Seeking for Forgiveness in Atonement: Critical Analysis

Lastly, Briony's attempts to seek forgiveness from Robbie and Cecilia are too late. Such as when Briony is back in the old Tallis house in the library where she is reminiscing about 'the problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination, she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all' (371). Briony concedes that she cannot atone. She can ask for forgiveness, however, forgiveness must be given by the person who has been exploited or harmed. Being the creator of the story places Briony in a predicament because of her "'absolute power to decide outcomes'" (371). She inquires whether she is not "'also God?'" (371) referring to the personalities and scenes in her book. As the creator, she can do anything to anybody or any circumstance. Perceiving this strength, Briony reasons that there can be "no atonement for God or authors," but the endeavour matters.

Additionally, McEwan shows how Briony is devoured by her guilt, so the possibility of atonement for her wrongdoings is something of high significance to her. Briony wants to make some sort of compensation by coming clean about the arrangement of sins that the younger form of herself set into action with her lies. In any case, as both Robbie and Cecilia die without having to see each other again, true atonement for Briony was unrealistic. As the same way as when Briony is standing at the same window as when she was younger, she looks at the driveway which the police drove Robbie away, and she thinks to herself, "'I like to think that it was not weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them at the end. I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me. Not quite, not yet. If I had the power to conjure them at my birthday celebration... Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at The Trials of Arabella? It's not impossible'" (372). Briony is desperately seeking atonement for her wrongdoings towards Robbie and Cecilia. Therefore, she chooses to lie at the end of her novel, by creating a happy ending for Robbie and Cecilia. Briony lies in her novel because she believes that she gives them what they deserve. She would "like to think" (372) of her ending as "a final act of kindness" (372) towards them and as an apology for her mistakes. Briony realizes the greatness of her mistake and wants to apologize to Robbie and Cecilia by trying to give back what she takes away from them, which is their happiness. Also, the religious implications of the word "Atonement" imply an element of confession, admittance to the truth of one's sins and an attempt to resolve those sins. Briony admits to her sins by writing a novel, so she can atone, however, even in her fictional tale, Briony is not "so self-serving" (372) to grant herself forgiveness. Briony understands that she is not permitted the atonement that she frantically needs. Thus, Briony's late actions to seek forgiveness from Robbie and Cecilia are what stops her from atoning.

Ultimately, Briony can't accomplish atonement since she doesn't recognize her guilt, driving her to not look for forgiveness from Cecilia or Robbie, and Briony is past the point where she can look for atonement. Briony does not archive atonement, although she desperately needs it to live in peace. Finally, guilt does not leave Briony no matter how much she tries to make amends

for her mistakes.