

**UK / France** (Working Title Films, Relativity Media, Studio Canal) 130m Color

**Language:** English / French

**Director:** Joe Wright

**Producer:** Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Paul Webster

**Screenplay:** Christopher Hampton

**Photography:** Seamus McGarvey BSC

**Music:** Dario Marianelli

**Cast:** Keira Knightley, James McAvoy, Romola Garai, Brenda Blethyn, Vanessa Redgrave, Saoirse, Patrick Kennedy, Benedict Cumberbatch, Juno Temple, Peter Wight, Harriet Walter, Michelle Duncan, Gina McKee, Daniel Mays, Nonso Anozie.

**BAFTA:** Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Paul Webster (best film), Sarah Greenwood, Katie Spencer (best production design)

**Oscar nominations:** Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Paul Webster (best picture), Saoirse Ronan (best supporting actress), Christopher Hampton (best adapted screenplay), Sarah Greenwood, Katie Spencer (best art direction), Seamus McGarvey (best cinematography), Dario Marianelli (best original score), Jacqueline Durran (best costume design)

## ATONEMENT (2007)

Consider the 'British costume drama' and know that through carefully wrought language and an intermingling of different classes of people you've got the basic setting for many British movies. Joe Wright's *Atonement* expands this basic form to include a memorable portrait of romantic love, albeit with a finale twist.

No doubt this expansion is helped along by Christopher Hampton's adaptation of Ian McEwan's celebrated novel, a metafiction about historical memory and how point-of-view constructs reality. Thusly, *Atonement* tells a story about misunderstanding and class distinctions but adds a war-time set piece to ground social intrigues in historical fact, all while inserting an autobiographical confession to change our perspective by movie's end. Gone is an easy fix, allowing betrayed lovers to re-unite. Gone, too, is the simple-minded idea of offering forgiveness that heals all wounds.

Opening in 1935, 13-year old Briony Tallis (Saoirse Ronan) wiles away her first teen summer falling in love with Robbie Turner (James McAvoy), the son of her family's gardener. Things turn nasty when Briony misconstrues the attraction between Robbie and her older sister Cecilia (Keira Knightley). Briony accuses Robbie of raping a guest at the Tallis estate, and true love between Robbie and Cecilia is fated for seeming tragedy.

Time passes. Robbie goes to prison and is later remanded to army service during World War II. In the lapsed years, Cecilia disowns Briony who then seeks absolution for her youthful folly by nursing war wounded; meanwhile Robbie tries to survive Dunkirk. Coincidences ensue and Briony confesses to her earlier lie, allowing Cecilia and Robbie to declare public affections. But it's only a dream featuring the ever-haunting Ms. Knightley and Mr. McAvoy, surely two of the most precious Continental exports of recent years, although neither performance overshadows the breakthrough role of Ms. Ronan.

Briony is actually a dying old woman (Vanessa Redgrave) who has finished writing her final story, a re-telling of youthful indiscretion. All her good works and labored guilt, then, are sacrifices to the innocence lost with the onset of war, maturity and the better judgment of thoughtful reflection. **GC-Q**



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