



# Atonement

Author  
**Ian McEwan**

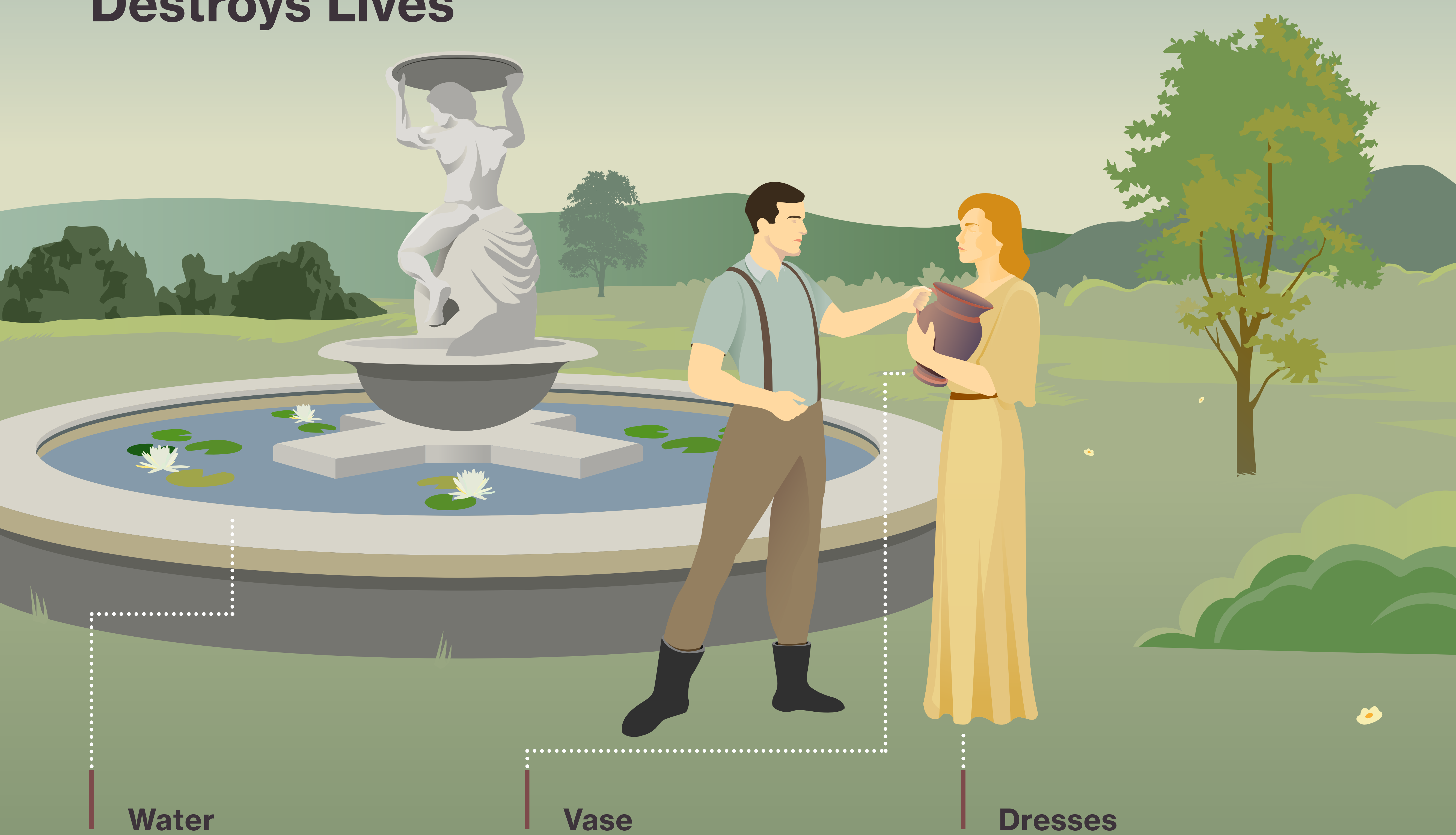
Year Published  
**2001**

Original Language  
**English**

## SYMBOLS

### A Child's Mistake Destroys Lives

When 13-year-old Briony misinterprets her sister's budding romance with their servant's son as something more sinister, she steps in with tragic results. Briony spends the rest of her life attempting to atone for her error.



#### Water

Symbolizes the desire for life, emotional rebirth, and freedom from guilt

#### Vase

Represents the fragility of a love torn apart by false accusations

#### Dresses

Represent female characters' desires to look mature and attractive

## Author



**IAN MCEWAN**  
BORN 1948

A titan of British literature, McEwan often explores weighty themes such as identity and the nature of truth. McEwan drew from his father's experiences fighting in the Battle of Dunkirk in World War II and his fascination with the psychology of false beliefs to write *Atonement*.

## Main Characters



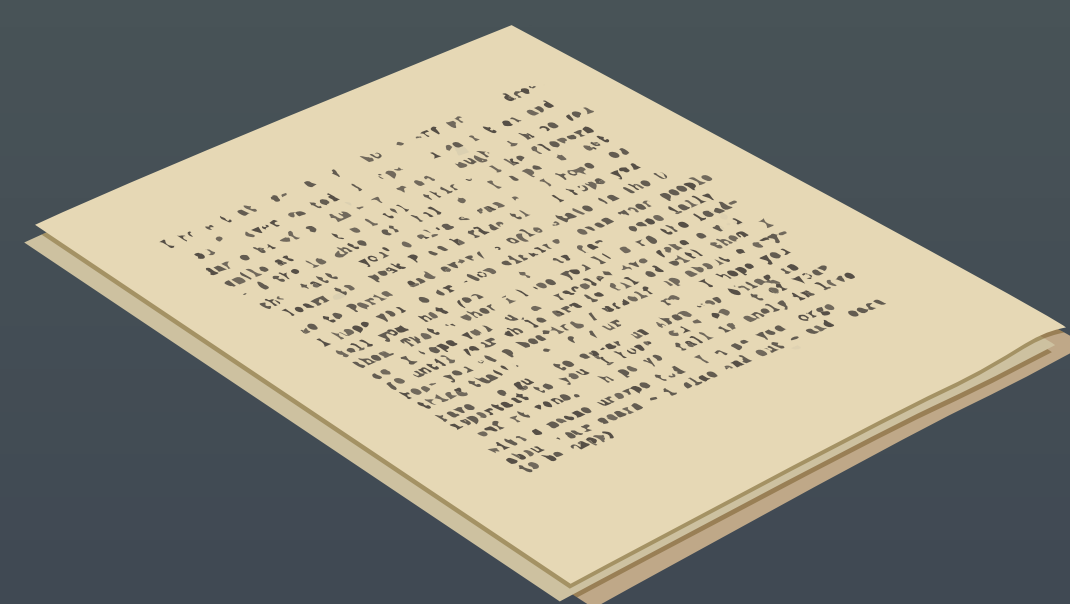
### Briony Tallis

Imaginative girl; tries to make up for falsely accusing Robbie of raping her cousin and destroying his future with Cecilia by "writing" *Atonement*



### Cecilia Tallis

Briony's impulsive older sister; loves Robbie and believes in his innocence but never gets to see him again before she dies



### Robbie Turner

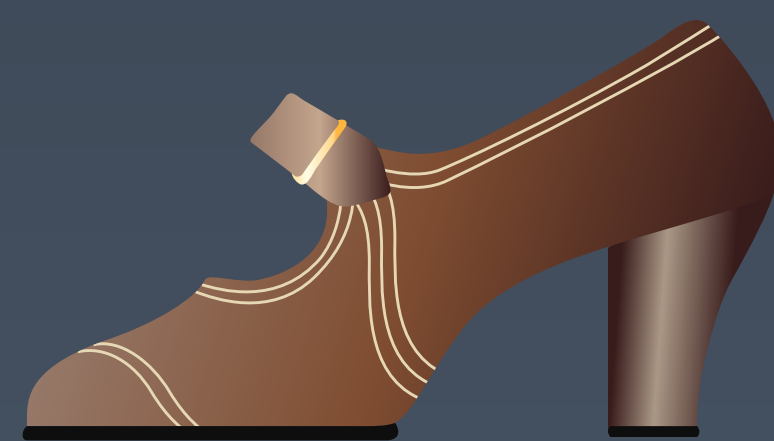
Studious young man and son of the Tallis family's housekeeper; falls in love with Cecilia but dies in WWII after being falsely imprisoned

## Themes



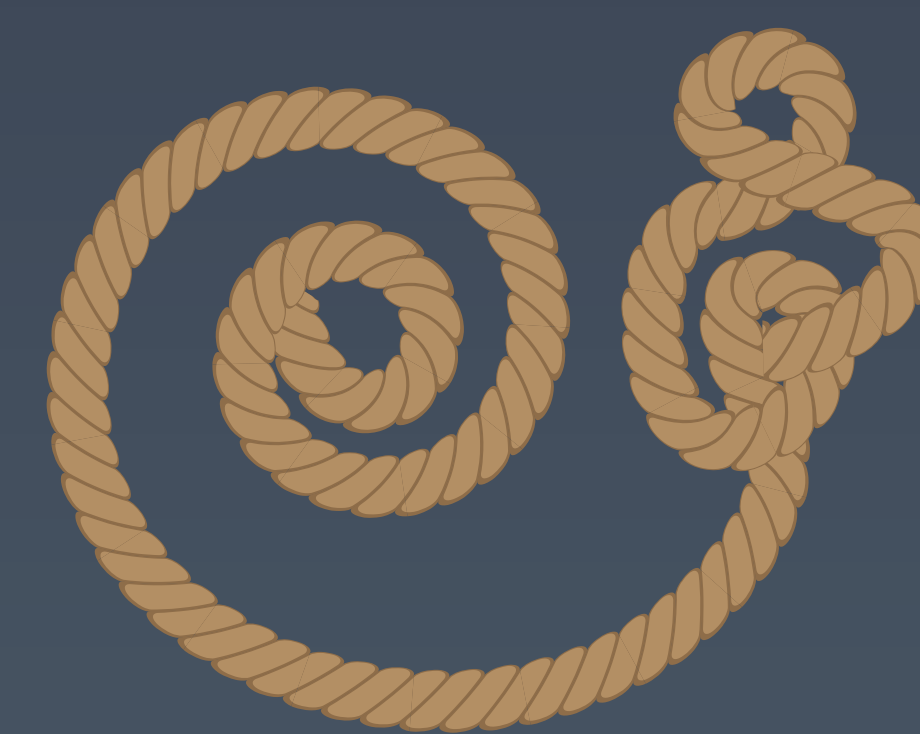
### Power of Words

Briony learns words can be used to both create and destroy.



### Coming of Age

Briony's attempt to grow up too fast is her undoing.



### Order vs. Chaos

Briony's obsession with control leads to suffering.

**T**he truth had become as ghostly as invention.

Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 3