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## 缺陷的自我：探究《贖罪》與《不存在的女兒》裡 不可能的救贖

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### 摘要

當人們自覺犯了錯與隨後帶來的慘重後果，良知會引導他們在這場自我衝突的戰爭中，去逃避罪惡感或是盡全力去彌補。然而，要是犯錯者拒絕道歉並做出實際的彌補，其罪惡感無法消除，也不能得到救贖。此論文採用尼采對善意與救贖的概念，將兩部當代小說並置討論，以探究犯錯者缺陷的自我會阻擋其獲得救贖的可能。在《贖罪》中，布里奧妮一生責備自己對姊姊西西莉亞的男友羅比不實的控訴，以及對兩人造成的慘烈結局。儘管布里奧妮替他們杜撰了一個完美結局的故事，想藉此救贖她犯的罪，但她不願道歉，無法及時給予無辜的受害者實際的彌補。《不存在的女兒》中的大衛·亨利醫生在拋棄了剛出生患有唐氏症的女兒後，向家人扯了要命的大謊。儘管日後他對此感到哀傷，終其一生都因他犯下的錯受苦，也不願揭露傷害家人的這個秘密。布里奧妮與大衛在善意的假象下犯錯，並歷經道德上的試煉。雖然兩人一生都在為此贖罪，卻不願誠懇地向受害的一方道歉並坦承錯誤。對布里奧妮與大衛而言，由於缺陷的自我，罪惡感終究無法消除，救贖也是不可能的。

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## **The Flawed Self: On Impossible Redemption in *Atonement* and *The Memory Keeper's Daughter***

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### **Abstract**

*When people are conscious of making mistakes and their subsequent disastrous consequences, they are led by their conscience to evade the guilt or make amends wholeheartedly in the self-struggling battle. However, if the wrongdoer refuses to apologize for the mistake and make realistic amends, his or her guilt cannot be eliminated, and his or her redemption cannot be attainable. By elaborating on Nietzsche's concepts of goodwill and redemption, this article aims to juxtapose two contemporary novels, exploring how the wrongdoer's flawed self prevents him or her from being redeemed. In *Atonement*, Briony blames herself in her long life for her false accusation against Robbie, the boyfriend of her sister Cecilia, and it brings a destructive result to them both. Although Briony invents a story for them with a happy ending to atone for her crime, she resists apologizing for her crime and making amends to her innocent victims in time. In *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*, Dr. David Henry tells a fatal lie to his family after giving his newborn baby girl with Down syndrome away. He feels regretful afterward and suffers for his*

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*mistake in his entire life, but he is unwilling to disclose the secret that harms his family. Briony and David commit a crime under the disguise of goodwill and undergo their testing in morality. While spending their lifetime to atone for their sins, they refuse to make an apology to their victims and admit their wrongdoing. Because of their flawed selves, for Briony and David, guilt is eventually irremovable and redemption is impossible.*

*Keywords: goodwill, guilt, atonement, redemption, Nietzsche*

This article examines two contemporary novels, Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2007) and Kim Edwards's *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* (2007), which demonstrate the wrongdoer's flawed self as the attribute of his or her impossible redemption. These two novels, one British and one American, depict the family disputes and individual conflicts intertwined with the themes of sin and atonement. Based on Nietzsche's concepts of goodwill and redemption, this present study discusses the moral issues concerning guilt, atonement, and redemption. Atonement and redemption are two sides of a coin; redemption cannot be achieved when atonement made by the wrongdoer is failed in real life. McEwan's *Atonement* portrays a severe crime that devastates two families and ruins the lives of two innocent people. Briony Tallis commits her crime by declaring a false testimony against her sister Cecilia's boyfriend Robbie at thirteen years old and spends her long life in lamenting the fatal and irreversible fallout. Positioned between popular and literary writing, Edwards's first novel *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* focuses on how the dark secret hidden by an orthopedic surgeon becomes a doomed force affecting each character. David Henry abandons his daughter Phoebe after she was born and diagnosed with Down syndrome. Instead of accepting this baby with birth defects, David hastily gives her away and tells a lie to erase her existence. This disastrous lie that David refuses to disclose to his family makes him suffer from his regret and guilt. While Briony and David feel guilty after acting wrongly under the disguise of goodwill, they stay in a self-loathing world of isolation and resist apologizing for their sins and being honest with their flawed selves. Accordingly, Briony and David live with guilt alone, and their redemption is impossible.

In *Atonement*, the atheist McEwan uses his metafictional technique to demonstrate the issues of forgiveness and redemption not through divine

atonement in Christianity but through Briony's self-referential atonement. Lippitt (2019) claims self-forgiveness is possible for Briony and emphasizes that "the moral perspective of humility" is developing in her. She has been corrected from a proud and self-obsessive teenager who always senses herself with her moral standard to a young nurse who looks after injured and dying patients. By perceiving her sin that ruins the lives of Cecilia and Robbie, Briony's humility is to "correct her austere unforgiving view of herself" (p. 126). Lippitt's statement of Briony's self-forgiveness is not an "all-or-nothing condition" that liberates herself from her sin, but it can be viewed as a "threshold" that makes the elderly Briony capably blame her young self, the "priggish" and "conceited" little girl (pp. 132, 136). As Lippitt concludes, Briony does not need to stop condemning her sin, but she can allow herself to step across this threshold and live well. On the other hand, Bradley (2009) comments that *Atonement* is not "quite the morally redemptive imaginative force it appears to be." By comparing young Briony with Mohammad Atta, the lead perpetrator behind the September 11 attacks, Bradley pinpoints their similarities in committing the crime. Stimulated by their moral imagination, Briony and Mohammad Atta vilify their victims as the "incarnation of evil" and "mythologize themselves as quasi-religious saviours or protectors." They are directed by their own impractical belief fixed and rooted in their imagination to walk into a dark adult world where they choose to commit their crimes (p. 25-26). Here I want to address some significant questions. Does Briony really turn to be humble and need to forgive herself after acknowledging her crime? For Briony, is atonement considered as a means or an end? Her moral perspective of humility that Lippitt stresses is ambiguous and disputable. If her humility were true, Briony would apologize for her sin and make amends to Cecilia at any cost when working in London. If her humility were true, she would not need to spend her entire life atoning for her

sin. From a carefree teenager under the protection of her family to a nurse working harshly alone, Briony is persuaded by herself to shift her focus from herself to the outside world. She believes this is the price she shall pay for her crime. She might act humbly for her nursing work in London, yet it is certainly not an expression of humility when she avoids making realistic amends in the first place. The way she treats those patients in the hospital is different from how she responds to Cecilia and Robbie. She has been doing nothing to her two innocent victims for “five years” after committing her crime (McEwan, 2007, p. 337). Briony’s narrative storytelling may lead readers to acknowledge her attempt to amend for Cecilia and Robbie, but her intention to delay the revelation of the truth made by her cleverness and calculation in real life has again proven her ineradicable character flaw which makes her self-referential atonement unworkable.

In *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter*, David is driven by his absolute fixation to walk into a shadowy world. It is his obsession with perfection that turns all things to miserable and irreparable consequences; he abandons the imperfect one of his twin children and tells the deadly lie for the purpose of keeping his perfect life. As Newman (2013) argues, “All the action stems from this one moment of perceived imperfection, and the doctor’s subsequent attempt to have only a perfect child” (p. 21). David’s intolerance of imperfection reflects his irremovable anguish of losing his sister and parents in the past; as it is narrated, he lives alone without “any living family” that he acknowledges (Edwards, 2007, p. 5). Moreover, his fixation can be observed by his option of being a photographer. Those impressive and stunning pictures that he takes very close are contrary to his defective and unhappy family. Flint (2009) remarks that fictional photographers “are damaging void of self-questioning;” therefore, “their deficiencies” are usually “left to their

companions” to recognize (p. 393). As a fictional photographer with keen observation, David attempts to hide his fixation behind the camera and stay safe in his private world. What lies behind “all his photographic endeavors” is David’s “impossible desire” to make his life controllable in the same way as he controls his perfect pictures (Flint, p. 394). The “destructive power” of the secret is emphasized by Edwards in this novel (Smith, 2007, p. 67). More precisely, this destructive power that damages his perfect family is unavoidable because David allows himself to evade his family in real life and stay in the darkroom with his artificial pictures. The two protagonists, Briony and David, are compelled by their wrongdoing to undergo a journey of moral transformation. They both spend a long time to suffer from guilt and atone for their mistakes in their own way; Briony invents a happy ending for her victims through storytelling and David takes perfect pictures of his family through photography. Even though they both are given a chance to make a correction afterward, they would rather loathe themselves and struggle with guilt alone than decently face their victims and apologize for their mistakes in time. Briony and David, the protagonists in these two novels, will be respectively analyzed in this article to explore their impossible redemption caused by their flawed selves.

### **Guilt, Atonement and Redemption**

No sooner does an agent know he or she is wrong than he or she feels guilty. Guilt is perceived when humans are conscious that they act wrongly. People feel frustrated and blame themselves when their mistakes do great harm beyond their expectations, especially to those close family members who mean a lot to them. As Swinburne (1989) argues, “In virtue of doing wrong (or failing to fulfill his obligation) an agent requires guilt” (p. 74). Guilt makes people miserable about themselves, leading them to the imprisonment of the mind.



Nietzsche (1997) has argued that depression and humiliation can always be seen with failure in a guilty person (p. 88). Nevertheless, guilt can be thought to be a stimulus revitalizing the wrongdoer to overcome the shame and make amends, as Nietzsche too says that one can let one's strength be regained by condemning what one has done (p. 88). Simply put, feeling guilty is the preliminary step for the wrongdoer to reflect upon his or her mistake. The next step is to atone for the sin and make realistic amends. Atonement is significant to humans who act wrongly by the limits of consciousness and their partial moral judgment. Barry (1968) emphasizes the concept of atonement and inoculates its significance to the modern world. He remarks that atonement implies self-transformation "from identification with self-central estrangement to identification with love and holiness" (p. 166). Barry highlights the invaluable meaning of the concept of atonement and considers atonement as the principle that assists people in creating a harmonious life through the manifestation of love. Likewise, Nietzsche (1982) declares, "To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'" (p. 251). His notion of redemption encourages people to understand they shall live bravely in this earthly world and create their own atonement through experimentation. By redefining the concept of redemption, Nietzsche positions redemption in an affirmative stance; for the wrongdoer, what shall be focused is not dwelling on what he or she did wrongly in the past. Nietzsche believes redemption stimulates humans to correct and shape themselves for proving their attempt to become better. It is Nietzsche's contention that man's creation is "the great redemption from suffering, and life's growing light" (p. 199). The wrongdoer shall take action with responsibility afterward and put things right promptly. Even though the energy emerging from conscience forces the wrongdoer to challenge his or her conflict and weakness, in Nietzsche's view,

he or she needs to release the guilt from the prison of conscience by reshaping the mind and making a correction. Consequently, redemption can be attained when the guilt is removed.

However, removing the guilt is an arduous task for the wrongdoer when his or her wrong act is attributed to goodwill. Goodwill is the feeling that motivates people to treat others kindly in balanced relationships. Goodwill is the virtue that humans express to others and show their giving and receiving, but Nietzsche (2003) sees it as an error which creates a “delusion” leading people to a feeling of pleasure that they apparently neglect its hidden harm on them (p. 272). While people are satisfied by demonstrating their goodwill, they can hardly perceive its pleasant delusion. When remaining in this delusion, therefore, people are apt to act incorrectly and imprudently, especially when they fail to distinguish their motive from personal satisfaction. The disguise of goodwill beclouds people and makes them suffer greatly. For Nietzsche, demonstrating goodwill does not mean a person’s behavior is altruistic; when it consists of a “self-interested motive,” it is a mere selfish act (Reginster, 2000, p. 180). A person whose motive is self-interested does not intend to give a helping hand because he aims to serve himself only. When the motive of demonstrating goodwill is occupied with a concern for the interest of the self, it will entail a self-righteous action which is not beneficial but harmful. Furthermore, Nietzsche (1994) argues that the harm caused by the disguise of goodwill is to make people feel “superior” by sensing they can be of help but not vice versa (p. 237). To make it clear, it is challenging for the wrongdoer to recognize his or her self-righteous nature and admit the error generated by the disguise of goodwill. This disguise of goodwill leads him or her to assertively believe the action must be done for the purpose of preventing pain and offering benefits. When the disguise of goodwill is ultimately replaced by the awareness of the sin after a prolonged period, the guilt is inevitably perceived.

The wrongdoer not solely feels much disappointed afterward for losing the sense of superiority misled by the delusion of goodwill, but he or she is compelled to confront the bad effects and undergo the harsh moral transformation. Nevertheless, the feeling of guilt that has been rooted so deeply over a period of many years will finally become a hindrance that strongly prevents the wrongdoer from making atonement at the right time. Even though the wrongdoer spends much time atoning for his or her mistake, redemption is failed when guilt cannot be removed.

### **Self-Referential Atonement**

Misled by her self-referential moral imagination, young Briony believes she shall demonstrate her goodwill for the benefits of her family. As a teenager fascinated by her talent in writing, she misinterprets the passionate and intense romance between Cecilia and Robbie as a lechery. Without recognizing the intimate adult relationship, Briony is stirred by her partial moral judgment to convince herself that Robbie is a sexual violator intimidating Cecilia. She arouses her “selfless love” and feels obliged to rescue her sister (McEwan, 2007, p. 157). It is her self-referential selfish love under the disguise of goodwill that she assumes this villain should be expelled from her family (p. 160). After catching a glimpse of Lola being sexually assaulted by the guest Marshall, she mistakes him for Robbie based on her presumption which is “less like seeing, more like knowing” (p. 170) and stands up to this sexual predator who she believes she knows. Her accusation against Robbie is a self-regarding act which aims not to rescue Cecilia but to satisfy her own need to be a defender in front of her family as well as proving her “statement of fact” (p. 166). Since then, she has been led by her guilt to atone for her sin in a lifetime journey of moral transformation.

It is until the events happen subsequently that the wrongdoer is conscious of the crime he or she has committed. When Briony is convinced to give her testimony derived from her moral imagination, she does not fully comprehend her mistake inundated by her desire to make up stories “so as to order inherently chaotic experience as well as to legitimate her own” with an eagerness to prove her talent (Shah, 2009, p. 43). Briony’s goodwill is supplanted by her sense of guilt when she is aware that her crime ruins Cecilia and Robbie. Cecilia cuts off her connection with the family and moves to London as a nurse after Robbie has been arrested and then sent to Northern France to serve the army. For Briony, she loses the energy to do what she likes and gives up her education. Defeated by her crime, she feels much more remorseful, telling herself that she “would never undo the damage. She was unforgivable” (McEwan, 2007, p. 285). Following Cecilia to be a nurse in London is the way that Briony chooses to respond to her crime: “She was abandoning herself to a life of structures, rules, obedience, housework, and a constant fear of disapproval” (p. 276). The hospital is a place where Briony is compelled to confront her reckless self as well as learning to be caring for the concern of others’ need. She discovers that she cannot fully devote herself to all patients, and this must-be option merely allows her to immerse in a different world cutting herself from the past. Living in a rigid nursing life, she makes herself as “a barrier to friendship” dealing with harsh and emergent tasks alone (p. 274). However, it is through this tiresome nursing work that she recalls her happy time in youth and starts writing again in the spare time for comforting her loneliness. It is the sole way that she can let her abandoned self “be free.” As it is narrated, “Here, behind the name badge and uniform, was her true self, secretly hoarded, quietly accumulating. She had never lost that childhood pleasure in seeing pages covered in her own handwriting” (p. 280). Her solitude in writing not only revitalizes her joy, but it also reinforces her self-

critical reflection of her crime. As Williston (2012) proposes, “Internalizing her victims’ judgment has thus placed Briony in a state of deep moral isolation, and this has dramatic implications for her sense of who she is” (p. 72). Staying in a world of isolation, Briony learns to reflect upon the consequences to her family caused by her crime and makes up her mind to use her writing as the means to atone for what she has done.

People will never know how much they are able to bear the weight of guilt in the mind until it comes to themselves. Baumeister (1997) claims that “guilt is supposed to occur only when the person recognizes that he or she is responsible for the misdeed” (p. 321). This solitude is necessary for Briony to remind of her initial crime, yet her attempt to atone for her crime by not giving an apology to Cecilia and making realistic amends but using her storytelling is self-absorbed and evasive. Briony remains in a self-loathing world of isolation and spends her life making self-referential atonement. When attending the wedding of Lola and Marshall in a church as an uninvited guest, Briony remembers the actual vision stored in her memory. Briony realizes that she made a hasty accusation against Robbie when she was thirteen years old. This is a crucial chance that she could show her humility to Cecilia after leaving the church. Briony knows she should be responsible for this union between Lola and her real attacker, but she simply senses her own inability to unfold the truth of the sexual assault in front of Lola at the wedding. In consequence, she does nothing. Worst of all, she chickens out instead of going to see Cecilia and tell her the truth. After all, Briony gives up the chance to apologize for her crime, as she eventually admits it.

Briony believes she can tell the truth in her draft and create a fictive happy reunion for Cecilia and Robbie, yet her intention to prove herself superior by comparing with others is always with her from youth to old age. When Robbie

serves the army in France, he attempts to dip into the reason why Briony, a child in his eyes, can assertively send him to prison “with a lie” (McEwan, 2007, p. 228). He recalls an accident that happened between him and Briony when they were walking down to the river “for swimming lesson he had promised her” a few years ago (p. 229). When seeing nine-year-old Briony suddenly jump into a river at that time, Robbie was too shocked to accept her thoughtless behavior which could have made them both drowned. Without giving an apology, Briony abruptly declared her love to him with “forthright, even defiant” tone. After being falsely accused by Briony, Robbie concludes that she just wants to avenge herself by acknowledging his love which is not for her but for Cecilia; therefore, she performs this accusation by “her persistence with a story” to see him all the way to prison (pp. 233-234).

In addition, Briony always wants to prove herself better than Lola from the beginning to the end. Briony disdains her cousin who is vain and never gives up being a bride of a rich man. It is undeniable that Briony sees the value of being a writer and intends to depict the sexual assault in her draft, but her motive is ambiguous and controversial. As Shah (2009) remarks, “the ‘anthropic reference’ of one’s fictive imagination ensures that Briony is irredeemable: A human story cannot save a human story” (p. 43). Briony’s aim to reveal the truth and publish it posthumously is not just to show her deep sorry for her sin. She still wants to prove she could at least be better than Lola in this aspect, as she admits that she is “haunted by the thought of Lola, the severity of that gaunt old painted face, her boldness of stride in the perilous high heels, her vitality, ducking into the Rolls.” Her ceaseless competition with Lola and her persistent resentment of Lola’s superiority can be apparently revealed: “But at eighty she [Lola] has a voracious, knowing look. She was always the superior older girl, one step ahead of me. But in that final important matter, I will be ahead of her, while she’ll live on to be a hundred. I will not be

able to publish in my lifetime” (McEwan, 2007, p. 361). Briony’s guilt can never be removed because Cecilia and Robbie were dead during the war. For Briony, redemption cannot be reached because she rejects making instant and realistic amends while Cecilia is alive. Although Briony finally claims that a novelist cannot really achieve atonement with “her absolute power of deciding outcomes” as God (p. 371) as her self-mockery, she does not choose to meet her victims humbly in time and give a sincere apology to them. In other words, she would rather indulge in her “boundless capacity for self-delusion” (Bradley, 2009, p. 27). Her remorse and apology which she describes in her draft for the two dead victims separated by her crime can never be revealed in real life; therefore, she can never be guilt-free.

### **Self-Righteous Lie**

Unlike a father who normally feels cheerful when seeing the birth of his own flesh and blood, David mercilessly gives Phoebe away after her birth under the disguise of goodwill. Based on his medical knowledge and practice, David is driven by his presumption to give a quick and absolute conclusion regarding Phoebe’s disease. He believes that she should be sent away immediately in order to prevent her from playing the same tragic role to Norah as his dead sister to his mother. This misconception and his miserable memory of the past cut off the connection between him and his daughter. It contrarily deepens his bias misguiding him to consider her a girl endowed with the weapon of evil; her inborn Down syndrome is supposed to destroy his forthcoming happiness with Norah and Paul, the healthy twin brother of Phoebe. It is undoubtedly noticed that David sees Phoebe not as a beloved daughter but “a classic case” with fatal defects (Edwards, 2007, p. 16). With his instinctive and self-righteous reaction, David becomes a defender believing

he shall protect his family from this defective baby, as he claims his motive to the nurse Caroline, “This poor child will most likely have a serious heart defect. A fatal one. I’m trying to spare us all a terrible grief” (pp. 18-19). David’s immediate conviction, therefore, causes him to speak out an irreversible lie to Norah: “Our little daughter died as she was born” (p. 20).

Beyond David’s expectation, Caroline persuades him to tell the truth to Norah and stop the ridiculous memorial service prepared for Phoebe. Unwilling to confront his wrongdoing, David replies with his rejection, “It’s too late now. Do whatever you have to do, Caroline, but I can’t tell her. I won’t” (Edwards, 2007, p. 65). Unmarried Caroline resolves to leave the city with this baby after the memorial service and starts a new life afterward. David is much shameful when sensing his impossibility to get rid of the deep grief which is “woven with the dark threads of his past” tying his memory of his sister with his daughter together: “When he imagined the daughter he’d given away, it was his sister’s face he saw, her pale hair, her serious smile” (p. 109). He is gradually led by those unexpected letters and photos delivered by Caroline to realize his early conviction has been replaced by his guilt and self-resentment. The lie of Phoebe’s death which he tells Norah initially for their better future has ironically become a shadow darkening his family life and constructing an invisible wall that alienates him from Norah and Paul. Therefore, David uses photography as a sole evasion from encountering the loss past as well as sustaining his family life which he deliberately creates. David believes photography is a quiet method that makes his loss “bearable;” it can transform his grief into “the language of photography, even if he cannot speak of it directly” (Andermahr, 2011, p. 38). He chooses to remain in a dark and isolated world with his secret alone, picturing all ups and downs happening in this family. From a protector giving orders to make his family secure to a silent memory keeper who is “incapable of closer kinds of contact,” as Flint (2009,



p. 393) argues, David blames himself for his wrong decision and lives in his isolated world. His affection for his family has been shaded with his guilt and regret; he prefers taking vivid photos which are more beautiful than his unhappy life. “Photography is all about secret,” as David tells Paul, “The secret we all have and never tell” (Edwards, 2007, p. 201). Standing behind the camera and secretively watching Phoebe’s photos posted by Caroline, he is bound to confront his guilt alone in the darkroom. His regret for his wrongdoing can never be eliminated.

The destructive power of David’s self-absorbed lie locks him in an isolated world from his disharmonious family. He and Norah live in a house like “two planets in orbit around the same sun, not colliding but not drawing any closer either” (Edwards, 2007, p. 142). Compared with his family relationships, photography is easier and more bearable to him. By presenting amazing objects which he likes to obtain people’s admiration, David feels secure in this secretive world without feeling defeated by his hidden guilt. However, he is forced to step out of his shadowy world when unexpectedly meeting Caroline again in the exhibition of his photography held in Pittsburgh, the city where he grew up. Being informed to know Phoebe is healthy without any heart problem, David knows Caroline’s words rebuke his presumption of Phoebe and remind him of his unerasable mistake. Impossible to reach Caroline after the exhibition, he goes to the old and empty house left by his parents and meets Rosemary, a young and pregnant girl who resides there after being abandoned by her boyfriend and mistakes him as a harmful intruder. David uses Phoebe’s photos given by Caroline to prove himself a harmless father; unexpectedly, Rosemary’s pregnancy stimulates him to think of Phoebe, who he has abandoned. He feels compelled to speak out his past including his lie in front of this stranger who is two years younger than his children. This is

the first time he unlocks the door of his closed heart, revealing his error, and feels relieved. The feeling of freedom supports him to confront his wrongdoing and responds differently to his family. He gives a positive reply to support Paul for the school, moving out to give Norah the free life she wants and setting up the beneficial accounts for Phoebe and the son of Rosemary. By treating Rosemary as a substitute for Phoebe, David expresses his parental love for filling in the feeling of emptiness.

Like Briony, who resists making an apology, David resists disclosing the dark secret despite his all efforts to correct what he has done and make a harmonious relationship with his family. He would rather keep the secret than show humility to his family hurt by him; accordingly, his insistence on carrying this heavy load makes him unable to escape from his misery. When he finally finds the place where Phoebe lives, he cannot help but remember how badly he has made Norah painful and suffer from his deception. David assumes he shall not hurt her again as he did from the outset, but his motive for hiding the secret is not just for Norah's sake. On the contrary, his aim is to avoid unwanted and unbearable conflicts which will make him feel humiliated and destroy him completely. Years later, there is a chance for David to correct his wrongdoing and disclose the lie. Encouraged by Rosemary, he attempts once to reveal the truth to Norah on her birthday, but she is not there. Instead of giving it another try, he refuses to do it again. As Neiman (2015) claims, "We took the blame for suffering on ourselves in order to give life meaning" (p. 216). With his memories of the past, he realizes the secret that he has kept all the time turns out to be the proof of his irremovable wrongdoing that has destroyed his family life. This secret is "a kind of penance" that David gives himself to mark his self-inflicted life with misery and grief (Edwards, 2007, p. 322). It is also the evidence that forces him to admit his self-righteous mistake and realize his insistence of staying in the world of misery alone. By carrying on this penance

along the way till the end of his life, David's guilt is not removed and it is impossible for him to be redeemed.

### Conclusion

When crimes are committed, the wrongdoers are responsible for what they have done. Nietzsche (1994) regards evil as the frightful energies of human nature, "the Cyclopean architects and pathmakers of humanity" (p. 256), which can drive humans to interpret their complicated nature and see if they are able to overcome or destroy themselves. Instead of remaining in a self-loathing world to reflect on their sins, the wrongdoers need to be honest with themselves and admit their mistake to those whom they hurt. In so doing, the wrongdoers can sincerely show their sorry and remove the guilt. Being willing to make an apology in front of others is the evidence that not only assists the wrongdoers in understanding the bad effect on the sufferers but also encourages them to change their mind and look at themselves affirmatively. Yet the responsible evidence cannot be seen in Briony and David. Accompanied by grief and guilt, Briony and David are led by their wrongdoing to walk on a long and challenging moral journey. They are prevented by their flawed selves from apologizing for their misdeed and making amends properly. Briony's self-referential atonement is not an end to her because she does not do anything to amend Cecilia and Robbie. By inventing a happy reunion for them, Briony only allows herself to show her sorry in a fictive story. The evasion of Briony has already terminated her possible redemption in real life. Although she spends her lifetime atoning for her sin, it is a futile effort for dead Cecilia and Robbie. In short, the happy ending Briony creates in her draft, her "final act of kindness" (McEwan, 2007, p. 372), is meaningless to them.

Even though both David and Briony are unapologetic, the consequence

for David's family is better than for Cecilia and Robbie. David does not disclose the secret of Phoebe to Norah, but it is finally revealed by Caroline, who goes to visit Norah and tells her everything after his death. David is unable to tell the truth hidden beneath his fatal lie in his entire life, but what he has done surprisingly unites his wife, son, and daughter together as a good and unexpected result. For example, he has taken many photos of Paul since childhood, prepares the account for Phoebe for her future life, and gives Norah a free life by ending their marriage. These things that David does privately turn out to be a belated and redemptive way of providing his family with a new start.

Mankind's potential to make an irreversible disaster is seen in *Atonement* and *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*. Briony and David have acknowledged the harmful consequences caused by their sin and condemned themselves deeply for doing wrong, but they cannot persuade themselves to willingly face their victims and make a face-to-face apology in all circumstances. The wound of the victims hurt by the wrongdoers will not be healed by making atonement which is futile and unrealistic. Clearly, Briony and David are resistant to standing in front of their family, and they have no willingness to admit they are not good. There is a possibility to make a difference when people are ready to admit their mistakes honestly and make amends genuinely at any cost; however, for Briony and David, their sins cannot be forgiven, and neither can they be guilt-free and redeemable.

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