

Atonement was an Oscar favorite all year long. When it turned out the film was more complex and challenging than typical Oscar bait, it sadly lost momentum and might be left out of the nominations (which got announced January 22nd). Here a moment of **"For Your Consideration – Best Supporting Actress"**



THE AMBIGUOUS BRIONY TALLIS: *An Imaginative Egoist?*

Let me begin by professing my love for one of the great cinematic achievements of 2007: Atonement, elaborately directed by Joe Wright from Ian McEwan's classic novel and starring a cast of perfection. Really this entire ensemble cast is exceptional, with stirring lead performances by James McAvoy and Keira Knightley that easily recall the elegance of old British and Hollywood film stars.

Yes this film is a love story and Atonement captures it with a sense of longing and tragedy, all against a backdrop of an emotionally paralleled horror of war, and with a filmmaking style of a conventional period epic. However, this is essentially an intimate film which re-imagines conventions into a study of self-aware creation. At its centerpiece lies Briony Tallis, flawlessly portrayed in three life stages by Saoirse Ronan, Romola Garai, and Vanessa Redgrave. Each of these actresses perfectly captures the mystery of this character. Both the performances and filmmakers do not judge the character, instead leaving Briony ambiguous.

In the young Saoirse Ronan we see Briony as an imaginative and naive child, observe the flirtations between Celia and Robbie (like playing with an insect, or the figurines laying across the floor of her bedroom). In Romola Garai we see Briony haunted and trying to make amends. Then in the eldest Vanessa Redgrave we see the ambiguity of a writer who through her creation has attempted to make herself less morally responsible.

Each actress expertly defines the essence and the mystery of Briony, notably in their wordless stare. Ronan's lethal stare captures the naive imagination, Garai's emotionless stare depicts her haunted guilt, and Redgrave's stare illustrates the ambiguity of Briony's actions.

Atonement is structured in three-parts and most of the second half is learned to be a literary recreation by the eldest Briony. She has re-written the story to diminish her guilt and in her mind make good on her past mistake. The ambiguity lies in whether you believe she is doing good, or if it is simply the act of a deceitful ego. Viewed either way, Briony fails to recognize differences between the fiction she imagines and the result those imaginations have on reality.