there to look a certain way. The description of the temple is a reflection of the decline of the Tallis family and of the British Empire as a whole. It foreshadows the destruction of both society and the house.

The temple was the orphan of a grand society lady (pg. 73)

Link to Lola, the twins and even Briony and Cecilia whose mother has retreated into solitude. This is much like Austen's novels where parental figures are also frequently absent.

Leaning across to whisper in the ear of its neighbour, was cut down with an outrageous lie on her lips. (pg. 74)

But it is Briony who will tell the outrageous lie.

She climbed the steep grassy slope to the bridge, and when she stood on the driveway, she decided she would stay there and wait until something significant happened to her ... She would simply wait on the bridge, calm and obstinate, until events, real events, not her own fantasies, rose to her challenge, and dispelled her insignificance. (pg. 77)

Briony is coming of age. The bridge is symbolic of the transition from childhood to adolescence. She has recognised her own fantasies and chooses real events, however there is an irony in this, as the letter which Robbie gives to her as she stands here (the real event), leads Briony to create another fantasy.

A Fauvist dedicated to improbable colour might have imagined a landscape this way. (pg. 78)

A Fauvist is a modern artist whose work emphasises strong colour over realism. Briony the author compares herself to a Fauvist as she chooses a happy ending for her central couple rather than realism.

Beyond the compass were his copies of Auden's *Poems* and Houseman's *A Shropshire Lad* ... Ten typed-up poems lay beneath a printed rejection slip from *Criterion* magazine, initialled by Mr Eliot himself. (pg. 82)

Literature. Auden and Houseman write about death and morality for youth in rural England; Robbie and Cecilia live this. Robbie is a failed writer.

Himself as Malvolio. (pg. 82)

A reference to Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night'. Malvolio is a steward, in love with his mistress, who is made a fool of. By casting himself as Malvolio (whom he has previously portrayed), he casts Cecilia as Olivia. He is the cleaning lady's son, and thus, a lower class. He believes that he has been making a fool of himself in front of her. The fact that this is a reference to a play, again places emphasis on artifice and playing pretend.

Surely Freud had something to say about that in *Three Essays on Sexuality*. And so did Keats, Shakespeare and Petrarch, and all the rest, and it was in the *Romaunt of the Rose*. He had spent three years dryly studying the symptoms, which had seemed no more than literary conventions. (pg. 84)

Robbie mixes his metaphor here, between medicine and literature. First, he talks about Freud and symptoms and then Keats et al and literary conventions. Shakespearean and Petrarchan are the two different forms of sonnets (English and Italian), traditional love poems. Keats is a Romantic poet, renowned for his letters and his relationship with Fanny Brawne; letter-writing is the only way that Robbie and Cecilia can communicate for much of the novel. Much like Robbie, Keats also died young, of disease (TB, in this case).

Now jokiness had made way for melodrama, or plaintiveness. The rhetorical questions had a clammy air; the exclamation mark was the first resort of those who shout to make themselves clearer. He forgave this punctuation only in his mother's letters where a row of five indicated a jolly good joke ... The exclamation mark would have to be reinstated. Volume was obviously not its only business. (pg. 85)

Self-reflective. This is clearly a writer considering the building blocks of their own work.

A charlady who supplemented her income as an occasional clairvoyant. (pg. 86)

A psychic or fortune teller. Clearly she was pretending, still there is irony in that she was unable to predict what would happen to her son.

Her dedication to the surface of things. (pg. 87)

Appearance/reality

In the years to come he would often think back to this time, when he walked along the footpath and made a shortcut. (pg. 90)

Builds the anticipation. This is the narrator telling the audience that this, or what is about to happen, is an important moment. Robbie in the next paragraph even talks about 'anticipation and dread'.

One word contained everything he felt, and explained why he was to dwell on this moment later. Freedom. (pg. 91)

Foreshadowing Robbie's imminent loss of freedom.

There was a story he was plotting with himself as the hero. (pg. 91)

Robbie relates his plan for his life to a story (much as Briony confuses life with fiction -> a hint about the narrator). This draws attention to the fictitious nature of this moment.

The study of English literature seemed in retrospect an absorbing parlour game, and reading books and having opinions about them, the desirable adjunct to a civilised existence. (pg. 91)

Appearance/reality. Literature not as all-consuming but just as a helpful addendum for life.

Futuristic date of 1955 ... He thought of himself in 1962 (pg. 92)

Authorial voice. These dates are in the past for the reader, which creates distance between us and the character.

Also stacked would be books by the thousand ... his third-edition Jane Austen, his Eliot and Lawrence and Wilfred Owen (pg. 92)

Robbie cannot imagine a future without literature. There is an explicit link to Austen here. The mention of Wilfred Owen is foreshadowing of Robbie's fate; Owen was a soldier who died in the First World War and is now renowned for his anti-war poetry. Owen wrote about the experience of the soldiers in the trenches, showing what it was really like, in contrast to Jessie Pope's patriotic propaganda. Part Two can be read as an Owen-esque view of the Second World War.

He would be a better doctor for having read literature ... Birth, death, and frailty in between. Rise and fall – this was a doctor's business, and it was literature's too. (pg. 93)

The importance and power of literature.

The handwritten letter he had rested on the open copy of *Gray's Anatomy*, Splanchnology section, page 1546, the vagina. The typed page, left by him, near the typewriter, was the one he had taken and folded into the envelope. (pg. 94)

Here, literature has led to confusion. Robbie has confused the content of 'Gray's Anatomy' with the content of the inappropriate, vulgar letter – both of which detail the female anatomy.

She entered the house and the door was closed behind her. (pg. 95)

The chapter ends with Cecilia closing the door behind herself and Robbie, dramatically sealing their fates.

On two occasions within half an hour, Cecilia stepped out of her bedroom, caught sight of herself in the gilt-frame mirror at the top of the stairs and, immediately dissatisfied, returned to her wardrobe to reconsider. (pg. 96)

Appearances.

But the public gaze of the stairway mirror as she hurried towards it revealed a woman on her way to a funeral (pg. 96)

Foreshadowing of her and Robbie's fates. From this point in the narrative, once Robbie gives the letter to Briony, he and Cecilia are set on their respective paths to death.

It was her future self, at eighty-five, in widow's weeds. (pg. 97)

Cecilia will not live to see eighty-five. Nor will she ever become a widow. Briony, on the other hand, will experience both things and is perhaps influenced by this in her writing of this sentence.

Drowned in the lake, ravished by gypsies, struck by a passing motor car, she thought ritually (pg. 101)

Cecilia's flair for the dramatic here is much like Briony's. The reference to gypsies creates a link to Austen, where gypsies were a threat to young women (like Harriet Smith in 'Emma').

Her parents were absent in their different ways. (pg. 103)

Much like in Austen's novels, where parents are frequently absent.

Motivation was never judged to be at variance with outward show. (pg. 107)

He is unable to distinguish between appearance and reality.

It was essential, for her to know everything. She had been delighted to see her brother again, but that did not prevent her from exaggerating her feelings to avoid her sister's accusing question. And afterwards she had only pretended to be eagerly obedient to her mother's command (pg. 113)

That it is 'essential' for Briony to know everything, emphasises her need and love of control, while her choice to exaggerate and pretend highlight the theme of appearance and reality.

The word: she tried to prevent it sounding in her thoughts, and yet it danced through them obscenely, a typographical demon, juggling vague, insinuating anagrams – an uncle and a nut, the Latin for next, an Old English king attempting to turn back the tide. Rhyming words took their form from children's books – the smallest pig in the litter, the hounds pursuing the fox, the flat-bottomed boats on the Cam. (pg. 114)

About the word 'cunt', which Briony has just read in Robbie's letter. That her immediate thought is of anagrams, once more draws attention to the written narrative, asking the reader to pay close attention to every word. The Latin for next (tunc) creates a link with Lola, who in a previous chapter conjugated the infinitive 'to love' in Latin. This also emphasises both Briony's age and class. King Cnut demonstrated that it was impossible to turn back the tides, even as a King, and that one must bow to the power of God, which can be applied to Briony's power as author/God. She cannot turn back now that she has seen this word and is set on her path. That her next thought is of rhyming words from children's books (runt, hunt, punt) again emphasises her young age.

But that episode in the sunlight was not quite so interesting as the dusk (pg. 115)

The dusk is an ambiguous time of in-between; it is not quite day, and not quite night. In the same way, Briony is not quite a child, and not quite an adult.

She wrote, 'There was an old lady who swallowed a fly.' (pg. 115)

This children's song brings attention to Briony's age and her supposed innocence. In the song, an old lady swallows increasingly larger animals in an attempt to catch those that have come before. In this way, the story snowballs out of control, much like the events of the evening are about to.

She could do the woods in winter, and the grimness of a castle wall. But how to do feelings? (pg. 116)

These are things that children would write about. The fact that Briony can't 'do' feelings, underlines the fact that she has yet to learn empathy. It is this which will become the tool she uses to gain atonement.

A fifth person she could not remember. (pg. 116)

Memory is problematic, again makes the reader doubt what they are reading.

The womanly tang of Lola's perfume could not conceal a childish whiff of Germolene ... 'Everybody thinks they're angels just because they look alike, but they're little brutes.' (pg. 117)

Appearance/reality.

The family home in the north – Briony imagined streets of blackened mills, and grim men trudging to work with sandwiches in tin boxes. (pg. 118)

This reveals Briony's own classism as she has a stereotypical view of what the more industrial north might look like.

The call would come to go downstairs and her cousin would need to be in possession of herself. (pg. 118)

Briony cares more about appearance than her cousin's obvious distress.

She could learn to be a little more expressive. (pg. 119)

Appearance/reality. Putting on a façade.

If the police made an arrest, she, Briony, might be made to appear in court, and say the word aloud, in proof. (pg. 121)

Briony is already imagining (writing) what she will cause. Foreshadowing.

She might spring away, or hit him, movie-style (pg. 135)

Robbie is still imagining himself as a character.

He saw it clearly, how it had happened: she had opened a sealed envelope to read his and been disgusted ... (pg. 139)

Robbie is able to say exactly what occurred in the earlier chapter. Does this reveal the true author?

This decision, as he was to acknowledge many times, transformed his life. (pg. 144)

Ending the chapter with this, builds tension, and emphasises the importance of the upcoming events.

She paused in the entrance to the drawing room and observed that the chocolate-smearing cocktail glasses had yet to be cleared away. (pg. 148)

Paul made the cocktails and left the mess here, much like the mess he leaves behind after the events of the evening.

How could anyone presume to know the world through the eyes of an insect? (pg. 149)

Marks Briony's inability to empathise.

Some things were simply so. (pg. 149)

Simplistic, black and white view of the world.

But she and Jack would be long buried before the full effect was achieved. The story would be over. (pg. 151)

Emily has no foresight. Even she looks at life through the lens of fiction, comparing it to a 'story'.

How artfully Mr Marshall had put everyone at ease (pg. 152)

Ironic.

She had lollled about for three years at Girton with the kind of books she could equally have read at home – Jane Austen, Dickens, Conrad, all in the library downstairs, in complete sets. How had that pursuit, reading the novels that others took as their leisure, let her think she was superior to anyone else? (pg. 152)

Emily does not consider Cecilia fondly, because she has not conformed to her expectations (Gender) and because she no longer needs her mother. Emily does not value literature, thus she cannot empathise (power of literature) with her daughter and understand why she might want to go to college to study literature.

Leon had lowered his voice and was muttering quickly into the cupped receiver. Emily couldn't hear a word, and did not want to. (pg. 154)

This furthers audience anticipation because Emily chooses not to hear, we cannot either.

She caught his meaning precisely. He wouldn't tell her now, he wouldn't have her collapsing on the tiles and cracking her skull. (pg. 155)

She assumes that everything is about her, everyone is concerned about her rather than what has happened to Lola. Demonstrates Emily's lack of empathy.

Within the half hour Briony would commit her crime. (pg. 156)

This is a promise to the reader; we are finally to discover what has happened. It also helps to build anticipation.

She thought how she might describe it (pg. 156)

Briony's singular focus on her fiction so that the idea of her cousins' hypothetical deaths does not upset her: she only thinks how she might write about it. The fact that she chooses to kill them with water (having them drown) is also notable.

Truth was strange and deceptive (pg. 158)

Asks the audience to question the narrative. Are we taking this as truth?

Villains were not announced with hisses or soliloquies, they did not come cloaked in black, with ugly expressions. (pg. 158)

This is the realisation of a child becoming an adult but again influenced by fiction.

Man, mad, axe, attack, accuse (pg. 158)

Foreshadowing the attack and Briony's forthcoming accusation.

But drawn to the glow and glassy stillness of the water (pg. 159)

Lola's rape takes place beside the lake, tying into the repeated motif of water.

Her mother was forty-six, dispiritingly old. One day she would die. There would be a funeral in the village at which Briony's dignified reticence would hint at the vastness of her sorrow. (pg. 160)

Only a child would call forty-six old. Again, Briony is dramatizing her life and making events about her.

If she had she would not have committed her crime. (pg. 162)

Highlights the frailty of events. They could have just as easily not happened.

The dark shapes of the widely spaced trees across the park made her hesitate ... Leon, Cecilia and Mr Marshall would be a long way off now ... Even a man standing in front of a tree trunk would not be visible to her ... Unlike the adults, she had no torch ... These were everyday sounds magnified by darkness. And darkness was nothing – it was not substance, it was not presence, it was no more than an absence of light. (pg. 162-163)

Briony's description here draws repeated attention to the darkness of the situation and her inability to see anything. This will later bring into doubt her statement that she 'saw' Robbie raping Lola. There is also an irony in the fact that Paul Marshall is grouped with Leon and Cecilia as being a 'trustworthy adult'. This brings to light Briony's inherent classism.

The bridge led to nothing more than an artificial island in an artificial lake. (pg. 163)

Appearance/reality. The island is surrounded by water, but it is an 'artificial' lake, therefore it has none of the cleansing properties that a 'real' lake might.

The building's indistinct pallor shimmered in the dark. When she stared at it directly it dissolved completely ... there was as shrub she did not remember. Or rather, she remembered it being closer to the shore. The trees were not right either, what she could see of them. The oak was too bulbous, the elm too straggly, and in their strangeness they seemed to league. (pg. 164)

Briony can't trust her eyes here. This description emphasises the darkness and her inability to see. This undermines her later certainty.

She was witnessing some trick of darkness and perspective. (pg. 164)

It sat up and called her name. (pg. 164)

She doesn't recognise the person until they call her name. Using the neutral pronoun 'it' shows that Briony is unable, even, to say clearly whether this person was male or female. This undermines the certainty of her later accusation.

She had no doubt. She could describe him. There was nothing she could describe. ... 'I saw him. I saw him.' (pg. 165)

This completely subverts everything we have just read.

Turning away may well have been not a distancing, but an act of intimacy, a way of gathering herself to begin to speak her feelings ... Perhaps she had already drawn breath and parted her lips. But it did not matter because Briony was about to cut her off and the opportunity would be lost. (pg. 166)

Reflective tone. This is clearly the older narrator reflecting back on this night.

It was her story. (pg. 166)

Briony is casting the people and events around her into a plot. She has once again, made Lola's suffering about herself.

However close they were, it was not possible to read expressions. The dark disc of Lola's face showed nothing at all. (pg. 167)

This repeated referencing of the darkness, continually creates doubt in Briony's assertions that she saw him 'plain as day'.

Lola did not need to lie ... Lola was required only to remain silent about the truth (pg. 168)

The reader's doubts are confirmed as the narrator reveals, through the words 'lie' and 'truth' that Briony's claims are not the truth.

It was not simply her eyes that told her the truth. It was too dark for that. Even Lola's face at eighteen inches was an empty oval, and this figure was many feet away, and turned from her as it moved back around the clearing ... The truth was in the symmetry ... The truth instructed her eyes. (pg. 169)

By 'the symmetry', Briony means 'the story'. For the story to make sense, whomever sent the threatening (as she sees it) and vulgar letter, must also be responsible for the rape of Lola. This is how a story would be plotted, thus, this is what must have happened in real life.

Within a couple of days, no, within a matter of hours, a process was moving fast and well beyond her control. (pg. 169)

Link back to the snowballing story of 'the old woman who swallowed a fly'.

Behind the facades of pretty buildings (pg. 169)

Appearance/reality.

Her own vile excitement (pg. 173)

The elder Briony is disgusted with her younger self at this moment.

But how had her mother materialised so quickly from Lola's bedside? ... But if she was there being consoled by her mother on the Chesterfield, how did she come to remember the arrival of Dr McLaren in his black waistcoat and his old-fashioned raised shirt collar, carrying the Gladstone bag that had been the witness to the three births and all the childhood illnesses of the Tallis household? (pg. 174)

There is uncertainty in the narrative. The reader is unsure whether or not to trust this.

Briony was to have no memory of what suddenly prompted her. (pg. 176)

The uncertainty of memory provoking doubt in the narrative.

Old Hardman and his son Danny were brought in for interview. Briony heard Betty say that Danny was at home all evening with his father who was able to vouch for him. (pg. 181)

Creates doubt. This is the possible alternative suspect. It is notable that suspicion falls on a servant and not a guest or family member.

Who would believe her now, with Robbie posing as the kindly rescuer of lost children? All her work, all her courage and clear-headedness, all she had done to bring Lola home – for nothing. (pg. 184)

Briony doesn't care about Lola, the twins or justice being done, just about whether or not people believe her story.

They had moved closer, and now Robbie spoke briefly, and half raised his locked hands and let them fall. She touched them with her own, and fingered his lapel, and then gripped it and shook it gently. It seemed a kindly gesture and Briony was touched by her sister's capacity for forgiveness. (pg. 185)

Briony is, again, the onlooker to a scene she does not understand. This is a parallel to the fountain scene; both important scenes in Robbie and Cecilia's relationship and both moments misinterpreted by a watching Briony.

'Liars! Liars!' Grace Turner shouted again, and took a few hopeless steps after the retreating car, and then stopped, hands on hips, to watch as it went over the first bridge, crossed the island and then the second bridge, and finally vanished into whiteness. (pg. 187)

This is a very dispassionate description; is Briony distancing herself from this crime? Is she unable or just unwilling to empathise with Grace? Is the fact that the car vanishes into whiteness symbolic of Robbie's innocence?

There were horrors enough, but it was the unexpected detail that threw him and afterwards would not let him go. (pg. 191)

This is the first line of Part Two. No character, date or location is provided (in fact, the character is quite lost), which confuses the reader. After what we have just read – Robbie being driven away by the police for a crime we know he did not commit, without having the real perpetrator revealed – adds to this confusion.

He wasn't trying to impersonate an officer. (pg. 191)

Appearance/reality. Here, unlike the rest of the novel, the character is actively trying not to pretend – 'he simply intended to survive'. This immediately creates a stark contrast between the setting of Parts One and Two. War is not a time for pretence.

It was a leg in a tree ... this is a leg ... he could throw up or crap. (pg. 192)

The writing style here is very different to that in Part One. It is factual and straight forward, no adjectives or unnecessary embellishments. This births the idea that Literature and War do not naturally fit together. Part Two utilises realism.

Robbie Turner walked on (pg. 193)

Three pages into Part Two and the audience finally discovers which character they are following.

How fine it might have been, to end a day's ramble in the French countryside, walking into the setting sun. Always a hopeful act. (pg. 194)

This creates a link between Parts One and Two. The Robbie Turner of Part One, who planned a hike from Calais to Istanbul, might have thought such a thing. The Robbie Turner of Part Two who is experiencing this, is thinking only of survival.

There were ripples in the landscape, faint echoes of vast upheavals elsewhere. (pg. 194)

This is a symbol for the war, which has brought these three men to this place at this time. The war is caused by 'faint echoes of vast upheavals elsewhere'.

Turner wants to put more distance between himself and that bombed cottage. (pg. 194)

Robbie is now referred to by his surname. This underlines his role as a soldier, but also suggests that prison and Briony's crime have stripped him of his identity. He has lost something since the night the reader last saw him.

If one stuck in your hair and stung you, it sent out a chemical message as it died and all who received it were compelled to come and sting and die at the same place. General conscription! (pg. 195)

Robbie compares himself and the other soldiers to bees → insects, frail, compelled to fight, protect and die for someone else.

They were walking cross-country to Dunkirk (pg. 200)

There is dramatic irony here as the reader knows precisely what happened here but the characters, as yet, do not. In addition, the men are marching towards the sea. The water here could be cleansing, to help heal these men.

They listened to the night sounds they had grown used to – the rumble of artillery, stray shots in the distance, a booming far-off explosion (pg. 200)

These are not normal sounds to hear at night. The fact that the men are used to these sounds underlines the horror of war.

'All that fighting we did twenty-five years ago. All those dead. Now the Germans back in France. In two days they'll be here, taking everything we have. Who would have believed it?' (pg. 201)

The futility of war. It has achieved nothing.

The wound throbbed uncomfortably, each beat precise and tight. (pg. 202)

Robbie has a piece of shrapnel buried inside his abdomen, emphasising the damage of the war, in that, it cannot be escaped. This is poisoning him from inside and is symbolic of the damage caused by Briony's lie.

The indifference with which men could lob shells into a landscape. Or empty their bomb bays over a sleeping cottage by a railway, without knowing or caring who was there. It was an industrial process ... where a child's limb in a tree was something that ordinary men could ignore. (pg. 202)

This is a condemnation of war in general, not just one side.

They need never see the end result – a vanished boy ... thinking of another vanished boy. (pg. 202)

Robbie sees himself as the boy dead in the cottage, sees the waste of life and loss of potential and mourns for it.

Watch the flashes in the southern sky. (pg. 203)

One normally watches the sunrise. This underlines the horror of war, when the beauty of nature (the sunrise, the sounds of animals etc. at night) are replaced with the effects of war.

In the nightmare of the dark, All the dogs of Europe bark. (pg. 203)

This is a quotation from 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' by Auden. The poem mourns the loss of Yeats but this particular section – the beginning of stanza three – talks about the beginning of World War II. This intertextual link, passed onto Robbie in a letter from Cecilia, marks this Part Two as distinctly anti-war.

They pursued him the old themes. (pg. 204)

This is a very literary word choice.

So they wrote about literature, and used characters as codes ... Tristan and Isolde, the Duke Orsino and Olivia (and Malvolio too), Troilus and Criseyde, Mr Knightley and Emma, Venus and Adonis. Turner and Tallis. Once, in despair, he referred to Prometheus, chained to a rock, his liver devoured daily by a vulture. Sometimes she was patient Griselde. Mention of 'a quiet corner in a library' was a code for sexual ecstasy. (pg. 204)

The power of literature. (See Literary Couples in Atonement worksheet for background on the couples). By comparing Robbie and Cecilia to these couples, Briony (who has, of course, written this part of the novel as well), suggests that they belong in this pantheon, a doomed love affair for the ages. Here literature and sex are explicitly linked. It is thus notable that Robbie and Cecilia's only sexually intimate moment occurs in a library.

When she wrote, 'I went to the library today to get the anatomy book I told you about. I found a quiet corner and pretended to read', he knew she was feeding on the same memories that consumed him every night, beneath thin prison blankets. (pg. 205)

Masturbation is implied here and the link between literature, sex and the couple is only strengthened. The only anatomy book the reader has any awareness of is Robbie's copy of 'Gray's Anatomy' with its page on the vagina, which caused him to confuse the letters in Part One. This again, furthers the link between literature and sex.

She found a cottage in Wiltshire. (pg. 207)

Symbolism of the cottage → their happy ending, normalcy.

It may have been the first touches of green along the French lines, and the haze of bluebells glimpsed through the woods (pg. 211)

Symbolism, a time of change, the beginning of life.

I get the impression she's taken on nursing as a sort of penance. (pg 212)

This is the letter Cecilia has written to Robbie, presented in full, nor paraphrased. Thus, it is written in Cecilia's voice, not Briony's. Penance links to the idea of atonement.

First his own life ruined, then everybody else's. (pg. 217)

Robbie acts in a completely irrational manner, which only his perspective makes understandable. This is the effect of the shrapnel in him and, thus, the war in general.

Turner and the corporals tramped through typewriter ribbon spools spilling from their boxes. (pg. 218)

The futility of words compared to war.

And it was hot now. (pg. 219)

The heat creates a link with the first part of the novel, which took place in the middle of a heat wave.

He walked / across / the land / until / he came / to the sea. A hexameter. Five iambs and an anapaest was the beat he tramped now. (pg. 219)

This is a very literary reference, and clearly comes from the writer. It is also fitting that Robbie, who so often references poetry, thinks about this now. Iambic pentameter mimics natural step. The anapaest emphasises something is wrong with Robbie, he is walking differently, perhaps due to his injury.

On account of being 'orribly and onerously overrun from all directions. (pg. 221)

It is his accent which creates this alliteration. This underlines the message (which is quite a serious one) in a light-hearted manner.

Turner put himself at the disposal of the RAMC captain and helped on the stretcher parties bringing in the wounded. (pg. 223)

Robbie is finally getting to doctor.

The quantity of blood obscured the textbook details. (pg. 223)

Again, the realities of war overwhelm academia and literature.

'Twas ostensibly ominous in the overview
To be 'orribly and onerously overrun. (pg. 225)

This is reminiscent of Briony and her prologue for the 'Trials of Arabella'.

Which he had come to treat link a sacred site ... They lay on the far side of a great divide in time, as significant as BC and AD ... It was a kind of genuflection. (pg. 226)

Religious imagery recurs throughout this section.

The story could resume. (pg. 227)

Despite everything which has happened, Robbie still considers his life a story.

Who would care? Who could ever describe the confusion, and come up with the village names and the dates for the history books? And take the reasonable view and begin to assign blame? No one would ever know what it was like to be here. (pg. 227)

Again, words and literature cannot compare to the horror of war. 'No one would know' or 'describe' and yet that is precisely what Briony is attempting to do here.

Find Cecilia and love her, marry her, and live without shame. (pg. 228)

This is Robbie's plot.

How to begin to understand this child's mind? (pg. 229)

This is a misunderstanding, much like Briony's.

In the deserts of the heart/Let the healing fountain start. (pg. 242)

Another line from 'In Memory of W.B Yeats by Auden. This one recalls the fountain of Part One, but the word 'healing' suggests that this fountain has the power to cleanse or heal the damage caused by the first.

A beefy lance-corporal with a sledgehammer was smashing typewriters and mimeograph machines. (pg. 242)

Literature is of no use in war.

A chaplain and his clerk were dousing cases of prayer books and bibles with petrol. (pg. 243)

Not only are they burning books, these are religious books. Where is God in this war?

In the lucid freedom of his dream state, Turner intended to shoot the officer through the chest. (pg. 246)

We are privy to his logic, however his irrational and illogical actions are beginning to alarm.

His gun had gone – he couldn't remember where (pg. 247)

The reader has already seen him through this way. The fact that Robbie can't remember this not only ties to the idea of memory being unreliable, but also hints at the severity of his injury.

A solitary sunbather in his underpants, face-down on a towel, had patches of uneven sunburn on his shoulders and legs – pink and white like a strawberry and vanilla ice-cream. (pg. 249)

This simile – the comparison of the sunbather's sunburned skin to ice-cream – adds to the holiday atmosphere, which is completely at odds with the gravity of the situation.

She looked right into him and saw his faults, and knew he'd been in prison. (pg. 254)

Robbie is projecting this onto the woman, whom he believes to be a gypsy.

But Turner, feeling a familiar unreality taking hold, could not discount the possibility that the woman was possessed of certain powers ... 'There's something not right with you, Guv'nor.' ... He was certain now that if they did not capture the pig, they would never get home ... As a child, Turner had once tried to persuade himself that preventing his mother's sudden death by avoiding the pavement cracks outside his school playground was nonsense. But he had never trodden on them and she had not died. (pg. 255)

Robbie's actions, which throughout this part, have slipped into irrationality, become more and more so in this extract, to the point that Nettle is able to identify that something is wrong with him. This rapid increase creates tension but also foreshadows his imminent death.

One man did not get up, but lay awkwardly across the stairs, his legs higher than his head, and screaming hoarsely, almost inaudibly, as though in a panicky dream. Someone held a lighter to his face and they saw his bared teeth and flecks of white in the corners of his mouth. He had broken his back, someone said, but there was nothing anyone could do, and now men were stepping over him with their blankets and bolsters, and others were jostling to go up. (pg. 258)

The brutality of war is described in a matter-of-fact manner, which makes this brutality all the more horrific, as it implies that it has become the norm.

This was the moment Turner chose to describe to Nettle the kind of place that he had in mind for dinner. He embellished to make his point, adding French windows open onto a wrought-iron balcony through which an ancient wisteria threaded, and a gramophone on a round table covered by a green chenille cloth, and a Persian rug spread across a chaise longue. (pg. 259)

This is completely absurd. There is no such restaurant in Dunkirk and certainly no such restaurant during war times. This description highlights just how much affected Robbie is by his injury.

Had he always taken for granted the strangeness of these names? (pg. 262)

About Briony and Cecilia. This emphasises the theme of class. Both of these names are associated with the upper-class and it is only with distance from the house that Robbie is able to identify this.

The water tasted metallic. (pg. 263)

The suggestion is that he is tasting blood.

The unease was not confined to the hospital. (pg. 269)

This is the opening sentence of Part Three. Much like with Part One, it is unclear where or with whom we are. It is very possible that the point of view character could still be Robbie. However, by the end of the paragraph Briony is named and it becomes clear that we have, once again, switched characters.

Empty beds spread across the ward, and through other wards, like deaths in the night. (pg. 270)

This is an odd simile, given that we are now in a hospital, and that Briony has just informed the reader that the empty beds are due to patients being discharged. This simile suggests the deaths that are still to come and foreshadows the revelation of Robbie's death, who, after the last lines of Part Two, died in the night.

She reread and committed to memory the commandment: in no circumstances should a nurse communicate to a patient her Christian name. (pg. 272)

Briony, like Robbie, has lost her first name. She is known by Tallis – she has also lost part of her identity, however this is deliberate on her part, as a sort of ‘penance’. In the narrative, she is still referred to as Briony, not Tallis, suggesting this fact and emphasising that her loss is nothing compared to Robbie’s.

Between tasks, perhaps a dozen times a day, the students scrubbed their cracked and bleeding chilblained hands under freezing water. (pg. 272)

Briony, here, is constantly washing her hands in the ‘war on germs’, this also suggests an attempt to cleanse herself of the crime she has committed.

It seemed theatrical to Briony. (pg. 277)

Another reference to the theatre and thus, pretending and artifice. Briony has clearly changed greatly, or at least she believes she has, since Part One where she was the theatrical character.

The oldest of the children ... had got into the fountain, climbed onto the statue and snapped off the Triton’s horn and his arm, right down to the elbow ... Betty accused the boy of throwing it in the lake ... There was talk of draining the lake ... the cows had been moved into three fields on the north side so that the park could be ploughed up for corn. A mile and a half of iron fencing dating from the 1750s had been taken away to be melted down to make Spitfires. Even the workmen who removed it said it was the wrong kind of metal. A cement and brick pillbox had been built down by the river, right on the bed, among the sedges, destroying the nests of the teal and grey wagtails ... Wretched Betty dropped Uncle Clem’s vase carrying it down and it shattered on the steps. (pg. 278-279)

This is the news from the Tallis home communicated to Briony in a letter from her mother. The destruction of the fountain and the digging up of fencing from the 1750s is symbolic of the destruction of this particular class of society, which after the war ceased to exist in the same way. That it is Triton’s conch (or horn) arm that is broken, suggests an inability to calm either the war or the events Briony put into motion when she lied. The arm is then suspected to have been thrown into the lake (which is artificial), tying back into the water motif. Two items which were closely related to Robbie and Cecilia’s relationship (the fountain and the vase) are now broken and unable to be repaired – the arm has disappeared and the vase ‘shattered on the steps’, suggesting that the couple are also doomed never to be together again. The war effort has not only destroyed class in society, it has also had an impact on the natural world – forcing the cows to be moved and destroying the nests of the wagtails.

Simple accounts of her day which increasingly shaded off into fantasy. (pg. 280)

Foreshadows the idea that the novel will do the same.

She liked to write out what she imagined to be their rambling thoughts. (pg. 280)

Briony is talking about the patients, however this is precisely what she does with Robbie and Cecilia in Part One.

She thought of herself as a kind of medical Chaucer. (pg. 280)

Geoffrey Chaucer is most famous for his ‘Canterbury Tales’, about a number of people making a pilgrimage to Canterbury to visit the shrine of St Thomas Becket. By describing herself as a ‘medical Chaucer’ Briony suggests that she, too, is on a pilgrimage, this time for atonement.

In later years she regretted not being more factual ... At the time, the journal preserved her dignity: she might look and behave like and live the life of a trainee nurse, but she was really an important writer in disguise. (pg. 280)

There is a change in perspective here as the elder Briony reflects back on her time as a nurse at the hospital. Despite her changes, she still has the ego of the Part One Briony.

The age of clear answers was over. So was the age of characters and plots. Despite her journal sketches, she no longer really believed in characters. They were quaint devices that belonged to the nineteenth century. 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. It was thought, perception, sensations that interested her, the conscious mind as a river through time, and how to represent its onward roll, as well as all the tributaries that would swell it. (pg. 281)

It is notable that Briony would choose a river as a simile to represent the conscious mind. It not only relates to the recurring water motif, but suggests that memory and thought is fluid. Here Briony is praising the modernist style of writing, namechecking Virginia Woolf in particular, as an influence. For the modernists, style and experimentation in technique was of the utmost importance and parts of this influence still remain in Part One.

Briony was more than implicated in this union. She had made it possible. (pg. 285)

Talking about Paul and Lola. This is the first indication the readers gets that Paul is responsible for Lola's rape.

White, soft-skulled babies. (pg. 287)

This is quite a horrific description on what is meant to be a pleasurable morning. The nurses have been given the morning off, however this description of soft skulls, foreshadows the imminent arrival of the injured soldiers at the hospital that afternoon.

Briony's thoughts remained fixed on her themes. (pg. 288)

Much like Robbie who considers his own themes.

She thought too how one of these men might be Robbie, how she would dress his wounds without knowing who he was, and with cotton-wool tenderly rub his face until his familiar featured emerged, and how he would turn to her with gratitude, realise who she was, and take her hand, and in silently squeezing it, forgive her. (pg. 298)

This is a very childish, almost Romantic notion, which is clearly influenced by stories.

Damp sweaty battledress whose pockets contained rancid food along with the sodden crumbs of Amo bars. (pg. 304)

Amo is Paul Marshall's company and here, paired with 'sweaty battledress' and 'rancid food' has incredibly negative connotations.

We found *Two Figures by a Fountain* arresting enough to read with dedicated attention ... There are some good images – I liked ‘the long grass stalked by the leonine yellow of high summer’ – and you capture a flow of thought, and represent it with subtle differences in order to make attempts at characterisation. Something unique and unexplained is caught. However, we wondered whether it owed a little too much to the techniques of Mrs Woolf ... One is intrigued by her resolve to abandon the fairy stories and home-made folk tales and plays she has been writing (how much nicer if we had the flavour of one) ... A young man and woman by a fountain, who clearly have a great deal of unresolved feeling between them, tussle over a Ming vase and break it. (More than one of us here thought Ming rather too priceless to take outdoors? Wouldn’t Sevres or Nymphenburg suit your purpose?) The woman goes fully dressed into the fountain to retrieve the pieces. Wouldn’t it help you if the watching girl did not actually realise that the vase had broken? ... Simply put, you need the backbone of a story. (310-312)

This is a critique of Briony’s first attempt to write Part One of the novel from Cyril Connolly, editor of ‘Horizon’ literary magazine. The ‘long grass stalked by the leonine yellow of high summer’ appears on page 38 and has remained, obviously, thanks to the compliment in this letter. By including the letter as it was written, not paraphrased, and making reference to a sentence which remains in this version of the novel, and which the reader can go back and locate, draws attention to the novel as written and fictional – a postmodern technique. Note differences between the first draft and the version we are reading: it is a Ming vase rather than a Meissen and Cecilia jumps into the fountain fully dressed. These suggest that Briony has either decided to change the details to make her first draft fictional, or details have been changed over the course of the writing. Connolly says that ‘wouldn’t it help you if the watching girl did not actually realise that the vase had been broken’. These two things make the reader doubt everything they have read before. He also writes that it would have been ‘nicer if we had a flavour of one’ of her plays, and thus, an extract from ‘The Trials of Arabella’ is included in Part One.

You apologise, in passing, for not writing about the war ... As you will see, we do not believe that artists have an obligation to strike up attitudes to the war ... Warfare as we remarked, is the enemy of creative activity. (pg. 315)

This highlights literature’s inadequacy in responding to war.

None of this could conceal her cowardice. Did she really think she could hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and drown her guilt in a stream – three streams! – of consciousness? (pg. 320)

Briony reflecting on her first draft of ‘Two Figures by a Fountain’. She discovers that the style and technique from modernism is insufficient to bury her guilt. McEwan (as cited in Finney) states that in this first draft Briony “is burying her conscience beneath her stream of consciousness”, indicating that there are moral consequences to this modernist focus on style.

She came at last to a confluence of shabby streets which she assumed from the detached quarter of her map was Stockwell. (pg. 322)

A comparison can be made here between Briony’s journey to see Cecilia and for atonement, and to Robbie’s death march to Dunkirk.

She had been imagining the scene of a crime, a gothic cathedral. (pg. 322)

Link to Gothic literature and ‘Northanger Abbey’, in which Catherine Morland imagines horrific crimes influenced by the literature she reads.

She left the café, and as she walked along the Common she felt the distance widen between her and another self, no less real, who was walking back towards the hospital. (pg. 329)

This is the real Briony, heading back towards the hospital, as the reader will discover soon enough.

At the bottom were *Gray's Anatomy* and a collected Shakespeare, and above them, on slenderer spines, names in faded silver and gold – she saw Houseman and Crabbe. (pg. 335)

These are Robbie's books, a witness to Briony's plea for forgiveness and her search for atonement.

Now she had seen him walk across the room, the other possibility, that he could have been killed, seemed outlandish, against all the odds. It would have made no sense. (pg. 338)

Why would Robbie's death have made no sense to Briony? It would not have been ordered, she would not have been able to set things right. It would have made for an unfinished story.

'Growing up.' (pg. 342)

Briony claims it is growing up which has made her certain about Robbie's innocence. This confirms that this is a coming of age story for her.

'And if you can remember anything at all about Danny Hardman, where he was, what he was doing, at what time, who else saw him – anything that might put his alibi in question, then we want to hear it.' (pg. 345)

Robbie and Cecilia believe that Danny Hardman is responsible for Lola's rape. They suspect him due to his lower class (despite also being a servant's son, Robbie has been educated which places him above Danny in the social hierarchy). Later, when Briony reveals that it was Paul Marshall, Robbie 'But I can't imagine him with Lola Quincey' (pg. 347), demonstrating that they are blinded by their own prejudices to the obvious.

They stood outside Balham tube station, which in three months' time would achieve its terrible form of fame in the Blitz. (pg. 348)

This is also where Cecilia will die.

She knew what was required of her. Not simply a letter, but a new draft, an atonement, and she was ready to begin.

BT

London 1999 (pg. 349)

This ending to Part Three pulls the reader out of the narrative, drawing attention to the written nature of the novel and forcing them to question what is real and what is not. By describing her new draft as 'an atonement', it is clear that this story is Briony's penance.

Today, on the morning of my seventy-seventh birthday, I decided to make one last visit to the Imperial War Museum library in Lambeth. (pg. 353)

This is the first time the first person pronoun is used in the novel. This makes it clear that this person is the author of what has come previously. The initials at the end of Part Three confirm this person as Briony.

I have vascular dementia, the doctor told me. (pg. 354)

There is an irony in the fact that Briony, who has spent her life chronicling the events of one day in 1935, and whose work has been concerned largely with memory is now losing hers.

One day I too will prompt a moment's reflection in the passenger of a passing cab. (pg. 355)

Briony is still somewhat self-important.

I merged them in my description to concentrate all my experiences into one place. A convenient distortion, and the least of my offences against veracity. (pg. 356)

Part Three is brought into question. It is fiction, some may not be true. By claiming this to be the 'least of my offences against veracity' Briony also brings into question the truth of the rest of her novel.

'Absolutely no (underlined twice) soldier serving with the British' army would say "On the double". Only an American would give such an order. The correct term is "At the double".' (pg. 359)

An example of Briony editing, drafting and proofreading, which occurs throughout Part Three as well. Here it is simply more explicit.

Which portion of my mind, of my memory, had I lost to a miniscule stroke while I was asleep? (pg. 362)

There is some irony in Briony losing her memories when she has so wilfully rewritten them.

The music was still playing as turned into the drive of Tilney's Hotel. (pg. 363)

This is an explicit reference to Austen's 'Northanger Abbey' and the character of Henry Tilney. He is the same character who speaks the epigraph at the beginning of the novel.

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. (pg. 371)

Link to Shakespeare's Sonnet 18. The power of literature. Through this final draft, Briony is able to bring her sister and Robbie back from the dead and give them a happy ending. The adjectives used here also link Cecilia and Robbie to the characters in 'The Trials of Arabella', the play Briony was writing at the beginning of the novel and which, aptly, ends the postscript.

If I had the power to conjure them at my birthday celebration ... Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at *The Trials of Arabella*? It's not impossible.

But now I must sleep. (pg. 372)

These final lines again create doubt in the reader about the veracity of what they have read. This ending leaves the reader confused and uncertain about what to believe.