

The theme of social class in atonement essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Introduction Points :

1. Atonement set in 1935 England where society was highly influenced by the social class system.
2. From the beginning, the narrative forces the reader to realize that this is not the tale of just one family in Southern England but a cross section of British society at that particular time frame before the war changed everything.
3. Social class plays a key role in Atonement ï establishes the background and foundations for the tragedy
4. A series of misunderstandings and misinterpretations set in train the events that culminate in Robbie Turner being wrongfully imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.
5. Prejudice & assumptions based on class stereotypes contribute to this process at several points. Most importantly, though, his conviction in the flimsiest of evidence reveals how pervasive attitudes to class were in England in the 1930s.

Body Points :

1. Robbie and Cecilia were the same age, grew up together “ He had known her since they were children.” and shared the same love for Literature ï they both have degrees in Literature ï went to Cambridge together.

2. Even though they share some common interests, they were separated by a much more fundamental divide – Cecilia was the daughter of a wealthy upper-middle-class senior civil servant and Robbie was the son of the Tallises' cleaner.

3. Even though they had grown up together and Robbie “ had spent his childhood moving freely between the bungalow and the main house” the social gulf was unbridgeable.

4. At that time at Cambridge, they have moved in very different circles, she seemed to be avoiding him. “ That’s our cleaning lady’s son she might have been whispering to her friends as she walked on”

5. Robbie was the recipient to Jack Tallis’s charitable patronage. It was Jack’s money that enabled him to go to Cambridge. This has given Robbie some social mobility. If he had lived to become a doctor, he would have formed part of the middle class.

6. Emily Tallis resented this. She has a conservative point of view and believes that social mobility should not be encouraged since this would be ‘ upsetting the natural order of things” and viewing Jack paying for Robbie as “ a hobby of Jack’s”. She deemed this as “ unfair on Leon and the girls”

7. Emily even disapproves of her daughter going to Cambridge since that it might interfere with her finding a suitable husband.

8. “ Nothing good will come of this.” “ My mother never forgave you your first”

9. All of these factors prevent the emergences of a natural relationship between these two who have known each other for so long.

Body {2} points :

1. The early misunderstanding between them is due to the difference in social class.

2. Robbie removing his shoes and socks is explicitly misinterpreted by Cecilia as an insult and an attempt to distance her.

3. Similarly Robbie misinterprets Cecilia's undressing at the pond as an attempt to humiliate him.

4. These incidents convey the complexity of emotions in play that day. " He saw it clearly now. The idea was to humiliate him. There it stood, the undeniable fact." He thought as her " Treating him though he were an infant."

5. Their unequal social class positions cause tension and awkwardness between them.

6. Social class alone is not responsible for the day's outcome. Briony also misinterprets the fountain scene and she herself says " The sequence was illogical". This helps her to establish the frame of mind that allows her to see Robbie as a " maniac" after she reads the obscene note.

7. Briony can't image things differently. She assumes that Robbie is attacking Cecilia in the library and this further affirms her thoughts of him being a maniac and a danger to her sister.
8. Briony was able to persuade herself that the rapist must have been Robbie.
9. Lola went along with Briony's assumption because she could see that Robbie, because he came from the lower class and attitudes towards people like him at that time were not hidden, would make a plausible candidate for the role of a rapist.

Body {3}

1. The two acts which break the social convention between them are : Cee's undressing in the fountain scene and the obscene note, which makes Cecilia fully aware of her true feelings for her childhood friend. " Everything was explained. The whole day, the weeks before, her childhood. A lifetime. It was clear to her now."
2. While Robbie is away, Cecilia writes " I'm beginning to understand the snobbery that lay behind their stupidity." Nonetheless, she goes on to assume that working class Danny Hardman was the real attacker because it was unthinkable that the millionaire upper class Paul Marshall would be capable of such a thing.
3. They are so blinded by prejudice assumptions that they ignore the scratches both on Lola and Paul's face.

4. Emily says : ‘ There had been something maniac and glazed in his look.”
5. McEwan seems to imply that even those who try to reverse the effects of a resented class system end up protecting the upper class rapist from exposure.

Body {4}

1. Social class plays a central role in other parts of the novel too.
2. In Part 2 ĩ the two working class corporals who accompany Robbie see him as a leading figure/leader/note his natural leadership potential even though he comes from a lower rank.
3. Briony and Cecilia volunteer for the lower-class occupation of nursing and witness a breakdown of social class.
4. The coda makes the reader aware that the class structure of Britain has changed. Briony’s taxi driver Michael, is a law graduate and is also studying as a postgraduate in one of the most prestigious Universities in England : The London School Of Economics. He drives a taxi because he needs the money and is even more educated than Briony.

Conclusion :

1. It is clear that class-based prejudice & attitudes underlie the whole of the central plot of the novel which can be viewed as an extended critique of a set of assumptions based on false evidence which paves the way for the condemn of an innocent man.