

Chime Study Guide

Chime by Franny Billingsley

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Chime Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-6: Introduction - Dreary's Death.....	5
Chapters 7-12: Ghost Children - Boxing Lessons.....	10
Chapters 13-18: Nelly's Trial - Caught at Dawn.....	14
Chapters 19-24: Briony and the Boggy Mun - Give Us a Kiss.....	17
Chapters 25-32: The Motorcar Picnic - The Second Chime.....	21
Characters.....	26
Symbols and Symbolism.....	34
Settings.....	36
Themes and Motifs.....	38
Styles.....	43
Quotes.....	46



Plot Summary

Chime begins with the narrator, Briony, speaking about her trial. She informs the reader of her guilt in the matter and that the reader should not be thinking she could possibly be innocent. After this brief introduction the novel returns to the events prior to the trial.

Briony introduces the reader to her father, a clergyman and her sister Rose as well as a new boy, Eldric who would be living with the family at the parsonage. At a funeral the ghosts of dead children began to speak to her, telling her that the Boggy Mun (the spirit of the swamp itself) had sent them the swamp-cough, and that they are asking for her help. They said that the reason for the swamp cough was that the men are planning on draining the swamp, and angering the spirit.

The constable expressed his belief that the witch was Nelly Daws. Briony decided at this point to talk to the Boggy Mun in order to save Rose from the swam cough. Unfortunately, this plan backfired in a massive way, as she found out that the Boggy Mun had given Rose the swamp cough and would not release it from her or another boy in town until the men from London stop draining his swamp. The following day Eldric, Briony and Rose went to the courthouse to testify. Nelly was hanged, but she did not turn to dust. They had hung the wrong woman.

Briony was in the swamp and destroyed a pumping station run by Mr. Clayborne who wanted to drain the swamp. She was nearly caught by Robert, a hired guard, when Eldric arrived and took her aside to discuss the implications of her actions. On her way back from the swamp Briony was attacked by The Hand but saved by Eldric. Briony later asked Eldric about what had happened while she was passed out, and he explained that he had never left her side, missing both the harvest festival and the hayride, as well as lessons with Leanne (much to Briony's pleasure). After this, Eldric invited her to Blackberry Night.

Days later it was Blackberry Night, and Briony had removed her cast. Cecil arrived and tried to force her to kiss him when Eldric came crashing in to save her, hitting Cecil multiple times and dragging him away. Eldric kissed her cheek and then her mouth. There was chemistry between them until Eldric realized what was happening and stopped them. He tried to take Briony home but she ran away before he got to his feet.

While Eldric was talking to Leanne, Mucky Face arrived to attack her but Briony was able to get him to go back to the river, but not before Eldric saw her. She informed him that she had the second sight, the ability to see and talk to the Old Ones. While in the bar she came to the realization that the wave was sent to harm her, and she attempted to figure out who would have sent it. Eldric felt betrayed until she gave him enough implication that he could infer that she was a witch. They discussed his relationship with Leanne, and Briony wrote one of her limericks about it which gave her the spark to realize the truth about Leanne; she was a Dark Muse and had attempted to kill Briony. Briony told Eldric her big secret, that she was a witch.



It was the night of Halloween, and Briony went to the graveyard of the children and called them all to speak about their illness and how the people could stop the swamp cough. They told the people that the Boggy Mun had killed them as a result of the drainage, which sent the crowd into a frenzy. The Stepmother also rose, and informed Briony and all around that not only had she been murdered but she was one of the Old Ones and claimed Briony as her murderer. The crowd turned on Briony, calling her a murderess and calling for her to be hung as a witch. Briony turned to run and the Constable followed, but was shot by Eldric. Briony ran into the swamp where she then saved Eldric from The Dead Hand, helped him up and they walked back to the village, to take him to Dr. Rannigan.

There is a time lapse, and it is now the last day of the trial, the courtroom is almost completely full. Eldric interrupts and says he has information that could help, turning her words into a story, much like she did with Leanne. He suggests that Stepmother was a dark muse. Father then enters the conversation revealing that she was a Dark Muse. Rose then enters, saying that she is ready to reveal her secret, having been persuaded by Robert. She reveals that Stepmother had taken the register of the midwife, which read that Briony had been born between November 1st and Second, making her a Chime Child, not a witch.

It is another time lapse, it is now March. Eldric and Briony are in good shape, and she is even talking to Father again. Briony sneaks out of the house to the swamp where she talks with the Reed Spirits and promises to write down their stories. She is to apprentice with the Chime Child when she recovers from the injuries she sustained saving Eldric. A motorcar arrives and Eldric exits and sits by her. They discuss his lost hand, and he expresses his lack of masculinity and attempts to unbutton Briony's blouse to which she responds negatively. Eldric backs off and tells her again about his love for her to which she responds with an outpouring of emotion about her love for him. This time when he says he loves her, she believes it, she believes that she is someone who can be loved.



Chapters 1-6: Introduction - Dreary's Death

Summary

Briony opens the novel by telling the reader that she has confessed to her crimes and wishes to be hanged, making it very clear that her's will not be a story to try to change the reader's mind about this fact. At the end of the admission she jumps back some months to when she first met Eldric. She states that she had been in Swampsea for 17 years with her Father and sister Rose. This was one of their first appearances in public since the suicide of Stepmother, something that Briony could not accept. They met Mr. Clayborne, Eldric's father, a London man who had arrived six months earlier to begin draining the swamp, and who was there to greet his son. Rose was not doing too well out in the cold, and she began coughing which reminded Briony of Stepmother and her illness, and triggered thoughts of anger towards her father.

Eldric came off the barge and Briony was shocked at his age, assuming he would be younger. She immediately labeled him as a bad boy and understood why he was living with them in the parsonage and not in the Alehouse with it's association of interesting characters. Briony thought of Cecil, a local boy enamored with Briony, and how much he differed from Eldric who reminded her of everything that the Swampsea was not, and everything that London was. Rosy and Briony were introduced to Eldric, Rose blurting out one of her uncontrolled statements. This meeting reminded Briony of how time spent in the house was awkward and silent with just her, Rose and Father since the death of Stepmother. She noticed that Rose was about to scream, and thought of the inquest after her Stepmother's death where she testified contrary to her father regarding the question of suicide. Rose started to scream.

There is a slight lapse in time and the group had moved to the Parsonage where Rose had locked herself in the cupboard. Pearl Whitby, the maid, was looking after her, but failing to get her out of the cupboard (or Miller as Briony quickly corrected herself). Briony desperately wanted Rose out of the cupboard so she could then leave her in Pearl's care and see Tiddy Rex, a local boy who had the swamp cough. She wanted to see if his symptoms matched those of Rose, something that she had been worrying about for weeks. Eldric walked in and requested Briony's presence, asking as the representative of Father. She agreed and walked into the dining room to find Father, Mr. Clayborne and Mr. Drury (Eldric's tutor).

The two began to talk, and Eldric shared with Briony his nickname for Mr. Drury; it was Mr. Dreary. He said that he would be finishing his studies there as to stop disappointing his father. Briony thought to herself about how she too would enjoy studying, but reminded herself of the need to watch over Rose. Eldric told her that she was to study with him, including boxing, which reminded Briony of how stepmother would encourage all of her actions, especially her writing. She also thought of how she was to blame for



the Stepmother's spinal injury and later illness, blaming herself for her eventual death. Eldric asked her if they could leave the dining room and see the rest of the house, as he had no interest in talking about draining the swamp, the conversation the adults were currently having.

Eldric revealed that he was expelled from university for throwing a rock through a chapel window, all to win 1,000 paper clips. She jokingly warned him about Cecil Trumpington as his competition for the baddest boy in town. Throughout the tour Briony noticed the energy that poured off of Eldric; he looked just like London, full of the same energy as the city. He offered to her what he had been fidgeting on the whole time, a crown. Briony admitted to the reader that in a normal story this would have started butterflies in the heroine's stomach, but in her case he merely moved from hated to neutral in her mind. She showed him his room, the room in which the Stepmother had died.

They began talking about the swamp when Pearl raced in telling them that Rose had run away into the swamp. Briony instantly blamed herself, regretting her lack of care for Rose and her inability to keep her promise to Stepmother. She then remembered that she must always hate herself as well. Eldric and Briony searched the swamp itself, while Mr. Clayborne and Father searched the fields. Eldric had brought with him three Bible Balls, a crumpled up page of the Bible meant to protect it's holder from the Horrors of the swamp. They moved through the Flats and Briony warned Eldric to follow her through the Quicks but to go ahead once they had reached the Slough. Briony took a Bible Ball but informed the reader that she had no need for it, being a horror herself. The reeds called out to Briony, and she recalled when Stepmother told her she was a witch, something that she hadn't believed at first until Stepmother told her that it was for her own good and that she was only looking out for the best for Briony, she was always helping them to create things, always encouraging them. The Reed Spirits continued to call out, asking for a story. They burst through into the Slough to find Rose surrounded by witches on branches, swirling around Rose. Briony shook the Bible Ball at them but they only laughed and flashed the humans before drifting up and away. Briony remembered when she called a wind that caused Rose to fall off a swing and suffer a cranial injury, resulting in her current mental state - or so Briony believed.

Later, back in the parsonage, they have been joined by Swamp Reeve, a local expert on the swamp. The constable was also there, and they discussed the witches riding snags. He attempted to question Rose, but she screamed and Pearl took her away. Eldric began to cut up the papers that Rose had been working on in an attempt to console her later on. The constable approached Briony next and then Eldric, asking if they remembered anything peculiar about the witches, to which Eldric stated that one of them had had red hair. Eldric had finished his fidgeting and decided to bring it to Rose, it was a paper made into the shape of a rose.

Mr. Clayborne then questioned Swamp Reeve on the Chime Child, and he explained that she was a member of the both the living and the spiritual world, and was present at trials as she is able to understand the Old Ones. Eldric and Rose returned to the room, and the constable suggested that Briony and Eldric go back to the swamp to show them



the area where they had found the witches. Mr. Drury also agreed to come along although he had no interest in taking along a Bible Ball. Briony was about to stay back and not go into the swamp when she saw a skull, representing death, on Mr. Drury's shoulder implying that he would die soon. She decided to go into the swamp to attempt to save Mr. Dreary.

Briony was one with the swamp, able to weave in and out without thought. Briony told Eldric that she didn't believe her stepmother killed herself, and Eldric neither believed her or didn't but merely begins to sing. Mr. Dreary was openly mocking the Bible Ball. Briony thought on how the Old Ones were unable to survive around machines and metal, all but the vampires. They arrived at the spot, but the Horrors frightened Mr. Dreary and he ran off into the swamp. The Wykes lent false light, trying to draw in lost travelers. On the way Briony recalled when she called Mucky Face (the river) onto the Stepmother which injured her spine. They arrived at the spot where they had seen Mr. Drury only to find that he had been swallowed up and vanished.

Analysis

The author's choice to tell this as a story within a story seems more or less arbitrary at the beginning, but it becomes clear throughout the novel the importance that is placed on story-telling in general and the need to write certain events down so they will not be lost forever. In that sense, Briony's writing of her experiences prior to the trial make eternal her struggle to overcome and understand certain elements in her life, mainly Stepmother. It is also clear from the beginning of this novel that the family aspect of the Larkins is almost non-existent, as there seems to be a physical as well as emotional rift between the daughters and their Father. This rift stops them from being a real family, and has halted their progress into acceptance by the Swampsea community, portrayed as the classic "outsiders aren't welcome" type of town.

However, this generalization of their community is not exactly founded, as Eldric seems to fit in with the members, especially at the Alehouse rather quickly. This simply places more emphasis on the fact that it is not the town that is cold, it is the Larkin family that has been unable to make an effort to fit in. They have also been physically absent, as each of them was ill for long periods of time. Greeting Eldric off of the barge is the first public appearance the family has made since the trial of Stepmother, a full three years earlier. The reader knows, of course, by the end of the book that the main reason for their absence in the community is that they each had to make immense physical and emotional recoveries after being fed upon by the Dark Muse, Stepmother.

It is also important to note the difference between knowledge of a community and being a member of said community. The Larkins have immense knowledge of their community, Briony and Father especially seem to know nearly everything regarding the Old Ones, and Briony herself is an expert in navigating the swamp, almost as skilled as Swamp Reeve. When Eldric questions them on some of the intricacies of the swamp, Briony and Father are able to explain the Bible Balls, as well as giving information on several unique Old Ones such as the Wykes. Eldric himself seems to already be more



or less informed, as he had been questioning around the Alehouse. This is a community that is forthcoming with information because it is a necessity that everyone there know the dangers of the swamp and the lengths necessary to protect themselves. They care about everyone inside of their walls, but are more reluctant to open up emotionally. Eldric's arrival actually helps the Larkin family immensely in terms of community, as his friendliness allows them to get outside of the house more and more often, helping Briony - but especially Rose - adapt to living outside of the parsonage.

The best example of an individual totally at odds with the community and lacking any of the necessary knowledge to survive is Mr. Drury. What is more intriguing than his general disdain for the culture in which he is surrounded (clearly a subtle dig at Americans in general) is that he represents the skeptical reader at this point in the novel. It is important to remember that while he is hearing about all of this information, the reader is as well and if there is any element of skepticism or lack of desire to buy into a story about witches, this is quickly wiped away when he is killed off immediately. The author makes it clear to the reader that there is no other option but to buy into this story or read through the rest of it as dead as Dreary Mr. Drury.

Finally, throughout all of these introductory passages the reader gets a glimpse into the psyche of Briony. She is insecure, which is normal given her age, but more than that she seems to be constantly putting herself down and blaming herself for everything that happens around her. She holds herself to a level of responsibility that is just too high given her abilities and age, and never lets off herself. This does not help when it is clear that Father is more or less uninterested in caring for Rose, leaving her completely in Briony's care. She feels responsible when Rose runs off into the swamp, and finds herself equally responsible when Mr. Drury dies, both of which are entirely unrelated to any action that Briony could have taken before or after the fact. She uses these failings to continuously put herself down, and references the Stepmother often in conjunction with remembering to hate herself, something that is just awful for a 17-year-old girl. Father seems either unaware of her psychological problems or simply unwilling to deal with them or take any of the weight off of her shoulders.

Discussion Question 1

What does the fact that the Larkins were still considered outsiders despite their 17 years in the village say about the general attitude and makeup of the villagers?

Discussion Question 2

Who, between Briony and Father, was more responsible for Rose and understood her more? Was this problematic or logical?



Discussion Question 3

How did Briony begin to explain her relationship with the Stepmother? What advice had she received from the Stepmother?

Vocabulary

absolve, embroidery, burdensome, foyer, firestorm, gale, snickleway, duckweed, alabaster, petticoat, ingenuity, whorled, conventional, subterranean, tussock, arsenic



Chapters 7-12: Ghost Children - Boxing Lessons

Summary

It was the day of Mr. Drury's funeral, as Briony reminded herself that he was killed by the Horrors, not by nature itself. She walked Rose by their mother's grave, in disrepair. She remembered, too, that Stepmother was not buried there due to the manner of her death. Briony heard a child's voice telling her that the Boggy Mun had sent the swamp cough, and more ghost children join the first as they seemed to walk out of their graves. They asked her for help, asking her to tell the villagers that the Boggy Mun will stop the swamp cough if the London men stopped draining his swamp. The two of them discussed Rose's secret book, and then headed off towards the Alehouse where the reception would be held. Briony thought to herself about the possible repercussions if she did tell the villagers about the swamp cough, revealing herself to be a witch and most likely sentencing herself to death.

Briony and Rose passed Mad Tom on the way to the Alehouse. Briony was greeted by Eldric upon their arrival, and shortly after Cecil arrived asking to be introduced to Eldric. The two men went off to grab some food, and Briony eavesdropped on the Constable's conversation about his suspicions that Nelly Daws was the witch on account of her red hair. He was speaking with the Chime Child and the Hangman. A fisherman stated that he had seen her dancing around a maypole once, but couldn't be totally sure it was her. Rose revealed that Mr. Drury hadn't taken a Bible Ball into the swamp, a fact that shocked the surrounding parties. Eldric was able to make Rose laugh with a joke, which is quite rare given her general dislike of males. Tiddy Rex also joined them, looking well for the fact that the swamp cough had set in. Briony heard the fiddle, something strange, and realizes that it was Gather. He hadn't played it in three years. He asked her to sing with him but she refused, as she was bitter over his having ended this tradition without a word to her. Seeing Tiddy Rex reminded Briony of the swamp cough and the cause, the Boggy Mun. She decided that maybe by talking to the Boggy Mun and offering some of her own blood she could save Rose from the swamp cough.

Briony arrived at the swamp, cut her arm and poured out blood into the swamp. She asked the Boggy Mun to take back the swamp cough in return for her own blood. He responded that this was not enough, and instead struck Rose with the swamp cough, stating that the only way to remove it was to get the London men to stop draining the swamp. Briony was shattered, knowing that she was now responsible for Rose having the swamp cough. She began to hate herself again, also remembering that the Stepmother had protected her in the past, warning her to not go to the swamp.

Briony decided that she would tell the townspeople the next day, but not right away. One of the Old Ones, the Brownie had followed her home, asking her to write stories. Briony only knew him as the one who had helped her burn down the parsonage library. When



she returned home she talked with Father who told her that Rose had the swamp cough, and Dr. Rannigan said that he has medicine that can make her suffering diminish. He also told them that he will get them new clothes. Briony blamed herself strongly for this latest development, having ignored Stepmother and causing another death, if not right away, eventually.

Briony opened this chapter by discussing how Father had fired Fitz, her old intelligent tutor. She was trying to convince Rose to eat breakfast, and she finally did. Eldric made them eggs and revealed that Pearl would not be in that day, as her baby had died. They walked by the jailhouse where they saw a bunch of boys throwing rocks at Nelly Daws' cell. They were singing a chant about Rose being daft, and Briony went at them and began to fight with their leader, Petey. She did a serious amount of damage before she was pulled off by Robert the fireman, Rose's friend. Cecil and Eldric had picked up Petey, and Briony asked Cecil to bring him to Dr. Rannigan to be checked over. Robert took Rose away, offering to walk her home.

It was Eldric and Briony alone in the square. Eldric began to clean her up with his handkerchief, and offered to teach her how to box, to which she responded that she would enjoy that. They began talking about starting a bad-boy club, using a type of fake latin as a code. They ended up with the Fraternity of Bad Boys, calling each other frater. Briony thought to herself that it was so rare for someone to be taking care of her, and that she was grateful for it and would remember it forever.

The Brownie was accosting Briony again for her stories, but she ignored him and headed out into the swamp to damage the pumping station. She looked out for a guard but did not find one. She entered and set up the necessary ingredients for an explosion when Mucky Face interrupted her trying to talk to her, apologizing for attacking Stepmother, saying he was called by an Old One, not Briony, stating that she lacked the power. Briony was unable to believe this, remembering her actions leading up to the event. Mucky Face too asked her to write stories, saying that he would be forgotten if she did not write them down. The pump station exploded and Briony ran away, but reminded herself that she had called Mucky Face and was still responsible for Stepmother's death.

It was the first meeting of the Bad Boy Club, and Eldric was teaching Briony how to box. They talked about London, and Eldric questioned her about why she did not continue her studies, instead choosing to care for Rose. He told her he feels that it was unjust that she was asked to do so, but she responded by saying that she chose to do it herself as an atonement for the injuries to Stepmother. Eldric called it a sacrifice, but Briony strongly disagreed with that word, reinforcing the idea that it was her decision. The argument began to fade, as Briony was unable to agree with Eldric but no longer had any information to back up this claim.

They ran through the swamp and talked about the pump station that was already being rebuilt. She told him the story of the library fire, where she ran inside to attempt to save some of the stories that she had written about Rose, because Rose loved them so. She burned her hand in the process, and Stepmother raced in to save her, or so Briony



assumed. The Strangers were also in the swamp, asking her for stories, telling her about a female spirit who kept screaming Briony's name, which reminded Briony of the act of love that Stepmother had performed in order to save Briony from the fire.

Analysis

It is at this point in the novel where the reader can see the actual power of the swamp and its ability to influence all life around it. Briony, worried sick about her sister possibly having the fatal swamp cough, went to converse and offer a sacrifice to the Boggy Mun, the spirit of the swamp. This in of itself is incredibly primitive, the act of a blood sacrifice goes back to many near-ancient religions including the ancient Greeks and Romans, the Aztecs most famously, and countless other worship systems that follow some kind of natural spirit. It also speaks again to the strange pressure that Briony seemingly places on herself to solve problems. There is not need for her to go to the swamp to find out if Rose has the swamp cough, it is a common enough occurrence in the town that Dr. Rannigan would be more than apt to deal with the problem. However, Briony knows the swamp as more of a home to her than Swampsea and goes to the Boggy Mun. His revelation is the first time that the reader can understand the power of the swamp, in its ability to cast harm on individuals until it gets what it wants.

Scientifically it is possible that the swamp cough is a reaction between the pumping station and the swamp water, but in this novel that possibility is never discussed; rather, it is accepted immediately by Briony that the Boggy Mun is responsible for the swamp cough. The sad parts of this episode are that Briony decided to cut herself in order to achieve a positive end, and this action is rejected by the Boggy Mun immediately, and that instead of blaming the all-powerful king of the swamp for the swamp cough that he quite literally has taken credit for, Briony decides that this swamp cough is now entirely her own fault, as she believes that she has escalated a situation that is already at a tipping point. She blames herself for even entering the swamp in the first place, as part of Stepmother's conditioning had been forbidding her from the swamp, as Briony could only cause harm in conjunction with it.

In fact, not only does Briony blame herself for this occurrence but immediately begins to atone for her crimes, attempting and succeeding to blow up the pumping station. This illegal and completely over-the-top action seems completely rational to a Briony who cannot reveal the information of the Boggy Mun without risking death herself, but it also speaks on her need to expunge herself of these feelings of guilt and lack of self worth. Briony is able to find the meaning in her life, sadly, by over-the-top and aggressive attempts to rid herself of the blame, to solve problems that were not even caused by her in the first place.

There is another incident that ties into Briony's blaming herself for everything bad in her life, as it is important to first note that she believes she caused her sister's mental issues (completely untrue). So, when the boys in the town start making fun of Rose for being "daft" Briony goes to attack them not only in defense of her sister, an action that arguably just made the situation worse for Rose, but in order to punish others for



something for which she feels responsible. Rose is mentally disabled because of Briony, and so when they make fun of Rose, Briony feels as if she is more responsible for their actions than they are. This explains the violent and intense response that she gives, only stopping when Eldric steps in.

Discussion Question 1

What effect did the death of Mr. Dreary have on Briony?

Discussion Question 2

Why didn't Briony believe Mucky Face when he told her he was called by someone else to hurt Stepmother?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Briony go to the swamp and not to a doctor to diagnose Rose's cough?

Vocabulary

slurp, peculiar, cherubim, strumpet, fret, dependable, pewter, tankard. parsonage, disincline, divulge, lunatic, unbearable, sympathetic, ventilated, fraternity, initiation, illumination, degeneracy, antenna, laundered, estuary, diverge



Chapters 13-18: Nelly's Trial - Caught at Dawn

Summary

Briony, Eldric and Rose were on the way to the courthouse, having all been called as witnesses. Briony attempted to get out of it by saying she would become ill but Father will not listen to her. It is at this point when the reader is introduced to Leanne, a stunningly beautiful woman, well dressed and with an attractive voice. She was a witch hunter, going around to any and all trials that she could to celebrate the conviction and hanging. The trial began and Eldric commented on the age of the Chime Child, who was, in fact, quite old. Rose was called to the stand and she testified that Nelly's and the witch's hair were not alike at all. Eldric went up next, but Briony could not watch him as she was reminded of the trial of Stepmother and had to leave the courthouse.

Outside in the town square Cecil approached Briony and spoke strangely of a type of betrayal that she had committed before Briony was able to brush him off, but he followed her to the Alehouse. It was the day of Nelly's hanging, and Leanne had returned to see this as well. The hanging occurred. They had made a mistake. Nelly's body did not turn to dust. Father entered the Alehouse and asked Briony again to sing, and she again refused. Cecil continued to flirt with Briony until she was unable to take any more and left the Alehouse. She thought about the trial and how Nelly had been convicted because she had been seen dancing around a maypole once, and that the judges had ignored Rose's testimony.

The wind was blowing strongly as Briony walked home, it was referred to as the Bitch. She wondered if this was the wind she had called that injured Rose, and decided that it likely was. She realized that even if she were to reveal herself a witch and tell the villagers about the drainage and the association with the swamp cough they would not believe her. She made her way back to the pump station, newly rebuilt, where she was tackled by Robert, the newly appointed guard. Eldric appeared quickly to Briony's aid and convinced Robert that she could not be guilty, of course, understanding himself that she was. They talked about it, and Briony was unable to give him a real reason. Eldric agreed not to turn her in if Briony helped him get permission to host a garden party at the house. He chalked it up to their being in Fraternitus together. Briony pulled out a bottle of communion wine and they drank together. Briony thought to herself about the connection between the communion of the church and the one shared between the two of them.

It was the day of the garden party, and Rose was anticipating the arrival of her friend Robert. They entered into the garden to find it decorated in Japanese style, with painted sheets and lights encircling everyone. Almost immediately Briony was approached by Cecil, who offered her a drink and pulled her off to the side. He expressed again his jealousy of Eldric, and asked her to join him on Blackberry Night, a night of debauchery



in the village. She declined. She looked over at Leanne and Eldric and found herself jealous of them, although she noticed that Eldric looked nearly ill. It is revealed that this whole party was made as a birthday party for Leanne, which saddened Briony who felt as if their night with the communion wine had been tainted. Rose approached and expressed her sadness that Robert had not come, and asked Briony to read her a story.

It was five days later, and Eldric had appeared outside of Briony's window late at night. She was surprised, as directly after the party he had fallen quite ill, and he should not have recovered this quickly. They ran together through the swamp and into the slough. He gave her a present, a fidget of a wolf-girl, in the exact shape of Briony, made out of wire and pearl. They returned from this excursion to find Mr. Clayborne and Father awake and waiting for them.

Mr. Clayborne and Father were enraged, but only at Eldric. Briony quickly realized that they believed that the two of them had been engaged sexually, to which Eldric responded he would never do that. Father and Mr. Clayborne told Briony that Eldric would be studying instead with Leanne now, as they believed she was a better influence on Eldric. Briony decided to return to the Boggy Mun with a new agreement, one that would actually be in her own favor.

Analysis

This section of the novel deals the most with the issue of justice and morals, as the trial and execution of Nelly Daws reflects the priorities of their legal system and the response of Father and Mr. Clayborne show the antiquated morals that are still prevalent in this society. Starting with the morality aspect, Briony and Eldric are accused of essentially having sex outside of the roof of the parsonage. This is something that angers both Mr. Clayborne and Father, as Father is interested in protecting his daughter from this bad boy who is five years older than her. Mr. Clayborne is equally eager to protect his son from the types of bad influence that got him expelled from university, as he is still unable to believe that his son would have committed the action that he did if he was not influenced negatively. His and Father's decision to not let the two of them study together has a different meaning for each of the men. It is clear that Father's is to stop Briony from potentially having out of wedlock sex, which makes sense given that he is a priest.

What doesn't make sense is that he has put almost no effort into understanding Briony or caring for her since the death of Stepmother, and this action at this point in their relationship has little or no weight as he has not been a father to her in the past. Mr. Clayborne's reasoning is completely unrelated to the morality or lack thereof of sex before marriage, he couldn't care less if his son is having sex, it matters to him that is with Briony, whom he views as a negative influence. This is made abundantly clear when Mr. Clayborne does not take Eldric away from tantalizing women, he merely puts him in the presence of the better matched tantalizing woman of Leanne, by stating that they will be studying together. The blowback from this choice puts the blame once again firmly on Briony, as Mr. Clayborne does not see his son as a potential threat to anyone,



he is merely too eager to be influenced by individuals without the proper goals in mind. As a result of this, Briony is blamed for an action that she did not commit. It is also implied that she is blamed because she is the woman, as during this pre-industrial England it was still generally accepted by church-going individuals that women were the seductresses of men, and not vice versa.

The trial is a whole different matter, one that requires a brief overview of the proceedings as they differ strongly from those in the modern court system. There is no jury or any kind of weighing power, there is simply a judge and his adviser, the Chime Child. The judge is the one with the real power, as he can take in the advice and counsel of the Chime Child, combined with witness testimony and make the decision himself. It is also important to note that it does not matter the action committed by an Old One, simply being an Old One is enough to get hung, and so the trial is not one of crime committed and evidence, as there is literally none, but of character and identity. This is inherently problematic, as a trial without proof cannot be infallible. There is also a societal need to rid the community of dangerous Old Ones, and so if there is even the chance of someone being a witch or some other being, the judge has to act in the best interests of his community. In this specific case, despite the testimony of Rose to the contrary, the judge states that Nelly is guilty, which is more of a judgment on her character and the fact that she had been seen by a maypole and had no alibi for the night than any kind of physical evidence. It is more or less circumstantial, and of course the judge was wrong as Nelly hangs and does not turn to dust. This is a necessary aspect of the justice system of Swampsea as there is a need to protect over a need to see that accurate and correct justice is being done.

Discussion Question 1

What did the trial and mistake made by the Chime Child and judge say about the accuracy of the justice system in Swampsea?

Discussion Question 2

What caused the slight change in Cecil's normally polite and courting manner towards Briony?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Father and Mr. Clayborne attempt to separate Briony and Eldric?

Vocabulary

hermetic, inquest, maroon, corporeal, oblige, testimony, nostalgia, pinafore, genial, talcum-powder, plausible, discern, righteous, endeavor, inference, highwayman, reminiscent, deprived



Chapters 19-24: Briony and the Boggy Mun - Give Us a Kiss

Summary

Briony met the Boggy Mun and made her offer, stating that she could act on All Hallow's Eve, so as to let the ghost children speak to the villagers (on Halloween the living can see the dead). She said that she would only do this if he cured Rose of the swamp cough. Boggy Mun countered, saying that he would allow Rose and Tiddy Rex to stay at the same level of the sickness until All Hallow's Eve, so as Briony did not have to worry about them. She agreed to this deal, but was unable to feel much relief. On her way back home she was approached by the Bleeding Hearts, asking for her to make stories for them, love stories about she and Eldric. She was then attacked by the Dead Hand, and she had not taken with her a Bible Ball. She told it that she was a witch, but it did not let up, breaking bones in her hand and wrist. Eldric arrived and was able to get the Dead Hand off of her.

Briony awakened for a moment, seeing Eldric and Dr. Rannigan above her; they gave her anesthesia and she drifted back into the dark. In her feverish state she heard Father's voice singing. She awoke and Eldric was by the end of the bed, and he offered to sing the same song which Briony eagerly encouraged. Briony awoke for good, and noticed that Eldric was still in the room, but looked very tired, almost ill. She asked him about the harvest festival and the hayride, but he informed her that he did neither of those things, choosing instead to stay by her side. He even skipped his lessons with Mr. Thorpe and Leanne, much to Briony's pleasure. Some time later she asked about her hand, and Father and Eldric tell her that while it had been grievously injured it was still attached, making sure not to use any harsh descriptive adjectives. She got right to the point, asking and receiving the answer that all 27 bones in her hand had been broken. Later, Eldric told her that the reason he found her was because he saw a knife with blood on it, and he asked her what she was doing. When she refused to answer, he offered his own blood for her next blood offering, asking her if it was related to the pumping station to which Briony nodded. He then invited her to Blackberry Night, to which she did not fully answer yes, but it was implied in her thoughts.

That night Rose was standing over Briony's bed when she awoke, and Briony asked Rose for a mirror to see her face, finding out that it was quite red with vertical bruises next to her mouth. Rose then asked her how midnight looked to Briony, or how right before midnight looked, talking about some secret. Briony didn't have a response to this strange question and Rose said she would go to ask Eldric. Rose took Briony down to a small tea party that they were having in the library, showing her all of the things of Mother's that they had taken out of storage. She gave Briony a present, pieces of her special paper so Briony could write stories again. Leanne and Eldric approached her next, Eldric looking quite ill. They gave her a gift that Eldric had made, crystal pendants on a fiddle string to make a necklace. Mr. Clayborne expressed his disdain in his son's



artistic talent, but Leanne defended Eldric. Briony asked Rose what kind of story she wanted, and Rose requested one where she saved Briony. After the others leave Briony began writing, finding an immense happiness from writing something for Rose.

It was September 29th, Blackberry Night, and Briony was running through the swamp. Her hand had healed, and she revealed to the audience that she had come to the night alone, without Eldric or Cecil. Cecil came bounding over to her, clearly intoxicated. He asked her if she had kissed Eldric, and without a response he tried to kiss her, grabbed her wrists and put his lips on hers. She fought back ripping at his lips with her teeth, but he returned. Eldric hit him, driving him away from Briony and knocking him to the ground, pulling him away. Briony ran away and Eldric found her a few seconds later. He grabbed her and he kissed her cheek first, then they both kiss. Eldric broke it off, stating that he couldn't break the promise he had made to Father. Briony raced away from him and he did not follow.

That night Eldric had become ill and was bedridden. Briony had received numerous letters from Cecil, refusing to answer any of them, over the course of the next four days. She asked Pearl about Eldric's condition and she said that he looked as ill as Stepmother when she was near death, and that Leanne would not let him rest, continually giving him things with which to fidget and create. Briony didn't know what to do, so she decided to visit the doctor, taking Brownie along with her. They were unable to find him at his office or at the alehouse the first go around, finding him there around lunch later. Unfortunately, Cecil was also there and attempted to talk to her but she turned her back on him. She tried to lose him but he was unrelenting. He apologized profusely, saying that she owed him for the time he did a favor for her, a favor that she was unclear of, and asked for clarification. He responded with a threat, and she walked away to his shouts in the background.

Time had passed, and Briony was at home and Dr. Rannigan had come and gone. She was able to remove Leanne from Eldric's presence by telling Mr. Clayborne that her visits tired him. Two days after this Eldric had fully recovered, much in the way Father and Briony had with the Stepmother. She conversed with Eldric via note and they met in the library. He was looking much better. Briony expressed disappointment in the way that her boxing was unable to protect her, and Eldric reassured her of the fact that boxing takes some practice, and that she shouldn't worry. He also told her that Cecil took arsenic as a virility enhancer. This explains why Father had taken away Fitz upon finding out about the arsenic, wanting to protect his daughter from what had happened with Cecil. She also began to blame herself for what had happened to Eldric, although she had no recollection of setting any spell or curse against him.

Briony and Eldric were boxing in the swamp, Briony dressed in shirts and a tank top in order to be more flexible. They were working on unpredictability, which results in Eldric landing a lot of punches and Briony more or less not. She became cold and Eldric shields his eyes while she redressed herself. They were in awkward silence for a bit of time, but once they acknowledged it they were able to talk again in a similar manner to how they had in the past. Mad Tom interrupted them, alerting them to the fact that Leanne was behind them. She went down with Eldric and the two talked away from



Briony. Mad Tom was more aggressive than usual towards Leanne, and she was actually quite afraid of him. Briony turned towards the water when Mucky Face appeared above her, ready to strike. When he realized it was her he asked her to command him to stop. She did so and he fell back to the river. Eldric had seen her do this and asked for an explanation.

They had walked to the Alehouse and Eldric was still waiting for an explanation from Briony. She told him that she could see the Old Ones - that she had second sight. She explained that one of the Old Ones had sent Mucky Face to attack her, only to be stopped by Briony's command. Eldric was hurt and betrayed that she would keep this a secret, but she made him understand why by reminding him of what happens to witches in Swampsea. She then told him that only Stepmother knew besides him. She implied it, but never says outright that she was a witch.

Briony also spoke about how Eldric had left her to talk to Leanne, and he explained to her that he found Leanne interesting only when she was around him. This intrigued Briony and she began to write down what he said about Leanne. While writing, Briony realized that Leanne was a Dark Muse. Eldric said that he would never believe that, even when Briony brought up the fact that he had only recovered from his illness when she had left. They had both been drinking, but Briony much more than Eldric and she was beginning to lose her inhibitions. She asked him if he had kissed Leanne, or if he had kissed other women. He responded by saying that she has had too much to drink. They flirted back and forth for a bit, until Eldric decided she needed to go home. He walked her home and took her up to her bed. She awoke the next morning remembering only that she had said to Eldric in her stupor "Give us a kiss, then, love!" and that he was in incredible danger if he didn't admit that Leanne was a Dark Muse.

Analysis

The analysis for this section of the novel is on relationships, specifically romantic ones and how there is both a need for clear definition of roles and expectations alongside consent from both parties. Starting with communication between the two members of a relationship, there is the relationship between Briony and Eldric. While they have had sexual tension for the majority of the novel, this is never fully acted upon until one kiss on Blackberry Night, something that neither of them want to discuss afterwards. It is strange that a couple wouldn't talk about an event that was seemingly positive for the both of them, but that is the choice that they made. The choice to not define themselves in a relationship or discuss at all what had happened leads to uncertainty on the part of Briony, enough so that she feels jealous about Eldric's relationship with Leanne, even calling him out for abandoning her and asking if he had ever kissed her. This uncertainty and questioning makes sense if they are in a defined relationship, but because they are not it comes off as strange and unwarranted, as if Briony believes that he needs to have a certain type of loyalty to her only.

The idea of unconfirmed loyalty comes into play in a major way with Cecil, as he had been hinting at his jealousy and his desire to be with Briony since the beginning of the



novel while she had given him no reason to believe that she was his. He tells her that he thought they had an understanding, some type of bond but she clearly does not agree. His expectations and need to get what he wants culminates in Cecil's utter ignoring of any kind of consent or desire on the part of Briony as he will use his masculinity to attempt to get exactly what he wants no matter if she is a willing or active participant in it. His attempted sexual assault comes as somewhat of a shock to the reader, as much as it did to Briony, who had always viewed him as rather enamored with her but not willing to go to such lengths. He proves himself to be an unstable and dangerous individual and more or less loses any possible chance of being with Briony. He does not make any kind of amends after the fact, only showing that he is still insanely pursuing her, even threatening her after the fact. In this age of consent awareness, this abusive relationship hits very hard as Cecil is the perfect example of a man who had an image in his mind and would not let the real world alter it.

Eldric is in a similarly abusive relationship with Leanne, as he is quite literally under a spell where he feels happy around her, but is unable to realize that she is just using him to drain him of his energy, creativity and life. After some time in her company he falls ill, almost fatally ill at times, as a result of her draining him of all energy and life. In the real world this strongly represents a one-sided relationship, where one party gives and gives to the other in return for fleeting happiness followed by periods of sadness and emptiness. This relationship is one that is repeated numerous times in the novel, as Stepmother had the same relationship with Father, as well as Briony and Rose. In fact, she left Briony so warped and twisted as a result of her abuse that Briony believes not only she is a witch, but that she is wicked, incapable of love and responsible for every single bad thing that happens to her or the people that she is close to.

Discussion Question 1

What did the Dead Hand's attack suggest about Briony's status as a witch?

Discussion Question 2

What was the true meaning behind Rose's strange questions about what midnight and right before look like?

Discussion Question 3

How did Cecil justify his actions on Blackberry Night?

Vocabulary

elude, insinuate, pursuit, mangled, acquainted, ecstasy, frolic, oblique, soppy, tweed, mortify, indulge, abstruse



Chapters 25-32: The Motorcar Picnic - The Second Chime

Summary

That afternoon Tiddy Rex knocked at the door, requesting that Briony meet Eldric in the square for a surprise, stating that Rose, too, was invited. Briony went along with it, even though she knew that Rose does not generally enjoy surprises. The surprise was a motorcar, beautiful and totally foreign to the girls. He drove them to a picnic that was prepared by Pearl. While they were enjoying their time, Leanne arrived, looking as beautiful as ever. Rose alerted the group to her arrival, catching a glimpse of her green dress in the distance. Leanne joined them, despite the fact that Briony clearly did not want her there. Rose began to question her, and it became clear that Eldric was making fun of Leanne subtly in order to appease Briony. Rose showed the group a picture she had made, one with two babies in it, her and Briony. The time of night in the picture was just before midnight and after midnight, as there were two moons drawn by Rose. Briony did not understand the meaning, and Rose was not willing to yet share her secret, the one she had been talking about since the beginning of the story. Leanne revealed a secret of her own, that she worked well with artists, being able to get them to achieve the highest level of their creativity in her presence. This had a deeper meaning for Briony, who strongly believed that she had made no mistake in her claim that Leanne was a Dark Muse.

More time had passed, and Briony knocked on Eldric's bedroom door. He was slightly surprised by her arrival, as this was clearly not something the two of them had done often. She asked him if he owns a gun and if he could use it, and he answered that he could shoot and would find one. She asked him to bring the gun to the Feast of the Dead on Halloween, but gave him no other information. He told her that he believed he had finished with Leanne, although he was still unsure as to whether or not she was a Dark Muse. The two said they want to each share a secret with the other, Briony went first revealing to him that she was a witch. He asked her to prove it, and she attempted but failed to make fire appear. She told him about how she injured the spine of Stepmother by calling Mucky Face and he was unable to believe that either. Briony was hurt by the fact that she had revealed this to him, but knew that she only had to move forward to save her sister and the rest of the villagers.

It was Halloween night and the sky looked green. Briony and Eldric were masked, standing next to each other and discussing the events that were to follow. He informed her that he had ended the relationship with Leanne and that he loves Briony. She was surprised by this, but had no time to respond as the clock tower rang and she must go to the ghost children.

Briony summoned them and they all arose and walked with her, and they headed back towards the villagers. They called out that they had been poisoned by the Boggy Mun,



that the drainage of the swamp was the cause of the swamp cough, which had been sent by the Boggy Mun. Stepmother also arises from the grave, the Unquiet Spirit that the Reeds had discussed earlier. She told Briony that she was one of the Old Ones and announced to the town that Briony was her murderer, disappearing into a pile of disintegrating petals. The crowd drove itself into a frenzy, calling for the hanging of Briony. Cecil attempted to help her, which in close conjunction to Stepmother's rise made it clear to Briony that the favor that Cecil had done for her in the past was poisoning Stepmother. Eldric saved her for the moment by shooting his gun first into the air and second into the Constable's shoulder. He threatened he would do it again, but the crowd had no fear and pushed forward towards Briony, who ran away.

She ran into the swamp where she encountered Mucky Face yet again, warning her that Eldric had been taken by the Dead Hand while he was searching for her. She ran over to help him but was unable to save all of him, leaving his right hand to the Dead Hand but saving his arm. She helped him up, he was greatly injured. They walked together towards the town to bring him to Dr. Rannigan, where Briony knew that she would also be arrested and taken to court for being a witch. On the walk she thought about telling him she loved him too, but was unable to do so.

More time has passed, and it is now the last day of her trial, the present-day where Briony began this account. She has admitted to everything she has been accused of, and has made no real effort to recover from the strains of her escape and rescue of Eldric. This angers Dr. Rannigan greatly as he believes, justly, that she has already given up. The Chime Child asks her again if she believes herself guilty or innocent and she responds guilty. She also admits that she had never suspected Stepmother could have possibly been one of the Old Ones, removing the possibility of the Judge removing that charge because it was an Old One she had killed. Eldric steps in, and offers to write down the effects that Stepmother had on her, in the same manner that Briony had written down the effects that Leanne had had on him, piling up large amounts of information, including that Stepmother had kept her at writing even when she was very ill, making her feel closer and closer to death. She then tells him about the fire, that she has two memories. Eldric urges her to speak on only the first one, where she had matches, paraffin and kindling with her and set the fire in that way.

Next, Father rises and states that Briony could have had no impact on the way that Rose is, as there was never any injury, she was born that way. Eldric then suggests outright that Stepmother was a Dark Muse, Father backs it up saying that he realized it a year into their relationship. They then attempt to tell Briony that she might not be a witch, to which she asks how she has second sight. Rose then steps up, offering to tell her secret, the one she had kept for the entire novel. She reveals that there was a register that the midwife who had birthed Briony had written. Inside, it is written that Briony was born in the middle of November 1st and 2nd. Stepmother had kept it a secret so she could make Briony believe she was a witch and not a Chime Child. The Judge asks to see the register, but has already agreed that the trial is over.

Briony leaves the courthouse, Brownie by her side. She walks past a fading Leanne on the courthouse steps, which makes her realize the importance of what had happened.



Stepmother, whom she had believed loved her with unconditional love, was feeding on her writing. She begins to cry, until Eldric interrupts her.

Briony is now struggling with the idea that she likes herself, fighting with her own conditioned mind that tells her that she is a witch and wicked. It is March and Briony tells herself that this transition would be easier if Eldric would give her some positive feedback. She is worried about him, worried that he has lost some of his confidence along with his hand. Eldric brings Rose in and they begin to paint together, this time they color of the motorcar a bright red cardinal. Father had cared for her during her illness even telling her he loved her on several occasions. Briony wishes that Eldric would be as positive to her as Stepmother was negative, to cancel out all of the harm that had been done to her. Tiddy Rex arrives and they induct him into the new gang, the Fearsome Four (Rose also included). She mentions that she has a new tutor now, James Bellingham.

That night Briony sneaks outside and walks along the swamp, She had written herself into an understanding that she had to burn her hand to lose stepmother's curse, but now she is unable to do so. She calls upon the reed spirits, talking to them and promising to write down their stories, understanding the importance of keeping their experiences and tales eternal. She thinks about how writing gives people meaning, finding their own immortality within their mortality. The Old Ones will die soon, she believes that the machines and industry that is coming will kill them and there is no way of really stopping it. Only the stories will remain, which highlights even more their importance.

The motorcar rolls up besides Briony and Eldric exits. They talk about his hand and Briony makes comments that suggest that Eldric no longer could take on Cecil, making Eldric feel emasculated. He gets close to her and tries to unbutton her sweater, which reminds her of Cecil. She breaks away and Eldric starts crying. He tells her that he is unsure of himself, that he believes Briony doesn't love him since he lost his hand. He asks her what she loves a person for. She responds by saying that she loves a person for all of the reasons that Eldric has made her feel over the past months. Briony feels an opening in her heart, an emotional outpouring that she has never felt before. He tells her he loves her, and this opens up an entirely new world for Briony, one she has never felt before.

Analysis

The first aspect of the section that needs to be looked at is the two-part sacrifice that Briony makes in order to save her sister and the village as a whole. The first part is that by simply walking with the ghost children and having them speak to the town, the only possible answer that the town can come up with for this ability is that she is a witch. There is an immediate response from the crowd when they realize that Briony is responsible for these ghost children, and she is at first not entirely ready to sacrifice her life. This in of itself shows a huge leap from the Briony of early chapters, who was more than willing to give up her life a day after hearing the Boggy Mun say he was responsible for the swamp cough.



This new-found value in her life is found in Eldric, as it is in direct conjunction with his arrival and the beginning of their friendship. She tasked Eldric as her protector, arming him with a gun to cover her escape into the swamp, and only fully sacrificing herself to save Eldric after he is attacked by the Dead Hand. This proves that the reason for her living at this point is almost entirely Eldric, as with him living she has the willpower to run away and attempt to fight the town to live. However, when it becomes clear that she needs to bring him back to the village in order to save his life, she makes the sacrifice willingly, but then reverts to her old mentality regarding her self-worth. She admits to everything charged of her in the courthouse, adding more hardship by choosing to remain in jail and refusing medical treatment, willing to die at the end of the trial if she could just be declared guilty.

Of course, during the trial Stepmother's conditioning is revealed, and Briony's life is saved. This is happy in of itself, but the author makes a great choice in not letting the novel simply end here. By moving forward several months and allowing for Briony to become healthy, another door is opened that takes a look at how someone who has hated themselves, who has reminded themselves of the lack of love in their life for so long can learn to love and live again. Briony struggles greatly with her new-found self-worth, as she finds it very difficult to shut out the false memories that Stepmother had placed in her mind, and open up the emotions that she had quite simply never used in an outward and open sense.

She expresses her need for Eldric especially to tell her that he loves her, that she is wonderful as she still associates a large part of her worth with him. He represents almost a maternal presence in her life, providing her with the unconditional love that she needed in order to perform the task to save the village and to live on now. In a great twist, she is able to give back to Eldric while opening up her own ability to share love by helping him with his own insecurity and lack of masculine feeling due to his lack of hand. She has a long speech in which she thanks and states that she loves all of these unique and individual actions that Eldric had done for her, each word opening up her heart more and more. At the end of the novel, when Eldric tells her she loves him, she equates it as opening a new door for her life, where her new worldview could grow. It is great that the author does it in this way, making it very clear that while this will not be easy for either protagonist, it is necessary and they are willing to work on it together, as they both have had self-worth issues in the past. In this way, one of the main points that the novel makes is that a good relationship should not seem perfect or even easy, it is a journey on which both parties need to consent to the difficulties and joys that will be found along the way.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Briony put Eldric's life at risk when she brought the ghost children into town?



Discussion Question 2

What are the signs that allow Briony to realize Stepmother was a Dark Muse?

Discussion Question 3

Does Briony believe that the swamp can live on for another hundred years?

Vocabulary

motorcar, sculpt, essence, witticism, declension, genetic, hypothetical, candlewick, sluice, barkeep, stolid, sterilized, abdominal, ingest, ligament, candor, exculpatory, overabundance, robust, economic, irrelevant, dazzle



Characters

Briony Larkin

Briony Larkin is the main protagonist as well as narrator of the novel. She is the daughter of Father Larkin and the sister of Rose. Her own mother died in childbirth with her sister, Rose, and she spent her childhood with Stepmother until her untimely death due to arsenic poisoning.

Briony, for all of her life, has been able to speak with the Old Ones and began to write stories about them, detailing their past and various escapades. She also writes for her sister Rose, who really enjoys being placed into Briony's various fairy-tales. The Stepmother is responsible for Briony's entire worldview, making her believe that she burned down the library not with matches and kindling but with her witchly powers, and telling her that the reasons she can speak with the Old Ones is due to her also being an Old One. At the same time, Briony believes that Stepmother really does love her and is simply looking out for her, calling to memory frequently how she saved Briony from the fire, displaying the strength that only a mother's love could.

Throughout the novel Briony is searching for this love, something that she has been robbed of by the death of her birth mother, and the absence of Father due to his grief. Stepmother then instills the idea into the mind of Briony that she is an evil person, dangerous to all those around her and can no longer talk to the Old Ones, because if she does she will just hurt people more. She also draws Briony and Rose away from their Father, telling them that he does not understand women, and that they do not need to listen to him. Briony also believes that she has called Mucky Face to hurt Stepmother on one occasion, due to her jealousy of Stepmother's relationship with Rose.

As a result of this conditioning, Briony constantly reminds herself that not only is she incapable of being loved by anyone but that she also cannot love anyone herself, because witches do not love. She substitutes lust and other words when she feels like she could be feeling some sort of love.

This conditioning and life view has a large effect on Briony's personal relationships, as she is led to believe that she is responsible for Rose's condition as well as her swamp cough, and she is unable to let herself love Rose despite strong feelings to that degree. She is unable to relate to Father, as he broke off communication a year into the marriage to Stepmother and stopped their bonding time playing music and singing together. This has such a great effect on Briony's view of him, that when he breaks out of his grief and attempts to sing with her again she rejects him twice.

It is only with Eldric that she is able to start to break down the emotional barriers that she has set up, with Eldric serving as the closest thing to unconditional love that she has ever experienced. It takes a large amount of effort on both of their parts, however, as she is reluctant to admit her own feelings towards him. He is the only person that she



tells is a witch, bringing him into the loop regarding her need to reveal the reason for the swamp cough. There is a real level of trust between them, and this leads to a friendship later on.

Briony also has a large amount of responsibility; not only is she responsible for taking care of Rose, she has to constantly fend off the aggressive sexual advances of Cecil that escalate all the way to rape, despite her never showing any interest in him. She also is the only individual in the village that knows the cure to the swamp cough, the one that had been leveled onto the children by the Boggy Mun. She makes a deal with him in order to save her sister, one that requires her to commit vandalism on the pump stations and eventually reveal to the town that she is a witch by telling them this information through the ghosts of the dead children.

Eldric Clayborne

Eldric enters the novel as the typical bad-boy; he had been expelled from his school in London for throwing a rock through the stained glass window of a chapel. He has moved with his father to Swampsea in order to curb his rebellious spirit and perhaps insert some type of morals into his life. He moves into the Parsonage with the Larkins, staying in Stepmother's old room. He is intriguing to Briony and the two quickly become friends, forming the Bad Boys club, studying together as well as his teaching her to box. He is a kind and generous individual, spending large amounts with Rose who is enamored by his fidgetings, when he creates things out of common objects. It is clear that there is some type of chemistry between him and Briony, but this does not come to any sort of fruition until Blackberry Night when he saves her from an attempted rape by Cecil and kisses her.

The two do not really discuss this event until later in the novel when Eldric reveals that he loves Briony. Throughout all of this he shifts from health to illness due to his time with the Dark Muse Leanne, who is draining him of his energy through his fidgetings. He does not believe Briony at first when she tells him that Leanne is a Muse, but eventually rejects Leanne upon his realization that his health and illness are correlated with his time spent around her. He helps Briony somewhat during her reveal of her being a witch, but ends up needing to be carried back to town as a result of his "heroics".

At Briony's trial Eldric breaks the fact that Stepmother was an Old One to those involved, disproves some of the supposedly evil things that Briony had down, and also assists in Rose's revelation that Briony is not a witch but a Chime Child. The novel closes with an interaction between him and Briony where he expresses his love again and is able to break down her emotional walls. He plays the part of the unconditional love, replacing Briony's absence of a real mother.

Rose Larkin

Rose Larkin is the daughter of Father and younger sister of Briony. She was born with some type of mental disability, one that allows her to have a large amount of focus on



certain aspects of her life such as counting steps, her wardrobe (she loves to match) and her art while at the same time being prone to screaming fits and generally unable to take care of herself. Briony has agreed to take on the task of protecting Rose, and does an admirable job.

Rose has a friend named Robert with whom she enjoys to spend a lot of her time. Her relationship with Briony has faded much in the same way as that of Father, as they are no longer as close as they had been due to a bit of resentment on the part of Briony. Rose is a sweet girl, who does care very deeply about her sister and throughout the novel attempts to help her with her self-esteem issues in her own way. Rose carries the most important secret of the entire novel and attempts to help Briony guess it without her revealing it outright, be it through words or drawing. Eldric is the one who is able to grasp the truth, that Briony is another Chime Child.

Father Larkin

Father is the parson/pastor of the only religious institute in the town of Swampsea. He serves as the religious protector of the community, supplying them with Bible Balls in order to ward off the Old Ones in the swamp. During the novel he is a rather sad and awkward individual, showing the pain and suffering he has faced during the deaths of both of his wives, the second from an apparent suicide. He no longer has a real relationship with either of his two daughters, having drawn away from both of them leading to a silence between them that is unbearable. What makes this worse is that he and Briony disagreed publicly on the cause of death for Stepmother, Briony stating in the inquest that suicide could never have been an option for her, more or less accusing Father of murder.

Father had given up his violin a year into the relationship with Stepmother, and when he brings it back three years later (present time in the time of the novel) Briony is hurt and feels betrayed by his lack of communication with her and his lack of respect for their past relationship, so she refuses to sing with him.

Father is both an absent and heavily involved father figure, worried about Briony's potential relationship with Eldric but at the same time completely fine with her abandonment of university in order to stay home and take care of Rose. It is later revealed that he knew Stepmother was a Dark Muse a year into the relationship, but because he believed that Dark Muses could not effect women, he let her stay in the house. This explains his giving up of the violin and his art. He apologizes to Briony for his lack of communication and their relationship is on the road to recovery by the end of the novel.

Stepmother

Stepmother, her real name is never said, is the second wife of Father after his first and mother of his children passed away in childbirth. Stepmother is depicted at first as a wonderful woman, who empowered Rose and Briony to step up to Father and practice



their gifts, Briony for writing and Rose for drawing. She also let Briony know that she was a witch, which helps Briony to stop using her powers for evil. After Briony (apparently) calls Mucky Face onto her Stepmother out of jealousy, the Stepmother becomes injured and ill eventually dying of an arsenic overdose. It is later revealed that she was a Dark Muse the entire time, and what she was actually doing was lowering Briony's self-esteem and self love in order to increase her artistic production and keep her in the house with her.

Pearl Miller

Pearl Whitby (her maiden name, as Briony often forgets that she is now married) is the maid and caretaker of Rose in the house, although it seems to Briony that she does more work with Rose than Pearl, despite not being paid. She cooks for everyone but does not have a large social role in the meals or the family in general. She pops in and out of the story, more or less related only to food.

Cecil Trumpington

Cecil is the attractive but unintelligent suitor of Briony for the majority of the novel, despite her never giving him any inclination of interest. He can be humorous at times, but for the most part serves as a source of amusement for her in his general stupidity.

It is only after Eldric arrives that Cecil's jealousy towards him starts and his attitude towards Briony shifts to become more and more sinister, finally resulting in an attempted rape whilst drunk during Blackberry Night. It is later revealed that he has been using arsenic, which explains his increased hormones and masculinity but does not excuse his actions in the eyes of Briony. He remains a threat to her throughout the novel, but makes no further moves. It is also revealed that he is the one who killed the Stepmother, after a conversation with Briony in which he misunderstood exactly what she was asking of him.

Mr. Clayborne

Mr. Clayborne is the London Man responsible for the draining of the swamp, setting up pump stations in order to build on the land in the future. He is the enemy of the Boggy Mun, and the representation of industrialization for this novel. He is also the protective father of Eldric, having decided to take him out of London and placing him in the parsonage in order that he will become less of a bad boy.

Mr. "Dreary" Drury

Mr. Drury (or Dreary as referred to by Eldric and later Briony) is Eldric's new tutor upon his arrival to Swampsea. He is an American and does not believe in the Old Ones, choosing not to take a Bible Ball with him into the swamp and mocking the very fear that



the others have. This results in his being spooked by the spirits and he drowns in the swamp the first time he enters.

Mr. Fitzgerald "Fitz"

Mr. Fitzgerald or "Fitz" as he is called by Briony was her old tutor, a man that she respected for everything he did except for his strange friendship with Cecil, a known buffoon and overly masculine individual. He has been sent away at the start of the novel by Father, for reasons unknown. Briony later discovers that he was an arsenic user along with Cecil explaining both their friendship and the reason for which he was sent away.

Tiddy Rex

Tiddy Rex is simply a friendly and helpful boy with the swamp cough, the fatal disease that the Boggy Mun has placed on numerous children in order to alert the town of the drainage of the swamp. He serves first as a mirror for Briony to see if Rose also has the swamp cough, and secondarily as a type of messenger when he begins a slight recovery.

Swamp Reeve

Swamp Reeve is another character who, while having a minimal role, is very respected by the community in his statements. He is a human, but knows the swamp like the back of his hand and serves as the guide and source of information for the natural dangers that occur within. In terms of importance, he is viewed as the second biggest threat to Briony by Eldric when she reveals herself to be a witch, do to the power his words can have on the community.

The Constable

The Constable plays a minor role in the novel, only appearing in two occasions. The first is when he questions Rose, Briony and Eldric about the witches they had encountered in the swamp, and the second is when he attempts to arrest Briony resulting in Eldric shooting him to protect her (all turning out legal in the end).

Dr. Rannigan

Dr. Rannigan plays the role of the village doctor and nothing more for the majority of the novel. He cared for Stepmother, Briony, Eldric, Rose and others throughout. It is at the end of the novel when his personality comes out in his disappointment and rage at Briony for not wanting to recover during her trial, enraged at her acceptance of a fate that had not yet been decided.



Robert the Fireman

Robert is Rose's truest friend, he is much older than her but is incredibly gentle and kind with her mental condition. She trusts him with everything and becomes very sad when he is not around. He is responsible for saving Briony's life at trial when he convinces Rose to reveal her biggest secret, that Briony was born between the 1st and 2nd of November and is, therefore, a Chime Child.

Mad Tom

Mad Tom is the village madman, more or less harmless, but at times he antagonizes the members of the community verbally, causing him to be generally avoided. His one contribution to the plot of the story is when he notices Leanne appear behind Briony and Eldric, she had come up silently and without warning.

Judge Trumpington

Judge Trumpington is arguably the most powerful individual in town as, although he takes the advice of the Chime Child, the final decision in a trial is his alone. He is the father of Cecil, but is nothing like his son. He is a respectable man who truly looks out for the good of Swampsea, taking into account fully every aspect of a trial and the possible repercussions of erring.

Leanne

Leanne is introduced as a woman who has been greatly effected by witches and Old Ones in the past, as they have been responsible for the death of multiple members of her family including her uncle. She is described as a witch-huntress, but not in the physical way. She simply finds them at trial and watches the trial and the subsequent hanging.

Leanne quickly latches onto Eldric and they begin a romance. It is later revealed that she is a Dark Muse, feeding off of Eldric's little creations. Once Briony realizes this, Leanne attempts to kill her, but Briony is able to send away Mucky Face. Eldric eventually believes Briony that Leanne is a Dark Muse and sends her away, where she wastes away outside of the courthouse.

James Bellingham

James Bellingham is to be the new tutor for Briony in the events that will happen after the novel. While he is never introduced physically to the reader, his presence demonstrates a growth of hope for Briony in her future, and the possibility of university and a life beyond the swamp.



Chime Child or Mrs. Gurnsey

The Chime Child or, as she is called by the humans, Mrs. Gurnsey was born betwixt both the world of the living and the dead by being born in the middle of midnight in between two days. She has the ability to speak with the Old Ones, which gives her a great power and help to the community. She is one of the two individuals responsible for the trials and judgments passed on Old Ones in the town, as she has a large resource of information that the rest of the town simply does not. She acts as the mediator and go-between and, while making mistakes from time to time, and she is generally trusted and relied upon by the town.

Mucky Face

Mucky Face is the personification of the river itself, in it's power and danger. He is more of a minion than a real Old One, as he can be ordered around by all of the other Old Ones. Stepmother called him to attack herself, although Briony believed that she was the one who had called him, and Leanne calls him to attack Briony.

The Brownie

The Brownie is the closest thing to a friend that Briony has among the old ones, he was her confidant in the past until Stepmother told Briony she was a witch and told her to never talk to the Brownie. Briony believes that he helped her to set fire to the library, while this is not the case.

The Boggy Mun

The Boggy Mun is the entity that personifies the swamp, he is the most powerful of the Old Ones in that area and he is enraged by the draining of his swamp and the loss of his life that he has been poisoning the members of the village with the Swamp Cough, a fatal illness. He uses this power in order to get Briony to tell the townspeople what is going on and save the swamp, but not before also cursing Rose. He is not exactly as villainous as the others but will stop at nothing to get his way.

The Dead Hand

The Dead Hand is one of the many dangers of the swamp, this being is a hand that latches onto a living hand, and if not stopped with break the hand, rip it off and continue up the arm until it's victim is dead. Briony is able to fend off the Hand when it attacks her, but not before it breaks all the bones in her right hand. She also gets it away from Eldric, but not before it takes off his hand.



The Bleeding Hearts

The Bleeding Hearts are another group of Old Ones who want desperately for Briony to write stories, they differ from the Reeds in that they do not seem very interested in stories about the Old Ones themselves but stories about Briony and Eldric, love stories.

Dark Muse

A Dark Muse, in this novel, is a type of Old One or witch that preys on primarily men. The Dark Muse will latch onto a man with artistic talent and drain him of that energy, feeding herself while at the same time killing him. This in turn, makes her more and more irresistible to the man, making it impossible for him to spend time apart from her. If she is unable to drain him fully or he stops his art, she must move onto the nearest blood relative. When she has run out of relatives, the Dark Muse fades away into dust.

Ghost Children

These are the ghosts of the children who had died of the swamp cough, they constantly call out to Briony for help and she is confused until she realizes the connection between the swamp cough and the draining of the swamp. They play a large role in the salvation of future children, as Briony uses them to drive home the seriousness of her claim regarding the swamp cough to the village.

Mother

Although never met by the reader, she is the mother of Briony and Rose, and the first husband of Father. She is described very briefly, more in a sense of Briony's longing for her than anything else. She lives on in the novel through her belongings, such as the piano and the rocking chair.



Symbols and Symbolism

Stories

The stories in this case refer to those written about the Old Ones, as well as referring to Briony's skill and talent as a writer. In a greater sense they represent the wisdom and knowledge of those older, something that will be lost with their death. This is symbolized by the stories that Briony writes as she comes to understand that what she does for them not only pleases them but also supports her society and helps it to continue to grow towards the future, even as the future tries to stop this from happening.

Bible Ball

The Bible Ball is the physical item that stops the people of the Swampsea from being taken by the Old Ones. It also symbolizes their faith in a greater power, that through this crumpled up piece of paper they can be saved from their enemies and live without fear. Without it they are in incredible danger, despite how simple an object it is, it is the symbolization that gives it its power.

The Swamp

The swamp represents the old guard and nature. It is the physical representation of the world pre-industrialization and pre-common knowledge. This swamp is one of confusion and strange beings but also one of incredible beauty in its natural splendor. It wants to protect itself and the reaction of the Boggy Mun against the draining is the personification of nature resisting against the mechanization of the world.

Burnt Library

The burnt library symbolizes the rejection of the Dark Muse by Briony, even though she was unaware of the Stepmother's real identity. By burning her creations, however, she also burned all of the history of the Old Ones essentially sending them into a frenzy, as they need to have their history on paper in order to live past their imminent death.

Red Hair

The red hair of Nelly Daws and how it differs from that of the actual witch represents how the court system can overlook important details in the interest of finding a criminal or for the general security of the town. Even in a more primitive justice system based on honesty and trust, they still feel the need to typecast and punish individuals who fit the bill, despite facts pointing to the obvious.



The Motor-Car

The Motor-Car represents the first arrival of industrialization to the town, it shocks the residents with its beauty and strangeness. It is completely different than anything they are used to, and as a result they are somewhat drawn to it. Briony fails to grasp the correlation between the car and the draining of the swamp until the very end of the novel, but when she does she understands the inevitability of the swamp, and how the motor car is a large part of that.

The Old Ones

The Old Ones are almost semi-deities in the village of the Swampsea, they have the ability to mess with the lives of the villagers to near fatal degrees in order to simply be evil or to serve their own purposes, as the Boggy Mun does. They are sacrificed to by Briony, and the villagers live in constant fear of their power while also appreciating the balanced life they share.

Fire and Water

Fire and Water are the two most powerful and dangerous elements, and in this novel both of them are used by Briony apparently as a result of her witchly powers. But while the water itself could have been a result of these primitive powers, the fire itself was man-made and so when the library becomes burnt it is a symbol of man killing the past.

The Swampcough

The swampcough represents the lack of modern science in their society, as they are unable to heal it through the doctor, but only through reaching out to the primitive beings that rule their swamp. This places their village in a world even prior to the time of the novel.

The Bitch

The Bitch symbolizes the wind, it is the personification of the wind, and can be called by the Old Ones to do their bidding. It represents the semi-pagan society that they have created, where they refer to elements of nature as almost living creatures.

Briony and Rose

Their names symbolize their relationship, the rose and the vine. Rose is the pretty flower and Briony is her protector. It was the choice of their parents, and symbolizes the effect that names can have on children who have no choice in the selection process.



Settings

The Swamp

The swamp is the heart of this novel, it is where the Old Ones live and have lived for more than 200 years. It is the only place where Briony feels truly herself and truly at home despite her living at the parsonage. The swamp is a physical representation of nature and the old world, one that existed and exists without technology or machines, and needs to exist in order to sustain the spirits and beings that dwell there. It is also an incredibly dangerous place, as any villager who enters is at danger of attack or trick if they do not carry with them their bible ball. It is the epitome of how nature is both beautiful and dangerous at all times.

London

London is the representation of the industrialized world, it is the big city where no one in the village has been to save the Claybornes. Eldric studied there before he became expelled, and his father chose to bring him to Swampsea in order to get him away from some of the amoral elements of a city. Boggy Mun refers to the one's draining his swamp as from London, as he and the novel associates industrialization of nature as something to be associated with London. It is both a magical and foreboding location, one that the villagers can hardly imagine even exists, and yet it has control and power even far away from it's machinery.

The Alehouse

The alehouse is where everyone in the village gathers after a big event, be it a courthouse meeting, a hanging or a funeral. Briony, Eldric and Cecil spend significant amounts of time here, and it is here where Briony becomes overly drunk and asks Eldric embarrassing questions about his sexual past. It serves as the public location where the characters have more control over their surroundings, as they are not at home but neither are they in the dangerous swamp.

Swampsea

Swampsea is the name of the small backwards village, one that deals regularly with witches and the like, even having to carry around pieces of the Bible in order to avoid being attacked. It is a simplistic place, relying heavily on trust of one another in it's justice system, a two-man judgment: The Chime Child and Judge Trumpington who decide the fate of possible witches and the like. It is a town that has completely accepted life as it is there and has no interest in changing anything or recognizing the implausibility of the fact that witches exist. It is also governed by one religion, of which Father is the pastor, but there are no instances of service besides the funeral.



The Courthouse

This is the place where the audience meets Leanne, the witch huntress as well as the location of the traumatic trial of stepmother, one that haunts the location for Briony. It is also the location of any and all trials, most of which having to do with witches. It is here where Nelly Daws is condemned and Briony saved. It has a negative energy in the novel, because Briony is plagued not only with memories of her stepmother whilst inside the walls but also by the failings of the judgment team with regards to Nelly.

The Larkin Parsonage

This is the house of the Larkin family, one that is filled with silence and sadness until the arrival of Eldric. The family and the house have a dark past, as Briony's mother passed away while she gave birth to Rose and stepmother whom Briony had loved at the time turned out to be a Dark Muse, who forced Father to put away his music and Briony her writing in order to rid themselves of her presence. It is also a confining and strict place, as when Briony is here she has to watch over Rose nearly always and deal with the awkwardness between herself and Father, sometimes biting in his lack of participation and at other times his over participation in her life. With the arrival of Eldric the house begins to take on new life, as his positive energy and friendliness give those within a level of hope.

Blackberry Night

This is a modern version of the night of Bacchus in roman times or that of Dionysus for the ancient Greeks, it is a night of revelry for the youth of the village. They drink, lose their clothing and run around the swamp and, unsurprisingly, nine months later there are a multitude of children born. This is an ancient and raw ritual that dates back thousands of years, and helps to date this community in terms of their connection to nature and the past, in that this is a generally accepted night.



Themes and Motifs

Self-Esteem

Self-Esteem plays an enormous role in the thoughts and actions of the narrative protagonist, Briony Larkin. She has been almost warped from birth into a certain role, and from then on has fulfilled this role as well as having more and more negativity placed onto her. Her name meaning the thorny vine to which the rose is attached is not a great start, as her sister being named Rose makes it very clear as to which of the sisters is the one to be protected, and the one who will be used as the protector. Since her mother died with Rose's birth, the only real maternal presence she had in her life was from her stepmother who did nothing but degrade and lower her self image to horrible degrees while making it seem like she loved her. Stepmother was able to convince Briony that she was the only one who loved her and cared about her. Stepmother made Briony believe that she was a witch and responsible for her sister's mental condition, her own accident, as well as the burning of the library.

This leads to the immense feelings of guilt that Briony feels at all times, as she believes that almost everything that goes badly has to be her fault due to her being a witch. Further than this, Stepmother made Briony believe that she was incapable of love due to the fact that she is a witch, unable to love her sister and unable to be loved by anyone else. There are numerous, almost uncountable, occasions in the novel where Briony reminds herself that she is evil, that she cannot love and this usually occurs in a moment when she is about to make a breakthrough and love someone or even herself. She is constantly taking one step forward and then pulling herself back as a result of the conditioning that Stepmother, a Dark Muse, gave her.

Eldric has to deal with self-esteem in a different way, in terms of how he defines his self-worth. In being expelled from the university he can no longer find real worth in his intelligence and has to move on to his masculinity and charm. His meeting of Leanne comes at a vulnerable time in his life, and she makes him feel wonderful and worth something even for his tiny fidgetings, a feeling that makes him very reluctant to let her go even though he loves Briony more and understands that Leanne could be another Dark Muse.

Eldric is later emasculated by the loss of his hand, and attempts to redefine himself through sexual prowess, but Briony helps him to understand he has worth simply by being himself. At the same time she realizes the love that he has given her is enough to overcome years of her conditioning, and she is able to accept that she is capable of love both of herself and of someone else, even if she is not yet ready to say it.



Old vs. New

One of the larger overarching themes of this novel is the idea of the old, natural world and the coming of the industrial age in England. The swamp itself and the beings inside are clear representations of both the beauty and knowledge of nature, but at the same time it's ability to control and destroy. The point of contention regarding nature comes from how humanity deals with it, in choosing to work with nature and devise ways in which the two sides can work in commune, or simply removing the dangerous aspects of it and replacing it with technology, as represented by London and the draining of the swamp.

The people of the Swampsea have made no strides themselves with regards to suppressing nature or the Old Ones, while of course they have their way of protecting themselves from the dangers presented, they make no effort to cover up the swamp. They have even created a justice system that allows for the Old Ones to be tried justly alongside the humans, with the help of the Chime Child who has the ability to speak to both groups. It also appears that simply ignoring the swamp or attempting to brush away the dangers of nature is generally not a good idea, as the epitome of lack of belief or desire to conform, the American Mr. Drury, is eaten alive by the swamp due to his lack of desire to take a Bible ball.

This attitude is viewed in a different light by Mr. Clayborne and the rest of the men from London, as they have begun draining the swamp in order to build on it. They bring with them motorcars and the like, but the most important is this lack of respect for nature and the past in their drainage. There is no real need to do so, and the only result that it does have is angering the swamp which results in the literal deaths of multiple children of the town. It is in response to this that Briony becomes essentially a Wildlife Preserver, as she destroys pump stations and works to get the men from London to leave. She does this at first to save her sister, but later realizes that the real importance of her actions is through her preserving of both the natural order and, through her stories, the history and experience of the Old Ones. The resounding message that the author is trying to get across with this theme is that, while dangerous at times, nature and those older have experience and information that is necessary to preserve, for their sake and for the sake of the world in general.

Grief

Grief is a theme in this novel for many characters; there is Eldric and his grief over the loss of his hand, Briony over the loss of Stepmother and family relationship, and Father over the loss of his first wife, then his music and his second wife. The author displays this grief in many ways, focusing mostly on the way in which the characters decided to deal with this grief, and how this has a massive effect on their own lives and clearly on the lives of those closest to them.

Starting with Eldric, as his grief is the most simple and easy to explain, he feels that he has lost a bit of his own self when his land is lost and he is unable to regain the



relationship he had prior with Briony. As a result of this subtle change in his own psyche, Briony begins to treat him, partly due to her own guilt for the situation, as a fragile being. This makes him want to prove his masculinity, as he attempts to prove his virility and sexuality which only drives away Briony more. They are able to work through this, but it is one example of the way that the author uses reactions of grief and to another's grief in order to create rifts and strong characters.

Father, on the other hand, has a two-fold grief. The first is in the loss of his first wife, assumed love, and mother of his two children. This is the grief of a man who has lost much, and in the things he has gained, his children, he can only see the face of their mother. There is not much discussed about what he did to move past this, but his first decision was to marry Stepmother very soon after in order to support his children by giving them a mother again. Much like Leanne, Stepmother approached an individual in a weak state, taking advantage of his need to replace not only the wife in his own life but the mother to his children. The worst aspect of his grief is the grief in understanding that Stepmother is a Dark Muse, which forces him to give up his musical solace and eventually leads to her death. Unfortunately he did not tell his children that she was a Dark Muse, rather, he allowed her to live in the house and poison their minds, driving them away from him. It is only at the end of the novel that he can begin to understand and regret this decision, as he understands her ability to effect also women.

Briony has the most grief of any character, as she grieves the apparent murder of her stepmother in a way that no one else does, believing her to have really loved her and that this woman was the mother full of unconditional love that she had never experienced. She gives up everything - her education and future - in order to first care for Stepmother and then for Rose. Briony takes this grief to an even deeper level as she blames herself for every bad event that occurs for the town, for her family and for herself, believing herself to be the cause of her own grief, when this is not the case. This puts her into direct conflict with Father and their relationship shatters to the point that he is unable to fix it himself. It is only when she realizes the truth that she is able to move on from her past and realize that her grief was unfounded, and the blame placed on herself was as well.

Abusive Relationships

Abuse in relationships is one of the more adult themes that finds its way into this novel in two ways. There is the lack of consent on the part of the victims of a Dark Muse and the lack of consent between Briony and Cecil. The first occurs with numerous characters, and is the spirit world equivalent of drugging your victim, as the Dark Muse has a certain allure, whether it be sexual or not, that allows her to draw very close to the victim without the victim realizing. In fact, the victim almost wants to be around the Dark Muse itself after a point, not fully understanding the situation and simply desiring to be around someone that they believe is the best and most attractive around. This first happens with Father, as he is unable to really consent to the relationship or the marriage as any attraction is not true between them. Then it is Briony, and her strong desire for a mother and the love associated draws her to Stepmother who twists this



relationship first to her own desires and finally, in spite towards Briony who stopped writing, in an antagonizing way as a response to Briony being able to finally regain free will and reject her consent to her Stepmother.

It is this relationship that has the greatest effect on Briony, as she is unable to understand the reasons for Stepmother's actions, and only wishes to follow them as a type of unconditional love slave. With Rose it is even worse, because she is not only unable to make up her own mind with the Stepmother, she does not even have the mental capacity of your average human child.

The most applicable Dark Muse to a real world situation is Leanne, who preys on the sexuality of Eldric, making him attached to her at the hip while draining him of his energy and art in a type of continual unhealthy manner. He really struggles to break out of this, as someone would in a normal abusive relationship, because he feels as if he is truly gaining something from their being together.

Abusive relationships and the sub theme of consent come to the forefront with Cecil and his growing jealousy and possessive behavior towards Briony that results in attempted rape. He believes that there exists a kind of accord between them, and every minute that she spends with Eldric sets him off more and more, as he believes that he more or less owns her and Eldric is trying to steal her away. This, coupled with an arsenic addiction and high amounts of alcohol finally strip him of his inhibitions as he decides that if Briony will never agree to their being together he will simply take her as she is already his. This luckily does not work out for him, but it is a testament to the fact that his attitude and mannerisms are the same as the Dark Muses despite not having a predisposition to being this way. He is the real world Muse, someone who believes that they can take what they want whenever they want it regardless of who is involved.

Mental Illness

Mental Illness and the way in which the community and one's family deals with it is a central theme in this novel with regards to the character of Rose Larkin. Although it is never said outright, it is very clear that Rose has some sort of mental disability, and has had it since birth. Her mental state, while accepted by Briony takes a toll on her as she states at one point in the novel that it is difficult to think good thoughts about Rose while in her presence, due to the sheer willpower it takes to remain calm around her. Briony is the character that has the most experience with Rose and also the most responsibility towards her care, making sure she is dressed and remains for the most part calm.

Briony has had to give up large aspects of her future, the chance of going to university, in order to care for Rose, so there is a bit of resentment there even if she is not willing to say it. She also, due to her namesake, acts as her protector when members of the community decide to make fun of Rose. There was a song written about Rose that makes fun of her differing intelligence, and Briony hears some boys singing it, and responds protectively and violently towards them. Despite this one instance, the



community as a whole really does a fine job of making Rose feel comfortable and not an outsider.

Robert the Fireman, for example represents the perfect attitude to have towards Rose as he is really her true friend, spending hours with her and simply listening and conversing with her despite her quirks. Rose enjoys his company greatly, and she is disappointed when he is unable to spend time with her. Also, despite her natural resistance towards new people, Rose is very much friendly with Eldric who seems incredibly apt at distracting her and keeping her busy. He is a man without judgment, simply accepting her as she is to the point that she is able to trust the combined team of Robert and Eldric with the secret that will save Briony's life.



Styles

Point of View

Chime is written from the first person point of view of Briony Larkin, and shifts from her acting in certain sequences to thinking to herself and at times addressing the reader directly, as one does when writing a story. While there are certain details that she knows that the reader does not, these are more because she shares her past with the reader in a random manner, and these details are revealed in every flashback. The novel follows her story from the start, clearly focusing on how other characters and events have an impact on her, and how her decisions and reactions impact the novel as a whole. She speaks with the voice of a teenage girl, at times impetuous and sassy but at other times with a certain maturity and intelligence that can only come from the hardships she has faced in the past. She is very honest with the reader, and does her best (saying this nearly directly) that she is not trying to set up a traditional story where the girl gets the guy and everything is happy in the end. There are hardships and the like that are fully presented by Briony in a manner that never paints herself in an overly positive light, and at times, she presents herself in an overtly negative light.

This is because, as the reader finds out very early on, Briony struggles with self-esteem and self worth in a similar manner as the reader most likely does or has at some point, but to an incredibly high degree. This makes her not only a relatable character, as everyone has had self-image issues at some point in their life, but a very sympathetic character as there is no way that a girl of her age and general personality could be as evil as she makes herself out to be. She is quick to remind the reader that despite her outwards beauty, pale like a china doll, she is truly wicked, evil and incapable of love. This is somewhat of an interesting decision by the author, as it is rare to find a novel where the protagonist is not a villain, but views and describes every element of the story as if she were one. It leads to a very entertaining read, as the reader has the interesting task of feeling bad for Briony but at the same time the reader is meant not to agree with a large part of how Briony describes herself. In a way, this point of view allows the reader to attempt to work behind the scenes and fight through what she is saying to find the real truth, as it is difficult to accept that the voice through which the reader relates could have done all of these atrocious and spiteful things.

Briony's character is also one that, contrary to the majority of the reader's experience, only blame's herself for actions. In the everyday world it is incredibly rare to find one who takes on blame for aspects of life that one have not control over, it is far more common to pass blame off for these aspects and even ones over which one does have control to some higher power: a deity, parents, the government, or some other group that has an impact on one's life. The result is that this character allows the reader to re-examine the way in which aspects of their life have been dealt with, taking into account the way in which Briony is eager to take on the blame for everything that goes wrong, but nothing that goes right.



Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is a mix between the standard intellectual conversations between high school aged students, a lot of wit and quick responses, the highly matured thoughts of Briony due to the sadness she has faced in the past and the incredible responsibility she gains at the end of the novel, and the kind of mystical and more or less strange language regarding the swamp. The language and the manner in which everyone in Swampsea accepts the world in which they live is difficult at times to understand fully, especially at the beginning of the novel when it is not entirely clear if these are merely nicknames for natural events or truly beings with intelligence unlike anything in the real world.

The way in which the author makes it very clear that the reader will have to adapt to this world is through the introduction and quick death of Mr. Drury the American skeptic. He is the perfect representation of the reader at this point in the novel, and when he is unable to take at face value what everyone is telling him, he dies in the swamp. This wakes up the reader to the fact that this is indeed real and also very serious, it is not merely some backwards backwoods society, there are real dangers and everything that has been said and will be said has a real effect. The Old Ones themselves use a language that is not quite modern English, speaking very formally and with an accent that seems fitting to their age and their location in the swamp. The closest human that speaks as the Old Ones do is Swamp Reeve, a man who has adapted fully to the swamp. Even some of the lesser spirits find themselves unable to speak in normal parlance, choosing sing-song voices or speaking in rhymes.

The language of the rest of the people of the village is simple and normal, with the exception perhaps of Father who tends to speak in slightly higher language. The village itself does not seem to be living in a backwards world, which sets them at odds with the swamp itself. They have a justice system, religion and social events that are all organized around the harvest and other farming seasons. Rose has a specific language, as she is known to count the steps to things, talk about how people are dressed and ask strangely detailed questions which serves the purpose of differentiating her style of speech from the rest of the village, while allowing the reader to see that she is clearly still an intelligent individual. Briony and Eldric, on the other hand almost have a language of their own, relying more on looks and fake Latin than they do English. When they do speak normally, it is in the flirtatious and back and forth manner that the reader expects from two teenagers who seem almost destined to end up together.

Briony herself has instances of incredible depth in her thought, an example of which is when she thinks of the type of communion that she and Eldric share whilst drinking the communion wine. Her biggest instance of deep understanding is at the very end of the novel, when she realizes the importance of preserving the stories of the old ones, as well as the inevitability of their destruction with the coming of industrialization.



Structure

This novel is structured very much as a story that has been written by Briony for someone to read, as she makes it clear by her addressing the reader directly on numerous occasions. This allows her to, at times, jump out of the present tense in which she is telling the story to the future, speaking from a Briony who understands how this tale will end (although not all of it). An important distinction to make is that the future Briony who addresses the reader has not had the revelation regarding her self-esteem, and so it seems as if she is writing the story from her time spent in jail awaiting trial for her actions. She still talks herself down, and mentions her guilt when referring to the reader. It does not follow a fully chronological order, as Briony does not begin with Father meeting Stepmother and continuing from there, she decides to start the story with the arrival of Eldric, who has a much more positive effect on her life.

The flashbacks that the author uses in this novel are not traditional flashbacks for the most part, there are a few instances where the dialogue is directly from the past, but the author chooses to represent these past events in terms of how Briony can remember them, which is not very well. So it is more that Briony is sharing feelings from that time, and attempting to explain why it has an effect on her now than a direct explanation of the events as they displayed themselves. In this way, it is very much structured from the viewpoint of only Briony, as the reader has no opportunity to leave her to see the world from a neutral point of view.

In terms of plot, the novel moves along more or less smoothly although there are numerous subplots that make it not entirely clear what is the main drama of the novel. It is unclear if the reader should be following closely the secret that Rose hints at almost everytime she appears, Eldric's relationship with Briony, Eldric's relationship with Leanne, or the effect that Stepmother has on Briony. It is unclear if it is more important that Briony is a witch, or that she blames herself for all of these bad events or perhaps the main event is the draining of the lake and how this has started the swampcough. It is in the way that all of these plots are woven together that create a very believable story, because in everyday life it is impossible to simply drop everything to start a type of quest, such as stopping the draining of the lake. Briony has responsibilities such as caring for Rose that she needs to attend to, as well as supporting her own emotional growth, fending off the aggression of Cecil and the like.



Quotes

I still can't understand how Cecil and my old tutor, Fitz, got along so well, when we often called Fitz "the Genius" and avoided calling Cecil anything at all, so as not to be rude.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 8)

Importance: This quote has its importance in determining Briony and Cecil's backstory, how they both studied together and also the massive difference between their intelligence levels. This is why Briony is unable to be attracted to him, despite his physique. It is important when Cecil attempts to make a move later in the novel, and is rejected.

We laughed a lot and I grew warmer still, lovely and warm. I do realize that some of that warmth was due to the wine, but there was much more to it than that. There are two distinct aspects to Communion wine: one aspect is the wine itself, the other is the idea of communion. Wine is certainly warming, but communion is a great deal more so.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 15)

Importance: This quote is during Briony's time drinking Communion wine with Eldric, obviously outside of the church setting. This quote is a combination of her social growth with Eldric as well as her religious background, as she speaks a spiritual and Christian truth, but realizes not with her father the preacher but with her new-found friend, arguably the first.

It also left me with some brain-room to think about how to save Rose. One needs an entire absence of Rose to be able to think about her. If she died, I could think about saving her all the time.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 16)

Importance: This quote or more of a quip speaks volumes to the relationship between Briony and Rose, in that Briony is worn down and tired around Rose, and it is very difficult to think about her in a positive way, because her mere presence drains Briony of her energy and compassion at times. It also speaks to the level of guilt that Briony feels with regards to Rose, as what she means by thinking about her if she died, is that she would be plagued with her lack of ability to do anything to resolve the situation.

Nelly was no witch. She was a 19-year-old girl who, once, had danced round a Maypole. Judge Trumpington had been wrong; the Chime Child had been wrong. Couldn't they have listened to Rose about the different colors of red hair, Nelly's and the witch's?

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 14)

Importance: This quote outlines the justice system of the town, how they take into account certain behavior over empirical fact, that the color of their hair had not been at all alike. As a result two evils had been committed, the witch is allowed to continue to harass the public and an innocent girl had been killed by the town.



There are several kinds of silence. There's the silence of being alone, which I like well enough. Then there's the silence of one's father. The silence when you have nothing to say and he has nothing to say. The silence between you after the investigation of your stepmother's death.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote, occurring very early in the novel is important for establishing the relationship between Briony and her father. They are not close anymore, having been drawn apart by the trial of the Stepmother and having disagreed about the cause of her death. As a result their meals and day-to-day lives are awkward and filled with a silence that they can never break without discussion, but cannot discuss because of the silence.

How could I have forgotten that the swamp has no beginning? How could I have forgotten that the swamp simply seeps into existence? That it bleeds and weeps into existence?

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 6)

Importance: This is the first true description of the swamp as a seemingly never-ending piece of land that is impossible to avoid or ignore, it simply exists. It has always existed and would like to always exist, if it weren't for the London men trying to drain it. It has no beginning and will fight to the death to have no end.

Eldric acknowledged Cecil with a flat Chesire Cat smile, then tugged it into a real smile as he saluted Leanne with his glass. "To Leanne, the best companion a man could ever have." The guests broke into a chaos of laughter and teasing. Eldric blushed. Leanne didn't. Perhaps she runs on petrol, not blood.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 16)

Importance: This quote, while spoken by Briony, is important in describing both the characters of Eldric and Leanne. Eldric, for his ability to smoothly transfer from fake appeasement to genuine happiness as well as his embarrassment at the reaction to his sweet words. Leanne, as this is the foreboding of the fact that she is a witch as Briony believes that she is not really human, perhaps even robotic in her intense beauty and lack of human emotion.

You could write your way into happiness. It might not be the happiness you'd experience if Eldric pushed Leanne from a cliff, but there's a firefly glimmer in writing something that would please Rose.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 20)

Importance: This quote shows the love that Briony really does have for her sister and how she believes that while she is very rarely happy herself, she has the ability to create happiness for herself and others through her writing. This quote is even more important in light of the fact that the Dark Muse, Stepmother, understood this and attempted to drain Briony of her gift to create not only books but feelings themselves.



"You match because a rose is a flower and so is a briony?" "It's a vine," said Rose. "A poisonous vine," I said. "

-- Rose and Briony Larkin (chapter 25)

Importance: This quote is interesting in the way that Rose and Briony were named, as the rose is the flower worth protecting, and the thorny vine that encircles it is there to protect it, much like Briony and her harder exterior protecting the vulnerable Rose. It also speaks to Briony's self-esteem as she has never viewed herself as a flower or anything beautiful; how could she when she is named after a poisonous thorn?

I understand better, now, the appetite of the Old Ones for their story. The Chime Child has told me. She may have made a mistake with Nelly Daws, but she is terrifically clever and knows ever so much about the Old Ones. It's only the mortals, she says, who can write down a story, so that it doesn't vanish from memory. And of course, it's only we, the Chime Child and I, who can hear the Old Ones and set their story down."

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 32)

Importance: This quote defines one of the roles that Briony had already been fulfilling long before she knew she was a Chime Child. It also has a parallel effect in explaining the need to record and write down the knowledge and experiences of old things and individuals as once they die their knowledge dies with them.

I think about the Old Ones, they have a past but no history. I think about the inevitability of death, and whether it's not that very inevitability that inspires us to take photographs and make scrapbooks and tell stories. That that's how we humans find our way to immortality. This is not a new thought; I've had such thoughts before. But I have a new thought now. That that's how we find our way toward meaning. Meaning. If you're going to die, you want to find meaning in life.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 32)

Importance: This realization by Briony shines a whole new light on her existence and the importance of what she creates, that it is in her creations that she not only preserves her life longer than it is physically possible but also enriches her life while she is living by helping her find the meaning behind it.

I look about the Flats, I try to imagine it. Men will dig up the ancient trees. They'll shrivel the Flats into a toothless granny. They'll drain the swamp into a scab. The Old Ones will have nowhere to live. And if that doesn't kill them, industry will. The factories and hospitals and shipyards that are sure to come. The Old Ones can't survive a world filled with metal. They can't survive the clatter and growl of machinery.

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 32)

Importance: In the context of this novel this quotes on the literal challenges and changes that will effect the village upon the death of the Old Ones, how they are unable to deal with a world that is moving towards machines. In a more metaphysical sense the author is describing the industrialization of the world, and how nature itself is fading in light of new technology, and there is nothing to be done to stop it.



I lay my hand on my heart. Our parents teach us the very first things we learn. They teach us about hearts. What if I could be treated as though I were small again? What if I were mothered all over again? Might I get my heart back?

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 32)

Importance: This is the younger Briony speaking through her, the Briony that never had a real mother, only a leech of a stepmother. This is a Briony who is emotionally spent and craving love and the understanding of what that love is. She needs the unconditional love of a mother, and the closest she has come to it is in this moment with Eldric.

'I love you.' Word magic. If you say a word, it leaps out and becomes the truth. I love you. I believe it. I believe I am loveable. How can something as fragile as a world build a whole world?"

-- Briony Larkin (chapter 32)

Importance: This is Briony's big moment where she finally accepts herself and accepts that not only is she worthy of love that she is loved. This is an incredible moment for her, one that recreates her world and makes everything in the future infinitely better.