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**Wartime Britain Reflected in Ian McEwan's Atonement**

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## Zásady pro vypracování

Studentka představí kulturně historický kontext období 2. světové války ve Velké Británii, bude prezentovat různé úhly pohledu na toto historické období s ohledem na různé sociální, politické či osobní podmínky. Zvoleného autora i literární dílo zasadí do příslušného literárního kontextu. Tyto teoretické poznatky pak bude reflektovat v literární analýze McEwanova románu *Atonement*.

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Prohlašuji:

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## **ANNOTATION**

The bachelor thesis focuses on the cultural and historical context of the Second World War in Great Britain. It defines the author and the literary work in the appropriate literary context, analyzes the state of British society at the time with a focus on the social class and examines pre-war preparations on the Home Front and also the war itself and its impact on the British society. It then reflects this information in a literary analysis of McEwan's *Atonement*.

## **KEYWORDS**

*Atonement*, Ian McEwan, Great Britain, Second World War

## **NÁZEV**

Odraz válečné Británie v *Pokání* Iana McEwana

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na kulturně-historický kontext období druhé světové války ve Velké Británii. Zasaduje autora i literární dílo do příslušného literárního kontextu, analyzuje stav společnosti dané doby se zaměřením na jednotlivé společenské vrstvy a zkoumá předválečné přípravy na domácí frontě i válku samotnou a její dopad na britskou společnost. Tyto poznatky pak reflektuje v literární analýze McEwanova románu *Pokání*.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

*Pokání*, Ian McEwan, Velká Británie, druhá světová válka

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## Introduction

The Second World War and the era of the thirties that preceded it was a defining moment in the history of Britain. It comes as no surprise that many authors, including Ian McEwan, are still drawn to creating stories within this setting. Given that McEwan's father served in the Second World War and was even included in the Dunkirk evacuations<sup>1</sup> it was only natural for him to get inspired by this historical event. His novel *Atonement* is set in this precise historical period – the 30s and then during the war. Yet the question of *Atonement*'s genre may still be up for debate, as there is no clear definition of what is historical fiction and if there are any rules that need to be followed to achieve this label. This thesis is trying to answer these questions firstly theoretically. On one hand, some definitions are very generalized and abstract, such as the theory of Sarah Johnson who defines historical fiction as 'a fiction set in the past'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there are definitions with greater detail, in particular the one given by Richard Lee who considers a novel to be historical if it has 'been written at least fifty years after the events described, or written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events, and therefore approaches them only by research.'<sup>3</sup> The thesis then tries to demonstrate if *Atonement* meets the desired criteria and gives examples in support of them.

The thesis then looks at the social context of the time period and tries to analyze it. The focus is placed on the social classes which were very prominent at the time. In the theoretical part of the chapter, the classes are defined with the help of Storry and Mike's *British Cultural Studies*.<sup>4</sup> Their work, with support of other sources, helps define the individual classes – upper, middle and working – and also to show the distinctions between them. The two most defining elements is the economic situation and the social capital of an individual. Both of these factors go hand in hand as they influence one another. The key to achieving both is education as a renowned university will provide the graduates with good job opportunities while securing them valuable personal connections for future networking. The practical part of this chapter analyzes the social class representations in *Atonement* that is represented by the main characters. The upper class is focused on Paul Marshall and Lola, as they become aristocracy during the book and

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<sup>1</sup> McEwan, Ian. "An Inspiration, Yes. Did I Copy from Another Author? No." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, November 27, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Sarah. "Defining the Genre: What Are the Rules for Historical Fiction?" *by Sarah Johnson*. Historical Novel Society, January 7, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Richard. "Guide: Our Definition of Historical Fiction." Historical Novel Society. Accessed January 19, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Storry, Mike, and Peter Childs. *British Cultural Identities*. Seconded. London etc.: Routledge, (2002).

accumulate significant wealth. The middle class is represented by the Tallis family. The family, although still significantly wealthy and privileged, does not reach the upper class definition and more so the upper-middle class definition. The second chapter goes in depth with each family member and especially with Cecilia as she decides to remove herself from her family. Lastly, the focus is on the working class which is represented by Robbie, his mother Grace and other servants of the Tallis family. Robbie is an atypical working class man, as he was provided with many life advantages thanks to the Tallises.

In the final chapter, the thesis explores the historical context of the time period. It firstly looks at the years leading up to the Second World War, defining the 30s and observing the complicated economic situation after the Wall Street crash and domestic affairs concerning the creation of Commonwealth. Then the text looks at the escalating war preparations, pacifist movements climaxing in 1935 with the Peace Ballot and the situation on the Home Front. In 1935 the Air Raid Precautions circular was sent out by the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, which tried to explain to the citizens how to protect yourself against air raids and poisonous gas. Later the ARP volunteer organization was helping with preparations all over the country by issuing gas masks, digging trenches and shelters and even giving lectures to make sure that the citizens could protect themselves the best way possible.<sup>5</sup> During this time, the country reached a unity never seen before which was even heightened after the successful Dunkirk evacuations. Lastly the chapter sheds light on to the role of women in the wartime and their contributions to the work force mainly in military nursing and factory work. The practical part goes into detail with the war preparations and nursing specifically as these two subjects are described the most in the novel. War preparations include the representation of changes the Tallis household had to endure in the form of taking in evacuees and having to plow the park for corn cultivation and changes in London like the removed bus or road signs. Attention is given to the nursing journey Briony goes through as she starts her training and then progresses to taking care of soldiers who were brought to the hospital she works at. It is then when something in her changes from a child to an adult. Lastly the focus is shifted on Robbie and his struggles of trying to get to the Dunkirk beach and to get evacuated as the hardships he had to go through are shown.

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<sup>5</sup> Neil R. Storey and Fiona Kay, *The Home Front in World War Two* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2017), 10,11.

## Defining Historical Novel

The genre of historical novels and fiction attracted numerous great writers which created publications that the public seem to enjoy and love till this day. With the great recurring popularity and wide acceptance of the genre we must ask ourselves what exactly is historical fiction?

The definition of historical fiction and historical novels has been a topic of discussion for many years now with no concrete answer so far. Harry E. Shaw says that defining the genre of historical novel is important mainly because if the readers know what to expect from a novel, it helps them to make sense of it.<sup>6</sup> People seem to have a general idea of what a historical fiction might be, to give an example - Sarah Johnson, a professor that is part of the Historical Novel Society, says that almost all of us have a general idea of what hides behind the term 'historical fiction' and also what it should be. Her generic definition is 'a fiction set in the past'.<sup>7</sup> But the Historical Novel Society has a more definite answer than Johnson herself. They consider a novel historical if it has 'been written at least fifty years after the events described, or written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events, and therefore approaches them only by research.'<sup>8</sup> Emma Darwin, a historical fiction writer, does not approach the definition in such strictness as others and only claims that readers should find 'a sense of Then' and that it is not a question of how many years must pass since the event or era but how unfamiliar is the topic and how can the writer re-introduce it and show it to the reader in a new light.<sup>9</sup>

But Johnson's definition then also raises the question of what 'past' is. Is it the past of the author or the past of the reader? Darwin claims that the 'past' is the past of the author – the time gap between the event and the age of the author. In her opinion, the author cannot be describing the events that form the historical background of the novel from their memory but has to do it from research.<sup>10</sup> Johnson mentions in her article that some readers are even more strict with defining the historical novel and that a 'novel should only be called "historical" if the plot reflects its

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<sup>6</sup> Shaw, Harry E. "An Approach to the Historical Novel." In *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, 19–50. Cornell University Press, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, Sarah. "Defining the Genre: What Are the Rules for Historical Fiction?" by Sarah Johnson." Historical Novel Society, January 7, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, Richard. "Guide: Our Definition of Historical Fiction." Historical Novel Society. Accessed January 19, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Darwin, Emma. "So What Counts as Historical Fiction?" This Itch of Writing, April 14, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Darwin, Emma. "So What Counts as Historical Fiction?" This Itch of Writing, April 14, 2014.

historical period so well that the story could not have occurred at any other time in history'.<sup>11</sup> One last definition worth mentioning is by H. Scott Dalton who defines historical fiction as 'a fictional story in which elements of history, be they persons, events, or settings, play a central role.'<sup>12</sup>

As one can see, these definitions are generally similar but they differ in the attention to detail of the novel's topic, plot and even characters.

When defining the historical novel and fiction, it is also important to differentiate between a historian writer and a fiction writer. What sets them apart and how do they approach the historical novel?

According to Dalton, both historians and writers have in common the need for 'cutting through the fog of perception' and trying to come as close to the truth as possible.<sup>13</sup> The historians usually ask what happened and why, while writers would be more concerned with what the event was like and how it felt. Dalton then comments on how writers are writers of fiction and not history and according to his ideas, fiction is more about the characters and less about the particular events.<sup>14</sup> Cora Agatucci seems to have the same opinion as Dalton as she claims that historical fiction is different from other types of novels mainly because of the focus on the consequences caused by historical events and their reflection into the personal lives of each character.<sup>15</sup> The characters are forced to make decisions they would not make otherwise had there not been a particular historical event. On the contrary to these differences between a historian and a writer, Johnson claims that some authors are not particularly concerned about the historical setting at all and only use it to make their plot more believable and would not talk about their novel as a historical one.<sup>16</sup>

Historical fiction is the most natural form of story-telling. Richard Lee, the founder of the Historical Novel Society, claims that historical fiction is even more than natural, that it is primal and he supports this claim by the fact the first stories of all cultures are the ones about heroes and ancestors – therefore a historical fiction.<sup>17</sup> A lot of experts and specialists who were trying

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<sup>11</sup> Johnson, Sarah. "Defining the Genre: What Are the Rules for Historical Fiction? by Sarah Johnson." Historical Novel Society, January 7, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Dalton, H. Scott. "What Is Historical Fiction?" What is historical fiction?, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Dalton, H. Scott. "What Is Historical Fiction?" What is historical fiction?, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Dalton, H. Scott. "What Is Historical Fiction?" What is historical fiction?, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Agatucci, Cora. "Historical Fiction Criticism and Evaluation." Oregon State University, March 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, Sarah. "Defining the Genre: What Are the Rules for Historical Fiction? by Sarah Johnson." Historical Novel Society, January 7, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Lee, Richard. "The Problem of Truth in History and Fiction: A Speech by Richard Lee." Historical Novel Society, January 7, 2022.

to define the historical novel were concerned about the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the historical facts a fiction writer might use in their novel. Agatucci claims that a historical fiction has elements that cannot be historically proven but instead it should suggest a way things happen. She believes that even though an authentic setting and characters are important, not all things need to be necessarily true and grounded in fact.<sup>18</sup> It is enough if it is presented in a believable manner that represents the past, but urges not to take things too far and to beware of anachronisms.<sup>19</sup>

This seems to be the general idea that other experts also agree on. Barbara Foley points out that a historical novel should have a new point of view on the historical process which is shaping the characters and the plot should be an interpretation and evaluation of the social world at the given time. Her idea is that factual references cannot dictate the retelling of the event.<sup>20</sup> This therefore suggests that Foley also does not deem facts as necessary as some of the experts mentioned above. Lee, in his speech about the problem of truth in history and fiction, also shares his observations and comments that it is obvious to people that the books are not always true and based on facts but in his opinion no one would read them if they weren't drawing from life. He believes that this contradiction is 'an absolute fundamental – perhaps the absolute fundamental quality of art'. Art seeks both accuracy and illusion and the history in the novel is usually not completely generalized but more so tailored for its audience.<sup>21</sup>

Now let us observe how Ian McEwan approached his historical novel *Atonement* and if he distinguished himself from any of the definitions and opinions mentioned above.

McEwan did not live through the Second World War or the era preceding it, which is the main setting of *Atonement*, as he was born in 1948 in Aldershot, Britain. His hometown is famous for being the home of the British Army and has a rich military history which is documented in local museums.<sup>22</sup> McEwan visited Libya when he was only eight years old and he later described that he felt a sense of the force of history and politics around him and for the first time realized how political events are real and affect people's everyday lives.<sup>23</sup> He told The Guardian in an interview that his father was a soldier in the Second World War and that he was

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<sup>18</sup> Agatucci, Cora. "Historical Fiction Criticism and Evaluation." Oregon State University, March 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Agatucci, Cora. "What Is Historical Fiction?" Oregon State University, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Foley, Barbara. "The Historical Novel." In *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*, 143–184. Cornell University Press, 1986.

<sup>21</sup> Lee, Richard. "The Problem of Truth in History and Fiction: A Speech by Richard Lee." Historical Novel Society, January 7, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> "Aldershot - Towns & Villages." Visit Hampshire. Accessed January 20, 2022

<sup>23</sup> Krčiković, Razija. "Understanding Ian McEwan by David Malcom." Academia.edu, April 15, 2017.

a part of the Dunkirk evacuations. He shared with McEwan all his experiences, stories and memories not only from the front but also from the hospital afterwards.<sup>24</sup> Most of the father's stories then inspired and helped McEwan with his writing. His father said that while being in France he experienced the most intense period of his life and that was when he felt truly alive.

This approach to McEwan's writing would be approved by several writers and experts mentioned in the beginning of the chapter as McEwan did not write about history which he lived through but he had to make his own research – for example he studied sources at the Imperial War Museum – and did not retell the events from his own memory.

Darwin's opinion about making sure that the historical topic is not familiar enough to the reader as the writer of historical novels should re-introduce the topic is also important when writing about the Second World War. She claims that the Second World War has become a historical fiction only a few years prior to 2014 and that it is because people are only now distanced enough from the event for them to feel like it has its own personality that they can seek out.<sup>25</sup> Even Lee speaks out about the war – though it is World War One his point of view is still relevant. When discussing the truthfulness of the facts that a novel should be built on, he wants the writers and readers to realize that there may be enough facts about particular dates of battles and numbers of fallen soldiers but it is hard to see the war from a personal subjective view. Even if there is great general documentation, finding out how the soldiers felt during the battles and what they emotionally went through is almost impossible if they did not live to tell their story. Any letters that the soldiers might have managed to send home from the front usually never went into any detail and if they did the soldiers mostly only talked about 'doing their bit' as not to upset their families.<sup>26</sup>

When Grant Rodwell approached the topic of historical novel he expressed his belief that the most important thing is for the reader to feel what the characters might feel and to care about what they might care about – their friends or family. The readers should not burden themselves with understanding the national strategy for winning the war if the character is not concerned about it.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> McEwan, Ian. "An Inspiration, Yes. Did I Copy from Another Author? No." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, November 27, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Darwin, Emma. "So What Counts as Historical Fiction?" *This Itch of Writing*, April 14, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, Richard. "The Problem of Truth in History and Fiction: A Speech by Richard Lee." *Historical Novel Society*, January 7, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Rodwell, Grant. "Defining the Historical Novel." In *Whose History?: Engaging History Students through Historical Fiction*, 47–54. University of Adelaide Press, 2013.

A writer would have a hard time trying to build on such little facts had he not used imagination. McEwan was lucky with his father's accounts of the war which may have helped him to put himself in the character's shoes and build a great storyline. His personal style has also reflected the fascination with history and historical fiction in contemporary British fiction even though he diverges from them by not mixing genres and by focusing on psychological states as well as taboo subjects, in *Atonement's* case rape, and fragmentations of the novel.<sup>28</sup> McEwan stated in an interview that he is not really concerned about the rules he should follow when writing and that the only rule he has set up for himself and his writing is that 'the only obligation of a novel is that it be interesting'.<sup>29</sup> As Briony puts it 'No one will care what events and which individuals were misinterpreted to make a novel.'<sup>30</sup>

McEwan has approached the matter of creating characters that are put into real historical events with great respect: 'It is an eerie, intrusive matter, inserting imaginary characters into actual historical events. In writing about wartime especially, it seems like a form of respect for the suffering of a generation wrenched from their ordinary lives to be conscripted into a nightmare.'<sup>31</sup>

Maria Margaronis agrees with McEwan on the portrayal of violence and that it can be a very tricky subject to write about and a careful approach is always recommended. Her opinion is that war-time fiction is popular because the extreme emotions draw people in but it is important 'not to exploit the violence and make sure we choose the correct approach as for authenticity and responsibility.'<sup>32</sup> McEwan has also mentioned that when writing *Atonement* he has tried to focus more on the telling details such as the cavalry officer shooting his horses or French man walking his dog as the convoy moves by him, rather than describing battles and major events.

When portraying scenes in the novel he wanted to make sure that the situations actually happened – thus including a lot of stories from his father like the near-lynching of a RAF clerk or descriptions of the hospital.<sup>33</sup> John Frederick shares McEwan's opinion that when writer puts a sensitive selection of detail it gives the reader rich and deep emotional participation of the

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<sup>28</sup> Krčiković, Razija. "Understanding Ian McEwan by David Malcom." Academia.edu, April 15, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Zalewski, Daniel, Ian Parker, and Cynthia Zarin. "Ian McEwan's Art of Unease." The New Yorker, February 16, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 371.

<sup>31</sup> McEwan, Ian. "An Inspiration, Yes. Did I Copy from Another Author? No." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, November 27, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Margaronis, Maria. "The Anxiety of Authenticity: Writing Historical Fiction at the End of the Twentieth Century." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 65 (2008): 138–160.

<sup>33</sup> McEwan, Ian. "An Inspiration, Yes. Did I Copy from Another Author? No." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, November 27, 2006.

events described.<sup>34</sup> McEwan has also made Briony, as she is the assumed author of *Atonement*, to make her own detailed research. In the coda of the book she describes how she researched materials from the Imperial War Museum or letters written by Mr. Nettle, who was Robbie's evacuation companion. She even managed to find an old colonel from the Buffs who made sure that the little war details were worded correctly and the historical terms accurate. When Briony thinks about the issues of being true to the facts she says she feels 'like policeman in search team, we go hands and knees and crawl our way towards the truth.'<sup>35</sup>

But even though McEwan tried to use as much facts as possible he is also, according to the opinion of Brian Finney, concerned with the act of narration itself. He uses intertextuality frequently and foreshadows events and unreliable narrator as early as in the epigraph of the novel which is his warning not to treat *Atonement* as a classic realist text. He changes his style of writing depending on what suits the part of the book the best. In Part One the style is more formal and archaic which helps to evoke the time period while Part Two and Three are shorter, simpler and reflecting the army-style of thinking which is not only part of Robbie's reasoning but also Briony's as the nurses are trained similarly to soldiers. The last part – London, 1999– has more of a contemporary feel, which is also fitting with the story and its progress.<sup>36</sup>

To summarize – defining a historical novel, how close to the facts and how truthful it should be is very much subjective and falls on the heads of individuals and writers themselves. McEwan chose to try to retell the story as truthfully as he could while also giving himself a freedom and space for creative imagination. He plays not only with history but with the reader as well. By choosing this approach of combining and mixing elements he was able to create a historical novel whose plot is beautifully supported by history and facts but can also focus on the relationships and feelings.

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<sup>34</sup> Frederick, John T. "Costain and Company: The Historical Novel Today." *The English Journal* 43, no. 4 (1954): 169–82.

<sup>35</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 359.

<sup>36</sup> Finney, Brian. "Briony's Stand against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's 'Atonement.'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 27, no. 3 (2004): 68–82.



## Society and Social Class

Britain as a nation has always placed importance on tradition and has been time and time again seen as a very class-ridden society. This persistence of class can be understood through various historical and cultural factors. To give an example, Hervé Picton claims that the binary conception of class (us versus them mentality) is a direct consequence of the Norman Conquest that took place in 1066. This event has split the society into two parts – the French speaking aristocracy and the rest of the citizens. It is possible to trace the effects till this day since the working class used to be Francophobic while the upper and middle class remained rather full of Francophiles with a taste for the French culture.<sup>37</sup> Since England has always been considered to be rather conservative, we could say that nowadays the British society has remained aware of the class system around them, but people are more class-conscious than class-ridden. One of the reasons why class still remains in the unconsciousness of the British could be the surviving aristocracy and monarchy which remains powerful and wealthy. It is also important to note that while the class system is a big part of the *Atonement* plot, society is more complex so the characters facing challenges because of their class also face challenges because of their gender and many other factors. This paper will touch on the topic of gender only briefly when discussing the main female characters of the story.

The problematic of class can use various different terms to describe it – hierarchical terms (monarchy and aristocracy), binary terms (us versus them) and lastly the most popular triadic terms (upper, middle, working).<sup>38</sup> The terms usually depend on the time period so in *Atonement* we encounter the binary and triadic terms as they are the most relevant given the time period.

As Picton cites the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu - defining individual classes should not only be based on the economic situation of an individual but also on the social capital an individual is provided with.<sup>39</sup> This social capital is understood as education, contacts or networking and relationships in general.

Since *Atonement* looks at class in the traditional triadic terms this paper will now briefly look at and define each class with relation to the book itself.

The upper class has always been associated with aristocracy and hereditary elite. People in this class are wealthy and can have property that is based on a title they may possess. In today's

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<sup>37</sup> Picton, Hervé “*Class in Britain: Change and Permanence*,” Academia.edu, (2020), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Picton, Hervé “*Class in Britain: Change and Permanence*,” Academia.edu, (2020), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Picton, Hervé “*Class in Britain: Change and Permanence*,” Academia.edu, (2020), 3.

society the aristocracy has slowly been replaced by celebrities, pop stars or athletes and football players – they do not have to be talented but they always need to be rich.<sup>40</sup> When looking at certain characteristics that define a class there are subtle calibrations – as mentioned above it is easily measured by income, occupation or status but one’s class can also be assumed based on their accent, domestic situation, the area they live in or their choice of clothing.<sup>41</sup> The upper class has a dominant position in society and is based on people with common background that have close social connections as networking is a big part of the upper class. The percentage of citizens in this class is rather small which adds to its exclusivity. One either enters the upper class through their family background or through public school education. Most people in this class tend to create their network of contacts through their education, which they obtain in public or independent schools and later at the so-called Oxbridge universities. This type education establishments reinforce class structures as they were usually only accessible to rich and white individuals with good family connections. Children that were not able to attend the top schools and universities did not only miss out on the importance of creating a meaningful business connections but they also formed their social personality and identity while growing up without these privileges, making it harder for them to be able to find the social mobility they might need later in life. Storry and Childs support the idea of education being predetermined by the class one is born into with claims that 80 percent of middle-class children were attending a university compared to 17 percent of children from poorest homes.<sup>42</sup>

The upper class in *Atonement* is represented mainly by the Marshalls, Paul and later on also Lola. Throughout the book, Paul Marshall is concerned with his aim to become richer and for his business to take off and to create wealth for him, rather than any public service the country may need with the war preparations at the time. His goal is to seize the business opportunity of creating the Amo chocolate bar which would ideally become a part of the standard-issue ration pack. Since he is trying to profit off of war one could easily call him a warmonger. The upper class has always had a sense of detachment from the rest of the society which is nicely represented in Paul Marshall’s vision of making as much profit as possible regardless of the cost to others. Even though Paul is presumptively a part of the upper-middle-class at the beginning of the book, in the last part of the book we discover through Briony’s thoughts that Paul along with his wife Lola have been granted the title of Lord and Lady Marshall – thus

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<sup>40</sup> Picton, Hervé “*Class in Britain: Change and Permanence*,” Academia.edu, (2020), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Gardiner, Juliet. *The Thirties: An Intimate History*. London, United Kingdom: HarperPress, (2011), 525.

<sup>42</sup> Storry, Mike, and Peter Childs. *British Cultural Identities*. Seconded. London etc.: Routledge, (2002), 79.

making them literal aristocrats and confirming their position in the upper class.<sup>43</sup> Briony also mentions Marshalls' appearances in the newspaper, creation of their Foundation with focus on medicine and agriculture and charity work.<sup>44</sup> According to Piciucco, Paul Marshall himself becomes a symbol of war, an anti-hero of the story and the opposite of Robbie.<sup>45</sup> While Robbie wants peace and is innocent and falsely accused of the rape of Lola, Paul wants war and is guilty of being the rapist. For Paul, his class and hunger for money and power is placed above his moral behavior to maintain his position in society. He secures his safety by marrying Lola, his victim. As Cecilia later realizes, his position in society makes him untouchable: "He's immune. She'll always cover for him."<sup>46</sup>

The middle class is extremely fragmented and the position of people in it usually depends on the job they have. According to Storry and Childs, the middle class can be split into four main categories: higher professionals, salaried professionals, white-collar workers and self-employed.<sup>47</sup> The higher professionals are the ones who lack the power and wealth of the upper class but are still very influential. The vocation of these individuals is usually a doctor, a lawyer or a politician. People in this category are very similar to the upper class in the sense that most of them attended good schools including a university and value their independence. They enjoy holidays, pensions and have considerable freedom over their life. Salaried professionals also get good education, have some freedom in their occupation but are nowhere near the salaries of higher professionals. People in this category are teacher, lecturers, local government official or social workers. White-collar workers take up the majority of the middle class. The individuals in this group have a supervised nine-to-five job with little freedom. Lastly the self-employed – they have freedom over their profession but are usually forced to work very long hours.

Based on the information given throughout the novel, the Tallis family would best fit the description of the upper-middle class since they have high economic, social and cultural capital. Their lifestyle may seem similar to the upper class in some sense but the Tallis family lacks the inherited wealth and influence of the upper class. They still live a very privileged lifestyle. The family estate in Southeast England is set in a countryside that provides the family with the

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<sup>43</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 357.

<sup>44</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 356-7.

<sup>45</sup> Piciucco, Pier Paolo. "War and Peace in Ian McEwan's 'Atonement.'" *La Guerra e Le Armi Nella Letteratura in Inglese Del Novecento a Cura Di Lucia Folena Trauben*, (2013).

<sup>46</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 347.

<sup>47</sup> Storry, Mike, and Peter Childs. *British Cultural Identities*. Seconded. London etc.: Routledge, (2002), 184-187.

luxury of privacy, peace and quiet and a big garden and surrounding areas of the house like the swimming pool or an old temple on an island. Yet the house is described as relatively ugly:

“Morning sunlight, or any light, could not conceal the ugliness of the Tallis home—barely forty years old, has bright orange brick, squat, lead-paned baronial Gothic... a tragedy of wasted chances.”<sup>48</sup> This may be a form of foreshadowing of the actual reality of living in the house. The estate may seem grand but the relationships inside of the house are subjected to the pressure of class and are not so pretty after all. Even though the house should evoke feelings of comfort and security, nobody is really happy being there and some even feel the urge to leave. The atmosphere of the house is also easily picked up by visitors – Pierrot especially – since he describes it as “a strange house where politeness was all.”<sup>49</sup>

Emily Tallis, the mother of the household, is the perfect example of a typical class mentality of the 1930s. She has the standard position for a woman in a family at that time – a homemaker, stay-at-home mom that looks after her children and organizes the house. She tolerates her husband’s affair as to not disrupt the family dynamic. Her and her husband Jack seem to have the old model of marriage – separate lives, man at work, woman at the house, very patriarchal. When Cecilia talks about the family dynamic in the house, she mentions how Jack does not organize the house or worries about anything, leaving all the housekeeping to Emily or the servants.

Jack Tallis’ occupation is a politician, a ‘slave to the Ministry, and to Eventuality Planning’<sup>50</sup>, which would put him in the ‘higher professionals’ group mentioned in the categorization by Storry and Childs.<sup>51</sup> Jack is distanced away from the whole family to the point where he does not appear in the book apart from a phone call. It is indicated that he is very busy with the pre-war political situation and war preparations. He seems to share some of the aspects of the mentality of the upper class, more precisely the ‘need to help the less fortunate’ as mentioned in *Class in Britain* by Picton.<sup>52</sup> This is demonstrated by his ‘hobby’ of funding Robbie’s education throughout his whole life.

Emily’s children – Leon, Cecilia and Briony - seem to already be affected by her absence throughout their lives. Emily’s illness has prevented her to be a proper mother in her children’s

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<sup>48</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 19.

<sup>49</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 57.

<sup>50</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 122.

<sup>51</sup> Storry, Mike, and Peter Childs. *British Cultural Identities*. Seconded. London etc.: Routledge, (2002), 184-187.

<sup>52</sup> Picton, Hervé “*Class in Britain: Change and Permanence*,” Academia.edu, (2020), 9.

lives so they all call her by her first name, demonstrating disconnect. Emily does not like that her husband decided to fund Robbie's education. Since Robbie is from a working class family he is not equal to her children in her eyes and she does not feel like it is fair to them, once again showing the typical class mentality of the time period. Emily seems to represent the old values of British people, who like to live traditionally through established way of life. Later, the education provided for Robbie is described further as a "hobby of Jack's", making it fairly obvious that the upper-middle class felt like they could intervene into someone's life just to pass the time and have a hobby to occupy themselves with. This approach to money and education speaks volumes about the Tallisses class mentality – especially Emily's and Jack's. This type of thinking is also present in the way Emily treats her house servants and does not take their comfort into consideration. She thinks about the way the household operates since it is her role in the family, but she takes the servants' work for granted and does not acknowledge their work if things are not done up to her standard. To give an example, she carelessly orders the family dinner to be a roast in the middle of a heatwave, not caring about the conditions her servants will have to work in. As far as gender stereotypes goes, apart from Emily being a stereotype of women at the time, she also wanted her daughter, Cecilia, to be the same. Since Emily wanted Cecilia to keep her upper-middle class status she and her husband would most likely object to her having any relationship with Robbie as he belongs to the working class - "They surely would not approve of a liaison between their eldest daughter and their charlady's son."<sup>53</sup>

Cecilia feels the pressure of her mother to marry someone wealthy and appropriate for her class and to have children, but she does not share the same worldviews or opinions as Emily. She is one of the first characters in the book who actually sees the damage the social class structure around her does and tries to stand up to it. This change in her mentality is triggered by the treatment Robbie receives with the false rape accusations. In the beginning of the book, Cecilia is somewhat bothered by the class structures around her, but she does not challenge them. She seems to see through the structures as she is able to appreciate the work that is done around the house by the servants, unlike her mother Emily. Cecilia helps to resolve the problem with the roast dinner her mother created and values the cleaning of the guest room or the special flower beds in the garden, which other family members blindly ignore. Yet she is still somewhat wrapped up in the upper-middle class identity of herself which was created by her upbringing. She does not necessarily disagree with her father paying for Robbie's education, as she

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<sup>53</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 313.

appreciates him as a friend, but she also thinks that Robbie is ‘pretentious and presumptuous’<sup>54</sup> for wanting to go to a medical college, since her father already paid for his attendance of Cambridge. The subject of money and education is brought up numerous times during the first part of the book as to not only highlight the differences in class mentality but also the class itself and the economic inequalities it brought into the British society of 1930s. For example, Cecilia is offended by Robbie taking his shoes off when coming into the house and Robbie misinterprets Cecilia taking her clothes off by the fountain. They both automatically bring class into their thought processes when trying to make sense of the situation at hand. Cecilia’s relationship to her family and her class gets more and more complicated as the story progresses.

As was already mentioned, she already feels somewhat conflicted about her identity as upper-middle class woman. She is in a position where she should be able to live comfortably for the rest of her life and should therefore feel a sense of stability provided for her by her family. Yet even before anything really happens, she already starts to realize her feelings towards the family and family house are rather negative and she wants to leave and be away as much as possible. Cecilia also realizes that she feels as an outsider and is at home only because she feels obligated to. She feels compassion for other classes (Robbie and the house servants), but she also has rooted prejudices inside her. To give an example, Cecilia automatically jumps to the conclusion that the rapist must have been Danny Hardman – a working class man – and does not only repeatedly bring it up to the police, she also makes it a center of her hypothetical defense for Robbie. By her trying to persistently clear Robbie’s name and find the incriminating evidence towards Danny, she makes it easy for the reader to see that even though she changed her mindset, the upper-middle class upbringing is still in her subconsciousness. We can see this mindset in her relationship with money as well. In the book she mentions how she wants to leave and looks at her personal finances, saying that she has a little money in her account, but then adds: ‘enough to keep her modestly for a year or so.’<sup>55</sup> This demonstrates a very privileged way of thinking.

The most radical thing Cecilia does in the book is when she cuts herself off from the family to stand alongside Robbie. She does not want to speak to any of her family members ever again.<sup>56</sup> She feels betrayed by her family and especially, her sister Briony, but she also starts to feel like she ‘can breathe now’.<sup>57</sup> Since she removed herself from her class-ridden family and

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<sup>54</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 19.

<sup>55</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 21.

<sup>56</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 205, 208.

<sup>57</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 209.

surroundings, she finally sees how her family behaves: ‘I can never forgive what they did. Now that I’ve broken away, I’m beginning to understand the snobbery that lay behind their stupidity.’<sup>58</sup> This must have been hard for Cecilia since she really had to challenge the accepted class boundaries she had while also having to look at her family values differently and in a new light. Fraser claims that by removing herself from her comfortable life she fragments her class identity and thus makes herself more class-conscious than she was before the incident<sup>59</sup> and Piciucco agreeing with this view also points out the previously mentioned us versus them mentality which is now more than ever visible in the book<sup>60</sup> - in this instance it is not between different classes but between the Tallisses and Cecilia.

Cecilia’s change is also partly represented by the clothing she wears throughout the book. In Part One she has multiple paragraphs dedicated to her indecisiveness of choosing the right dress for the family dinner. Her effort could be interpreted as foreshadowing about Cecilia’s feelings for Robbie or as a yet another example of the pressure a class-ridden society might put on an individual, especially a young woman. Gardiner discusses a typical 1930s fashion in her book *The Thirties*, where she claims that women (especially women living in town) needed to wear something between their day and evening dress, thus opting for special cocktail dresses.<sup>61</sup> Storry and Childs also look at the typical British fashion, not necessarily from the 1930s but from an overall classic British clothing standpoint. They claim that British clothing is full of muted colors such as green, brown or dark blue, made of nice fabrics and that women often opt for a string of pearls which is commonly associated with the upper class.<sup>62</sup> Cecilia in chapter nine is portrayed as she tries to put her dinner outfit together. First she starts with a black dress but decides not to pair it with a string of pearls – already showing her rebellion against the typical class mentality. Cecilia then decides to change and goes through her extensive wardrobe collection once again proving her class status. In the end she opts for a ‘figure-hugging dark green bias-cut backless evening gown’<sup>63</sup> and changes her mind about the pearl necklace. This outfit choice is of muted color just as the above mention by Storry and Childs and the necklace goes with Gardiner’s idea of how should Cecilia be dressed. As said before, Cecilia firstly decided not to wear her pearls but later changed her mind as her character development had not

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<sup>58</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 209.

<sup>59</sup> Ian Fraser, “Class Experience in McEwan’s *Atonement*,” PDFslide, November 29, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Piciucco, Pier Paolo. “*War and Peace in Ian McEwan’s ‘Atonement.’* La Guerra e Le Armi Nella Letteratura in Inglese Del Novecento a Cura Di Lucia Folena Trauben, (2013).

<sup>61</sup> Gardiner, Juliet. *The Thirties: An Intimate History*. London, United Kingdom: HarperPress, 527.

<sup>62</sup> Storry, Mike, and Peter Childs. *British Cultural Identities*. Seconded. London etc.: Routledge, (2002), 163.

<sup>63</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 97.

reached its peak yet. In the later part of the book she never seems to be focused about the way she is dressed or her overall appearance as she went through her transformation and changed her class mentality.

Interestingly enough, it is Briony, the catalyst of the whole story, who makes the most progress as far as social class and stereotypes go. At the beginning of the book Briony seems to be aware of her privileges. Her mindset and thought process when daydreaming gives the impression of an upper-middle class upbringing. In the first part of the book she says that ‘the world she ran through loved her and would give her what she wanted and would let it happen’<sup>64</sup> or that she had a generally pleasant and well-protected life without confrontation. This is contrasted by the very last part of the book when Briony, now an old lady with life experience, sits in a taxi to go to her birthday party. Her taxi driver turns out to be ‘a cheerful West Indian lad’<sup>65</sup> but Briony, instead of jumping to stereotypes that were ingrained into her since a very young age, seem to understand that it is not appropriate to ‘assume anything about people’s educational level from the way they talk or dress or from their taste in music. ‘Safest to treat everyone you meet as a distinguished intellectual.’<sup>66</sup> This incident clearly demonstrates how the way of looking at someone’s class had changed in Britain. But Briony’s viewpoint on class did not change overnight. Even though she starts to realize the class structures around her only as she comes in contact with war and death, she is still able to start to see through them at much younger age than Cecilia. As Briony moves around the hospital she sees the porters who claim to be able to get you anything as long as you ‘had the right money’<sup>67</sup>. So even when a war is at large, money makes the last call, making it a class issue apart from a humanitarian one. Briony starts to show signs of understating how her life might have been better, had she not decided to leave her family, just like her sister Cecilia. Briony also sees how some trainee nurses around her have a privileged life. She specifically mentions Fiona who, according to Briony, only has to ‘live her life, follow the road ahead and discover what was to happen.’<sup>68</sup>

It is also interesting to note the difference between Cecilia’s and Emily’s opinion of Briony’s decision to leave the comfort of her family safety net and to start training to become a nurse. Even though Cecilia despises Briony for how she effected and possibly ruined her life, she is still able to admire that Briony did not go to Cambridge as was expected of her and she sees it

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<sup>64</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 157.

<sup>65</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 362.

<sup>66</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 362.

<sup>67</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 328.

<sup>68</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 288.



as a big step for her. Contrarily, Emily is not happy with Briony's decision and believes that she will change her mind and come back to the lifestyle she is 'supposed' to have. The dynamic of gender stereotypes can be also seen in the way smoking is described in the novel. Men smoke everywhere without giving it a second thought while women are not expected to smoke or are shamed when doing so. To give an example, at the beginning of Part One Cecilia is seen smoking in the hall while she says she 'would not have dared had her father been at home'<sup>69</sup> since he disapproves of her smoking. This scene can be understood as symbolism for women being ready to take up more space in society and change the way they were being perceived if they were given the chance by being able to work. When Briony and Cecilia meet in Part Three of the novel, they are both employed as nurses. In one of the scenes they share a quiet moment while smoking a cigarette together.

Even though the upper-middle class is privileged in the way they can live their life as their heart desires, they are still faced with the restrictions that come from being in their position in society. In the 1930s, the rules the people were put under concerned mainly the etiquette. To give an example, when the family dinner in Part One of the book is finished, Leon, who took on his father's role for the evening as the head of the house, takes off his jacket 'thus allowing the other two men to do the same.'<sup>70</sup> The discussion about the jackets continue as rigid club rules are examined and described as ridiculous. This conversation appears to be historically accurate as Gardiner claims that the menswear guide from the 1935 was a black jacket ensemble.<sup>71</sup> During the mentioned dinner, Paul Marshall does not honor the etiquette rules as he starts a private conversation with Robbie at the beginning of the meal and turns away from Emily Tallis, the hostess. Robbie is then conflicted as what to do, so he chooses to answer Paul's question out of politeness, but judges his bad manners and lack of respect. These examples indicate that the rules were a part of every day's lives, especially during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The working class is usually defined by undereducated, underqualified individuals with manual jobs. People in this class also tend to be stereotyped as people with a regional accent. Women, who, apart from ethnic minorities, make up most of the working class are mostly stay-at-home moms. According to Storry and Childs, people from the working class tend to lean towards making their class a part of their identity to such a degree where they do not want to be in any other class that may be generally seen as 'better', for example the middle class. They view

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<sup>69</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 46.

<sup>70</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 139.

<sup>71</sup> Gardiner, Juliet. *The Thirties: An Intimate History*. London, United Kingdom: HarperPress, 525.

working class as a form of their expression and do not wish to change it.<sup>72</sup> Picton also claims that the main value of working class people is their solidarity and unity towards each other, which helps them to connect and form strong relationships.<sup>73</sup>

The characters representing the working class in *Atonement* are the servants of the Tallis' house (cooks, maids, a gardener and a driver) and Robbie who is the son of one of the house maids, Grace Turner. He lives with Grace in a bungalow which is located near the main house. The Turner's bungalow really illustrates the contrast between the social classes of the Tallis family and the Turner family. For example, the Tallis house is described as having big French windows while Robbie's room under the roof in the bungalow has only little sealed skylight window, making his view very limited: 'All day long his small bedroom, his bathroom and the cubicle wedged between them he called his study had baked under the southern slope of the bungalow's roof.'<sup>74</sup> There is also something to be said about the size of the bungalow compared to the descriptions of the Tallis family house. The bungalow is portrayed as small and cramped: 'Like the bedroom and bathroom, the study was squashed under the apex of the bungalow's roof, and was little more than a corridor between the two, barely six feet long and five feet wide.'<sup>75</sup> This is yet another McEwan's way of hinting at the vast difference between the classes of both families who co-exist mere meters from each other.

Even though one could easily classify Robbie as a member of the working class since his mother is a maid, they do not own their family house and they only have the bungalow as a job perk from the Tallisses, he has definitely defied the rigid rules of class in 1930s Britain. Picton argues that class is also a matter of 'subjective perception'<sup>76</sup> meaning that a person categorizes themselves and others based on already mentioned criteria of education, manners, speech and an accent. Robbie Turner, though from a fragmented working class family with low income, is able to rise above his class-predetermined fate with the help of the Tallis family. According to Fraser, Robbie is 'the embodiment of class dislocation'<sup>77</sup> since his father used to be a gardener and his mother is a maid for the Tallisses – therefore working class. Robbie grows up alongside the Tallis family and soaks up their lifestyle, their manners and etiquette and most importantly – their class mentality. He receives mixed approaches from the family. Jack Tallis appoints

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<sup>72</sup> Storry, Mike, and Peter Childs. *British Cultural Identities*. Seconded. London etc.: Routledge, (2002), 187-188.

<sup>73</sup> Picton, Hervé "Class in Britain: Change and Permanence," Academia.edu, (2020), 10.

<sup>74</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 78.

<sup>75</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 81.

<sup>76</sup> Picton, Hervé "Class in Britain: Change and Permanence," Academia.edu, (2020), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ian Fraser, "Class Experience in McEwan's *Atonement*," PDFslide, November 29, 2013.

himself his patron and gives him tremendous advantages for his future life – mainly education as Robbie is provided with grammar school, Cambridge and trips to France. Even the uniform and all of Robbie’s books were paid for by Jack Tallis. Robbie seems to also be able to secure an attendance at a medical school to get a doctor’s degree. Since education, as was already mentioned, is one of the main gateways to bettering one’s life and maybe even climbing the class ladder, Emily Tallis seems to not have Robbie in her favor. She does not like that her husband sponsors his education as she in her typical class ridden mentality sees it as unfair mainly towards her children. Even Cecilia at one points considers Robbie to be too ambitious if he wants to study medicine and have her father pay for it like he did for all his previous education. Yet Cecilia is, compared to Emily, merely surprised by Robbie’s actions, not repulsed. To her it may appear as if Robbie is forgetting his roots and background. When on his way to Dunkirk, his fellow corporals depend on Robbie’s French, which saves them numerous times. Robbie would not be able to navigate in his surroundings had he been deprived of the education the Tallisses paid for. The corporals seem to get the understanding that Robbie is not from working class, but from middle or upper-middle class based on the way he speaks and voice their confusion to him: ‘What’s a private soldier like you doing talking like a toff?’<sup>78</sup> This detail reveals that Robbie was submerged into the upper-middle class manners that he even took up an accent without realizing. This is an example of the so-called social mobility, which is defined by Picton as ‘the degree to which an individual’s socio-economic status can change during the course of their life.’<sup>79</sup> Robbie demonstrates this mostly before his arrest in the already mentioned knowledge of etiquette and proper polite manners, but his movement from one class to another is truly sealed and confirmed by him carrying these manners into the war, demonstrating how they became a part of him.

Robbie is moving freely between social classes almost as freely as he moves between the Tallis family house and his bungalow. He is aware of his family background yet he is not bothered by it. He does not care that his Cambridge classmates are making fun of him, he does not hide the fact that his mother is a maid and that he goes to the same school as Cecilia, with her father paying for all of it. In fact he seems to fully embrace it: ‘He liked people to know he didn’t care—There goes my mother’s employer’s daughter, he once said to a friend. He had his politics to protect him, and his scientifically based theories of class, and his own rather forced self-certainty. I am what I am.’<sup>80</sup> This example further demonstrates how Robbie isn’t really

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<sup>78</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 193.

<sup>79</sup> Picton, Hervé “*Class in Britain: Change and Permanence*,” Academia.edu, (2020), 12.

<sup>80</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 79.

restricted by his origins and is fully aware of his advantage. He wants to go to medical school not only because it will greatly improve his overall situation and future life, he also sees it as an opportunity to be truly free as that would be his own decision, not a decision imposed onto him like it had been so far. Unfortunately Robbie's social mobility, education and plausible class mentality change is not enough as he still suffers because of the social class ridden society. When trying to find Lola's rapist not one person seems to think that an almost aristocrat, the chocolate millionaire Paul Marshall, could be the one they are looking for. It does not take long for the whole family, except for Cecilia, to be convinced of Briony's misconstrued statements that it is the working class boy whose head got too lost in the clouds of a better lifestyle they so generously provide him with and took things too far. Even though Robbie is innocent, no one cares to actually stand up for him, as he was almost a burden to Emily and a convenient hobby to Jack. This prejudice against Robbie has the biggest consequences of all and changes the lives of every character in the book.

Last addition to Robbie and the class structure around him is going to focus on his clothing which is partly represented in the first part of the book as it also is an unspoken key to unveiling someone's social class status. Throughout the book the reader gets a glimpse of Robbie's background through his clothes – there is a mention of the state of his socks which have holes in them or his shirts which were hang to dry in the kitchen. To the big family dinner he wears a suit which is described later in the book as an 'oversized suit his mother had saved for'<sup>81</sup> and as the only suit in Robbie's possession. These subtleties easily demonstrate the difference between not only the Tallisses and Turners, but also between the classes each of these families belong to. The before mentioned Cecilia's effort of getting ready for the family evening is strongly contrasted in the way Robbie prepares for the night, the main difference being the described clothing and fashion choices.

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<sup>81</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 205.

## The Time Period and the Second World War

The 1930s reflected a time of big changes in Britain's approach to imperialism. The country was concerned about the British Empire and started to see it as a demanding commitment so a decision to deconstruct the empire was made and steps were taken to create a commonwealth. Therefore in 1931 the Statute of Westminster published a new legal framework and recognized a Commonwealth of self-governing nations.

Even though the British Empire became a Commonwealth at the beginning of the decade, Britain still sought out help and assistance from the nations to recover from the economic situation the country was in by implementing tariffs.<sup>82</sup> The British economy was damaged by the Wall Street crash and Great Depression causing high unemployment and falling trade. In 1932 there was over 3 million unemployed and many more only part-time employed.<sup>83</sup> The government created the Unemployment Insurance Fund in hopes to support those who were affected but this decision also deepened the country's debt.<sup>84</sup> By 1935 Britain managed to financially recover and balance the budget by introducing austerity measures and tax increases.<sup>85</sup> The Second World War was a sad but effective solution to the unemployment crisis since it made it possible for the industry to grow again. The thirties, though causing poverty for many, also brought the riches for many people as well. A partial depression appeared in certain areas like the north of England, Scotland and Wales as they suffered with the results of decline in traditional industries while the south of England enjoyed the boom as the 30s were good years for business in electrical appliances, cars and house building.<sup>86</sup> In the novel, Briony's cousins – Lola, Pierrot and Jackson Quincey – come from the north to stay with the Tallis family. Briony's idea of their local life is described as 'streets of blackened mills, and grim men trudging to work with sandwiches in tin boxes'.<sup>87</sup> This demonstrates what people might have thought of the north and the economic situation there at that time. The contrast of the south is also shown through the approach of Paul Marshall trying to benefit from war or the description

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<sup>82</sup> Glyn Williams and John Ramsden, *Ruling Britannia: A Political History of Britain, 1688-1988* (London, England: Longman, 1995), 356, 358.

<sup>83</sup> "1930s England: Social Life, Clothes, Homes & Childhood," Study Queries, May 20, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Glyn Williams and John Ramsden, *Ruling Britannia: A Political History of Britain, 1688-1988* (London, England: Longman, 1995), 393.

<sup>85</sup> Maurois André et al., *Dějiny Anglie: Doplnění O Novější období Michelem Mohrtem* (Praha, Česká Republika: NLN, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1993), 430.

<sup>86</sup> Glyn Williams and John Ramsden, *Ruling Britannia: A Political History of Britain, 1688-1988* (London, England: Longman, 1995), 398.

<sup>87</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 118.

of the thirties as ‘this age of telephones and motorcars’<sup>88</sup> demonstrating further how the north and south of England viewed the thirties differently.

As the situation in Europe became more and more tense, waves of pacifism appeared in Britain, mainly in 1933 after Hitler became chancellor, as the citizens started to fear the possibility of another war. The situation climaxed in 1935 in the form of the Peace Ballot. The Peace Ballot was an unofficial referendum where over 11 million people took part, which at the time was almost 40 per cent of the population.<sup>89</sup> People preferred sanctions and economic measures to take place over military ones. This was one of the reasons why Britain tried to handle the situation with the appeasement policy of Neville Chamberlain. England wanted to keep a balance of power in Europe and tried not to weaken Germany too much. Other countries tried to enforce the use of violence against Germany if necessary, for example France at the UN talks, but Britain wanted to appeal on the morals of Germany.<sup>90</sup> Another reasons would be the already mentioned economic factors and also the reality of the insufficient armament. Alas, this approach was a signal to the enemies, and mainly Germany, that the country is coming from a place of weakness. When Chamberlain visited Munich in 1938 to discuss the ensuring of peace, he bought Britain some much needed time, but on the expenses of other countries like Czechoslovakia or Poland. Once people saw that Munich was just delaying the inevitable while others were suffering they wanted Churchill to change his approach and make a stronger policy towards Germany. The mood in the country shifted and everyone saw war as a ‘when’ and not as an ‘if’.

The thirties were the time of premonitions of war and preparations for it. *Atonement* provides an interesting insight into the war preparations as the novel shows it in multiple points of view. In *Atonement* this shift of mood described above can be seen through Robbie’s and Cecilia’s description in Part Two of the book. Robbie talks about how his military training suddenly started to pick up and how after Munich everyone seemed to think there would be a war so more and more men were being recruited.<sup>91</sup> Cecilia, while training to be a nurse, also noticed a shift at the hospital as more beds were being prepared and the staff had to undergo emergency drills as well as special educational courses (e.g. severe trauma nursing).<sup>92</sup> Even before all of

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<sup>88</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 182.

<sup>89</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, United Kingdom: HarperPress, 2011), 499.

<sup>90</sup> Maurois André et al., *Dějiny Anglie: Doplnění O Novější období Michelem Mohrtem* (Praha, Česká Republika: NLN, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1993), 434.

<sup>91</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 208.

<sup>92</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 208, 210.

these preparations started to take place, the war was already hinted at in Part One. Jack Tallis, though never actually appearing in the novel, except in the form of a phone call, is another character thanks to whom the readers can sense the time period and war preparations. Because of the way his family members, mainly Cecilia and Emily, talk about Jack and mention him, it is revealed that Jack works at the Whitehall ministry in Eventuality Planning. It is later specified that in 1933 he ‘disappeared into the preparation of mysterious consultation documents for the Home Office.’<sup>93</sup> This hints about the war preparations on the Home Front. The documents are described further when Emily sees a file on Jack’s desk which contains information about rationing, evacuation plans and an estimation of the volume of casualties.<sup>94</sup> Yet it is Paul Marshall who talks about the war in all probability the most in Part One, as he sees the war as a way of enrichment. He considers it a ‘greater challenge, his purpose and vision’ to make his chocolate Amo Bar a part of a standard-issue ration pack for soldiers.<sup>95</sup> It was not unusual to be in the chocolate or candy business as it was the thirties when a lot of new candy and chocolate products were introduced to the market. To give an example Milky Way, Snickers, Mars, KitKat or Smarties were all launched in the thirties and gained big popularity since their prices allowed children to buy them with their pocket money.<sup>96</sup> In the end Paul succeeds and his Amo Bar is present throughout the book as Robbie mentions an Amo bar which he passes around with his fellow soldiers.<sup>97</sup> Even Briony mentions finding ‘sodden crumbs of Amo bars’<sup>98</sup> in the pockets of soldier’s uniforms in the hospital. In Part One of the novel, as described, multiple characters are seen discussing the possibility of a war. Some smaller hints include the cousins Pierrot and Jackson who when talking about the importance of newspapers give an example of a newspaper topic ‘whether money should be spent on guns in case Hitler attacked England’.<sup>99</sup>

Since the war seemed inevitable people started to prepare for it as best as they could. One of the biggest problems Britain faced was the unpreparedness of the armed forces. To give an example, it is estimated that the Royal Air Force (RAF) was four times smaller than the German Luftwaffe.<sup>100</sup> The reason for the neglect of the armed forces were the optimistic views of the British government since they were under the impression there would be no such war as the

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<sup>93</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 103.

<sup>94</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 149.

<sup>95</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 50.

<sup>96</sup> “1930s England: Social Life, Clothes, Homes & Childhood,” Study Queries, May 20, 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 239.

<sup>98</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 304.

<sup>99</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 59

<sup>100</sup> Maurois André et al., *Dějiny Anglie: Doplněné O Novější období Michelem Mohrtem* (Praha, Česká Republika: NLN, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1993), 437.

First World War for at least another ten years and created a budget plan based on this idea wanting to save money. This plan, also called the ‘ten year rule’, was then renewed every year from 1918 until 1933, which left the armed forces greatly unprepared.<sup>101</sup> Britain therefore started to focus on slow and steady rearmament, trying not to damage the weak economy any further. After the Peace Ballot in 1935 the need to start taking action spread throughout the country.

In 1935 the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin had a circular sent out called Air Raid Precautions (ARP) for local authorities and in 1936 an ARP Handbook which tried to explain how dangerous poisonous gas can be and how to protect yourself against it. In 1937 the ARP organization was rapidly growing in size with over 200,000 volunteers and got even bigger in 1938 when Stella Isaacs formed the Women’s Voluntary Services for ARP. Each week 10,000 women enrolled and there was over million members during the war.<sup>102</sup> ARP was issuing gas masks and information booklets, air-raid shelters were being dug and lectures were given in towns and cities, demonstrating how to put on a gas mask and how to get it fitted.<sup>103</sup> ARP volunteers were also instructed with the location of shelters, telephones or trenches and all of them had to be trained in first aid. Trenches were dug in public parks but also in gardens and all over the country, especially near and in big cities. It is important to note that the typical bombing targets – industrial zones – were heavily populated and therefore made the preparations for evacuation even more important. Given the progress and development that happened in the aviation, Britain could not use her island position as an advantage any longer. The government tried to help everyone as much as they could, providing families with low income (under 250 pounds a year) with Anderson shelters. These shelters were easy to build and people got them ready in their gardens.<sup>104</sup>

Britain was and is known for the strong ethic that is part of the British identity. This attitude was present even more during the war preparations and on the Home Front – everybody had a task, a duty. Matthiasson even claims that ‘the war was seen as the only time the whole British society has come together regardless of class or self-interest’<sup>105</sup> Even though people suffered, a

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<sup>101</sup> Glyn Williams and John Ramsden, *Ruling Britannia: A Political History of Britain, 1688-1988* (London, England: Longman, 1995), 360.

<sup>102</sup> Neil R. Storey and Fiona Kay, *The Home Front in World War Two* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2017), 10,11.

<sup>103</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, United Kingdom: HarperPress, 2011), 733.

<sup>104</sup> Neil R. Storey and Fiona Kay, *The Home Front in World War Two* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2017), 20.

<sup>105</sup> Bjorn Matthiasson, “War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War,” *Contemporary European History*, September 10, 2017, 17.



national unity was formed during the war period. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the ‘stiff-upper-lip-attitude’. As the sense of danger spread even more after the Dunkirk evacuations in 1940, the unity was especially strong – this was nicknamed the Dunkirk spirit. It is often described as a ‘cheerful communal endeavor against hopeless odds.’<sup>106</sup>

The war was declared on 3 September 1939. Britain still did not have enough arms to be able to have a quick war and the economy would not allow a long one. Children were evacuated out of London into the countryside. Yet the first few months were really disappointing as Hitler had no immediate attack plan prepared. This era was called the Phoney War or Bore War since nothing was really happening and everybody was underwhelmed after the rapid preparations. The Phoney War lasted from 1939 to 1940 and many of the evacuated children were returned home again during this time. These children were then evacuated once more when Germany started their attacks in 1940.<sup>107</sup> Though the Phoney War was anticlimactic, it gave Britain crucial additional time to get ready and rearm. Factories, hospitals and homes had to be fitted with shutters or screened as they had to be able to operate during the black-outs. The Tallis family living in the countryside had to accept evacuees from the cities – three mothers and seven children. Emily is complaining about it, though she appreciates that the whole house was not requisitioned for use by the army. As other war preparations take place, the park behind the house is plowed up for corn and parts of the iron fencing are melted down to make Spitfire airplanes.<sup>108</sup> Ration books, which became a part of every-day lives during the war, are mentioned a couple times in the novel – once when Emily claims she lost it and then later in the book when Cecilia cannot find it. Briony, apart from her nursing responsibilities, worries about raising suspicion in the pre-war weeks as she is trying to find her way around London. All buses, street signs and maps were removed or blacked out to confuse the Germans if they were to invade the city. Since she does not know the way, she fears she will be seen as an intruder and attacked. These rumors about the so-called ‘fifth columnists’ were really popular at that time. When she goes through London she meets another family trying to evacuate – a mother with four children.

The first main way Britain actually took part in the Second World War was the evacuation of soldiers out of Dunkirk in May 1940. When the situation in France worsened and the troops

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<sup>106</sup> Bjorn Matthiasson, “War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War,” *Contemporary European History*, September 10, 2017, 17.

<sup>107</sup> Neil R. Storey and Fiona Kay, *The Home Front in World War Two* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2017), 27.

<sup>108</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 278, 279.

were trapped on the coast in Dunkirk, it was the last place where the troops could be evacuated from since Germany blocked them off. The operation was very complicated as the beach was very mellow and would not allow ships to get close enough, the city was under constant attack and everything moved very slowly at first since the operation was planned at the last minute. Thankfully, the previously mentioned unity of the people was seen at Dunkirk once more as a great deal of civilians came to the rescue with their vessels. The evacuation was a great success since most of the trained and experienced troops were saved (338,000 soldiers) but it came at the expense of a lot of equipment.<sup>109</sup> Just before Robbie is supposed to leave his military training, the war is declared and he has to report for duty and leave for France. He is then shown trying to get to Dunkirk and to get evacuated. Robbie's thoughts in Part Two align with the fact that Britain's war equipment was underprepared as he mentions that they expected antitank weapons but they never arrived and that 'they had little weaponry at all.'<sup>110</sup> He describes how everything was being destroyed so the Germans would not be able to use anything to their advantage – similarly to the already mentioned precautions in London. This included military vehicles, regular cars, horses, petrol and even tires on cars as they were fired through.<sup>111</sup> The readers get a feel of the evacuations as Robbie's walk to the beach is described in detail, showing the horrors of wartime. 'The gun flashes were everywhere but the north. The defeated army was running up a corridor that was bound to narrow, and soon must be cut off.'<sup>112</sup> An air strike is portrayed in depth with the damage it was able to cause and the lasting psychological damage it had on the soldiers and civilians. The evacuation beach of Dunkirk with 'thousands of men, ten, twenty thousand, perhaps more, spread across the vastness of the beach'<sup>113</sup> and Dunkirk itself is also described in depth. Though Robbie gets close to being sent home back to Cecilia, he sadly never gets to evacuate as he dies the night before his rescue of septicemia.

The fights began in April 1940 with Germany trying to invade Britain in the Battle of Britain, but the British managed their air force well so the German attacks were unsuccessful. After that Hitler focused on bombing of the cities – especially London – with the hopes that if London was destroyed it would also destroy the morale of British citizens. The first major day of bombing, also known as Black Saturday, was 7 September 1940. The largest bombs in Europe at the time were used. The bombing then continued for 57 days in a row during day and night

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<sup>109</sup> "Operation Dynamo: Things You Need to Know about the Dunkirk Evacuation," English Heritage, accessed May 12, 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 211.

<sup>111</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 224.

<sup>112</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 203.

<sup>113</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 247.

with main focus on night blitzes.<sup>114</sup> It was at this time the prepared shelters became the most useful. Unfortunately, there was a shortage of bomb shelters in London so people solved the problem by sleeping in underground stations. The platforms were then equipped with chemical toilets and sometimes even canteens.<sup>115</sup> The bombing eventually stopped in May 1941 as Hitler shifted his focus on the Eastern Front. Many tube stations were destroyed as a result of the bombing London endured. One of the infamous stations was the Ballham tube station, where Cecilia dies after trying to hide there from the Blitz.

As men were being drafted, they had to be replaced in the factories and so women started to enter the work force besides ARP and many went on to take up nursing and medicine in order to help the wounded soldiers. However, women were starting to get more visible in society even before their integration into the work force during the war. More and more women were receiving an education, yet they were still very dependent on their class background and financial abilities their families were able and willing to provide.<sup>116</sup> *Atonement* brings up this trend as Cecilia's brother Leon mentions to her that 'there are girls getting all sorts of jobs now.'<sup>117</sup>

Medicine practices vastly advanced during the First and Second World War but it was Florence Nightingale who revolutionized the military nursing system. She started getting involved after the Queen appointed her to improve the system after the Crimean War but her principles and beliefs became the standard for any military nursing that came after her – including the nursing during the Second World War. Prior to Nightingale, patients were dying as a direct result of poor nursing, so she strictly followed sanitation procedures and patient care. The first nurses trained by her began work in 1865. The hospital death rate was reduced from 42 per cent to 2.2 percent, highlighting the importance of nursing work. Nurses also provided emotional support to the wounded, sometimes even writing letters to the family of the patient.<sup>118</sup>

Nurses in the military require continual training and preparation to be ready to provide care in war scenarios. They must possess a combination of soldier, nurse, and management abilities to be able to handle and organize a variety of situations. These preparations must be both physical and mental. The wound principles utilized in the Second World War are still in use today, again

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<sup>114</sup> Neil R. Storey and Fiona Kay, *The Home Front in World War Two* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2017), 54, 55.

<sup>115</sup> Neil R. Storey and Fiona Kay, *The Home Front in World War Two* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2017), 60.

<sup>116</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, United Kingdom: HarperPress, 2011), 551.

<sup>117</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 107.

<sup>118</sup> Civilian Legacies of Military Nursing - Jstor.org, JSTOR, accessed May 12, 2022, 98, 102.

proving the timelessness of not only the advancement of the medicine at the time but also of the Nightingale's approach to it. Sadly, after the war ended women were no longer encouraged to pursue a career in medicine as it was very time-demanding and they were expected to care for their families and homes. The pressure of this occupation was very high since women had to work 60 hours a week in starched uniforms and leather shoes while also usually living in the hospital accommodation.<sup>119</sup> *Atonement's* Part Three delves deeper into the details of wartime nursing as it follows Briony's journey from her hard beginnings to facing the realities of war injuries and war nursing as she has to treat soldiers returning from the front. The ward sister that trains Briony is Florence Nightingale herself.<sup>120</sup> Briony describes the model behind her processes almost military as Miss Nightingale follows her rules precisely. Briony describes her training as 'abandoning herself to a life of strictures, rules, obedience, housework and a constant fear of disapproval.'<sup>121</sup> Briony also mentions her uniform being uncomfortable as the collars rubbed her neck raw and the shoes pinched her toes. Yet she seems almost glad for this discomfort as it helped her to 'close down her mental horizons'<sup>122</sup> and distract her from bigger unpleasantnesses of her demanding work.

As war looms closer, the mood at the hospital shifts into even stricter regime. Wards are being emptied and prepared for the soldiers, medicine cupboards are installed and filled with morphine and new supplies like kidney bowls or Bunyan Bags were inventoried.<sup>123</sup> Briony also mentions how just before the war started the top floor wards had been closed and every skylight had been cemented over to protect the hospital from air raids. To ensure as smooth operations as possible the operating theatres were moved to the basement.<sup>124</sup> Briony first faces war when first soldiers from Dunkirk arrive to the hospital. Part Three does not hold back with the descriptions of battle wounds, commenting on protuberances of bones, amputations, oil blasted into the skin and eating through the tissue, and of course death. She feels as close to the battlefield as ever, since she comes to contact with oil, sand, seawater and bullets. She comes to the realization that all the training she received was useful, but it was coming in direct contact with the harsh reality that made her truly understand what it means to be a nurse.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, United Kingdom: HarperPress, 2011), 557.

<sup>120</sup> It is important to note that although McEwan tried to be historically accurate, it would not have been possible for Nightingale to train Briony as she died in 1910. McEwan uses Nightingale to demonstrate the strictness that was expected of new nursing students.

<sup>121</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 276.

<sup>122</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 276.

<sup>123</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 272, 273.

<sup>124</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 273.

<sup>125</sup> Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London, United Kingdom: Vintage, 2001), 304.

## Conclusion

This bachelor thesis aims to analyze wartime Britain and its reflection in the novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. The first out of the three chapters of this thesis was concerned with defining a historical novel and answering if *Atonement* fits the proper definition. Attempts to effectively define the genre have been a subject of debate for many years now. Some definitions are simple, claiming that historical novel is any novel that is set in the past, others are more restricting, arguing that the historical event should be described only by someone who would not be able to live through it. The numerous definitions are fairly similar with the key difference being the emphasis on the book's subject, storyline or setting. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on the difference between historians and fiction writers. Historians are primarily concerned with facts - when, how, and why - whereas a fiction writer is more concerned with the emotions and thoughts that people had at the time. Fiction is more concerned about the characters while the historical event is in the background and has an impact on the characters' lives and emotions. This of course raises the question of authenticity when describing real historical events in fiction and therefore making them seem factual. Most experts, despite some minor discrepancies, agree that for the purposes of writing historical fiction, the facts do not necessarily have to be accurate but they should be presented in a credible manner and they should avoid anachronisms or considerable and easily noticeable historical errors. When approaching *Atonement*, McEwan did so purely in the form of research as he was not alive during the Second World War. He took inspiration from his father's stories as he served during the war and was a part of the Operation Dynamo. *Atonement* was published in 2001, 52 years after the Second World War ended and therefore McEwan could not write about the time period from his memory. This way he fulfilled most of the definitions of historical novel writing – mainly the distance the writer must have from the event itself. Though McEwan sees writing as something that should be interesting, he tried to stay as close to the historical accuracy as possible since he saw the topic of war as a sensitive one and wanted to show his respect by paying attention to the detail.

The second chapter focuses on the social context of the time period illustrated mainly on the social classes and their presence in the thirties for which the United Kingdom and especially England is known. Since people are accustomed to emphasizing traditions and customs, the social class structure has survived to this day, though not as polarizing since people are more aware of it and can consciously act against it. The continuous existence of the aristocracy and monarchy in the form of the Queen and her family could be one of the reasons why this social

phenomena survives. There are three major ways to divide social classes. The first is the hierarchical approach (monarchy and aristocracy), the second is the binary (us versus them mentality) and the last is the trinary (upper, middle and working class). The binary and trinary divides are usually the most used ones and it is also the type of division *Atonement* uses. This usage plays into the historical accuracy of the novel as the trinary division is typical for the time period of *Atonement*. The best way to understand social classes is to look at them not only from the perspective of income or riches but to also look at the social capital one possesses. A person's capital is defined as their education, contacts, and relationships.

The elite status of the upper class has always been associated with the aristocracy. People in it are usually very well-off financially and sometimes may have aristocratic titles. It is common for people in this class to know one another and form an interconnected network of contacts with each other. One is either born into it or gets in through public university – the top two being Oxford and Cambridge. In *Atonement* the upper class is represented by Paul and Lola Marshall as they make their way up into the upper class through riches, even obtaining the titles of Lord and Lady. The middle class is the most fragmented class as it covers the majority of the population. It ranges from jobs such as doctors and lawyers to administrative staff. Some people still enjoy a portion of the upper class privileges while others cannot reach them anymore. This class is represented by the Tallis family in *Atonement*. Though middle class, they are still at the very top of it. Their children study at Cambridge and they own a large plot of land with a spacious house. The parents – Jack and Emily – are typical representatives of the class as they share a certain disgust toward the working class. It is only Cecilia, and later on Briony, that breaks free from the class mentality around her demonstrating a class-conscious mindset. The working class is demonstrated on the characters of Robbie Turner, his mother Grace and other employees of the Tallis family. Robbie's position in society is however not very typical as he was provided with education and finances from Jack Tallis. Robbie is therefore an example of class mobility as he is able to rise above his initial class and move up towards the middle class.

The final chapter of the thesis looks at the historical context of the time period and its reflection in *Atonement*. Firstly it focuses on the 1930s before the war and the shift in Britain's attitude towards imperialism. It was at the beginning of the 30s, 1931 to be exact, when the Commonwealth of Nations was established. Two years later, when the world was hit with the aftermath of the Wall Street crash, Britain utilized the Commonwealth connections by imposing tariffs to help the country's bad economic situation. The beginning of the decade was therefore greatly impacted by the damaged economy which resulted in massive unemployment. The north

of the country was hit badly while the south experienced an economic boom with certain industries flourishing. In *Atonement* some small hints are included as to what was life like in the north as Briony thinks about the life there. The British economy was slowly recovering until the war, which was the main solution to the high unemployment numbers. The situation in Europe became increasingly tense and waves of pacifism swept through the country. This reached its peak in the form of the Peace Ballot in 1935. Britain's main problem was the lack of unpreparedness of the armed forces – mainly insufficient number of arms. But since war became the near future, people started to prepare for it as best as they could. The ARP was created, helping with informing people all over the country, digging shelters and publishing informational brochures. The strong ethics and unification of the population, which held together regardless of socioeconomic status or self-interest, revealed itself during these preparations and subsequently during the war. In *Atonement* these preparations are mainly touched on in Part Two and Three, with Robbie remembering the weeks before the war broke out and with Briony being a part of the hospital's preparations and training. Even the Tallis family took part in the preparations as they took in numerous evacuees from London – mostly mothers and their children. The family park was also plowed for corn growing and their fence was melted down to contribute to the making process of Spitfire planes.

When Britain officially declared war on Germany in September 3 1939, the consequences were anticlimactic as Germany did not have an immediate attack plan. The year that followed is often nicknamed the 'Phoney' or 'Bore War' as no big conflict really happened. However some part of the British forces was sent to help France. Not being ready for combat as they could have been, soldiers were cornered into trying to evacuate from Dunkirk. This event is partly described in the book by Robbie who endures wartime horrors to get to the beach. The Operation Dynamo was very difficult yet successful in the end, saving almost 400,000 soldiers.

During the war, women became a significant boost to the work force as they replaced the men who have left for war. The main areas were manufacturing factories and nursing. Military nursing was at the time based on the experiences of Florence Nightingale who revolutionized the military nursing system. She stressed discipline, obedience and strong mental and physical attitude. Briony and Cecilia both become nurses who deal with the aftermath of war. The novel primarily shows Briony's experiences in the medical field, revealing the hardships of training and then the horrors of war, with which she has to deal with best to her abilities.

## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl analyzovat kulturně-historický kontext knihy *Pokání* od Iana McEwana. V první kapitole se práce zabývá různými definicemi historického románu. Snaha o co nejefektivnější definování tohoto žánru je námětem diskuzí již mnoho let. Některé definice jsou velmi přímočaré a definují historický román jakožto „fikci zasazenou do minulosti“, některé jsou více konkrétní a tvrdí, že dílo, by mělo být napsáno alespoň před padesáti lety od popisované historické události někým, kdo nebyl během dané události naživu, a tudíž k věci přistupuje čistě skrze výzkum či bádání. Je mnoho velmi podobných definicí, které se liší zejména v důrazu na detail, ať už se jedná o námět knihy, jeho zápletku či postavy. Dále se práce zaměřuje na rozdíl mezi historiky a spisovateli beletrie a jejich přístup k historii. Historici se většinou zaměřují na fakta – kdy, jak, proč – zatímco spisovatel fikce by se zaměřil spíše na pocity a myšlenky, které lidé v tu danou dobu cítili. Historická fikce je pak spíše o postavách, a tom jak byly jejich životy utvářeny a ovlivňovány historickými událostmi, než o historických událostech jako takových. Odborníci se také zabývají otázkou pravdivosti a autenticity historických faktů, které jsou prezentovány v historické fikci. I přes menší odchylky se většina shoduje v tom názoru, že fakta nemusí být vyloženě pravdivá či přesná. Je ovšem důležité, aby tato fakta byla prezentována tak, aby byla uvěřitelná. McEwan nezažil druhou světovou válku, jelikož se narodil až v roce 1948, ovšem jeho otec ve válce bojoval a byl i součástí evakuací z Dunkerque. Byly to právě povídky jeho otce, které mu později sloužily jako inspirace pro historický román *Pokání*. Díky tomuto McEwan částečně naplnil některé hlavní definice historického románu.

*Pokání* vyšlo v roce 2001, tudíž více jak padesát let od popisované historické události a McEwan byl nucen získat informace pro svůj román skrze výzkum a tudíž nepsal ze svých vlastních zkušeností a vzpomínek. Romány psané o druhé světové válce jsou téměř nuceny podlehnout subjektivitě autora a spolehnout se na jeho vylíčení pocitů jednotlivých postav, protože i když jsou o válce obvykle vedeny detailní záznamy, často se v nich vyskytují pouze technické informace. Málokdy se však dochovávají dopisy vojáků, které by lidem dokázaly popsat jaké emoce a pocity v nich válka dokázala vyvolat. McEwan sám zastává názor, že by se při psaní neměl nechat omezovat a jediné pravidlo, které si pro svoji tvorbu vytyčil je, aby jeho díla byla zajímavá. Zároveň se ale během tvorby *Pokání* snažil respektovat tak citlivé téma jako je válka, jejíž váhu symbolicky schoval do kontrastních detailů jako je pán venčící svého psa za náletů vojenských letadel.



V druhé kapitole se práce zabývá britskou společností se zaměřením na společenské vrstvy, kterými je Velká Británie, a obzvláště pak Anglie, pověstná. Vzhledem ke konzervatismu země je i dodnes systém jednotlivých vrstev přítomný, už jen proto, že lidé jsou zvyklí klást důraz na tradice a zvyky. Společenské vrstvy jsou sice stále přítomné, lidé si jich jsou však více vědomi, než aby jimi byli řízeni. Jedním z důvodů proč tento sociální fenomén stále přetrvává, by mohla být trvajícím existenci aristokracie a monarchie ve formě královny a její rodiny. Společenské vrstvy používají tři hlavní způsoby dělení. Prvním je hierarchický způsob (monarchie a aristokracie), další je binární či dvojný způsob (my versus oni) a poslední, asi nejznámější, je trojný způsob (vyšší, střední a dělnická třída). V *Pokání* se nejčastěji vyskytuje dvojný a trojný způsob, což je i nejvíce typické chápání společenských vrstev pro danou dobu, v níž se děj odehrává. Je důležité si uvědomit, že definování jednotlivých tříd by nemělo vycházet pouze z ekonomické situace jednotlivce, ale také ze sociálního kapitálu, který je jednotlivci poskytován. Sociální kapitál je chápán jako vzdělání, kontakty a vztahy, kterými daný člověk disponuje. Vyšší třída byla vždy spojována s aristokracií a jistou formou elity. Lidé v této třídě bývají velmi bohatí a obvykle disponují značnými pozemky a někdy i šlechtickými tituly. Pro lidi z této třídy je typické se navzájem znát a tvořit propojenou síť kontaktů mezi sebou navzájem. Do vyšší třídy se buď narodíte, nebo se tam můžete dostat skrze elitní školu či univerzitu. Nejvíce typickými jsou univerzity Oxford a Cambridge, často přezdívané Oxbridge. Vyšší třída je v knize znázorněna postavami Pula Marshalla a Loly, kde sice obě postavy začínají jako vyšší střední třída, ale během knihy se obohatí na válce a vypracují se až k titulům Lord a Lady.

Střední třída bývá nejvíce fragmentována, a to hlavně podle zaměstnání, které daný člověk má. Pohybuje se od zaměstnání, jako jsou doktor či právník, až po administrativní pracovníky. Někteří lidé z této třídy stále dosahují na privilegia vyšší třídy, ať už se jedná o vzdělání či jejich ekonomické postavení. Do této skupiny patří i hlavní rodina knihy – Tallisovi. Jejich pozice není dostačující na vyšší třídu, rozhodně však spadají do vyšší střední třídy. To dokazuje například fakt, že Cecílie vystudovala Cambridge, jednu z dříve zmíněných elitních škol, nebo to, že Tallisovi disponují značným majetkem a velkým pozemkem s prostorným domem. Jack a Emily Tallisovi jsou typickými představiteli dané třídy jak svým chováním, tak svým uvažováním. V jejich vyjadřování je jisté pohrdání k pracující třídě – Robbiemu a zaměstnancům domu. Jack například Robbieho vnímá jako koníčka a hradí mu školné, učebnice či jeho záliby. Emily je ženou v domácnosti, což bylo pro ženu v předválečných letech velmi typické. Cecílie je jedinou členkou rodiny, která se vytrhne ze svého bezpečného rodinného

prostředí poté, co si plně uvědomí způsob, kterým její rodina jedná s lidmi z nižších tříd a je znechucena jejich chováním.

Dělnická třída je v knize zastoupena hlavně Robbiem Turnerem a jeho matkou Grace. Oba jsou zaměstnaní u rodiny Tallisových a bydlí ve skromném bungalovu, který je jim zdarma poskytnut Tallisovými. Jejich pozice není typická pro rodinu z dělnické třídy, jelikož ta největší překážka – vzdělání – je pro Robbieho překonána díky Jackově štědrosti. Dalšími představiteli jsou ostatní zaměstnanci Tallisových – služebné, kuchařky či zahradník.

Poslední kapitola práce se zabývá historickým kontextem dané doby, tedy 30. lety dvacátého století. Nejprve je popsána změna přístupu Británie k imperialismu, jelikož to bylo právě v tuto dobu, kdy Británie představila Commonwealth, tedy takzvané Společenství národů. Britské impérium už se v této době zdálo být spíše komplikovaným závazkem, který chtěla Británie co nejvíce zjednodušit. I přesto hledala Británie u těchto zemí ve třicátých letech oporu a pomoc při zotavování se ze složité ekonomické situace, a to sice zaváděním cel. Ekonomika byla zasažena krachem Wall Street a přinesla hospodářskou krizi s vysokou nezaměstnaností. Po Británii vznikla i takzvaná ‚částečná deprese‘, kdy na severu Anglie, ve Walesu a Skotsku byly největší problémy kvůli úpadku tradičních odvětví, zatímco na jihu Anglie se obchodu dařilo, a to především v oblastech automobilů či stavebnictví. V *Pokání* jsou tyto rozdíly naznačeny představami malé Briony o pochmurných mužích plahočících se do práce. Přesto se v knize mluví o věku telefonů a automobilů či o Marshallově snaze o obohacení se na válce. Ekonomice se dařilo zotavovat do roku 1935 díky zavádění daní a úsporných opatření – nejvíce zemi ovšem se zaměstnaností pomohla až druhá světová válka. Situace v Evropě byla stále napjatější a tak Británii ovládly vlny pacifismu, které vyvrcholily v roce 1935 v podobě neoficiálního mírového referenda, kterého se zúčastnilo přes 11 milionů lidí. Británie se snažila válce vyhnout, jelikož měla nedostatečnou výzbroj, nedostatečnou připravenost obranných složek a špatnou ekonomickou situaci. Nevyhnutelnost války se však brzy stala realitou a lidé se na ni začali připravovat, jak nejlépe mohli. V roce 1935 nechal premiér Stanley Baldwin rozeslat oběžník ARP (Air Raid Precaution), který vysvětluje, jak se chránit proti nebezpečí náletů či útokům za použití jedovatých plynů. Z ARP se pak stala dobrovolnická organizace, která se soustředovala na vydávání plynových masek, informačních brožur, kopání protiletectkých krytů či pořádání přednášek ke zvýšení informovanosti obyvatelstva. Během těchto příprav, a pak i během války, se projevila silná etika a sjednocení obyvatelstva, které drželo při sobě bez ohledu na společenskou třídu či vlastní zájmy. Přípravy na válku jsou v *Pokání* popsány zejména v druhé a třetí části knihy. Briony se z dopisu své matky dozvídá, že se z jejich rodinného domu málem

stal vojenský objekt, ale nakonec rodina musela přijmout evakuované matky s dětmi. Dokonce i park za domem byl zorán pro pěstování kukuřice a část oplocení pozemku byla roztavena na výrobu letadel Spitfire.

Po vyhlášení války 3. září 1939 měla Británie ještě skoro rok čas, než na ni Německo plně zaútočilo, což jí pomohlo s vyzbrojením a zlepšením své připravenosti na boje a válečné konflikty. Británie se však poprvé pořádně zúčastnila války už v květnu 1940, kdy proběhla evakuace vojáků z francouzského města Dunkerque. Operace byla komplikována mnoha různými faktory, ale nakonec proběhla úspěšně, a to hlavně díky velkému množství civilistů, kteří připluli vojákům na pomoc. I přes ztrátu vybavení se podařilo zachránit skoro 400 000 vojáků, a tato skutečnost ještě více ucelila národ a dodala mu tolik potřebný optimismus. Robbie v *Pokání* poskytuje náhled na krutosti náletů, kterými si prošel při snaze dostat se na pláž a být evakuován. Hlavní boje pak v Británii propukly v dubnu 1940, ovšem zemi se díky zdatnosti letectva podařilo nepoddat se německým náletům.

Během války se také dostaly více do popředí ženy, jelikož museli nahradit pracovní sílu, kterou vykonávali muži, než odešli bojovat. Mimo práci v továrnách se ženy začaly více prosazovat i v oblasti medicíny, kdy stavěly své principy na znalostech Florence Nightingalové, která zdokonalila odvětví vojenského ošetřovatelství. Zdravotní sestry musely prokazovat silnou vůli, smysl pro disciplínu a silnou fyzickou a psychickou zdatnost, která byla potřeba pro řádný výkon tohoto povolání. O zdravotnictví se z knihy nejvíce dozvídáme od Briony, která si prochází tvrdým výcvikem právě od Florence Nightingalové. Je nucena podrobit se přísným pravidlům a disciplíně a čelit krutostem války poté, co jsou do nemocnice přivezeni zranění vojáci.

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