

## WAR

### 1. [Depiction] Part 1: Distant, detached phenomenon

- C.f. Emily, C&R, twins: Vague allusions to war, Inability to recognize/comprehend its implications
- War instead as a metaphorical abstraction for twins'
  - Situating petty domestic dramas in wider pol realities: Self-absorption + indulgence
  - Only PM speaks of it: In terms of unscrupulous profit
- Setting: Tallis household; drawn-out, restless summer day pointing to relative stability

### 2. [Depiction] Part 2: Gritty narrative, all-consuming focus

- Certainty in Part 1 vs horrors and unpreparedness (R + B) for ghastliness of war

#### - Physical carnage + violence + waste

- Physical destruction: Vivid depictions seem surreal to R; perversion of the ordinary
- Abandoned items, rampant destruction, constant reminders of damage
  - Reinforced by corrupted imagery
- Psychological damage: R responding with reduced emotional sensitivity/thinking

- **Pervasiveness**: Encroaching even into Tallis household, effects on C/B

### 3. [Responses to war] Conflicts between survival and compassion

- Coping mechanism of desensitization towards violence, recognition of diminished human agency
- R's narrowing thoughts to point of survival; determination not to get drawn in
  - But emotional baggage of not being able to help/allowing survival instincts to reign

### 4. [Responses to war] Chaos + confusion + human futility

#### - On fictional level

- R's disorientation; messiness on the ground (Dunkirk), inability to take control; frailty of human life
- Pathetic but necessary attempts to restore order painting war as a disruption/intrusion in everyday life
  - Human attempts to restore stability, coping mechanisms; distract from visceral reality
  - B settling for no atonement

#### - On broader, thematic level

- Impossibility of altering human experience, assigning guilt/culpability in an event as complex as war
- Blamelessness in light of desperate need for survival; individual inability to redeem self
- Impossibility of atoning for soldiers left to die // B's impossibility of atoning for her sins
  - McEwan coping by telling tale of soldiers' suffering, demystifying war as beastly + primal
  - B uniting R/C in novel; punishing herself with no forgiveness + clarifying false accusation
- Readers' ready forgiveness for R; recognizing his need for survival, commending futile attempts to save others
- Prompting readers to forgive B: recognizing her childishness that led to crime, and her attempt at atonement

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## ATONEMENT

### 1. [Condition] Repentance + remorse

- PM: Lacking in conscience, no remorse; manipulative, unwillingness to concede life of luxury
- B: Recognition of wrongdoing, admission (progress from Part 1 – 3)
  - Destabilises path of atonement: Inability to + not always consistent

### 2. Process of atonement

- Method befitting of crime: B seeking to correct flaws in writing novel/becoming nurse
  - Lack of empathy/brashness vs attempts to put self in others' perspectives (Part 2/3)/nursing patients
  - Anxious to please vs shrugging off need for affirmation/validation in nursing
  - Self-centeredness vs punishing regime, selflessness
  - Inexperience vs maturity + hardiness (physically coping w weariness, emotionally)
- Waste + senselessness of R in the war – no correlation

### 3. [Effectiveness] Wrt seeking punishment

- Nursing: Away from comfortable trajectory, subjecting self to suffering as punishment
- Surrogate for Robbie's future; metaphorical nature of job in cleansing self of sins

- Recognition however that this is well-meaning but insufficient (c.f. horrors of war)
  - Awareness of her limited experience = sympathy for immense guilt

- Robbie reliving haunting memories of those he left to die

#### 4. [Effectiveness] Wrt using writing as a tool

- Limited by circumstances to tell story + make peace w B's crimes
- (Ironically) active imagination/penchant for fiction that caused crime also her means of making amends
- Recognition however that this is well-meaning but insufficient
  - Inability to recreate human experience: God-like powers limited to fictional realm
  - Overcompensation; false bravado + optimism cannot be transposed to real world
- B's intentions: Self-serving in allowing her to make final moral judgment? Desire for happy ending?

#### 5. Nature of atonement

- Fundamentally unattainable once things have gone beyond point of return
  - **On a plot level**
    - Symbols + devts: Vase, PM&L marriage, religious imagery, r/s w C
  - **On a broader level**
    - Subversion of traditional atonement narrative – what constitutes it
    - Understanding of wrongdoing, attempts to make amends
    - Reality where justice is not delivered,
    - Inescapable incompleteness of atonement in complex human relationships: Situation over novel in a war
  - Hope in readers' redemption + recognition of efforts
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### CHILDHOOD, MATURITY

#### 1. [Nature] Innocence and fragility of childhood

- Simple, stifling + unexciting world vs incomprehensible adult one
- Need for protection, victims of adults' actions (twins)
- Relative comfort + safety L retreats to after rape. Symbols: Nursery, play (childlike constructs)

#### 2. Childlike ideals

- Immature but excusable; comic (B, twins)
- Simplistic understanding of binaries; desire for control and affirmation etc. (B)
- Acting on impulse (twins); dangers of being without adult supervision
  - Imaginative faculties running wild

#### 3. [Process] Negotiation b/w childish impulses + awareness of reality

- Maturity that comes with genuine experience; vulnerability of premature transition to adult world
- Desire to be a part of adult world, yet inability to understand its complexities
  - L: Misinterpretation of sexual advances
  - B: Misinterpretation of R&C, desire for maturity in writing
  - Both: retention of childish tendencies in spite of attempts to mature ahead of themselves
- But also: Circumstantial demands to grow up (unforgiving realities) – L and divorce, war

#### 4. [Implications] Dangers of trespassing between the 2 worlds

- B's inability to discern, imposing childish ideals onto real people, seeking control (fountain scene)
  - Danger when she acts on these childish impulses
- PM's intrusion into the childlike world, manipulative advances to L

#### 5. Culpability for crimes

- TWE is B's youthfulness an excuse for her crimes: Irreversibility of damage and futility of atonement
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### LOVE, MARRIAGE, FAMILY

#### 1. Love invigorating human spirit

- Sustaining R&C

## 2. [Nature] Complexity of love

- Liable to misunderstanding by children – childish conceptions of love (B)/the unknowable sexual bliss
- Inadequacy of B's narrative, over-simplifying love
- C.f. R&C's tentative progression from friendship to love lade w misunderstandings/complications

## 3. [Nature] Sexual love and innocence to experience

- A natural transformation – both physical and emotional
- C.f. Lola and PM – silence, only obliquely addressed

## 4. Subversion of expectations on love

- L&PM's happy ending vs C&R's deaths: Perversion of love, trivial and selfish, unwholesome

## 5. Fragmented family unit

- Tallis household; subversion of parental authority, veneer of politeness/affection
  - Emily + Jack; Robbie's father
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## NARRATIVE VOICE

Part 1: Leisurely, languorous (stability, order, self-conscious narration)

Part 2: Straightforward, choppy, messy (ceaseless onslaught)

Part 3: Contemporary, self-conscious (makes clear her own biases)

- Narrative anticipation, hints that it was written in retrospect
- Unreliable narrator and instability of meaning

## WRITING

### 1. Significance to novel

#### On plot level: A plot device

- Framing interactions (R&C, B's coping mechanism as a child)
- Key plot device: Significance of letters (Connolly, twins, Robbie)

**On narrative level:** Reinforces scene (Part 1 vs Part 2)

### 2. Subjectivity of writing and possibility of misinterpretation

- B's testimony, R's letter
- Class biases: Wrt repeated narration, unreliable narration

### 3. Limitations of writing in achieving atonement

- Distinctions between fictional world and reality

### 4. Instability of meaning

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## SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS, HIERARCHIES

### 1. Perpetuation

- Wrt R, C, of a nuclear household
- Unconscious: Works to PM's favour

### 2. War as a social leveler

### 3. Made clear through narration

- Highlighting perceptions vs reality, limited POVs

## BRIONY

Ordinary, childlike impulses dangerous when carried to the extreme and transposed into reality

### 1. Penchant for control

### 2. Simplistic understanding of the world

- Binary opposites of morality/justice; fairytale-like interpretations of events
- Inability to grasp full weight of consequences of her actions

### 3. Tension between desires + limited experience

- Limited ability to inhabit adult world
- Childlike ideals distort perceptions of reality; inability to capture nuance, not comfortable with uncertainty

### 4. Product of stifling world/social circumstances

- Desire for drama, affirmation, over-confidence in abilities

## CECILIA

- Unknowing class bias
- Imposing expectations, anticipating R's responses
- Tension b/w indep and reliance
- Narration: Reveals her penchant for fantasies, self-consciousness and self-deception
- Self-absorbed, misguided sense of self-importance
- Takes on maternal role in Emily's absence

## ROBBIE

- Working class background integral part of his identity
- Maturity + growing up
- Actively facing up to consequences of his actions: War
- Waste + lost potential
- Compassionate tendencies

## LOLA

### 1. Desire to assert maturity w limited effectiveness

- Tension between veneer of maturity and childlike tendencies (hiding childlike excitement)
- Attempts at maturity largely in terms of dress/affected speech
- Self-consciousness in manufacturing a specific image

### 2. Dangerous entry into the adult world of PM

- Lack of experience/understanding on his advances rendering her vulnerable (not aware of implications)
- Playing a game she does not know the rules to

### 3. Forced to take on maternal role due to circumstances

- Affected behaviours with little understanding, trying to fulfill a role she cannot

### 4. Sympathy: Apparent that she is still a child

- Retreating into child sphere after rape
- Sympathy for her manufactured experiences

### 5. Placid acceptance of fate vs opportunistic and strong Lola

- Differing interpretations

## TWINS

- Spontaneous + genuine, unknowing innocence + self-import
- Inability to understand, rash and instinctual responses
- Emphasizes complexity of growing up

## PAUL MARSHALL

- Manipulative and unkind, reflected physically; exploitative
- Maturity (sexually), an imposing + ominous presence, immoral, only character that remains largely unchanged
- No remorse or atonement

## LEON

- Spineless and indecisive, though depicted as kind + generous; lack of commitment

## EMILY

1. Willing helplessness + evasion of responsibility
- Ineffectual mother/presence, thinking herself indispensable (ironic), self-deception wrt migraines
2. Stereotypical views + snobberies
3. Self-serving and focus on self-preservation; self-obsession

**TALLIS HOUSEHOLD** – superficiality of privilege + affected appearances, posturing, artificial, apparent flaws

**VASE** – irreparable damage, instability of individual witness, underlying faults

## LETTERS