

A comparison of atonement and lantana



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Through their respective texts, *Atonement* and *Lantana*, authors Ian McEwan and Ray Lawrence expertly convey the ideas of betrayal, atonement, loss and class. Within *Atonement*, McEwan employs stylistic features repetition, motif, symbolism and characterisation to explore the idea of betraying a loved one, the effort required to atone for this transgression, and the influence of class in pre-war British society. Contrastingly, Lawrence utilises *mise en scene*, soundtrack, camera shots and dialogue within *Lantana* to express his concerns regarding not only the infidelity and betrayal in contemporary urban life, and the importance of redeeming oneself, but the influence of socioeconomic status on the attainment of happiness.

Within *Atonement*, McEwan portrays the idea of betrayal through the technique of repetition. childish protagonist Briony believes Robbie is the rapist, and frequently repeats Yes I saw him. I saw him, ultimately betraying her family friend, and her sister Cecelia. Through repetition, McEwan conveys the intensity of Briony's belief, and the vast extent of her betrayal, as she never considers the possibility of false understandings. Contrastingly, Lawrence conveys betrayal through John and Valerie's relationship, in John's ignorance of Valerie's pleas to assist her, ultimately leading to her death. *Mise en scene* and editing is utilised through the image of the phone and answering machine, surrounded by family photos, to convey the harsh betrayal with which John ignores the voice over of her pleas for help. The stark contrast between the lighting of Valerie's telephone box, and the cut to the warm lighting of their home highlights the intensity of John's betrayal. Indeed, in contrasting ways, both McEwan and Lawrence convey the idea of betrayal through techniques of repetition and *mise en scene* respectively.

Similarly, McEwan and Lawrence display atonement, a concept that goes hand in hand with betrayal, through techniques such as motifs, and soundtrack respectively. Within *Atonement*, Briony's realisation of her wrongdoings leads her to work towards redemption until her old age. Through writing *Atonement*, the novel itself, not simply a letter, but a new draft, an atonement, Briony recreates the story so Cecilia and Robbie can have the life they deserved, whilst punishing herself for her wrongdoings. Through this, McEwan conveys to the reader how significantly her transgressions have impacted her life, and the importance of rectifying her mistake. Alternatively, Lawrence conveys the idea of atonement through utilising the soundtrack. When Sonia and Leon dance, Leon begins to atone for having an affair by actively trying to repair his relationship. The music accompanying this scene, *What do you know of love?*, provides an upbeat, romantic atmosphere, suggesting to the audience that through atonement, damage can be repaired. Certainly, through the use of motifs by McEwan, and of soundtrack by Lawrence, both authors are able to convey ideas on the theme of atonement within their texts.

The idea of loss is also quite prevalent throughout McEwan's text, *Atonement*, made clear through foreshadowing and symbolism. McEwan utilises foreshadowing when Robbie and Cecilia break the vase, symbolic of their relationship and its inevitable doom due to the actions of Robbie. This vase, of which ...split into two triangular pieces [...] and lay there, several inches apart, foreshadows how they will become separated, eventually losing each other and their lives. Through this, McEwan conveys the severity of Briony's actions, and how two people lost their happiness because of her lies.

In a similar way, Lawrence conveys the devastation associated with losing a child through techniques such as camera shots and dialogue. When John and Valerie share intimacy, a close up of their faces is shown, but never in the same shot, highlighting their isolation. Accompanied by the line look at me John, to which John averts his gaze, Lawrence conveys how the couple are united through their grief for their dead daughter, and nothing more, highlighting the immense impact loss can have on relationships within contemporary society. No doubt, through their use of foreshadowing and symbolism, as well as camera shots and dialogue respectively, both McEwan and Lawrence convey their ideas of the concept of loss through their texts, *Atonement* and *Lantana*.

Certainly, McEwan and Lawrence's convey the idea of class and the distinction between characters through characterisation and mise en scene. McEwan employs the characterisation of Emily Tallis as a reflection of the upper class society of Britain in pre-war society. Whilst she waits for the search parties to return, Emily takes particular distaste to the presence of Robbie, and evaluates how she opposed Jack when he proposed paying for the boys education, a statement which conveys how she believes her family is above the lower class citizens of the time, so much so that she would believe the word of a child over an adult. Through Emily, McEwan conveys his ideas on the upper class of Britain during the late 1930s, and his distaste of the snobbery with which they conducted themselves. In contrast, Lawrence conveys the idea of class in a much more simplistic way, employing the technique of mise en scene. Lawrence places Jane's house, a two story building made of fine and valuable materials, next to Nick and

Paula's, a run down one story house, reflective of their financial status. In this way, Lawrence conveys the idea that true happiness comes from mutual trust, respect and love from the people in your life, not wealth.

Clearly, though the use of characterisation and mise en scene respectively, both McEwan and Lawrence are able to convey their concerns regarding class and the influence of status in contemporary society. Through their respective texts, authors Ian McEwan and Ray Lawrence expertly convey their concerns regarding the prevalence of betrayal within relationships and the sense of loss this can generate, as well as the importance of redemption and influence of socioeconomic status on one's happiness. Through the conventional stylistic features of repetition, motif, foreshadowing, symbolism, and characterisation employed by McEwan *Atonement*, and the mise en scene, soundtrack, camera shots and dialogue utilised by Lawrence *Lantana*, both authors of their respective texts not only depict these common ideas, but convey their concerns regarding these aspects of contemporary society, and the need for their consideration in everyday life.