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BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Is Ian McEwen A Plagiarist?

Ian McEwen's *Atonement* is one of the better books of recent years. And now McEwen joins the ranks of well-known authors accused of plagiarism. I finally caught up with the imbroglio yesterday in the British papers, but [this New York Times recap of the issue](#) is the best one-stop guide. In short, it seems McEwen used some technical descriptions of medical procedures from a biography of a romance novelist who specializes in "hospital romances" and worked as a nurse during WW II in the same area as McEwen's major character. The one passage quoted as an example of cribbing seems rather innocuous -- there's no thrilling turn of phrase or startling image here:

Mr. McEwan, for instance, wrote: "In the way of medical treatments, she had already dabbed gentian violet on ringworm, aquaflavine emulsion on a cut and painted lead lotion on a bruise." Ms. Andrews's book has the lines: "Our 'nursing' seldom involved more than dabbing gentian violent on ringworm, aquaflavine emulsion on cuts and scratches, lead lotion on bruises and sprains."

And McEwan listed the memoir in his acknowledgements at the end of the book and has repeatedly mentioned Andrews in interviews and chats and praised her work for helping him. Clearly, when dealing with something technical, there are only so many ways to list medicines and treatments. I despise plagiarism and the free pass so many famous authors -- like Doris Kearns Goodwin and Stephen Ambrose -- seem to get. But this brouhaha seems much ado. Andrews herself before she died was told of the questionable passages and wrote, "I don't give a damn." Agreed.

POSTED BY MICHAEL IN NEW YORK AT 10:42 AM



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