

“A love of order also shaped the principles of justice, with death and marriage the main engines of housekeeping, the former being set aside exclusively for the morally dubious, the latter a reward withheld until the final page.” (McEwan, pg. 5, Ch. 1)

#### Critical Analysis:

Briony, a girl at the age of thirteen, has a unique vision of literature for someone who has little experience. Almost every work of art, no matter the form, is due to experience and knowledge. Briony has neither, but continues to write regardless. This foreshadows her behavior in reality (not her plays). As explained earlier in the chapter, Briony is the only person in the household who keeps a clean room. She is the only one who has continues order. This contrasts with her plays and writing, which are filled with chaos and ruin; however, this is again contradicted by her equation-like endings. She believed that death will follow evil, and happiness is rewarded to good. This is the though structure of an innocent child. Briony tries to convince everyone, if not herself, that she is much more than an ignorant child, but she portrays exactly that with her shallow understanding of the world's justice. Her view that marriage is the reward on the last page of a story shows that she does not comprehend beyond this stage of life. In contrast, it could also show her understanding that life does not gain any amount of happiness after marriage, thus being the final chapter of a story.

#### Personal Response:

I liked this quote because I think it defines Briony as a character. Her need for order contrasts with her love for literature, as does her lack of experience. I think that her way of thinking is the very essence of ignorance, but honestly, it's a lot more pleasant than the reality. Everyone wants to believe that justice is fair; however, it's not so. The world does not kill off the bad guys in the end. Marriage is often considered the sad ending in reality. I think her opinion of literature coincides with her idea of reality. She thinks they have the same guidelines. Her personal expression through art is ordered, like the rest of her life. She does not stray past her comfort zone. Her childish manner is only emphasized by her obvious effort to seem less childish. Everything about her actions contradicts and it's pretty confusing sometimes to understand her as a character. I think this quote helps sum it up.

“The mystery was in the instant before it moved, the dividing moment between not moving and moving, when her intention took effect. It was like a wave breaking. If she could only find herself at the crest, she thought, she might find the secret of herself, that part of her that was really in charge.”  
(Chapter 3, page 33)

### **Critical Analysis:**

The author uses Briony’s finger as a symbol for both her finger and herself. This excerpt indirectly characterizes Briony by revealing that she is not aware of herself and who she is. She knows she’s following orders from her mind, like her finger does when she mentally orders it to bend, but she’s not sure why she is the way she is; she does not know “the secret of herself”. This revelation contrasts with the character portrayed at the beginning of the novel: a young, intelligent, confident writer. The author also indirectly characterizes Briony by juxtapositioning Lola and Briony. By comparing and contrasting Lola and Briony, the reader can sense Briony’s lack of confidence when it comes to interacting with people. Perhaps the author’s intention is for the reader to question what made Briony the way she is.

### **Personal Response:**

Briony is aggravating, but I can relate to this quote. I sometimes find myself wondering why I’m doing certain things. I do them out of habit, or because I’m required to, but I also wonder if I’m truly in charge of myself and my life. Most adolescents aren’t in charge of their own lives because we’re all living by set guidelines, which isn’t necessarily bad. However, I think it’s healthy to stop and remind yourself that you are in charge of yourself and your life. My doctor asked me to always remind myself that I am in charge of my own personal universe. Briony feels that there’s a hidden part in her soul that orders her to be the person she is, but I believe that the “hidden part” is just society and its norms expecting people to behave a certain way.