

“You’ve killed no one today? But how many did you leave to die?”
Challenging the Notions of Atonement and Guilt in Ian McEwan’s
Atonement

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Tässä tutkielmassa on pyritty haastamaan hyvin yleinen tulkinta Ian McEwanin romaanista *Sovitus*, jonka mukaan kirjoittamalla tämän tarinan kirjan päähenkilö Briony Tallis "sovittaa" lapsuudessaan tekemänsä rikoksen. Kesällä 1935, Brionyn ollessa 13-vuotias hän sattumalta todistaa rikoksen, joka on kohdistunut hänen serkkuunsa, mutta jonka tekijää hän ei pimeässä kuitenkaan selvästi näe. Briony päätyy silminnäkijän valtuudellaan syyttämään rikoksesta perheen hyvää ystävää Robbie Turneria, joka todellisuudessa on syytön. Robbie tuomitaan rikoksesta, ja lyhentääkseen tuomiotaan hän liittyy armeijaan taistellakseen toisessa maailmansodassa, jossa hän kuitenkin haavoittuu ja menehtyy palaamatta koskaan takaisin kotiin.

Kirjan lopussa paljastuu, että Briony on ollut tarinan kertoja ja "kirjoittaja" koko ajan, ja hän kertoo tarinan nyt, vuonna 1999, tunnustaakseen oman rikoksensa ja myöntääkseen siten Robbien syyttömyyden. Briony myöntää, ettei hän nähnyt hyökkääjän kasvoja, ja hänen rikoksensa on siten väärän todistuksen antaminen.

Hyvin yleinen tulkinta kirjasta siis on, että tunnustamalla rikoksensa kirjassaan monia vuosia myöhemmin, Briony sovittaa tekonsa. Pyrin haastamaan tämän tulkinnan tutkimalla tarkemmin sovituksen käsitettä, ja sitä, päteekö se syvimmältä merkitykseltään Brionyn tunnustukseen. Argumenttini on, että Brionyn kirjaa ei voida kutsua sovituksesi siinä merkityksessä, mitä sana 'sovitus' yleisesti kantaa sisällään. Toinen argumenttini on, että ainoa sovituksesi kelpaava teko romaanissa on Robbien syyttömänä kärsitty tuomio ja rangaistus rikoksesta, jota hän ei tehnyt.

Tutkielmassa on lähestytty sovituksen käsitettä ensin kristinuskon näkökulmasta, ja sitten lain ja moraalien näkökulmasta. Tarkoituksena on ollut selvittää, onko Brionyn "sovitus" hyväksyttävä niin syntien sovittamisen, kuin rikoksen sovittamisen näkökannalta. Samaa menetelmää on sitten käytetty myös Robbien hahmon analyysiin.

Tutkimalla sovituksen käsitettä niin kristillisestä kuin oikeudellisesta näkökulmasta, ja yhdistämällä nämä määritelmät sitten *Sovitus* -romaanin, päädytään siihen lopputulokseen, että Brionyn kirjallinen teos hänen sovituksenaan ei ole näiden kahden teoreettisen näkökulman kanssa yhteensopiva tulkinta. Päinvastaisesti taas Robbien hahmon kohdalla käy ilmi, että hänen syyttömänä kärsimänsä rangaistus näyttää täyttävän lähes täysin sovituksen käsitteelle määritellyt vaatimukset, niin kristinuskon kuin lain ja moraalien näkökulmista. Tutkielmassa on pyritty siten osoittamaan epäkohtia yleisessä tulkinnassa kirjasta Brionyn sovituksena, mutta sen lisäksi myös nostamaan romaanista esille toinen, paremmin perusteltavissa oleva sovituksen käsite.

Avainsanat: sovitus, kristinusko, laki, moraalit, rangaistus

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1. Introduction: the novel and the aim of the thesis

As can be inferred from the title of the novel examined in this thesis, that is, *Atonement*, the concept of atoning for one's crimes and sins is at the heart of its story. While this tangible presence of atonement cannot be disputed, it can however be questioned what exactly is this atonement that occurs in the novel, and by whom is it done. This, essentially, is what I intend to do in this thesis, as I will first discuss the most common understanding of what this atonement is considered to be in the novel, but then also offer an alternative perspective on the matter. In fact, I will argue that this alternative interpretation - although unmentioned by critics - is the view that best conforms to the characteristics of an acceptable atonement.

Atonement is a novel by Ian McEwan, first published in 2001, and it begins in 1935 England among the wealthy Tallis family. The two sisters, Cecilia and Briony Tallis, take the centre stage of the story together with Robbie Turner, whose mother works as a servant for the Tallis family. At the beginning of the story, and thus during the main events, Briony is only 13 years old. She is a spirited child, with a passion for writing and inventing stories about everything and anything that happens around her. Briony has a true zest for excitement and an appreciation of drama, and although she very much desires to be considered an equal among her older siblings, she is still a child with a child's perspective on all things.

Cecilia and Robbie, on the other hand, are in their early twenties, and have both just finished their degrees at Cambridge University. Robbie is a working-class man, working as a landscaper for the Tallises during the summer. Despite his modest background, he has been able to attend the same schools as Cecilia because of the kindness and generosity of Jack Tallis, the father of the Tallis family. Robbie has been a friend of the family since his early childhood, but it is only at this point in their lives that Cecilia and Robbie begin to develop more romantic feelings for each other. Although it is clear that the feelings are mutual, they both seem confused about just what this new status of their relationship entails.

While their relationship has remained, in lack of a better word, "innocent", Briony witnesses

a scene where Robbie and Cecilia are by the fountain in the garden, and she sees Cecilia removing her clothes and jumping into the water. Not understanding this at all, Briony's imagination begins to run wild with questions and possible scenarios, and gradually, her impression of Robbie slowly starts to alter (p. 38). She is convinced that Robbie commanded her sister to take her clothes off, why else would she have done it? The truth of the matter is, that Cecilia dives into the pool to retrieve a vase that has broken during a small quarrel between her and Robbie. To Briony, however, only an illogical chain of events is shown, and she almost rejoices in the opportunity to use her own imagination to fill in the gaps of that story.

Soon after this scene by the pool, Robbie writes two versions of a love letter to Cecilia, one of more respectable content, and one of the more private kind, which he never intends to give her. There is to be a big family dinner at the Tallis house in honour of the girls' brother Leon visiting home, with his friend Paul Marshall. Three cousins of the Tallis children are staying with them for the summer as well (9-year-old twin boys and 15-year-old Lola). Unfortunately, as Robbie prepares to leave for the dinner at the Tallis' house, he accidentally takes with him the wrong letter, and ends up handing it over to Briony on his way to the house, thinking that in that way it will have reached Cecilia before he himself arrives at the house. Only after Briony has run off with the letter, does he realize his mistake. Briony, having seen the incident by the pool earlier, cannot resist the temptation to read the letter, and is deeply horrified by its explicit content. From now on, Robbie is "a maniac" in her eyes, a threat to the entire household, and she considers it her responsibility to protect Cecilia from him (p. 114).

This unfortunate chain of events culminates in an awful scene that same evening, when all the dinner guests are out in the dark searching for the mischievous twin boys who have gone hiding. While searching, Briony hears faint screams in the dark, and as she approaches she sees her cousin Lola apparently being attacked in the bushes, and a figure of a man running away. Lola has been assaulted, and Briony is quick to connect Robbie to this savage attack, although she did not clearly see the face of the man that fled the scene. Thus without any other witnesses, and Lola remaining silent, Robbie is accused and convicted of the crime, and sentenced to prison. Cecilia, the only one

believing in Robbie's innocence, cuts off all connection to her family, and most of all, to Briony.

The second part of the novel follows Robbie's service in the Second World War, which he has decided to join in order to shorten his prison sentence. Although the ending of the novel is still hotly debated, it appears to reveal that Robbie is injured and killed in the war, and thus never has the chance to return to Cecilia and the life he planned to share with her.

In the third and final part of the novel, the narrator suddenly shifts to first person, and it turns out to be Briony, in 1999 London. The whole novel is now seen as her creation, and as her attempt to explain everything that happened on that summer night at the Tallis house in 1935. All the events and characters of the story have been described by Briony, and this naturally makes the reader wonder whether Briony's account of the events can be trusted. However, the credibility of the narrator is not the issue I will focus on in my thesis.

Instead, I want to challenge the generally accepted interpretation among critics that Briony's novel serves as her "atonement" for her crime of false accusation (O'Hara 2011, 96). Supposedly, by writing this novel many years later, she clears Robbie's name and confesses that she knows he was innocent. Even if this is the case, I want to question the assumption that this rewriting is acceptable as an atonement. Do the characteristics of atonement apply here? Also, I want to look more closely at Briony's character, and the question of her innocence and guilt in everything that takes place in the aftermath of the assault. Yes, she is a 13-year-old child, but does that make it impossible for her to be fully aware of the consequences of her false accusations? Why should it be assumed that she does not intend for Robbie to be hurt and punished, as for example Anne Rooney seems to have done (2006, 48). And finally, if the innocent victim, that is, Robbie, indeed later dies as a result of her false witness, is "re-writing the story of what happened" (Rooney 2006, 7) enough as a satisfactory atonement for her crime?

The second key objective of my thesis will be the argument I make for the alternative interpretation, that it is actually Robbie's character who accomplishes a satisfactory atonement in the novel by bearing the condemnation and punishment for the crime he is accused of, but did not commit. Following the same method as with Briony, I will examine Robbie's essential character and

his role in the novel in connection to the different definitions given for atonement, and give reasons for why the punishment that he suffers eventually takes the form of an atonement. What are the characteristics that make his atonement an acceptable one? Are there any aspects of his atonement that would render it an inadequate one? Furthermore, what importance does the fact that Robbie is innocent of the crime he is convicted of, carry in relation to his atonement?

Before I begin my analysis of the novel and its two main characters, first the notion of atonement must be examined independent of the novel itself. I will do this by outlining the various characteristics given to an acceptable atonement in different contexts, beginning with Christianity in chapter 2. After establishing the different requisites for atonement in the religious context, I will then discuss the characters of Briony and Robbie from this perspective in chapter 3, and examine whether a satisfactory atonement is achieved by either of them according to the Christian paradigms. The same method will then be followed with the second context of law and morality, by first discussing the different requirements given for atonement within this field in chapter 4, and then applying these requirements to the two main characters in chapter 5. Conclusions will then follow in chapter 6. Thus, the main objective of my analysis is to determine whether there does in fact occur an acceptable atonement in the novel, and if so, by whom is it done? Also, if an atonement cannot be achieved, why is this? Even though in my thesis I will challenge the general understanding of the novel itself as Briony's atonement, I do acknowledge it as one possible interpretation. However, my intention is to argue for another, quite different interpretation of what this 'atonement' within the novel actually is.

2. Atonement in Christianity

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *atonement* as “the action of making amends for a wrong or injury”, and gives a separate definition for the word within a religious context, as “reparation or expiation for sin” (OED Online). *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* further makes a distinction between the Old Testament meaning of atonement within a “ceremonial context” where sin was removed by giving a sacrifice to God, and the New Testament meaning of atonement as “the atoning work of Christ” (1983, 50–51). The etymology of the word can be traced back to 17th century English, and it was apparently coined to relate to the “state of at-one-ness” between two parties that for some reason were in a state of imbalance (Beilby & Eddy 2006, 9). Yet another meaning is given to the phrase *the Atonement*, because in this case it is understood to mean “the saving work of Christ” (2006, 9). Indeed, it seems to be that in the Bible, and especially in the Old Testament, *atonement* is used almost exclusively in reference to sin: “guilt is taken away and your sin atoned” (Is 6:7), “an end to sin, to atone for wickedness” (Dan 9:24), to give some examples.

One could easily assume, then, that the notion of atonement is relatively straightforward within the Christian doctrine at least, but this, as I have also come to understand, is certainly not the case. On the contrary, there seems to be an “ongoing quest” for the most irrefutable definition of atonement (Beilby & Eddy 2006, 11), although some question whether such a thing is possible to find at all. Although it can be agreed upon, that *the Atonement* is understood as the death and resurrection of Christ, the debate seems to exist more on *what* exactly was achieved with the Atonement, and *how*.

Understandably, then, there exists in the field of theology a variety of different atonement paradigms, each emphasising different aspects of the Atonement. The therapeutic view, for example, focuses on entirely different aspects of the Atonement than say the penal substitution view does. For the purpose of my study, I will only discuss the three most prominent of the atonement paradigms, introduced succinctly in the book *The Nature of the Atonement* (edited by James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy): the Christus Victor view, the penal substitution view, and the healing view. With

the help of these three atonement paradigms I will then discuss the novel *Atonement*, and examine whether there exists an atonement in the novel that would meet the requirements given for it in Christianity. I should also note here that within my analysis the phrase ‘the Atonement’ (with the capital A) will refer to the Christian definition of atonement as the saving work of Christ, and the word ‘atonement’ will refer to the general definition of making amends for an offense.

2.1 The Christus Victor view

The Christus Victor view of atonement, also known as “the classic view”, is considered to have been the most dominant view of atonement in the history of Christianity, up until the Reformation in the 16th century (Beilby & Eddy 2006, 12). Although this view of atonement had been a vital component of atonement studies long before him, Gustav Aulén (1879–1977) is often credited as having developed a more systematic account of the Christus Victor view (Depoortere 2011, 323–324). My thesis will rely largely on the book *The Nature of Atonement*, in which the Christus Victor view is introduced in an essay by Gregory A. Boyd, where he both defines its central elements as well as gives reasons for why he considers the Christus Victor view to (still) be the most fundamental of all the atonement views.

In terms of its essence, the Christus Victor view is characterized as “Satanward” in its focus, meaning that it considers the most important aspect of the Atonement to be Christ’s victory over evil and “the powers” that rule the world, and that have “obtained rights over humankind” (Depoortere 2011, 324). To put it in very simple terms, in the classic view of atonement, good triumphs evil. The world is seen as a battleground in which good and evil are in a constant state of war, and it seems that evil has overpowered good for quite some time (Boyd 2006, 25). Boyd asserts that the basis for this “starting point” for the Christus Victor view can be found in Genesis, and the very beginning of the entire universe. Not only humans, but the entire cosmos is “held hostage by evil forces”, and only God has the power and ability to defeat these forces. Boyd

clarifies this by stating that while the Devil (before the Atonement has happened) is the “functional” lord of the universe, God however is the “ultimate” lord, and therefore He is able to defeat evil even though its reign seems to be absolute (2006, 27).

The whole world, then, was fundamentally evil, not only individual people and their sins. This view effectively broadens the scope of the Atonement as well, since it now pertains to the universe in its entirety. The Devil was the source of everything that was evil in the world, and not only did he have a hold of humankind, he ruled the entire universe (Brümmer 2005, 68). Because of this view of the world as a “cosmic war zone” between good and evil, this time (approximately two centuries B.C.) in the history of Christianity has often been called the apocalyptic period (Boyd 2006, 27). In the Atonement, then, it was Christ who would end this cosmic war and liberate the world from the hold of the Devil.

An important aspect that must be stressed with the notion of evil here is that it is not only the Devil and “the powers” that represent the bad, but actually the entire humankind is under Satan’s hold and therefore evil *in itself* (Beilby & Eddy 2006, 13). So even though there can be said to be a war going on between good and evil, the evil has already managed to slither its way into the side of “the good”, namely the humankind. Because evil has entered into the side of the good (people), people have thus become evil themselves, and as one of the most vital principles in the Christus Victor view states, evil cannot atone for evil (Boyd 2006, 29). Humankind is not and never could be able to “pay back the debt”, and yet somehow they must (Depoortere 2011, 322).

This premise of the poor state of humankind later provided another crucial aspect to this classic paradigm: *the ransom theory* of atonement. Support for this view can be found directly from the Bible itself: “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). In the Atonement, the life of Christ is given as ransom for the redemption of humanity, and thus God regains humankind from the hold of the Devil (Weaver 2001, 151). Through the Atonement, good is once again restored after the reign of evil, *everything* is made better, and people are freed from the bondage of sin (Boyd 2006, 30; 33). This yet again emphasises the larger scale within which to understand sin and atonement, because involved in the Atonement

is humankind in its entirety, that is, every sin of every individual person who ever lived.

One particular detail of the Atonement and indeed the ransom theory is of utmost importance: the *innocence* of Christ. The fact that an innocent life is given as ransom for those that are truly guilty (meaning, humans), creates an injustice that is nevertheless necessary for the atoning to be satisfactory (Finlan 2005, 71). In this seemingly illogical scenario, the atonement must be done by someone who is pure and innocent, even though it is exactly this innocence that should spare them from the punishment (of sin). Furthermore, Christ atones for humankind *voluntarily*, and “out of love” (Boyd 2006, 37). Christ takes the place of the guilty ones, suffers the punishment meant for them and atones in their behalf willingly, through no fault of His own. This is in stark contrast to the societal, and more precisely the legal view of atonement, in which it is always the perpetrator of the crime that also must atone for his/her crime, and rarely does this out of free will. But more on this matter will come in section 4.

From this redemptive function of atonement we arrive at yet another important aspect of the Christus Victor view of atonement: *freedom*. The result of the Atonement in this classic paradigm is essentially the world’s deliverance from evil, which could not have been achieved by anyone else but God (Boyd 2006, 32). To put it simply, one is set free because of another’s sacrifice, that is, the innocent atones for the guilty one/s. Through atonement, the guilty are now free to “escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Tim 2:26). Within the even broader scope of the Atonement, the evil powers that used to rule the entire universe, are now subjugated under God’s authority, and thus the “cosmic victory” of Christ brings freedom, and forgiveness (Boyd 2006, 33). Evil is overcome and no longer the master of the universe. This is essentially the meaning of ‘victory’ in the Christus Victor view.

There are some interesting characteristics that begin to come across the Christus Victor view of atonement. Firstly, it is the “receiver” of the atonement (God) who decides whether the atonement is satisfactory. In Christianity, because God is the one that has been offended or wronged in some way, He also holds the power to either accept the atonement, or reject it. This is in perfect accordance with a very common definition for the word atonement: there is a “state of imbalance”

between two parties, and in the Christian view that means God and humankind. Sin has created this imbalance, and God demands the balance to be restored (Weaver 2001, 154–155). The entire cosmos is indebted to God, and must propitiate for their sins. It is thus the *power* the one party has over the other, that brings imbalance between them. In the classic view of atonement, these two parties are also clearly divided into the good and the bad. This is true for all of the “levels” in which atonement can and must be done according to the Christus Victor view:

God – a human being;
 God – humankind;
 God – the universe;
 the good – the evil.

This is what Gregory Boyd emphasizes as being not only the soteriological (salvific), but also the cosmic significance of the Atonement of Christ (2006, 33).

Secondly, through and after the atonement, *there must follow freedom* for the ones who have atoned, or been atoned for (Boyd 2006, 35). Otherwise the atonement would have been in vain, and indeed inadequate. Whatever the crime has been, after the atonement - assuming it has been satisfactory - the crime is forgiven and expiated for completely. In the Christus Victor view it is also greatly emphasised that the redeemer (Christ) atones out of free will, and self-sacrifice (2006, 43). There is no obligation for Christ to atone for the entire humankind, but He does so out of love and mercy (2006, 36). This prompts us to question when discussing atonement in general, the *motive* behind the atonement. Why is the atonement done? How is the atonement done? If it is not out of free will, as in the Christus Victor view, but instead demanded for example by a higher authority, does this affect the meaning and significance of the atonement?

One final aspect of the atoning work of Christ that Boyd touches upon, but does not discuss at length, is the *domain* in which the atonement must and can be done (2006, 36). Even though it is not given greater importance within the Christus Victor view, I however find it a relevant notion to consider for the purpose of my thesis, and in connection to the events in the novel *Atonement*. In Christianity, Christ must indeed become man, and thus *enter the domain* of humankind (and evil), to be able to atone for the world. From this we arrive at an interesting question to consider: where can

atonement be done and how? These are aspects that Boyd does not elaborate on, but I will discuss them further with the other paradigms for atonement in Christianity, as well as in my own analysis.

To summarize the key aspects of the Christus Victor view in general as well as in relation to my thesis, the main factors in the Atonement are 1) good overcoming evil, 2) the innocence of Christ, 3) the Atonement done out of free will, and 4) the freedom that follows. This does not mean that the numerous other aspects of the Christus Victor view that I have mentioned earlier are any less significant, but simply that these four listed here make a good foundation from which to consider the questions I raise in my thesis as a whole. I will now move on to discuss the other two views I consider to be important in relation to my thesis, meaning, the penal substitution view and the healing view of atonement.

2.2 The penal substitution view

The second branch of the theory of atonement discussed here is called the penal substitution view, and like the adherents of the previous atonement theory, the proponents of the penal substitution view consider their selected view to be the most fundamental of the atonement theories, as well as the one most widely accepted in churches all around the world (Kyle 2013, 202). This view is said to have its roots in 16th century Christianity, when the notions of penance and sacrifice were particularly appealing to the church (Beilby & Eddy 2006, 16–17).

Where the Christus Victor view was described as “Satanward” in its focus, the penal substitution view is defined as “Godward”. For this reason it is often defined also as the *objective paradigm* of atonement. This means that the Atonement (the death and resurrection of Christ) is understood and viewed as “meeting a specific penal requirement” imposed by God (Kyle 2013, 202). This “requirement” comes from humanity’s moral failure: *sin*. Much like in the Christus Victor view, because of sin humankind is under the hold of the Devil, and not only does this sin have to be atoned for, it must be atoned for in a way that pleases God. In this predicament of sin and

atonement, humanity has the *obligation* to atone for its sins, but only God has the *ability* to do it, because no human can ever be free of sin. The solution then is Christ, the God who became man, but remained sinless (Schreiner 2006, 73–74). Only in this way could the atonement be satisfactory to God. Basis for this view is not difficult to find from the Bible, either: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

Because of this “exchange” between the guilty (humans) and the innocent (Christ) that takes place in the Atonement, this view of the atonement is indeed called the *substitutionary* view (Schreiner 2006, 67). The Atonement is done, and indeed *can* only be done by this substitution of Christ for the entire humankind. This sacrifice is viewed as a penal transaction between God and Christ, through which the freedom of humankind is purchased (Daly 2007, 41–42). Because God’s law has been broken, punishment must follow and a price must be paid. Yes, He is a loving God, but there are laws that humanity must abide by, and only Christ’s voluntary sacrifice can fulfil God’s requirements for justice (Kyle 2013, 203). At the same time, God demonstrates what the consequences are for violating His laws.

The challenge was then, and still is, the combining of the two very different images of God: the loving father, and the divine punisher of the world. This combination of the two sides might indeed be an impossible task, as for example Stephen Finlan has argued (Finlan 2005, 79). How can a supposedly loving and compassionate God allow the death of His own, innocent son? On the other hand, how can He allow the entire humankind and their sins to be absolved through the death of one man? The problem emerges from the proportionality of the wrong committed, and the punishment that follows. It has been argued that Christ’s suffering is not as itself enough to atone for all of the sin of humankind. A counter argument for this has been that even though God will not allow the breaking of His law, the punishment does not necessarily have to be “as justice demands”, because God has the authority to offer mercy as well as judgement (Terry 2013, 21). To put it simply, if humanity understands to sin no more, the Atonement is acceptable to God. Rather than punishing *all* humankind for their sins, in the Atonement God demonstrates his “personal anger against sin” in the suffering and sacrifice of Christ (Schreiner 2006, 79).

Thomas R. Schreiner is one of the current advocates for the penal substitution view of atonement. In fact, he claims that this understanding of atonement is “the heart and soul of an evangelical view of the atonement”, and serves as “the anchor and foundation for all other dimensions” for it (Schreiner 2006, 68). Thus, he does not reject or exclude other interpretations of the atonement, but instead asserts that at the core of these other paradigms stands the penal substitution view. Even so, he acknowledges that the concept of atonement is multifaceted, and an all-encompassing definition for atonement is difficult, if not impossible to find. However, penal substitution is, according to Schreiner, the right place to start.

Schreiner agrees, for the most part, with Boyd’s definition and arguments for the Christus Victor view, but finds some crucial aspects of atonement to be inadequately portrayed by Boyd. One and perhaps the most important of these is the question of the state and role of humankind within the concept of atonement. Whereas Boyd describes humans to be, according to Schreiner's criticism, close to helpless and innocent “victims” of sin and the evil powers (2006, 51), within the penal substitution view humans are considered as *active agents* indeed capable and even willing to commit sin. Schreiner thus emphasises more greatly the humankind’s own responsibility for “the evil within us” (2006, 68). It is not therefore so much for the evil powers that somehow control us “from the outside”, but for the innate evil and sin for which humanity needs to atone for. Boyd does also acknowledge this innate guilt of humankind in the Christus Victor view, but it is given even greater significance in the penal substitution view.

At the heart of this paradigm lies the premise that for all of the sin that humankind has committed in the past and will commit still, Christ becomes the penal substitute (Schreiner 2006, 82). Sin is “an objective reality”, a crime punishable by death, and cannot be atoned for simply by repentance or confession. As a law of morality, an offense must always be followed by a punishment (Kyle 2013, 208) - some kind of deed must follow. With this objective attitude towards sin and atonement, the subjective experience of an individual is taken out of the equation, and according to Schreiner, this is exactly how we should look at the notion of atonement. This is also the key factor and cause for a lot of the criticism that has been given against the penal substitution

view (Schreiner 2006, 70). Because of its focus on the legality of the atoning process, and the aspects of law and punishment (even death), it is often criticised for being impersonal and violent. According to Weaver, several atonement theories and the penal substitution view in particular hold the assumption that “justice equals punishment”, which is consecutively “understood as violence” (Weaver 2001, 155). Schreiner however proclaims that the penal substitution view is not in any way inconsistent with what the Bible tells us about atonement. It is thus a valid component among other theories of atonement, albeit a more objective one.

As it is rather bluntly asserted in the Bible itself: “the penalty for sin is death” (Rom 6:23). In the penal substitution view, because it is God’s law that has been broken, He also has the power to decide what the punishment for the offense should be. This is not of course how the actual legal system of a society operates - it is never the victim or the object of the offense who judges and punishes the criminal. In Christianity, however, God is both the one that has been offended as well as the judge who brings justice and punishment upon the guilty (Schreiner 2006, 72). In the penal substitution view on atonement, there must always come penalty before forgiveness. Simply regretting one’s crimes does not absolve a person of them, some form of actual penance must follow. Atonement is thus a process, not a single act of propitiation (Watkins 2005, 64).

According to Schreiner’s description of the penal substitution view, God demands perfection, and even “one transgression constitutes a person as a lawbreaker”. Because evil exists within humankind, and God’s demand for perfect obedience is impossible to meet, there develops a desire to rebel and sin against God. Therefore, once a sin has been committed, there is nothing that could be offered as defence for the crime, because behind every sin is the desire to commit it (Schreiner 2006, 73–74). In fact, it is not only desire that drives people to sin against God, but often some kind of personal gain as well. Schreiner states that “failure to keep the law stems from rebellion”, in which humankind rejects God’s authority and His demand for perfection (2006, 77). Put in very simplistic terms, humans desire something they know is against God’s law, but in their selfishness disregard this fact and defy Him. Although the penal substitution view may be criticised for being impersonal in its general attitude towards atonement, it does however bring a very

personal aspect to both sin as well as God's judgment on sin. There exists a personal "agreement of rights and obligations" between God and humankind, the breaking of which is thus also considered to be personal (Brümmer 2005, 73). Since there are no objective or rational reasons to sin, it must derive from personal interest and gain, and thus sin cannot be understood simply as an "outer evil" that lingers upon the whole of humankind, but instead as an inherent inclination within each individual person to rebel against God.

Even though this paradigm is often criticized for being impersonal and objective, the God in the penal substitution view of atonement reacts to sin on a very personal level. As Schreiner explains, sin is not seen merely as a transgression against a law, but indeed God himself (2006, 80). In His "wrath" and judgement, then, God demonstrates His *personal* hatred of sin. Thus, we might conclude that in the penal substitution view, even though objective in its approach on atonement, there are subjective, personal agents representing "both sides" of the atonement. However, Schreiner points out that this does not mean that God is unjust or irrational in His anger. It is not towards people that He shows His anger, but towards sin, and this must be because fundamentally, all good must hate all evil (2006, 80).

One other important aspect in the penal substitution view that I would like to discuss further here is the concept of judgement. If we look at the method through which atonement is arrived at within this particular paradigm, the most obvious components would be the transgression, and the punishment that follows. Between these two events, however, must exist the act of judgement. This (usually) consists of the confession of the guilty party, which is followed by a public condemnation and judgement for the crime committed. Although very legal in its character, this applies to Christianity and indeed the penal substitution view of atonement as well (Schreiner 2006, 78). For every sin there must be judgement and retribution. There exists a certain process, therefore, that both the wrongdoer as well as the one wronged must follow in order to arrive at a satisfactory and a just atonement (Watkins 2005, 70).

It could, however, be rather easily questioned whether this judgement is *truly just*, because as was discussed earlier, God does respond to sin with a personal hatred. This nevertheless is not a

question of great importance for the purposes of my thesis. Still, I find the “sequence” or process through which atonement is achieved to be of great significance: first, there must be a law that is then broken (with sin). From this follows judgement, and then a punishment that should and must always be just. All of these factors combined we arrive at atonement, and as it was in the Christus Victor view, in the penal substitution view as well it is again God alone who decides whether the atonement has been satisfactory.

Several important aspects of the theory of atonement have yet again emerged from the penal substitution view that will be fundamental for my analysis of the novel *Atonement*. Especially the notions of a satisfactory atonement, the judgement and punishment of an offense, as well as the process of atonement will surely prove to be an abundant source of comparisons as well as incompatibilities with the novel itself. Before I can dive into this abundance, however, I must discuss the third and final theory of atonement in my thesis, that is, the healing view of atonement.

2.3 The healing view

The third and last paradigm of atonement to be considered here is called the healing view, often also called “the subjective paradigm” because of its emphasis on humanity. For this reason it is usually described as “humanward” in its focus. The healing view thus interprets atonement from the human point of view, and considers its importance to be in the effect that it has on humanity (Beilby & Eddy 2006, 18). What these effects on humanity are, is a question without a definitive answer in itself, but some common themes can be found, such as reconciliation, restoration and well-being. Unlike in the two previously discussed paradigms, in the healing (and subjective) view the Atonement is directed at the “sinful humankind”, because the guilt of sin essentially lies upon humankind (Weaver 2001, 153).

Indeed, another aspect that sets this subjective paradigm clearly apart from the other two views previously mentioned is the role and status it assigns to humankind. Where the Christus

Victor and penal substitution views considered humanity simply to be within the hold of the Devil and more or less helpless in their plight, the healing view places the blame for this situation largely on humans themselves. This is what is generally meant by “the human condition”, that is, the plight that humankind is in before atonement has taken place. Humankind had the chance to be part of God’s kingdom, and indeed rulers of this Earth, but because of its “propensity to do evil” humanity refuses to obey God and turns away from Him (Spence 2006, 59–60). Because of this ignorance of humankind, in the Atonement God’s love and mercy becomes of utmost importance. Humanity clearly does not deserve to be redeemed, but because “God so loved the world”, as the famous John 3:16 begins, humankind is saved, and could only be saved, through Christ’s atonement.

In the book *The Nature of the Atonement* the healing view is presented by Bruce R. Reichenbach, and I will rely largely on his essay in my discussion as well. It is important to note first of all that in the healing view the “issue at hand” is not merely a physical illness that a human being might have in their body, but their entire (physical and spiritual) well-being, sense of wholeness, peace, and having a rightful place within a community are important dimensions as well (Reichenbach 2006, 120). All of these different aspects of human life are thus affected by what is meant by ‘sickness’ within the healing view of atonement. As it is said in Isaiah 1:5, the “whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted”. This all-encompassing sickness that humankind bears is the direct result of sin, and the failure of humanity to obey its covenant with God (2006, 121).

As I stressed earlier, in the healing view of atonement humankind is not only subject to sin, but furthermore *actively* sins, and has sinned ever since the Great Fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1–24). Because of this humanity has acquired “a fallen nature”, that is no longer able or capable to atone for itself. Moreover, humankind is not necessarily even willing to atone for itself, because by disobeying God a human being is not only a sinner, but “a defiant sinner who loves self above all else” (Schmiechen 2005, 70). This unrepentant, defiant humankind has broken its covenant (which in a way could also be said to be a kind of relationship), and as follows the breaking of a relationship, humanity is in effect now separated from God, much like Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden (Reichenbach 2006, 120).

This brings us to an important aspect of the healing view and the various effects of the sickness that a humanbeing carries. Throughout the history of humankind communities have mercilessly excluded and expelled “the sick in body and mind, the poor, social outcasts” in order to avoid whatever it was that the outcasts represented (Schmiechen 2005, 123). In the Old Testament this was done by the priests, who were considered responsible for the health of the community (Reichenbach 2006, 124). So, much like the sickness of a person can contaminate the whole community, likewise the sin of one person affects the entire community they live in. The wrongdoer carries a kind of “moral stain”, that not only injures the direct victim of the offense, but also the moral community which evidently has had its rules broken (Watkins 2005, 63). The only solution, then, for the community to recover from this disruption is to expel the one that caused it, that is, “the sick”. In order to be allowed back into the community, not only is repentance, but a “transformation of the self” needed (Schmiechen 2005, 70).

In the healing view of atonement, however, the sinner cannot atone and therefore transform oneself. So the only possibility for healing and liberation is in the Atonement of Christ, in which “He takes up sickness, bears our sorrows (suffering), brings us well-being and heals us by his wounds” (Reichenbach 2006, 129). This is the very essence of the healing view of atonement. Whereas the two other views previously discussed focused mostly on the atonement for sin, the healing view also greatly emphasises everything else that is removed *alongside* sin (i.e. sickness). Through the Atonement is not only sin forgiven, but overall well-being and harmony restored. This is what John Thomas has described as “the holistic nature of healing”, which can only be achieved *after* and *through* the Atonement of Christ (2005, 30).

The notion of ‘healing’ is usually understood as something that happens to or within an individual, and this is very much the case in the healing view of atonement too. However, healing can have other dimensions as well. As was mentioned earlier, healing does not always need to refer to an actual illness, but it can also refer to communities and relationships. Thus, when a relationship between two parties has been broken, through an act of reparation (or atonement) this relationship can be said to have been healed, and indeed *must* be healed again (Spence 2006, 59). The same

applies in the healing view of atonement: the Atonement of Christ heals the relationship between God and humankind. The injury has been mended, and forgiveness and reconciliation has followed (Reichenbach 2006, 130). Not only has healing happened within the wrongdoer and the victim themselves, it has also taken place in the relationship between the two. Likewise, the same is possible between the wrongdoer and the community they come from, as was discussed in the previous paragraphs. Through the healing that follows the Atonement of Christ, humans are allowed back into “the wholeness of God’s community”, and into “the wholeness of our person”, neither of which are no longer affected by sickness and sin (2006, 133).

Many vital aspects, then, have once again been introduced through this healing view of atonement that will be of utmost importance for my analysis of Ian McEwan’s novel. One of these is certainly the complex natures of both the notions of healing, as well as sickness. While seemingly straightforward by definition, within the framework of atonement they suddenly become widely multidimensional. Other important elements worth remembering are the effect of healing as pertaining to relationships and communities, and the exclusion of the guilty from the community in which they lived. Now that the third and last theory of atonement has been introduced, I will move on to combining all of the three atonement theories discussed, to the novel *Atonement*. Whether or not these atonement theories are applicable to the novel will be the question at hand, and moreover, whether in the light of these atonement theories there in fact can be said to exist an acceptable atonement in the novel.

3. The novel *Atonement* and the Christian definition of atonement

In this section the novel *Atonement*, its main events and characters, will be examined in relation to the three previously discussed viewpoints on atonement, namely, the Christus Victor, the penal substitution, and the healing views. The objective of my analysis will be to investigate whether in the light of these Christian paradigms there indeed does occur an atonement (or several atonements) in the novel, and to give arguments for why this is / is not the case. The answer will rely on the manners with which the supposed atonement in the novel is consistent or inconsistent with how atonement is defined in the three Christian atonement paradigms. I will begin with Briony's character, since the novel is more or less universally accepted as being her "atonement", and question whether it is satisfactory as such. I will then discuss Robbie's character and examine what exactly is his role when we discuss atonement in the novel. It should be noted here for clarity, that for quotations from the novel *Atonement* itself only the letter p. (or pp.) is given before the page number, to indicate that they are from the primary source.

3.1 "To have the world just so" - Briony's atonement from the Christian perspective

If we are to accept the novel *Atonement* to be Briony's admission and indeed atoning for her wrongdoing, as is suggested for example by Anne Rooney (2006, 7), and David K. O'Hara (2011, 84) in their readings of the novel, surely we must also be able to find some basis for this claim. My underlying question in challenging this idea of the novel as Briony's atonement is quite simple: *is the atonement acceptable?* What are the bases for her supposed atonement to be satisfactory? And if no such bases can be found, what follows from this? I will carry out my analysis of these issues by applying to the novel the key characteristics given to atonement in the three atonement theories discussed in chapter 2.

As was established in all three theories on atonement, the two parties representing the

“different sides” of an atonement are also nearly always divided into the good and the bad sides. The supposed evil has somehow offended “the good”, and now they stand separated in a state of imbalance, and order must be restored (Weaver 2001, 152). However, with a fictional novel and its more than complex characters this is not as straightforward a division to make. For example, even the most fundamental question concerning Briony’s guilt divides opinions among critics: is Briony purposefully hurting Robbie, or does she truly not understand the consequences of her accusations?

In her analysis of the novel, Anne Rooney states that it is “not malice” that causes Briony to accuse Robbie of the crime, but simply her desire for “a neat story” (2006, 48). Likewise, Brian Finney justifies Briony’s behaviour with the fact that she is only a child with an “over-active imagination” which causes her to misinterpret what has happened, and eventually, to lie (2004, 72). I however disagree with this interpretation of the events, and there are critics who share my opinion - to some degree at least. One of these is Mary Behrman, who does acknowledge the fact that Briony is still a child, but also points out that Briony in her “mercurial nature” does not simply happen to be the key witness to something, but instead *actively* pursues Robbie’s condemnation (2010, 459–460). This interpretation of Briony’s actions is not widely shared, though. Indeed, even though critics of the novel do not seem to hesitate to admit that Briony is responsible for the tragic events that follow her crime, they do however seem to think it impossible for the 13-year-old Briony to be fully aware of her wrongdoing. I am reluctant to dismiss this possibility quite so easily, since after all, *knowing* that it was too dark for her to see the face of the man who had attacked Lola (p. 169), she assures the police of her certainty that it was Robbie:

‘You saw him then.’
 ‘I know it was him.’
 ‘Let’s forget what you know. You’re saying you saw him.’
 ‘Yes, I saw him.’
 ‘Just as you see me.’
 ‘Yes.’
 ‘You saw him with your own eyes.’
 ‘Yes. I saw him. I saw him.’ (p. 181)

Even if we accept the defence that Briony truly believes that the attacker was Robbie, in this particular scene however, she is lying, and she is aware that she is lying.

In my opinion it can then be argued, that if the two parties in the state of imbalance here are Briony and Robbie, then we can, at least tentatively, classify Briony as “the bad”, and Robbie as “the good”. Even though Robbie’s character is flawed as well (he did write the obscene letter to Cecilia), he is nonetheless innocent of the horrendous crime that he is accused and later convicted of, and Briony knows this. Briony represents the bad, because all along she is aware that she is lying. The lying does not take place on just one occasion, either, since she is repeatedly questioned and interviewed, and even though she begins to doubt herself, she dares not reveal these doubts to the adults around her, because it might “disrupt the process she herself had set in train” (p. 169). Despite the fact that she does not know who the attacker really was, she consciously decides to accuse Robbie of the crime and to hold on to that decision no matter what, although admitting to herself that she cannot be sure that it was him.

Therefore, even if we may be able to somewhat clearly identify the good and the bad “sides” of the atonement at hand, their dynamic is still quite different from that brought forward for example in the Christus Victor view by Boyd. When in Christianity it is traditionally always the good that in the end triumphs over evil, this is not the case for the characters of the novel. On the contrary, it is Robbie (the good) who suffers and eventually dies, whereas Briony (the bad) lives on and never truly has to come face to face with the severe consequences of her actions. There is no restoration of balance, no possibility for Briony to reverse the past and undo what was done (Finney 2004, 69). Therefore, the question of how this battle between good and bad in the novel ultimately ends might be a question forever open to debate, since it relies largely on one’s own interpretation of the characters. Still, in my opinion it can be argued that there is a similar battle between good and evil in the novel as is present in atonement according to the three atonement theories. Only the question of who “the winner” eventually is, remains open for discussion.

Relating to this battle between the good and the bad we should also discuss further the apparent state of imbalance that exists between the opposite sides of the atonement in the novel. In fact, there are two different ways that the good and the bad, that is, Robbie and Briony, are in a state of imbalance. In both cases, however, the reason for this imbalance is the power that one holds over

the other. First of all, there exists an imbalance as it is defined in all of the Christian atonement theories: the one receiving the atonement has the right to judge whether it is satisfactory, thus they possess a power over the other (Schreiner 2006, 79). From this perspective, then, and within the reading of the novel as Briony's atonement, it is Robbie who has the power to judge her atonement, that is, to accept or reject it. Because in this scenario Briony is the one guilty of a crime, she stands in an inferior status to Robbie, who represents the innocent one that the crime was committed against, respectively. The original balance of both of them standing in equal value to the other could only be restored by an accepted, and indeed satisfactory atonement. Whether this happens or not is the question currently under debate. However, I would argue that the balance cannot be restored simply because Robbie is not and will not ever be able to accept (or reject, for that matter) Briony's atonement, because it comes much too late. Again, Mary Behrman seems to share my view on this issue stating that Briony "waits too long" with publishing the book that is her atonement, and only does this "when no one is left to care" (2010, 460). Thus, the imbalance between Briony and Robbie will remain forever, because the question of whether Briony has "done enough" to pay for her crime can never be resolved. Only Robbie can decide that, and he is no longer alive.

The other way that there exists an imbalance between Briony and Robbie in the novel concerns their social classes. Contrary to the imbalance that was discussed above and in which Robbie had the superior status, in this second type of an imbalance it is Briony who stands superior to Robbie. Briony is the youngest child of a wealthy, English upper-class family, whereas Robbie comes from a poor working-class home, and is the son of the Tallis family's cleaning lady. Still, prior to the tragic events of that summer night at the Tallis' family dinner when the attack and Robbie's arrest take place, there is no evidence of any kind of discrimination against Robbie from any member of the Tallis family in the novel. On the contrary, he is a good friend and schoolmate of Cecilia and Leon, and is even invited to their family dinner that night as if he actually was a blood relative. The class distinctions only become evident after Lola has been attacked, and the task of separating the guilty from the innocent begins.

David K. O'Hara also points out this social imbalance in the novel by saying that it is indeed

class distinctions that cause Briony's accusations to be so readily believed over Robbie's innocence, and further, the reason why "the true culprit" Paul Marshall is never even considered as a possible suspect. As appalling as this seems in our present day and world, in 1935 England it would have sadly been "far more acceptable to put this sort of thing down to the son of a cleaner than to confront the rather more scandalous proposition that it was committed by someone of higher stature" (O'Hara 2011, 79). Compared to Paul Marshall, then, or indeed anyone from the higher social class, Robbie is of inferior value and thus deemed a preferable loss. The consequences of blaming Robbie for the crime are weighed against the consequences of the attacker being someone else from the dinner party, and thus Robbie's lower social status determines his conviction. The same (awful) rule applies when Robbie stands in contrast to Briony and her accusations, as he so completely loses that battle of credibility against her on that fateful summer evening.

Moreover, Briony seems at times even to be aware of this sense of superiority she carries, and revel in it. Where this sense of superiority stems from is somewhat unclear, but O'Hara makes a remark on this in his article as well saying that Briony has "appointed herself an authority", from which she judges the events (and people) around her (2011, 79). The same observation is made also by Brian Finney in his description of Briony: "She ruthlessly subordinates everything the world throws at her to her need to make it serve the demands of her own world of fiction" (2004, 69). Briony, then, not only has the ability, but the desire to create stories and make sense of the world with and through her imagination, even if by doing so she causes harm to others around her. She has assumed for herself a higher authority, a *power* to judge and condemn others, maybe because at the age of thirteen she is yet to be reprimanded for it. I see this sense of authority portrayed clearly in the arrogance with which she opens and reads the private letter that was meant from Robbie to Cecilia only. Instead of feeling shame for having read something very intimate in the letter, she asserts that "it was right, it was essential, for her to know everything", and almost rejoices in the chance to "consider Robbie afresh" for the story she is steadily forming in her mind (p. 113).

In this second type of imbalance then, the superiority lies with Briony because of the class distinction between her and Robbie, but also because she has a sense of superiority "built in her" as

well. Perhaps this derives from the fact that already at the age of thirteen she considers herself to be an artist, a writer, with the compelling “desire to have the world just so” (p. 4), and with the boldness to fulfil this artistic desire. This would in no means be a negative aspect of her character if it did not result in the utter destruction of Robbie’s life. Much like in the form of imbalance discussed before, there is little hope for the restoration of balance here either. The social hierarchy of a country is hardly a matter over which an individual holds much power, therefore Robbie is forever destined to stand inferior to Briony, and the whole Tallis family. Briony cannot help this, no one can. This imbalance of social status between Robbie and Briony is only intensified by Briony’s perception of herself as superior to Robbie, and indeed with the power to compose what should happen to him, as if he was merely a fictitious character in one of her stories.

From this self-proclaimed authority of Briony’s it is more than fitting to move on to discuss the next characteristic of an atonement given in the atonement paradigms, that is, the innocence of the person who atones. The innocence and purity of the one that atones is perhaps one of the most important notions raised in all of the atonement theories discussed in chapter 2. Especially in the Christus Victor view the matter is given immense value, since according to this view the Atonement would not be satisfactory, or even possible, without the innocence of Christ (Boyd 2006, 27). In attempting to decide whether Briony’s atonement is satisfactory, then, we must also consider her innocence. Needless to say, this is a question which divides critics (and readers) of the novel, as was already discussed before.

From the strictly Christian point of view, I believe Briony’s atonement fails on this account as well. Despite her young age, her naiveté, or even the fact that she might honestly believe that Robbie was the one who attacked Lola, I still would not agree with her being viewed as innocent of all of the injustice that Robbie has to endure in the novel. Not when it can be found in the novel itself that Briony is not certain that the man she saw in the darkness running away from Lola was in fact Robbie (pp. 169–170). There are some, however, who at least want to make a defence for Briony, if not completely acquit her of guilt (although there are some that aim to do that too). For example, Piergiorgio Trevisan makes an interesting case for Briony’s defence by pointing out her

young age and her appetite for both reading and writing stories. Because the romantic and dramatic stories Briony has grown up reading are the only “reality” against which she can interpret the events of the real world, this leads her to eventually misinterpret much of what she witnesses (Trevisan 2010, 194). This is certainly true for the scene in the library (p. 123), where Briony discovers Cecilia and Robbie making love, but she interprets this through her “dramatic schema”, in which it is not love that she sees but instead, aggression, and thus Robbie becomes the villain of the story, and a monster in her eyes (2010, 196–197). Brian Finney makes a similar defence with the claim that because of Briony’s young age and her desire to be a novelist, she simply “misconstructs” the truth in her attempt to form a cohesive (and a good) story (2004, 80).

As compelling as these arguments for Briony’s childlike innocence are, I however see a wide gap between misinterpreting someone as an attacker, and actually publicly accusing them of being such. She might be innocent of her misinterpretations of the events, but not of her actions that follow. If, like Trevisan argued, it is the stories and the “aggression pattern” that she applies to what she witnesses in the library that cause her to interpret Robbie as a villain, does it not also tell us something of her innermost character? The fact that she so willingly assigns this ‘attacker’ role to Robbie instead of even considering any other possibilities, is in my opinion clear evidence of her desire for drama, and of her enjoyment in “making something greater” (p. 116) out of something she really had no right to make assumptions about to begin with. Therefore, I reject the claim that Briony could be regarded as innocent of what follows from her actions, even if they are based on her young age and “creative but simple mind”, as Trevisan puts it (2010, 197). Because of her questionable innocence, then, her atonement cannot be deemed a satisfactory one according to the three Christian atonement paradigms defined earlier.

Another important characteristic that a satisfactory atonement must have in regards to the person doing the atoning, is the voluntariness of this action. As was emphasised in all three atonement theories, and especially in the penal substitution view, there is an obligation for an atonement after an offense (Kyle 2013, 202), but to fulfil this obligation alone does not qualify for an acceptable atonement. The obligation must be met, but it must be met out of free will. In other

words, there cannot exist any beneficial or ulterior motive for the atonement, no gain should be obtained through or because of the atonement. Thus, even if there can be (and often is) a higher power or law that demands the atonement, it is the offender's "voluntary submission" for it that accounts for an acceptable atonement (Weaver 2001, 162).

Whether this characteristic of voluntariness applies to Briony's atonement, and indeed her atonement being the publication of the novel in which she admits her crime, is a problematic question for many reasons. Firstly, there cannot exactly be said to exist "a higher authority" that demands Briony to atone in the novel, but that might be simply for the reason that no one else knows of her crime but Briony herself. Thus writing a novel in which she (supposedly) finally tells the truth could be perceived as voluntary, but the problem of motive still remains. Furthermore, to say that Briony voluntarily atones by publishing her book in my opinion ignores the crucial fact that she actually decides to postpone it, she does not want to publish it in her lifetime (p. 370). So while the actual writing of the book might have been voluntary, Briony procrastinates with making it known to everyone else, proving that she is not willing to atone for her crime publicly (Behrman 2010, 460). Therefore, Briony does not voluntarily atone as would be required by any of the three Christian atonement paradigms simply because her atonement is incomplete, even if she began it out of her own free will.

The motives behind Briony's atonement are another matter very much open for debate, because the impression given in the novel that Briony's atonement consists of her giving Robbie and Cecilia the happy (but fictitious) ending they deserved, and of her "attempt" to atone being enough in itself (pp. 370–371), are notions that largely divide critics of the novel. The challenge lies in the question of *why* the atonement is done. In other words, what does Briony benefit from writing her novel, if anything? Some, and I would argue that most, of the critics of the novel simply view Briony's supposed atonement as her desire to "clear Robbie", and eventually "write her way to absolution", because she is the only one with the ability to do so (Jacobi 2011, 62). While I agree with Martin Jacobi's view on Briony having the ability and responsibility to tell the truth, I do not concede so easily with his claims that in addition to admitting her crime Briony "clearly show[s]

feelings of guilt and shame” or that in writing her book she “attempts to improve herself” (2011, 63). In fact, Briony does not *actually* apologize for her crime at any point in the novel, she merely states that she cannot be forgiven (p. 371). To draw the conclusion, then, that by writing a book in which she tells the truth Briony expresses feelings of guilt and remorse is an assumption at best, and a disputable one at that.

There are also critics, although fewer in number, that adopt a reading according to which Briony’s motives for writing her atonement are essentially selfish ones. For example, David K. O’Hara claims that Briony writes her book and thus her atonement purely “for her own emotional ends” (2011, 87). She does not atone in order to acquit Robbie, or to publicly confess her own guilt, but instead to improve her own self-understanding and ability to empathize with others, in this case Robbie and Cecilia. In writing her story she merely reflects back on the mistakes she made, and on the consequences that followed hoping to make sense of it all now many years later. Thus, because nothing else can be achieved by her “atonement”, it is done solely “for the purposes of her own moral well-being”, as O’Hara concludes (2011, 94). This complicates our discussion on whether Briony’s atonement is acceptable according to the three atonement paradigms. Not only is the voluntariness of the atonement crucial, but so are the motives behind it, and in the Christian understanding of the Atonement these motives cannot be selfish. So if we agree with David K. O’Hara’s interpretation of Briony’s atonement ultimately being done for *herself* and not for Robbie, it would fail to be a satisfactory one. The obligation to atone consist of the debt that Briony owes to Robbie, not to herself.

One other aspect relating to this issue of why an atonement is done is the question of *where* it is done, to which in the Christus Victor view was referred by the *domain* of the atonement. The Atonement of Christ was satisfactory because he “entered the domain” of evil, that is, people, and so was able to atone for them, as one of them (Boyd 2006, 37). The sin lies within the people, thus the Atonement also had to be done among the people. So in addition to the motives behind the atonement, the question of where one atones is equally important. Comparing this aspect to the novel, then, I would argue that Briony’s “atonement” is inadequate also if we look at the domain in

which it is done. After her crime, it has taken Briony 59 years to write her book in which she finally, and from her own perspective, explains what exactly happened that night at the Tallis house (Finney 2004, 75). However, at the time that this takes place in the novel (in 1999), she has not yet published the book, nor shared the “true story” with anyone else. In fact, she reasons with herself that because some of the central figures of the events are still around, the most important of these being Paul and Lola (now married), she determines that the book cannot be published in her lifetime (p. 370). This could of course be viewed simply as an act of discretion towards Paul and Lola, but I think it can also be interpreted as Briony selfishly postponing the inevitable: her confessing for her own, terrible crime.

Her crime was the false evidence she gave to the police in 1935, which led to Robbie’s prison sentence and later his service in the Second World War. To enter the domain of atonement would mean for Briony to also make a confession in front of the law (a judge), but the novel does not reveal whether she ever actually does this. Therefore, if we understand the domain of atonement as it was represented in the Christus Victor view, Briony does not “enter” it in any way, nor does she even seem willing to try. In regards to Briony’s atonement, entering the domain would require Briony *publicly* taking on the role of the guilty one in front of the law, but also the whole community, as Robbie had to do. Her confession (in her novel) is of no actual value, because it is not made public (Molander 2009, 183–184). Briony refuses to do this, she refuses to enter the domain needed, and instead looks for reasons for why she must delay her public confession. The claim that Briony atones through writing her book is therefore unacceptable in my opinion, because that atonement does not occur in the proper domain.

Briony’s failure to publicly admit her crime also prevents another aspect of a satisfactory atonement from being fulfilled, namely the demand for a punishment after an offense. This demand is present in all three atonement theories but perhaps stressed the most in the penal substitution view, where it is a fundamental principle that if God’s law has been broken, a punishment must follow (Schreiner 2006, 82). Some kind of deed is required, the offense cannot be without consequences. It is a matter of opinion, of course, what would suffice as a justified “punishment”

for Briony, because the extent of her guilt is in itself an unresolved concept. David K. O'Hara brings forth in his article a rather interesting view on this matter, according to which Briony's time as a nurse during the war effectively serves as a punishment for her crime. This "self-incriminating" act in which Briony "subsumes herself in her work and gives herself over to a procedural life" compensates for her wild imagination that allowed her to make up stories as a child, and which eventually led to Robbie's conviction (2011, 82). While I agree that there can be said to exist a sense of self-sacrifice in choosing to be a nurse, especially in wartime England, I however fail to see it as a form of punishment in this case. After all, Cecilia made the same decision to become a nurse even before Briony, so what should we make of her choice then?

I do not intend to deny that Briony struggles, and surely is witness to many horrors as the wounded soldiers begin to arrive at the hospital (p. 290), but her service as a nurse cannot in my opinion be considered a punishment for the crime she committed, and for the fatal consequences that followed it. Even if she has taken up nursing because she feels remorse, as O'Hara implies, it still fails to carry any significance in relation to her atonement. As Joakim Molander puts it: "If you pity *yourself* for hurting others you have not been able to fully grasp what you have done." (2009, 182; emphasis mine). As has become quite apparent, there are different interpretations possible to be made of Briony's decision to become a nurse in a time of great distress. Granted, she does take it up voluntarily, and endures when surely many would abandon their post, but is it really a punishment for her crime? Furthermore, is this "punishment" enforced by a higher authority, as the penal substitution view would require? I would argue for the negative for both of these questions. Briony in fact escapes *all* demands that a higher authority could (and should) place on her, because she never truly steps forward as the guilty one. Thus she cannot be said to have done penance for a crime she has not even admitted being guilty of, no matter how selfless her decision to become a nurse might seem. If the "steps" to an acceptable atonement are confession, repentance, and punishment, as Jeremy Watkins defines it (2005, 70), then Briony does not even begin this process, because she stumbles already on the very first step.

From the discussion of what the prerequisites are for an atonement we can now move ahead

to examine what then must *follow* the (satisfactory) atonement. Different end results are emphasized by each of the three atonement theories, but I will only discuss the most central in relation to the novel as Briony's atonement. Perhaps the most essential outcome of a satisfactory atonement is the *freedom* that it brings to everyone affected by it. This was underlined especially in the Christus Victor view, where people were released from "the hold of the Devil" through Christ's atonement. A satisfactory ransom was paid, and with it the freedom of the sinners purchased (Weaver 2001, 151). In accordance with this view, then, Briony's "atonement" should bring freedom to herself, Cecilia, and most of all to Robbie. Whether this happens or not depends on one's reading of the novel's ending, because even though a majority of the critics have accepted the view that Robbie and Cecilia both died during the war (Briony reveals this on page 370), some critics maintain that this did not actually happen (Jacobi 2011, 67). Whichever view one chooses to adhere to (I personally agree with the first reading), the issue of freedom is problematic in both. If Briony's confession had come earlier in her lifetime, it might have been possible for Robbie to be exonerated and survive the war (or avoid it altogether). Freedom would have been a possible outcome still, for everyone involved. At the end of the novel it is evident, however, that Briony is still waiting to publish her book at the age of 77, and it is far too late for Robbie to be "freed", even if he had survived the war and been reunited with Cecilia.

As the novel reveals on its final pages, Robbie evidently dies of his injuries as the troops are retreating to Dunkirk, and thus never returns home, or to Cecilia. What freedom, then, would be even possible to follow from Briony's "atonement"? Some argue that her novel is still a vital step in clearing Robbie's name (Jacobi 2011, 63), but I question whether this truly counts for anything anymore by the time that it finally happens (not in Briony's lifetime, as she admits on p. 370). Nor can she ever free herself of her guilt, because her atonement would have to be deemed acceptable by Robbie, and he never has the possibility to do this.

In the penal substitution view, on the other hand, what must follow a satisfactory atonement is the restoration of the law. The offense is paid for by a penal substitution, in other words, there is a *transaction*, after which order is once again restored and the debt is considered paid (Terry 2013,

14). The fact that Briony has actually produced something concrete (the novel), could be interpreted as her “payment” for her sin, but it falls short on two vital aspects: *who* it is given to, and *when* it is given to them. In the penal substitution view a transaction of any kind must always have at least two parties involved in it, someone must offer the deed, and someone must accept it. Briony could offer her atonement not only to Robbie, but to Cecilia as well, or Robbie’s mother, and so on. An apology is owed by Briony to all of these people, and thus there are many possible “debt repayment scenarios” for Briony to take part in. Writing a novel, even if it contains the truth, is not in itself enough to act as an atonement, or even an apology. Briony would have to make it public, make it known to everyone involved, but she instead wants to postpone this. By coming forward with her confession her “atonement” might be followed by the law being restored, that is, Robbie being cleared of his sentence, and the lives of everyone involved being restored to the way they were prior to the crime. This would make her atonement satisfactory, but as we know, this is not the way that the events play out in the novel.

In the healing view the outcomes of a satisfactory atonement occur in many different levels as well. The key concept is indeed *healing*, which can (and should) happen within an individual, within a relationship between two people, and sometimes even within an entire community (Reichenbach 2006, 130). From Briony’s atonement there should thus follow a restoration of at least her relationships with both Robbie and Cecilia, if nothing more. Cecilia has also evidently broken her connection to her family because they did not believe Robbie’s innocence (p. 208), and this relationship could also be mended by Briony’s confession and atonement. Within Robbie as an individual there would surely occur at least some psychological, and perhaps even physical healing if the truth was revealed, and he would be able to resume his life as he intended (study to be a doctor). His relationship to the community he comes from would be healed as well, as he would be a free man again. All of these different scenarios for healing would be entirely possible, should Briony succeed in her atonement. But, as the novel reveals in the end, in the year of 1999, she is yet to make her atonement known to others. We could conclude then, that if any healing follows from her “atonement”, it is the kind that O’Hara mentioned in his article on Briony’s own well-being

(2011, 87), meaning that only Briony alone benefits from her atonement, and no one else.

One other requirement placed on Briony herself as the one that must atone, is the notion stressed particularly in the healing view of the wrongdoer's need for *transformation* (Schmiechen 2005, 70). Similar to the other issues concerning Briony's innate character, this aspect is also one that divides critics and readers of the novel. Brian Finney, for example, argues that by writing her novel Briony proves that she has acknowledged the consequences of her crime and through fiction now attempts "to do what she failed to do at the time", that is, to have empathy (2004, 81). Alistair Cormack shares this view and asserts that the reader should indeed feel sympathy for Briony, and "admire her candid self-analysis" in which she has shown remorse for her crime (2009, 81).

I do not find these interpretations entirely impossible to agree with, but what I think also should not be ignored are the final pages of the novel that seem to reveal the true character of Briony. The adult Briony who reflects back on everything has not in my opinion gone through the kind of transformation that the atonement theories would require. At the age of 77, as she is completing her "final draft" of her atonement, she still seems more concerned with making it a good story than simply telling the truth (pp. 370–371). This desire for a good story was already evident in her at the age of thirteen, when she constructed her "story" of what happened on that summer evening in 1935 (Marcus 2009, 89). I can understand the argument that Briony's writing of her novel alone suffices to prove that she feels guilty and has therefore changed inherently, but I think we still need to be mindful of the fact that "remorse is not always sincere" (Molander 2009, 182). The novel might very well be Briony's attempt to atone, but from this cannot be directly concluded that she has transformed completely. Her confession does not necessarily stem from her sense of guilt. It is possible, that just as she had to make sense of the things she could not apprehend as a child by creating stories (Robbie's letter, the scene at the library), she has to now, as an adult, write a story of defence for herself, explaining why she did what she did, and why she failed to do what she should have done. Her desire for a good, cohesive story would therefore be greater than her desire for an atonement. This is, however, simply another possible interpretation among many.

As might have become exceedingly clear during my analysis of the novel, and indeed of the

novel as Briony's "atonement", there appears to exist an endless supply of issues to disagree upon and to argue for in the novel, and in Briony's essential character especially. The question whether Briony in fact atones with her novel seems to be a question every critic of the novel discusses or at least comments on, whatever their focus in their text might otherwise be. Some attest that Briony is, in the end, irredeemable (Shah 2009, 43), and that there can be no atonement, because no absolution can be given by Robbie and Cecilia (Cormack 2009, 81). Some, on the other hand, leave the matter open, stating that a definitive answer cannot be found (Marcus 2009, 94), whereas some readily accept Briony's story as a deed that "instantiates her atonement", and accept her writing as a form of penance (O'Hara 2011, 96; also Jacobi 2011, 64). The fact that Briony attempts to make amends is enough, and should therefore suffice as an atonement for her wrongdoing.

When examined by the guidelines provided in the Christus Victor, the penal substitution, and the healing view on atonement, however, Briony's "atonement" seems to on many occasions fall short of what could be considered a satisfactory atonement, even though there are consistencies as well. The "setting" for the atonement in the novel is very similar to the atonement scenarios described in the three atonement paradigms: there is an opposition of good against evil, an imbalance of power, a requirement for a punishment, and so on. However, where Briony's "atonement" appears to clash with the characteristics of a satisfactory atonement is the act of atoning itself, and its consequences. The questions of innocence, voluntariness, penance, and the outcomes of Briony's presumed atonement are factors that effectively render her atonement disputable, perhaps even invalid. The essential cause for Briony's atonement being deemed as inadequate seems to be her innate character. Her decision to postpone publishing her novel and thus make her confession public, seems to be the fundamental reason for why so many of the requirements for a satisfactory atonement are not met. Therefore, her novel cannot be deemed a satisfactory atonement according to the characteristics given in the three Christian atonement paradigms.

3.2 “He walked across the land until he came to the sea” - Robbie’s ultimate sacrifice

In this second section of my analysis chapter I will apply the Christus Victor view, the penal substitution view, and the healing view of atonement to the novel in regards to Robbie’s character. I will examine his character and his experiences in the novel from the viewpoint of a satisfactory atonement, and investigate whether such an atonement is in fact achieved by him, and not Briony. This is a perspective that has not been applied to the novel before, or at least I have been unable to find any literature on the novel that would have shared this view, and therefore I consider it to be an interesting and more than justified exploration to conduct.

As was established in the previous section, there can be made a division into “the good” and “the bad” in the novel, as is true for all three Christian atonement theories as well. Robbie represents the good, because he is eventually the blameless victim of the evil that Briony represents, respectively. I am not alone in appointing Robbie as “the good character” in the novel, although other critics do not necessarily place his character in such direct opposition to Briony’s as I do in my analysis. Nonetheless, nearly every description I have come across in my research has depicted Robbie as a very charitable and selfless character, a “genuinely good person” (Rooney 2006, 93). He has proven his academic skills in literature, and has further ambitions to go back to school and become a doctor (p. 92). During the summers he has done landscaping work at the Tallis house, and even taught Briony how to swim (p. 230). Indeed, he is considered almost an actual member of the Tallis family, and is therefore invited to join them for dinner on that night they celebrate Leon's coming home. Later on, when the twin boys run away in the dark night and the dinner party spreads out to search for them, it is Robbie who finally, in the early hours of the following morning, returns with the boys when everyone else had already been back at the house for quite some time, preparing for breakfast (p. 181–182). All in all, Robbie appears to the reader as a very sympathetic, honourable character, whose innocence is emphasised not just in regards to the crime he is accused of, but as a crucial part of his overall nature. He is a character with whom it is difficult not to side in this juxtaposition of good and bad that can be found in the novel.

Robbie's status as "the good" in the novel is however problematic, if we consider it through the characteristics provided by the three atonement theories. It is the good, after all, that should gain "victory over evil", as Boyd states in his essay on the Christus Victor view (2006, 45). But in the novel it is Robbie who "loses this battle", he loses his life and the future he could have had with Cecilia, through no fault of his own. In the battle that exists between the good and the bad, that is, Robbie and Briony, Robbie indeed does suffer defeat, but I think he can still be considered as representing the good, because of the fundamental and admirable, *good* attributes his character possesses. The good does not cease to be good, even though the battle might be won by the bad.

There can be found yet another "warfare motif" like this in the novel, in which Robbie once again represents "the good". By this I refer to the entire second part of the novel, which closely follows Robbie's time and experiences in the Second World War. He is fighting against Hitler's Nazi army, and I presume it would be rather straightforward to thus classify the Germans as "the bad side" of this battle. Granted, Robbie has enlisted in the army in order to shorten his prison sentence (p. 203), but that does not diminish the fact that he is out there in the war, fighting in France against the Germans. Robbie therefore represents the good in two different "battles" in the novel, but both of them are against an evil. Whether he can be said to have won either of these battles is a problematic question, because even though his fate is tragic in both, his essential character remains good and honourable throughout them, to the end of his life.

The key aspect of this battle between good and evil is the fact that the two stand in an imbalance of power against each other, as was emphasised particularly in the Christus Victor view. That Robbie comes from the lower, working class, is a fact that remains evident throughout the novel, even though he has "broached the divide" between himself and the upper class Tallis family by proving his academic skills at Cambridge (Ellam 2009, 43–44). The class distinction plays a crucial part in what essentially leads to Robbie's arrest, that is, Briony's word being believed over his. Robbie stands inferior to everyone else attending the dinner that night, and is therefore considered the "easiest to sacrifice", the loss they are willing to suffer (2009, 44). Despite his academic success, in the eyes of the Tallis family Robbie remains "little more than a peasant", the

son of their cleaning lady, and nothing more (Behrman 2010, 465). The upper class (and Briony in particular) holds a power in this sense of superiority of theirs, a power against which Robbie has virtually no chance to even begin to battle, and never had. He is not equal to them in value, nor in power, and his fate is thus unjustly in the hands of others, most of all in Briony's.

The ease with which Robbie is blamed and later condemned for the crime resembles the scenario presented in the healing view on atonement, where the one considered "sick" somehow was ordered to live in exile from the rest of the community in order to prevent this "illness" from spreading elsewhere (Reichenbach 2006, 127). Likewise, Robbie has been "tarnished" by the accusations that Briony laid against him, and his moral status has now changed because of it, thus the community (the Tallises) wishes to be rid of him (Watkins 2005, 63). He has been "a threat" in Briony's eyes long before she actually accuses him of the attack, but now the rest of the family share this view as well (all except for Cecilia). Robbie is therefore considered an outsider before his prison sentence even takes place, and excluded from the community simply because of the "sickness" he now carries in the eyes of the community. There develops a kind of social banishment before he actually is truly living in exile, first in prison and later in the war (Jacobi 2011, 467). To be able to once return to this community, Robbie must prove himself "transformed" and without any trace of the sickness that caused his exclusion. This is, essentially, what he sets out to do through the prison sentence and his service in the war, but as the novel reveals, he never returns home.

To move on to discuss the next characteristic of a satisfactory atonement, then, Robbie's atonement cannot exactly be said to happen out of *free will*, as is emphasized greatly in the Christus Victor view. Where Christ willingly submitted himself to be sacrificed as a substitute for humankind, Robbie's atonement is demanded by law, and imposed on him by a higher authority. He does not have a choice whether to atone or not, let alone a chance to decide in which way his atonement should be done. Robbie "leaves under duress", instead of voluntarily choosing to embark on the journey that will eventually require the ultimate sacrifice from him (Behrman 2010, 466). His atonement does, however, fit into the concept presented in the penal substitution view, where the atonement is indeed an *obligation* rather than a choice (Schreiner 2006, 82). The offense that

has occurred and of which Robbie is blamed is the attack on Lola, and in the eyes of the community Robbie is guilty of the crime. From this follows, that the law demands a penalty for the crime, and Robbie is held responsible for restoring the balance that has been disrupted within the community. As Jeremy Watkins presents a premise for a satisfactory atonement: “Anyone who is tarnished by wrongdoing has a moral obligation to atone.” (2005, 64) It is not then necessarily even a question of guilt, as can be concluded from Watkins’ quote. The fact that Robbie has been tarnished by Briony’s accusations is enough to stigmatize him as a criminal, and deem him liable also for the consequences that must follow the crime. To somehow prove that he actually was guilty is of no importance anymore since he already has been classified as the guilty one.

Faced with this obligation to atone, then, Robbie could (at least in theory) fight against it, reject it, and try to find a way out of it. But instead, he submits to the demand that he is faced with, and bears the condemnation for the crime even though it does not justly belong to him, very much like happens in the Christian paradigms for a satisfactory atonement. Although it is made clear in the novel that Robbie resents Briony and what was done to him (p. 228–229), there is a sense of passivity and voluntary submission in the way that he suffers his punishment, and especially his time in the war. This is very similar to the way that in the Atonement Christ voluntarily submits to innocent suffering and bears “the ultimate punishment” for the sake of others (Weaver 2001, 162). Robbie, too, suffers for the good of another, even if he does not realize it. Because he carries the guilt and the punishment for the attack, the true offender, Paul Marshall, escapes judgement and indeed thrives later in life because of his Amo bar business and the war.

However, the main reason for Robbie’s seemingly passive submission for his punishment can in my opinion be found in his love for Cecilia, and in the desire to clear his name and to be able to return home once again a free, vindicated man:

The story could resume. The one that he had been planning on that evening walk. He and Cecilia would no longer be isolated. Their love would have space and a society to grow in. He would not go about cap in hand to collect apologies from the friends who had shunned him. Nor would he sit back, proud and fierce, shunning them in return. He knew exactly how he would behave. He would simply resume.
(p. 227)

So even though he does not freely choose to atone for the crime, he has a motive for surviving it, a reason for fulfilling the obligation unjustly placed upon him. In the three Christian atonement theories it was stressed that no benefit can come to the person who atones, from their atonement, so how does this apply to Robbie? Although there are some obvious and desirable consequences for him to attain through his atonement, I would hesitate to call them “benefits” in the same sense that Briony could have been said to benefit from her atonement. In Robbie’s case it is more about achieving a previously held state of balance, and a value of being, rather than attempting to gain some type of additional benefit. Robbie’s motive for his atonement is to ultimately clear his name, to simply survive it, and return home. To fight against his condemnation and the authorities would be to delay this goal, and therefore he instead seems to suffer his punishment nobly and submissively (Shah 2009, 45).

Another important aspect of an acceptable atonement that is a bit more problematic in Robbie’s case than it perhaps was with Briony, is the question of who is “the receiver” of Robbie’s atonement. In all three Christian atonement paradigms it is God who has been *personally* wronged against, and who has the power to judge the offense, therefore He also is the receiver of the Atonement and judges whether it has been satisfactory or not (Schreiner 2006, 87). Robbie, however, is convicted of a crime against the “impersonal” laws of a community, although he is innocent of the actual crime. The judgement is passed upon him by the law, and therefore the receiver of his atonement must also be the law. Unlike in Briony’s case, for Robbie’s (alleged) crime there can be defined a satisfactory atonement in advance, meaning, the prison sentence that he is given. The process is “reversed” in a way that allows Robbie to know the price for his redemption before he even begins his journey towards it. Had he survived the war and completed his sentence, according to the law his debt to the society would then have been considered paid, and thus his atonement satisfactory. Robbie’s atonement would have a much better chance of being completed than in Briony’s case, because the receiver of Robbie’s atonement is the society itself, and he would only need to endure long enough for his debt to be considered paid. The tragedy of his atonement is the fact that he never survives the final stage of it, that is, the war.

One other aspect that supports the argument that Robbie's atonement could indeed be considered a satisfactory one is the matter of the domain. Again, as was with the penalty for the crime, the law also defines rather clearly the domain in which the atonement must be done, meaning prison. Although not voluntarily, Robbie nonetheless enters the domain required for his atonement, and spends 3,5 years in prison, before eventually enlisting in the army (p. 202). Some critics regard Robbie's time in the war as a way for him to at least "escape the blankness of prison" (Ellam 2009, 44), but I consider it to be more of a prolongation of his punishment than a relief of any kind.

The depth into which Robbie indeed enters "the domain needed", and the injustice of it, are manifested in the fact that his prison sentence alone would have sufficed for a satisfactory atonement - the service in the war was not a necessity of any kind. Prison was the only domain required for his atonement, and his atonement would have been just as acceptable had he decided to serve the complete sentence there. The fact that he chooses to serve his country in the war rather than to sit in a prison cell, perhaps tells us something of his essential, honourable character. It also intensifies the awfulness of the domain that he enters, from a relatively safe environment in a prison in England he further descends into the war in France, where "bursts of violence, casually committed atrocities and transgressions against human decency" are an ordinary part of a soldier's day (Rooney 2006, 108).

In the same way that in the Christus Victor view Christ had to enter the domain of the evil, that is, people, in order for the Atonement to be considered acceptable, so does Robbie enter the domain of "the evil". In his case, that evil consists of people that are now considered the same in social standing as he is as a sex offender, even though he is innocent of the crime. He must enter the domain where those who have offended the laws of society live, and from there can he only attempt to atone for the crime he was condemned for. Robbie does this, and even though his incentive for enlisting in the army might have been the prospect of having his prison sentence reduced, in my opinion it only signifies the depths he is willing to go to in order to achieve a satisfactory atonement, and redeem himself. By choosing to serve in the war he submits himself to great physical harm, and the risk of death, in order to atone for a crime he did not commit, and return

home as a free man. At no point in the novel does Robbie feel sorry for himself, or pity himself, but rather holds on to the same resolution each day: to survive (p. 192). The domain of Robbie's atonement can therefore be considered to be the proper one, because it was defined by the same law that judged him, and he enters it *publicly*, condemned in the eyes of the entire community. The war field is his hell after "the fall".

Out of all the prerequisites for a satisfactory atonement outlined in the three atonement paradigms, perhaps the most important one was the innocence of Christ. A sinner could not have atoned for another sinner, thus a pure, sinless substitute was needed in order for God's law to be satisfied (Weaver 2001, 154). This demand for innocence is also the most significant basis for why in my opinion Robbie's atonement can indeed be considered a satisfactory one. It is not a surprise revelation at the end of the novel when the reader becomes aware of Robbie's innocence, but a fact known from the very beginning of the novel. Although Briony admits rather late in the novel that Lola's rapist was in fact Paul Marshall (p. 324), Robbie's innocence is known to the reader all along because of the misinterpretations that Briony has consistently formed of Robbie throughout that fateful day. Because of the scene at the fountain, and the letter, Robbie is "a maniac" in Briony's eyes, and this leads her to construct her flawed story.

The assurance of Robbie's innocence is emphasised further by the "series of clues" that are given of the true culprit's character, that is, Paul Marshall's (Jacobi 2011, 61). After interrupting the children in their room, he favours Lola by giving her the chocolate and nothing to the twins, and then watches her closely, as if enjoying the way Lola eats the candy (p. 62). As Emily Tallis is resting in her bedroom because of a migraine, she hears Marshall in the children's room, and "a squeal of laughter abruptly smothered" (p. 69). To confirm the intuition that the reader has already formed of Paul's character, when they all gather for the dinner that same night, Paul has a scratch on his face and Lola similarly has abrasions and bruises on her wrists (pp. 127; 141). Later on, when Briony finds Lola in the darkness, and sees only a dark figure running away, Lola is not given the chance to even suggest Paul as a possible attacker because of Briony's conviction that it was Robbie (p. 167). Lola cannot be sure, because her eyes were covered by the attacker, and thus Briony takes

upon herself the role of the one that must be sure, she must tell the story for Lola.

Paul Marshall is not only guilty of the actual attack, but also of keeping silent as Robbie is first suspected and later convicted of the crime. Even though Lola is a victim as well, she however shares the same guilt of keeping silent, and escaping her responsibility to tell the truth and name Paul as the one who raped her (Rooney 2006, 106). Even if she was not able to definitely say the attacker was Paul, she should still express her doubts over the fact that it was Robbie. She admits this to Briony (p. 171), but not to the police later at the house, or to any of the other adults gathered there. It only appears to compound to the injustice that Paul and Lola later marry, and become successful, wealthy members of the London society, remaining “untouchable and secretive” for the rest of their lives (Ellam 2009, 48). They do not, at any point in their lives, have to stand accountable for their crime, nor for keeping silent.

Even though innocent of the horrendous crime that Robbie is condemned for, his character is not without flaws. The only “crime” that he could in my opinion to be said to have committed in the novel is writing the sexually explicit note to Cecilia, and then mistakenly handing it to Briony before realizing that he had taken the wrong letter with him. Having had his emotions stirred by the encounter with Cecilia at the fountain earlier, he writes out this “Freudian slip” of his onto the paper, then takes the letter and leaves “the innocent version” at his desk when he prepares to leave for the dinner at the Tallis house (Finney 2004, 73). He runs into Briony on his way and hands her the letter in the hopes of it making it to the house a little before him, so Cecilia would be able to read it in private before he arrived at the house himself (p. 93). As we know, Briony opens the letter herself, and becomes all the more assured of the fact that Robbie is “a maniac”.

Robbie does therefore commit “a wrong” of some kind in the novel, but I think it can only be considered as a human error at most, not as an actual crime that would deserve a punishment of any sort. After all, the feelings he has developed for Cecilia are mutual, and no harm would have been caused by his letter had Briony not opened it before handing it over to Cecilia. The harm that follows from the letter is thus mediated by Briony, Robbie’s mistake is made graver by Briony’s meddling, not himself. The fundamental characteristics of Robbie thus remain unaltered throughout

the novel, even though he makes mistakes. His character persists to stay good and honourable, even before the accusations are made against him, and all the way through his time in the war. Innocence appears to be an all-encompassing attribute of his, because it defines his essential character as well as his actions. He is innocent of Lola's assault and remains good and charitable under the "trying circumstances" that he is faced with later on, through no fault of his own (Jacobi 2011, 61).

This obviously creates a great injustice, but it is nevertheless the reason why Robbie's atonement can indeed be deemed a satisfactory one, when viewed through the three Christian atonement paradigms. The innocence of Christ is the key factor in what makes the Atonement satisfactory, and fulfils God's law, because those guilty of sin could not atone for themselves. This is also the reason why especially penal substitution view has been criticised as unjust and violent, because the Atonement seems to be merely a penal transaction between two parties (Daly 2007, 41). There is a noteworthy resemblance between the Atonement of Christ and the atonement that Robbie carries out through his prison sentence and service in the war. He is an innocent man, almost in every possible way, and certainly of the crime he was condemned for, and yet he seems to commit to suffering his punishment with great humility and honour. Indeed, honour can be considered the driving force behind even a seemingly unjust atonement, according to Vincent Brümmer (2005, 75). When in Christ's Atonement it was God's honour that had to be appeased, Robbie fights to preserve his own honour, as an innocent man. As a guiltless substitute, he bears the punishment that should have been Paul Marshall's, and he bears it with integrity. While in the war, it is not revenge in his mind, but rather to simply make it home, to be able to resume to the life that he barely got started with Cecilia. The world might shatter around him, but his innocence remains.

Robbie's innocence is not exactly a necessity for his atonement, as Christ's innocence was a demand imposed by God, but it is a crucial part of what makes his atonement significant. There is a very small number of people who are aware of his innocence, and of these people only Cecilia has the courage to defend him. Robbie thus carries the burden of exculpation on his own shoulders as he treads through the horrors that is the Second World War, his only hope in life being that of going home. This undeserved but at the same time honourable quest of his resembles those of known

mythical heroes, an aspect of Robbie's character that has been pointed out in several articles on the novel (Behrman 2010, 461–462). However, unlike the heroes of the mythical tales often do, Robbie does not survive his war, but succumbs to the cruelty he did not deserve in the first place. Robbie's atonement is thus very similar to that represented in the three Christian atonement paradigms, at least when the innocence of the person doing the atonement is considered. His innocence is what in the end makes his atonement satisfactory, and his death the ultimate sacrifice. Unlike in Briony's case, Robbie's innocence can hardly be questioned, because even the very person who was the first one to blame him, knows he was innocent.

Because Robbie's arrest, conviction and sentencing follows a typical kind of procedure, it is reasonable to examine his atonement as a process as well. In the Christian understanding of atonement there must exist a certain order in which the "steps" towards that atonement can happen. The first step would be to confess or at least acknowledge one's crime, then following that confession the person is judged and ordered to compensate for the crime, and only after the crime is considered fully repaid can they be said to have atoned completely (Watkins 2005, 70). In Christianity, this process is mandated by God, but in Robbie's case the law determines what type of process his atonement must be. The problems arise with the very first step, because a confession cannot be demanded of Robbie for a crime he has not committed. His entire atonement process thus begins with an injustice, and because of his inferior moral standing as a convicted felon he cannot protest against this injustice in any way. Because of his letter Robbie is then judged as "morbidly over-sexed" and "in need of help as well as correction", and therefore sentenced to prison (p. 204). Even though his "atonement process" was brought on by false beliefs, he nonetheless follows through with it as is required of him by the law.

Robbie's prison sentence effectively is the "deed" that especially the penal substitution view stresses as a vital part of atonement, meaning that there has to follow an act of expiation after the offense, confession and remorse are not enough on their own. Another key requirement is that the deed or punishment must be just in relation to the offense (Schreiner 2006, 79; 82). This is what Peter Schmiechen has referred to as the "doctrine of proportionality", which he also criticises as a

nearly impossible principle to abide by, in any type of atonement (2005, 115). The demand for proportionality of the punishment might in some cases seem unrealistic, but it is however a fundamental principle in the penal substitution view. If we look at Robbie's atonement, and indeed his ultimate sacrifice of losing his life in the war, then surely the punishment he suffers cannot be said to have been proportional to his crime - of which he was falsely condemned for to begin with.

Much like in the healing view of atonement where the concept of sickness was multifaceted, so are the injuries and the suffering that Robbie endures all-encompassing in his life. His first "deed" on the road towards atonement is to have his freedom taken away from him, that is, to go to prison. From there he enlists in the army, where he is wounded by shrapnel on his right side, therefore adding a physical dimension to his suffering. One could also assume that Robbie endures some type of psychological damage, because of the abruptness of his separation from his ordinary life, and the constant waiting of being able to go home while he is in France (Behrman 2010, 458). In the war, he is not only mentally fragile but also physically deteriorating, without food or water, simply trying to survive the journey to Dunkirk to be evacuated. Robbie has obviously suffered great damage to his social standing, relationships and reputation as well. Because of his "sickness", he was excluded from the community as a possible threat, as a wrongdoer who they did not want amongst them. Even if he was able to exculpate himself, or even serve his full sentence, he would never be considered in the same way by his community than he was before the accusations. The greatest loss he will suffer, however, will of course be the loss of his life, as the infection from the wound on his side spreads and he dies after having just made it to Dunkirk (p. 263–265). Therefore the hope of a future shared with Cecilia is also lost, along with his dreams of becoming a doctor.

In its entirety, what follows from that fatal summer night in 1935 is the "gradual breakdown of Robbie", as Julie Ellam has called it (2009, 28). He bears the ultimate punishment, and loses everything it was possible for him to lose. The injustice of this is made so great because he is innocent of everything he was accused of, and thus undeserving of everything that followed from Briony's accusations. His penalty for the crime he was convicted of cannot therefore be said to have been proportional in any way. Rather, his atonement takes the form of ultimate sacrifice, the

sacrifice of giving one's life for the good of another, as a completely innocent substitute. He stands as a penal substitute in the place where Paul Marshall should rightfully be, and thus the transaction described in the three atonement theories is completed here as well (Skotnicki 2006, 193). Although unjust, Robbie's "deed" cannot in my opinion to be regarded as anything else but a satisfactory one, because no more could be demanded of him than what he has already lost. His process of atonement is acceptable, because he was judged (even if on false bases), and given a certain punishment by law, even though the punishment he suffered was in the end far greater than what was demanded of him. Robbie's atonement seems to therefore align quite well with many of the characteristics given in the three Christian atonement paradigms, perhaps most of all with the notions of innocence and injustice.

Since quite a few prerequisites for a satisfactory atonement seem to be acceptably met in Robbie's case, let us now move on to examine if his atonement will remain satisfactory when the focus shifts to its outcomes. The most important result from the Atonement was in the Christus Victor view, freedom, in the penal substitution view, fulfilment of God's law, and in the healing view, obviously healing. To begin with the Christus Victor view, Robbie's atonement both agrees and yet disagrees with this view. Robbie does begin his atonement as is required by entering the domain of prison, and later the war, but because of his death while carrying out his atonement, there can be no freedom as an outcome. However, this is true only if we consider Robbie as the recipient of this freedom. Robbie's atonement is satisfactory, and indeed very much like that of Christ's, when we take into account the fact that there are others, that in effect are free because of his innocent substitution in their place. One of these "beneficiaries" is most clearly Paul Marshall, who as the true offender and Lola's attacker not only remains free for the rest of his life, but also financially benefits from the war through his Amo bar business (p. 325). Others that are able to enjoy freedom because of Robbie's atonement are Lola and Briony. Their freedom essentially consists of their freedom of guilt, in that they never have to stand accountable for withholding the truth about who attacked Lola on that summer night in 1935.

As was the case in the Christus Victor view, none of these beneficiaries of Robbie's

atonement truly deserve the freedom that they enjoy, nor does Robbie deserve to be the one that provides it for them. This is, however, the great injustice that in effect makes the atonement satisfactory, however illogical that might seem (Boyd 2006, 43). Another outcome emphasised in the Christus Victor view was the overall harmony of things that was restored through the Atonement, everything was made better again. Again, whether this is true in Robbie's case depends on the point of view that one adopts. Certainly no good follows for himself, no matter how honourable and noble his atonement actually is. The fact that he pays the ultimate price and dies in Dunkirk, negates any possible good that could have followed from his atonement to himself. Whether any good is restored in the community that he left behind is also a problematic question. By Robbie's exclusion from the community perhaps a sense of harmony can be said to have been restored to it, but I would still hesitate to define the state of affairs in that community to now have been "made better" some way. Because Robbie as an innocent man was condemned for the crime, Cecilia has cut off all connection to her family, and ends up losing Robbie to the war as well. Even though Paul, Lola, and Briony remain free in that they are never publicly held accountable, they however must live with the guilt of keeping silent forever (Rooney 2006, 106), an outcome that in my opinion can hardly be defined as a "good" one. Therefore, the Christus Victor view's requirement that everything should be made better is not met in Robbie's atonement, but the outcome of freedom on the other hand is achieved, even if its recipients are undeserving of it.

Related to the requirement presented in the Christus Victor view that order must be restored through atonement, is the concept stressed in the penal substitution view that God's law must be fulfilled by the atonement (Weaver 2001, 152). God's honour demands that an offense against His law must be punished, the debt must be repaid somehow, by someone. Repentance is not enough, some kind of deed must follow the offense in order for the wrongdoer to be once again part of the community, and considered as having atoned for their crime (Molander 2009, 188). When applied to Robbie's atonement, then, this demand for the fulfilment of the law seems to be met. He does obey the law, and suffers the penalty that was imposed on him by that law, to the greatest extreme. Even though his innocence renders his atonement highly unjust, it is however the atonement that the law

requires for the offense. It is not as much a question of who atones for the crime, but rather of the demand that *someone* must atone for the crime. Robbie's atonement does therefore parallel with the penal substitution view of atonement on this matter as well, because the offense is expiated and the debt repaid, even if by an innocent substitute.

The most important outcomes of an atonement emphasised in the healing view, on the other hand, are perhaps slightly more difficult to find resemblance with in Robbie's atonement. When the healing view stresses, obviously, the healing of everyone affected by the atonement as its crucial result, it applies to the wrongdoer as well as the victim(s). The word 'healing' refers to not only the physical health, but the overall well-being of a person, their relationships and even the community they come from (Reichenbach 2006, 130). Through a satisfactory atonement, the sickness that was a result of the offense has now been healed, and the community restored to the way it was prior to the offense. It seems quite understandable, then, to arrive at the conclusion that from Robbie's atonement no healing of any kind is possible to achieve. He is, as the innocent sufferer, the one most inflicted by pain and sickness, and indeed eventually the one that loses his life to an illness and thus never makes it back home from the war. Therefore he appears to be more or less defenceless against the 'sickness' that his atonement should bring healing for.

The question of whether any healing follows from Robbie's atonement thus becomes a matter of "could have been" scenarios. Had he survived the war and served his sentence in full, then surely he would have also been treated for his wounds and healed physically, as well as been at least to some extent part of the community again. If Briony had kept her promise and exonerated Robbie, he would have been able to return home as a free man, no longer tainted by the guilt that was wrongfully placed upon him. Following this, the relationship between Robbie and Cecilia would have been healed, as well as Cecilia's relationship with her family, and so on. No healing then seems to follow from Robbie's atonement on any level, not physical, social or societal - unless we consider the prosperity of those who caused the destruction of his life as a form of "healing", which I am reluctant to do here.

One other outcome pointed out in the healing view was the need for the transformation of

the wrongdoer. Indeed, it is not possible for the excluded person to return to the community unless they prove themselves to be “transformed” and rid of the “sickness” that caused their exile in the first place. Through atonement, the condemned person is restored to their rightful place in the community again, a process which Jeremy Watkins has called “a transformation of the impermissible into the permissible” (2005, 69). No longer posing a threat in the eyes of the community, the person is allowed back in and does not have to carry the “stigma of the sickness” anymore. The stigma is especially awful in Robbie’s case, because he is convicted as a sex offender. The only way for him to try to “prove” he has transformed (for which there truthfully is no need) is to humbly serve the sentence given to him. This transformation would be vital for his healing as a person, and for him being made whole again after the damage that the accusations have done, but also for the healing of his relationship with the community (Thomas 2005, 28). Although Robbie sets out to do what is demanded of him, the wounds he suffers in the war prevent him from ever returning home and bringing about, let alone enjoying, any kind of healing from his atonement. Therefore, Robbie’s atonement does not seem to be adequate when we consider the required outcomes given for a satisfactory atonement in the healing view.

However, one striking resemblance can be found between the atonement as presented in the healing view, and Robbie’s atonement. This resemblance is in the persons who atone, and more precisely, in their innocence of everything that they must endure in order for the atonement to be satisfactory. This connection is exemplified best by the description given by Bruce Reichenbach of “the Servant” (Christ) mentioned in Isaiah 53:

The Servant was noteworthy neither in lineage nor in appearance. He was an unwanted shoot from a desert bush, possessing nothing to attract people to him. He was despised and rejected and so intimately acquainted with pain and suffering that people shunned him. Yet what is noteworthy about this Servant is his atoning work, wherein he assumes the dynamic role of taking both our sins and their result—our sickness and pain. The observers rightly see the Servant’s suffering as coming from God, but they mistake it as punishment for the Servant’s own sins. The real truth is that the Servant was innocent—“he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (Is 53:9).

(Reichenbach 2006, 128)

It is remarkable how well this description applies to Robbie, as a son of a servant, and indeed the

innocent sufferer for the sickness of others. Robbie might not be able to bring about through his atonement the healing that is required in the healing view, but this is still only one aspect of his atonement that he fails to fulfil, and therefore not enough to deem his atonement inadequate as a whole. The outcomes of his atonement are not necessarily similar to those emphasised in the three Christian atonement theories, but this is largely due to the fact that he stands hopelessly inferior to the community that condemned him, already before his conviction and especially after it as well. He is innocently paying the price for a horrible crime, while those who are truly guilty, of the crime or of simply keeping silent, live freely and prosper in their lives. To bring “healing” is therefore an utterly unreasonable demand to place on Robbie, because the people with the “sickness” are those who are allowed to live freely in the community that shunned him.

To conclude this section on Robbie and his atonement, then, I would argue that when mirrored against the three Christian atonement paradigms, his atonement of innocently suffering the punishment that did not belong to him, and his ultimate sacrifice of losing his life in the war, is the only satisfactory atonement in the novel for which any argument is reasonable to make. Granted, his atonement does not coincide with the atonement paradigms in every respect, but it does seem to do so with the most essential aspects, such as the innocence of the one who atones, the domain of the atonement, and the requirement for a deed after an offense, to name a few. I believe that there is grounds enough here for the argument that it is not Briony, but in fact Robbie, who can be said to have successfully atoned for a crime in the novel, and whose atonement can be deemed acceptable by most, if not all of the requisites given in the Christus Victor view, the penal substitution view, and finally the healing view. This section concludes the discussion on the first of my two contrasting perspectives on atonement, the first of which has been the Christian understanding of atonement. I will now proceed to chapter 4, where the perspective shifts to law and morality, and the concept of a satisfactory atonement is examined from a legal point of view.

4. Atonement in law and morality

In this fourth chapter of my thesis I will present an alternative perspective on the concept of ‘atonement’, shifting from the Christian understanding of the word to its connotations within a more legal and judicial context. This chapter will divide into three separate sections, each presenting a different aspect of what an acceptable atonement within the realm of law and morality ought to entail. I will begin with the concept of retribution, which I will discuss as a legalist term despite of the word’s common association with religious views on atonement. Then I will discuss the concept of restitution, which offers a somewhat dissenting view to the retributivist idea of *how* atonement is achieved. Finally, I will discuss the notion of reconciliation, which is an important aspect of a legally acceptable atonement as well as the Christian atonement theories. My discussion will rely largely on the book *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law and Politics* by Linda Radzik, but I will also incorporate into my discussion other articles written on the issues at hand.

4.1 Retribution

The reason why *retribution* can be said to have such a strong association with the concept of atonement (both in law and theology) is its almost synonymical relation to another important term within the atonement discussion, that is, *punishment*. When the fundamental premise for atonement is that through an offense a moral debt has been incurred, in retribution theory this payment must be made and indeed can only be made through punishment (Radzik 2009, 26). The wrongdoer has committed a crime, and punishment is the only adequate way for them to make amends for it. In the retribution view, to be guilty of a wrongful deed is on its own sufficient reason for being punished, the consequences and outcomes of that punishment (whether they be good or bad) are not of significant importance, there need not be any other motive for a retributive atonement than that of doing justice (2009, 26).

The essential reasoning behind the idea of retribution is simply the fact that the wrongdoer *deserves* to be punished, and more precisely, they deserve to suffer. To not demand punishment would be to condone the crime, and ignore the moral requirement for the wrongdoer to pay for the harm they have caused others (Radzik 2009, 44). This is what Joakim Molander has defined as being “the principle of retribution”, in saying that it is not the victim of the offense, but morality itself that “demands an action directed towards the evil-doer” (2009, 186). Although there are of course human agents always involved in crime and retribution, nevertheless, the justification for a punishment does not come from the victim’s or even the society’s demand for it, but from morality. This “reaction” towards the offense and the person guilty of it, however does express the anger that human beings feel towards the breaking of their moral laws. Through this anger, the values that are deemed as inviolable in that community are revealed, and the punishment must reflect the severity of the offense (Molander 2009, 186). If an offense against these values was overlooked, the very fundamental principles of that community would be challenged. This is a particular branch of the retribution theory called expressivist retributivism.

Punishment must be imposed upon the wrongdoer because by committing a crime against someone, the wrongdoer has effectively elevated him/herself above the victim, and in fact above the entire public (Farnham 2008, 613). It is a right of every human being to be acknowledged in their community, to have their value realized by others, and essentially to construct a life for themselves. All of these aspects of human existence are thus damaged when a crime or an offense is done against them (2008, 612). This damage can be done to a person’s property, reputation, relationships, and in the worst cases, their body. So by offending the victim the wrongdoer “arrogates to himself the authority to interfere with the realization of a person’s value”, even if it is not a conscious intention in the offender’s mind (2008, 614). A retributive punishment is therefore necessary for restoring the moral equality between the victim and the wrongdoer. Because the wrongdoer has through their crime expressed a false claim of superiority over the victim, they must be punished for this and “brought low” again (Radzik 2009, 42). The moral equality is restored through punishment for the wrongdoer, and reinstated value and acknowledgement for the victim.

Even though through the offense there now exists an inevitable relation between the wrongdoer and the victim, the punishment however cannot be dependent on either of these two parties. If the punishment was something the wrongdoer could control (this is not an impossible scenario, more on this will follow), it would obviously raise serious concerns over the question of justice and proportionality. On the other hand, if the victim had the power to set the punishment for the damages they have sustained, concerns over the reasonability of the penalty would most likely become an issue. The punishment cannot and must not therefore be “overly vindictive”, even though it should at the same time express the anger that the wrongful act has caused in the victim as the object of the crime (Molander 2009, 186). The punishment must thus be something that the community, and more precisely the law, imposes and controls. Furthermore, it should not be solely about retribution, but also about giving the wrongdoer an opportunity to atone, and eventually be accepted back into the community (2009, 187–188). There must exist an authority that is superior to both the victim and the offender, and in retribution this authority consists of law and morality, and on a more functional level, the state (Radzik 2009, 40–41).

Retribution theory therefore seems to place certain requirements on the law that must condemn the offender, but some demands are placed on the wrongdoer as well. As part of the community that lives by certain moral laws, the wrongdoer must acknowledge it when s/he has broken these laws, feel guilt, and condemn their actions. To refuse to do this would be in itself an act of wrongdoing, and effectively denying the authority of law (Radzik 2009, 40). The wrongdoer would thus hold on to the false claim he has made with his crime, the claim that he is superior to others. Punishing such a criminal, even though demanded by law, is not in itself enough to serve any moral purpose. As Joakim Molander has noted: “only when the criminal understands why he needs to be punished, and possibly even craves for punishment, the punishment is ethical”, and suffices as “a form of expiation” (2009, 185). So although the requirements of the law might have been met by punishing an unrepentant criminal, in order for there to be atonement, the offender must acknowledge their guilt, and understand why they deserve to be punished.

In addition to this “self-condemning” of themselves, the wrongdoer can also make amends

through self-punishment, a view that Linda Radzik discusses in her book. Radzik does not present it as a sufficient alternative on its own for the punishment that the state imposes on the criminal, but simply as another possible means for the wrongdoer to make amends for their crime and do penance. In order to atone for his crime, the wrongdoer provides “counterevidence” for his previous claim of superiority and imposes punishment on himself (Radzik 2009, 42). Different forms of self-punishment could be to present a gift to the victim - given that it has required “significant effort” from the offender, to do service for the community, or even to voluntarily submit to the punishment he deserves (2009, 32). Radzik also makes a clear distinction between self-punishing acts and negative self-appraising emotions. Only the former can be deemed as a form of punishment, because there must always be intention behind punishment. Feeling guilt and shame can of course be painful for the wrongdoer, but these feelings are merely “natural consequences” of the crime, not an acceptable form of doing penance, because self-punishment must always be an intentional action (2009, 32). Only the deed of self-punishment matters, not the emotions that accompany it. It is important to note, however, that even though this kind of self-punishment might be considered a desirable action for the wrongdoer’s part, it is not an actual demand within the concept of retribution itself.

After discussing the different elements that seem to justify the retributive demand for a punishment after a crime, the question of what is achieved by it seems to become the next issue. Daniel Farnham has given a good definition for this in saying that “punishment should be a realization by a moral authority of the victim’s value as equal to the wrongdoer, correcting the relation of inequality that has been established” (2008, 618). Through punishing the criminal, the equality of the two parties involved is restored, and a platform for atonement created. To have suffered the punishment, it is worth emphasising here, still is not the same as having atoned for the crime. Other demands must be met before the offender can be said to have atoned for their crime, perhaps the most crucial of these being the requirement that the offender understands and accepts the punishment given to them (Molander 2009, 188). The punishment given must be proportional to the crime, and it must also be an accepted form of punishment within the society. Only then is it

possible for the offender to be welcomed back into the community which laws he has broken with his crime (2009, 194). Punishment is not therefore equal to atonement, but it is a step towards it. From a retributivist point of view, atonement begins with confession and remorse, followed by punishment and suffering, and finally results in the values of both the victim and the wrongdoer being restored.

As straightforward as the retributivist idea for making amends might seem, it is not without its problems. Linda Radzik, for example, has questioned how punishing the criminal could actually restore equality between them and the victim, and further suggests that this in fact serves only to degrade both victim and wrongdoer, denying them both their value as human beings, and the opportunity to realize themselves in the world (2009, 43). In other words, no good actually follows from “bringing low” the wrongdoer, because it does not effectively improve the condition of the victim in any way. Daniel Farnham has also raised valid concerns about the matter by asking that if retribution is so clearly connected to punishment and thus inflicting harm on someone, what good could possibly then be achieved by it? (2008, 607) Is it not a principle of humanity to do good instead of evil? Furthermore, where Joakim Molander considered it a vital principle of retribution for there to be a third person view (the law) to imposing punishment, Farnham presents this as one of its problematic aspects. Farnham does admit that there must be a higher, impartial authority that judges the crime, but the problem is the suffering that this supposedly benevolent and impartial “third party” thus enables (Farnham 2008, 607; 617).

The purpose of this section is not, however, to either justify or abandon the idea of retribution, but simply to introduce it as one significant concept of atonement within the field of law and morality. The most important aspects of retribution in relation to my thesis will be the notion of punishment, of course, as well as the questions of why it is needed and what is achieved by it. In connection to my analysis the roles of the wrongdoer and the victim are also another central issue that I will discuss further on. Now, however, I will move on to what could be considered an opposing view to retribution, that is, the concept of restitution.

4.2 Restitution

The restitution theory of atonement is of course so named because of its fundamental principle of restoration, that is, the idea of restoring whatever has been broken or offended by the crime. This generally applies to most of the different kinds of damage that a crime can cause, for example monetary loss, damaged property, or even broken relationships. If retribution theory was based on the idea that the wrongdoer deserves a punishment for his crime, restitution theory takes a different perspective on the situation, and asserts that the *victim* deserves compensation for the damages (Radzik 2009, 26). The main concern and emphasis is therefore different in restitution, the focus is on the victim instead of the wrongdoer. It is not enough to declare that the wrongdoer deserves to be punished, restitution theory points out that the victim also deserves to be compensated as a result of this punishment. As Radzik has defined it: “the principle of restitution looks backward to the rights held at the moment of the wrongful action”, meaning that it is not simply about “doing good” to the victim, but about following the moral intuition that if a person is injured by the actions of someone else, that injury must be mended by the guilty party (2009, 46).

Linda Radzik has further divided the concept of restitution into two slightly divergent types of making amends, the first being “pure” restitution, and the second “punitive” restitution. Pure restitution is called such because it does not relate to the concept of retribution in any way, thus abandoning the retributivist claim that the suffering of the wrongdoer should be the main focus of atonement. Rather, pure restitution centres around the victim instead, and the reparations they deserve from the offender (2009, 46–47). Pure restitution is founded on the basic human rights that every person has for property, freedom, and physical integrity. If any of these rights are broken, restitution is demanded from whoever is responsible for damaging them. Having a right for something is thus equal to having the right for restitution, if these rights are offended.

Instead of being considered as simply one of the “steps” towards atonement, there are some proponents of the theory who attest that pure restitution can in fact be regarded as “the whole of it” (Radzik 2009, 46). Radzik provides some valid points for why this could be the case, the most

important of these being the principle emphasized particularly in pure restitution that only compensation (not suffering) is needed for atonement, given that this compensation is equal to the loss. Problems however arise from this precept that only the restoration of the previously held rights or property alone suffices as a satisfactory atonement. For example, monetary loss can be repaid to the victim by anyone, it does not necessarily need to be the wrongdoer himself, but atonement on the other hand cannot be done by just anyone (Radzik 2009, 47). Therefore, having the damages compensated cannot automatically mean that atonement has been done. Even if the reparation was paid by the wrongdoer, it still seems to fall short of what could be considered an acceptable atonement. To reduce atonement to something as simple as to pay compensation, effectively denies the victim the respect that they rightfully deserve (2009, 48).

Another problem with equating restitution to atonement is the fact that not all crimes are possible to compensate for. A distinction between 'harm' and 'wrong' is useful to make here, in that harm is something that a person subjectively experiences, and that can affect different areas of their life, such as property or health. A harm can be caused intentionally by someone, but it can also occur without any actual reason, for example as a result of an accident. A wrong, on the other hand, carries more weight in its meaning because of the fact that it affects the person objectively (as well as subjectively). To put it simply, a wrong is something that other people can also recognize as a wrong, and which demeans the victim's value as perceived by others (Hampton 1991, 395). If the crime has been rape, for example, compensation could be given for the expenses that the medical treatment of the victim has required (a harm), but no amount of money could serve as an atonement for the violation of the victim's right for physical integrity, or the degradation of value they have suffered (a wrong). To even suggest this would be deeply insulting to the victim (Radzik 2009, 49). Restitution cannot therefore be considered as equal to atonement, because there are situations where only one or the other is possible to achieve.

Perhaps the aim of restitution, then, should not be to completely atone for a crime, but to at least offer something of value, some expression of remorse and apology to the victim. The basic differentiation between retribution and restitution still holds, meaning that something else is needed

instead of or in addition to the punishment of the wrongdoer. The victim must receive some form of repayment. Linda Radzik also stresses in her depiction of this line of restitution the importance of *how* the compensation is offered to the victim. Restitution must carry a symbolic meaning of remorse, in addition to its functional meaning as repayment - at least when the desired result would be for this compensation to be accepted by the victim (Radzik 2009, 50). Restitution should not be understood as merely a transaction where material is given by one person to the other, because even though this often is what essentially happens, there must be an element of an apology in offering that compensation. Whether it is an acceptable one as such, is left up to the victim to decide.

The second type of restitution that Linda Radzik describes in her book is called the punitive restitution theory, because in this view there are similarities with the retribution theory and its emphasis on the punishment of the guilty party. Punitive restitution theory shares a majority of the principles that were present in the pure restitution theory, the only clear distinction being the fact that punitive restitution does accept the punishment and suffering of the wrongdoer as part of making amends (2009, 50). However, punitive restitution does not agree with the justification that is given in retribution theory for this punishment. The basis for a punishment should not be in the assertion that the wrongdoer deserves to suffer, but rather in the fact that the victim deserves compensation. When a material repayment is not possible to give for the offense, for example in the case of the victim's physical injuries, the only form of compensation can then be the suffering of the wrongdoer. Even when material compensation can be given, punishment should still be a part of the atonement process, although not an atonement in itself (2009, 51).

To not punish the wrongdoer but simply order him to pay recompenses would be to disregard the feelings and needs of the victim, particularly the anger which is perhaps the most natural reaction to an offense (Molander 2009, 186). Although the suffering of the wrongdoer is not entirely rejected in the punitive restitution theory on these grounds, the risk that seems to follow is the fact that the punishment is now merely a form of vengeance that the victim desires. After all, the functional meaning of retribution was to inflict pain on the offender (Farnham 2008, 607). If the wrongdoer had claimed to himself a role of superiority with his crime, the victim might do the same

by demanding an unreasonably harsh punishment for the crime only to satisfy their desire for revenge. Punitive restitution thus holds that while it is an acceptable and indeed necessary part of atonement to not only compensate, but to be punished for the offense, the suffering of the wrongdoer should not be an intrinsic value (Radzik 2009, 51).

One other aspect which restitution theory raises as a more problematic concept than what is perhaps portrayed in retribution theory, is the context in which justice and punishment is imposed. Every crime consists of different circumstances, just as the people affected by the crime are all different individuals. This is why restitution theory, and more precisely restorative justice, seeks to replace the normative guidelines of imposing punishment with more procedural ones, taking into consideration the context in which the crime has occurred (Skotnicki 2006, 190–191). Restorative justice provides an alternative route to atonement, by removing the typical setting of a courtroom and a judge, and instead offering a forum where the victim can confront the wrongdoer, and then possibly arrive at an mutual agreement on how restitution should be made (2006, 189). This can of course only happen with the consent of both parties, otherwise the main purpose of restoration is lost. Restorative justice at its best benefits the victim in that they achieve some sort of closure, by confronting the offender and having the chance to express what the consequences of the crime have been for them. Restoration can also be beneficial for the wrongdoer, at least in some cases, if they come to understand the consequences of their actions, and hopefully attain a new respect for both the law as well as the rights of other people (2006, 191).

This is, however, merely the most ideal of outcomes that restitution can have, and unfortunately at some (if not most) cases the wrongdoer does not abandon their false beliefs of their superiority, even after having faced the victim of their crime. Indeed, no form of punishment, no matter how painful or demanding for the wrongdoer, can suffice as a satisfactory atonement if nothing has changed in the wrongdoer's thought process which led to them committing the crime in the first place (Radzik 2009, 52). Restitution, whether pure or punitive, should therefore be considered as an important, perhaps even necessary part of atonement, but to claim that it is in itself enough to serve as an atonement is highly problematic. First of all, there are some crimes for which

any kind of compensation is impossible to give. Secondly, when this is possible, the spirit in which this compensation is given matters as well, if atonement is the desired goal. Recompense for an offense does carry a functional purpose, but equally if not more important to this is the symbolic value it carries as an expression of remorse and admission of guilt.

As admirable as the principles of restitution theory are, in order to arrive at an atonement several other requirements must be met that restitution theory simply cannot guarantee. The fundamental elements of restitution are, however, important in our consideration of a satisfactory atonement. The justification for restitution is found in the rights that every human being has as part of a certain community, thus the violation of these rights is an act that deserves punishment. Furthermore, restoration of these rights to their previous state must follow as well. To compensate for the suffering that the victim has gone through nevertheless demands more than a material repayment (Radzik 2009, 54). Only once this “missing element” is part of a genuine, remorseful act of restitution, do we get a little bit closer to a satisfactory atonement. What this entails is the subject of the third and last section of this chapter, that is, the notion of reconciliation.

4.3 Reconciliation

Even though we have established two very different ways of making amends with retribution and restitution, they both however have the same essential goal: reconciliation. The question at hand now becomes more about what can be achieved *through* the punishment and compensation discussed earlier, how do they bring about reconciliation and atonement? Indeed, reconciliation and atonement are often considered as consisting of the same elements, in that they both make for the ultimate end result of making amends for one’s crimes (Molander 2009, 188). Reconciliation is a multidimensional concept in itself, but for the purposes of my thesis I will discuss it from the perspective which Linda Radzik has adopted in her book, that of reconciliation as atonement.

Within the context of making amends for one’s crimes, reconciliation seems to “take over”

from the point where retribution and restitution have ceased to suffice. In other words, while the material injuries and rights of people can often be restored to their previous state, this however does nothing for the relationship that has also been broken between the people affected by the crime. Vincent Brümmer has called this “fellowship”, rather than a relationship, to emphasise that there are certain *social* as well as legal rules according to which people must live as a group, as fellow human beings (2005, 40). The crime has brought with it estrangement of two (or more) people, and this fellowship can only be mended by personal reconciliation, not any kind of punishment or repayment. On the road towards atonement, then, reconciliation must follow, either from retribution or restitution.

A crime does not only break the relationship between the victim and the wrongdoer, but the relationship of both of these parties to their community, and to themselves. Therefore, there are many different kinds of relationships that deserve to be mended, and in some cases the relationship might not have even been a particularly healthy one, thus to simply demand the restoration of this connection is too simple. Linda Radzik attempts to avoid this problem by limiting the concept of reconciliation to the restoration of *moral* relationships. In this sense the two parties (should) stand in equal value to each other, as moral agents (2009, 81). As was defined earlier, the wrongdoer has with his crime claimed to himself a higher value than that of the victim’s, and only in reconciliation is this relationship brought back to its original balance. Only then do they both stand equal to each other in the moral community in which they live. This restoration between victim, wrongdoer and the community essentially is what Linda Radzik has called “the goal of atonement” (2009, 83).

Reconciliation does not, however, simply follow retribution or restitution automatically. On the contrary, there are certain requirements for the wrongdoer’s part, and for the victim’s participation as well. To begin to outline what these various requirements consist of, let us begin with what Radzik has labelled the “three subgoals” of reconciliation (2009, 85). The first of these is the moral improvement of the wrongdoer, the second is communication between all of the parties affected by the crime, and the third is the demand that the wrongdoer repair any harm that the crime has caused, to the extent to which this is possible. Similar to the concept of atonement, then,

reconciliation appears to be a process as well, instead of a mere end result. These subgoals form the foundation for reconciliation, but it is good to remember that there are crimes after which it is not possible to meet all of these requirements, as well as there are some minor crimes where this is not even necessary for the purpose of atonement (2009, 86). However, within the context of restoring moral relationships after an offense against the rights of an innocent victim, these three subgoals must all be met if a satisfactory atonement is what the wrongdoer wishes to achieve.

Linda Radzik has also outlined some particular means as to how reconciliation can and should be arrived at. They do rest heavily on the wrongdoer's shoulders, but the victim plays an important role in reconciliation as well, as we shall later see. The very first "demand" that Radzik appoints to the wrongdoer who hopes for reconciliation is the feeling of guilt. This is important to the credibility of the entire reconciliation process, because a remorseful wrongdoer obviously demonstrates that they are capable of making moral judgements, and have acknowledged their crime in full (2009, 87). Not only do they admit that what they did in the past was wrong, but they now know not to offend in the future. These emotions of remorse are crucial for the moral improvement of the wrongdoer, and for their ability to then sufficiently atone for their crime.

From this moral improvement can follow, and indeed should follow, the second requirement for the wrongdoer's part, that of feeling empathy. Radzik states that "a properly atoning wrongdoer must be moved emotionally by her violation of moral norms" (2009, 90). This does not mean to simply understand how one has broken these moral rules, but also to gain an understanding of what the offense has caused for the victim, and thus empathize with them. In other words, the wrongdoer must be able to put themselves in the place of the victim, not only mentally but emotionally as well (2009, 91). As was discussed in the restitution theory, an offer of compensation hardly amounts to anything if it is not accompanied by the feelings of remorse and guilt that the wrongdoer feels for their crime. There are cases, however, where the offender simply does not want to or perhaps is not able to feel empathy, and for this reason the requirement for empathy is a problematic one. Still, it is a vital part of a satisfactory atonement, and should not be discarded simply because it is a challenging demand to meet.

The next requirement is included in the subgoal of communication, and is perhaps the most crucial element on the path towards reconciliation, meaning, the requirement for an apology. Although seemingly simple as a task, within the context of reconciliation the apology however must include several different aspects. First of all, expressed in the apology must be both the admission of guilt as well as the remorse felt for the offense. Secondly, by apologizing to the victim the wrongdoer shows respect, for the victim as a person as well as for the moral norms that they must live by. Thirdly, the apology must be given freely and genuinely (Radzik 2009, 92). The question of how the apology is communicated to the victim is not the main concern here, but rather the reasons behind and the spirit in which the apology is given. By apologizing for his offense, the wrongdoer retracts the false claim he has made with his crime of the victim's inferior moral value, and acknowledges that he deserves punishment for the offense (2009, 94). Reconciliation does not automatically follow from an apology - no matter how genuine it has been, but it could be considered to be perhaps the most important gesture on the wrongdoer's part in hopes of achieving reconciliation at some point.

Other requirements placed upon the wrongdoer by Radzik, of which I will only shortly mention some here, are in addition to an apology to also offer an explanation for why the wrongdoer did what they did; to compensate any material loss that the crime has caused; to do some type of service for the community; and to better their behaviour in the future. All of these various demands are what Radzik simply describes as constituting the appropriate responses that a person hoping to atone for their crime should have. This does not mean that the wrongdoer should meet each and every one of these requirements, but at least those that are necessary for the three subgoals of moral improvement, communication, and reparation to be met (2009, 105). The reconciliation of moral relationships, as has now been established, is an outcome with many different requisites, especially for the wrongdoer's part. For there to be atonement, some requirements are placed upon the victim as well, although if not in the same sense of obligation as in the case of the wrongdoer.

If atonement should be considered (in its most simplistic form) as the repayment of a moral debt, then what essentially happens in reconciliation is that the victim, after the wrongdoer has met

the requirements needed, now considers the debt repaid and the wrongdoer as morally equal to themselves (Brümmer 2005, 41). As becomes evident from this scenario, the victim has an equally, if not even more important part to play in achieving reconciliation, than what the wrongdoer has. This is because the victim is in the end the target and receiver of the wrongdoer's expressions of guilt, remorse, apology, and so on. The wrongdoer can be said to have atoned for their crime only if their process towards it is acceptable in the eyes of the victim, only the victim can remove the wrongdoer's obligation to atone (Watkins 2005, 64).

Radzik, however, asserts that this "debt repayment model" does not adequately characterize what takes place in the reconciliation of moral relationships. Indeed, because it is a matter of broken relationships, it is therefore not enough that the victim accepts the restoration of this relationship, they must *participate* in it (2009, 121; emphasis mine). The victim of the crime can be argued to possess a kind of prerogative of deciding whether the reconciliation of the relationship is possible, but in order for this to happen the victim must also answer to some demands. Granted, the victim has a say in what for example would suffice as a proportional punishment for the offense they have suffered, but at the same time they cannot demand a punishment that is immoral or unreasonably cruel (Radzik 2009, 126). Thus, the role of the victim is not the same as to possess superior value over the wrongdoer, even if the wrongdoer deserves to be punished.

To be morally reconciled, then, essentially means to have the relationship restored, and the trust between the two parties renewed (2009, 129). This is a judgement that the victim has to make about the wrongdoer, and for which the wrongdoer himself cannot do anything except try to meet the specific requirements for reconciliation outlined earlier. The role of the victim is much more active, then, than simply being the passive receiver of the wrongdoer's efforts at an atonement. It is of course a risk on the victim's part to renew their trust in the wrongdoer, but this is crucial for their active participation in, and for the completion of, moral reconciliation. Furthermore, if the wrongdoer has succeeded in meeting the requirements for reconciliation and indeed a satisfactory atonement, the victim has an obligation to reconcile (Radzik 2009, 131). To refuse this would be to commit a wrong themselves, and to deny the moral value of the wrongdoer.

It should be noted here, that even though the two terms are often used interchangeably, to morally reconcile is not the same as to forgive. Forgiveness can be given freely by the victim to the wrongdoer, even if no act of atonement has been carried out, whereas reconciliation can only be arrived at through the (satisfactory) atonement of the wrongdoer (Watkins 2005, 65). Moral reconciliation is therefore a relationship in which two parties (victim and wrongdoer) must participate in, while forgiveness is something that can only be given from the victim to the wrongdoer. Furthermore, unlike in reconciliation, there can be no obligation to forgive, it is “a gift” that the victim can choose to give or not to give, regardless of whether moral reconciliation between the two has been achieved or not (Radzik 2009, 117).

Another important aspect of moral reconciliation is the fact that it is highly context dependent. To be able to outline the necessary requirements which the wrongdoer must meet in his process towards atonement, the entire context of what was broken by his crime and how, must be taken into account (Radzik 2009, 106). It is not only a question of the relationship between the victim and the wrongdoer, but about their relationship to the surrounding community as well. If the atonement of the wrongdoer fails to restore these relationships to the state they were in prior the crime, the atonement is inadequate and reconciliation unobtainable. There are of course crimes for which there can never be a satisfactory atonement, nor a complete reconciliation. The most likely example of this would be a crime which has resulted in the death of the victim, who then of course is unable to accept the atonement of the wrongdoer, let alone to participate in the moral reconciliation with them. Radzik suggests, however, that there is still some value even in a partial atonement, as long as the wrongdoer has genuinely done everything in their ability to achieve it (2009, 151). Even though reconciliation between the victim and the wrongdoer cannot ever be achieved in this scenario, the wrongdoer can still mend his own relationship to the community, by improving morally, respecting the law, and behaving better in the future.

To conclude this discussion on moral reconciliation, then, the most important notion seems to have been the fact that it is not merely about restoring whatever was broken by the crime, but also about restoring the relationships between the victim, the wrongdoer, and the community. It is a

concept undeniably filled with requirements and obligations, but this does not make it an impossible, nor an undesirable goal to strive for. In its almost synonymous relation to the concept of atonement, moral reconciliation is the outcome that both retribution and restitution theories hope to arrive at. What connects these two concepts so intimately is nicely summarized by Linda Radzik:

Atonement withdraws the insult and the threat that wrongdoing contained, communicates respect, redresses the harms caused, and reforms the wrongdoer. . . . Atonement, it seems, is simply defined as just that which will give the victim sufficient reason to forgive and morally reconcile.

(2009, 127)

Whereas punishment and compensation might have been considered as prerequisites for atonement, in relation to moral reconciliation atonement seems to become the prerequisite. In other words, moral reconciliation can only follow from a satisfactory atonement, it cannot come before it.

This section concludes my second theory chapter as well as my discussion on atonement within the context of law and morality. As was the case in the first theory chapter of the thesis, that is, atonement in Christianity, so in the context of morality I have also discerned three different concepts of atonement. These different perspectives on atonement in law and morality, and thus the perspectives later applied to the novel *Atonement*, are the retribution theory, the restitution theory, and finally the moral reconciliation theory. Regardless of what their role or importance one considers to be in relation to an acceptable atonement within law and morality, they however are concepts without which one cannot discuss making amends for one's crimes. With these three crucial elements of atonement as a legal concept, I will now move on to examine these concepts in the context of the novel *Atonement*, and more precisely, in relation to the two main characters of Briony and Robbie.

5. *Atonement* and the way to reconciliation

In this second analysis chapter I will discuss the concepts of retribution, restitution, and reconciliation first in connection to Briony's character, and in the second section to Robbie's character. The purpose of my analysis will be to examine both characters in relation to a satisfactory atonement as it is defined in the context of law and morality, and to arrive at a conclusion whether a satisfactory atonement according to these requirements is achieved in the novel. Although there are similarities between the notion of atonement in law and morality and its definition in Christianity, my intention is to draw out the requisites that are specific to a more legal, and indeed moral understanding of atonement.

5.1 "Not every child sends a man to prison with a lie" - Briony's obligation to atone

Before I can begin to analyse Briony's character and the novel as her atonement from the point of view of law and morality, it might be useful to give a bit more foundation for why I consider her character to be 'the wrongdoer' in this scenario. Although it is a generally accepted statement that Briony does commit a crime by falsely accusing Robbie of the attack on Lola - in fact she uses this term herself in the novel (p. 370), however, there seem to be very few critics who consider her to be an entirely culpable, morally responsible and indeed guilty character. The most common defence given for why Briony should not be held completely responsible for her actions is her young age (Rooney 2006, 106), and her appreciation of drama and literature (Trevisan 2010, 194). While I do not deny either of these aspects of Briony's character, I still am inclined to place a greater amount of blame on her than perhaps other reviewers of the novel have done.

The most obvious evidence I can rely on while making this claim, are the more or less explicit hints that Briony herself gives in the novel of her guilt, and of the intentionality of her crime. Indeed she calls it "a crime" (p. 370), works hard as a nurse to avoid "introspection" (p.

276), and is tormented by feelings of guilt after hearing about the marriage of Lola and Paul (p. 285). Towards the end of the novel she admits that Robbie and Cecilia have lost their lives in the Second World War, and as she is living in London in 1999 she still decides to postpone the publication of her “atonement”, that is, the novel itself. There is an obvious crime on her part, then, that seems to go unpunished.

Briony can be regarded as the wrongdoer in the novel also by the characteristics which she shares with the typical descriptions that can be found of the culprits, traitors, or of the generally “evil” characters of stories. For example, in the book *The Scapegoat* René Girard describes the “persecutor” responsible for the destruction of the victim: “Persecutors always believe in the excellence of their cause, but in reality *they hate without a cause*. The absence of cause in the accusation . . . is never seen by the persecutor.” (1989, 103) Girard also gives an equally fitting description of the evil gods of mythical stories, and of their enjoyment in “when things go badly”, as well as their supposed transformation to good when in the end, they attempt to correct the wrong they have caused (1989, 84). Like this persecutor that Girard describes, Briony has no cause for accusing Robbie, and like the evil god of mythical stories, she finds it exciting to be able to construct her “story” about Robbie. The fact that she later tries to make amends by writing her book, still does not prove that she has truly transformed as a person.

In the context of law and morality, then, Briony can likewise be paralleled with the descriptions given of the wrongdoers. Daniel Farnham defines the offender as effectively placing themselves above others, thus arrogating to themselves “the authority to affect the world without consideration of the will of others” (2008, 615). This is essentially what Briony does in the novel. She creates a story with which she affects the lives of others, with tragic consequences. For some reason, she considers herself as superior to Robbie, and thus with the authority to construct the completely false story about him. Furthermore, she makes this false story public by accusing Robbie of the crime, and earns for herself the title of the wrongdoer. Rather than leaving the responsibility of finding out what happened to Lola to the proper authorities, she assigns this power to herself, which according to Farnham is a particularly arrogant act on the wrongdoer’s part (2008,

614). To publicly accuse Robbie is a conscious choice of Briony's, which according to Pamela Hieronymi is another crucial characteristic by which one can be assigned as "the guilty one". To blame a person for something (in this case Briony for her crime), is fair if the person had a choice to do otherwise, she has deliberately chosen to become the type of person she is, and is capable of controlling her own behaviour (Hieronymi 2004, 126). In my opinion, all of these conditions apply to Briony, even if she is only 13 years old. Therefore to hold her wholly responsible for her actions, and indeed consider her the wrongdoer in the novel, is justifiable.

To move on to the first theory of atonement within law and morality, that is, retribution, the demands placed upon the wrongdoer in this view can now be applied to Briony's character, as the wrongdoer who has committed a crime. The aspect perhaps the most stressed in retribution theory was the importance of imposing punishment on the wrongdoer. The guilt of the offender is enough basis for punishment and suffering, nothing else needs to be achieved by the penalty. If we then consider Briony's novel as her atonement, the obvious question then becomes: is it a punishment? Has there been any kind of punishment or suffering in her process or act of atonement?

This is a matter that divides opinions, for there are some that suggest for example that Briony's work as a nurse during the war is her punishment, and furthermore, a self-inflicted one (O'Hara 2011, 82). She has chosen to abandon her previous plans of going to college, and instead becomes a nurse, serving in the hospital at a time when it was perhaps most demanding to do so. This view is defended also by Linda Radzik, as she argues that service work is indeed a form of self-punishment for Briony, through which she hopes to atone for her crime (2009, 32). Even though Briony's experiences as a nurse can certainly be said to be similar to that of being punished (little or no freedom, hard labour, obedience), does it meet the requirements given in retribution theory for punishment? I would argue that it does not, because Briony seems to admit in the novel that the reasons for her becoming a nurse are ultimately selfish ones. Although her days are filled with regulations and hard work, this is exactly what she expected it to be: she is "happy to have little time to think of anything else" (p. 277). Her "punishment", then, is not so much about making amends, but rather about avoiding the thoughts of guilt, not having to think about her crime.

Although it would not seem so on the surface, she benefits from her work as a nurse, and according to retribution theory there cannot be anything gained by the punishment, except the punishment itself. Therefore, even though there is value in Briony's toil, the motivation behind it refutes it as a retributive punishment.

Another argument for why there is no retributive punishment for Briony is the mere fact that her crime never comes to be known by the "third party", the objective authority which retribution theory requires as the sanctioner of the punishment (Farnham 2008, 620). Briony's confession exists only in her book, which she refuses to publish in her own lifetime. Therefore, the truth will never be known by the authority that would have the right (and obligation) to punish her, nor will the truth be ever known by the community and people affected by her crime either. Her crime, from a purely legal perspective, is the false witness that she gave which led to Robbie's conviction. From the point of view of morality, however, her crime is far greater. Her false witness not only causes Robbie's prison sentence, but also his service in the war, and in the end, his death. Robbie is wounded in battle, which then leads to his death in Dunkirk, and while Briony surely cannot be held responsible of what happens to Robbie during the war, she however is responsible for him being there in the first place. Briony's crime thus is the unforgivable kind, that is, the crime that results in the death of the victim (Radzik 2009, 84). There is no question about her guilt, or whether she deserves a punishment. Retribution demands that the punishment imposed by the third party expresses the severity of the crime, and the horror experienced by the victim (Molander 2009, 186). The consequences of Briony's crime have been too devastating, and therefore no punishment or self-punishment could ever suffice as an atonement for her. There is not even a partial atonement to be achieved at this point, and it would be an impossible task in itself to define what this could consist of in Briony's case.

One possible argument, however, could be made for the claim that Briony does in fact suffer a punishment that could be deemed as more alike to retribution, because of its slightly closer affinity to Robbie's suffering. This possibility arises from the interpretation that the vascular dementia Briony develops in old age, serves as her "ultimate punishment" for her crime. The

disease will eventually eradicate Briony's memory, speech, motor control, and finally the nervous system (p. 355), which means that before her body shuts down she will also have lost her identity. This is of course only speculation, but it is nonetheless the only form of punishment that could at least to some extent be paralleled to the suffering that Robbie endures. He too, as a prisoner and then a soldier, has first lost his identity and later loses his life. The interpretation of Briony's sickness as a punishment for her crime is a surprisingly rare one, in that I have been unable to find any article on the novel that would have pointed this out as one possible interpretation of her "fate". Julie Ellam comes close, but simply comments on the irony of Briony as the creator of fantasies, now suffering from a disease that will eventually strip her of this ability (2009, 42). Although a highly speculative claim to make, then, Briony's sickness is however the only form of punishment that at least somehow satisfies the requirements of retribution, though certainly not all of them.

I would therefore tentatively agree with the notion that Briony does suffer, as she witnesses many horrors as the wounded soldiers arrive to the hospital, and at old age suffers from a terrible illness that will slowly destroy her mental faculties. However, there cannot in my opinion be said to exist a punishment that would wholly satisfy the requirements given in the retribution theory. The fact that she never makes her confession public and so is never punished by a moral authority, dismisses one of the most important principles of retribution. Another important demand was to acknowledge the guilt, and thus agree to a punishment, but Briony refuses this as well. She admits to feeling guilty, but instead of making amends she puts all her energy into her work as a nurse, and into avoiding those feelings (p. 285). Her crime, in all its severity, will never bring her punishment in the sense that retribution theory would demand. Because of this avoidance of retributive punishment, there cannot follow a satisfactory atonement, either.

Moving on to the next concept of atonement in law and morality, then, in restitution theory this demand for punishment is removed, and the focus turned on the victim and the compensation they deserve. To be able to define how Briony could atone for her crime according to restitution theory, we must first consider all of the harm that her actions have caused. Normally, the idea of restitution is the obligation of the wrongdoer to compensate the harm or injury that they have

caused to someone, but this is a highly problematic demand to meet in Briony's case. The harm she has done with her crime is not so much about material damages, but about the damages to other people's lives. Robbie was planning to go to medical school, and was excited about what his future might bring now that things had progressed from friendship to something more with Cecilia (p. 90). After that summer evening in 1935 Robbie's entire life is gradually destroyed, along with his future together with Cecilia, as are the relationships they both had with their families. Therefore, if the principle of restitution is to look back at the rights held at the moment of the crime (Radzik 2009, 46), Briony is responsible for restoring the lives of Robbie and Cecilia to the state in which they were before she made her accusations about Robbie. The freedom, the opportunities, and most of all the reputation that Robbie had prior to the crime, he deserves to have restored, and this obligation rests upon Briony. The enormity of Briony's task thus becomes painfully obvious.

There is however, at least according to Radzik, the possibility to make partial amends, if the repercussions of the wrongdoer's actions cannot be fully compensated. For the wrongdoer to offer something that is proportional to the harm caused would be ideal, but in cases such as Briony's where there simply is no way to repair the damages, she still is obligated to offer "something of value" according to the theory of restitution (2009, 49). In my opinion, this is the only aspect of any kind of atonement that can be said to agree with the claim that Briony's novel is her atonement. It is not a complete atonement, and never could be, but rather her attempt to at least offer *something* as compensation, to somehow restore what she has broken. However, the problem then seems to be the fact that Briony "restores" the lives of Robbie and Cecilia only in fiction, as she reveals at the end of the novel (p. 370–371). Neither Robbie nor Cecilia survived the war, and they are only brought back together in the fictional ending that Briony gives her book. There is no restitution from her novel, nothing is really restored to the way it was before her crime. The insignificance of her attempt at compensation is made greater by her choice to postpone its publication, to deny it from the people that would have deserved it.

The idea of pure restitution would have been, to put it very simply, Briony's "best chance" at atonement. No punishment is required in this view, only the compensation for the damages that the

wrongdoer causes. For Briony it is however an impossible task, because the consequences of her crime are much too severe. Her book serves only as that “something”, that the wrongdoer must offer in compensation for even the most unforgivable of crimes. It cannot be equal to the loss that Robbie or Cecilia suffer, but it is nonetheless the only thing Briony can offer. The question becomes then, is it offered in the manner that restitution theory requires? To offer compensation is not enough for an atonement, it also matters greatly *how* this offer is given. It must express the guilt and remorse of the wrongdoer, and serve as a genuine apology to the victim (Radzik 2009, 50). If Briony’s book fails to accomplish any type of restitution, it should at least carry some symbolic value as an expression of the remorse that she feels. Yet again, we arrive at a question which divides opinion. While it can be argued that Briony’s novel is indeed her way of showing that she feels guilty and remorseful (Jacobi 2011, 63), I think it should matter more what she *does about this guilt*. As we have established, she chooses to become a nurse, immersing herself in her work instead of facing the consequences of her crime. Moreover, even if an expression of her guilt, her book is not - nor does it include - an apology. An expression of remorse is only valuable when it is made known to the victim, in a form of a genuine apology, and Briony obviously fails to do this. Her novel, even though it does include her confession, seems to consist more of “guilt-filled explanations and justifications” (Ellam 2009, 40), than of remorse or an apology.

In punitive restitution, the answer to damages that could not be fully restored was for the wrongdoer to suffer. In addition to offering at least some kind of compensation, the wrongdoer also deserves to suffer, because the victim has suffered. It should be noted, however, that even though punitive restitution allows the punishment of the wrongdoer, their suffering should not be considered an end in itself (Skotnicki 2006, 194). As we came to notice earlier, to determine whether Briony suffers a punishment in the novel or not, is a debatable issue. Even if we accept her punishment to consist of her service as a nurse in wartime England, other problems remain. After all, what is the restoration that follows this punishment? Is it in any way actually directed at either Robbie or Cecilia? If Briony’s suffering and self-punishment was the only way for her to make amends, it would still fail on many accounts. Furthermore, by removing everything else from

restitution and simply leaving punishment, the wrongdoer effectively disregards the respect that her atonement should express for the victim (Radzik 2009, 53). There simply seem to be too many demands for Briony, too many of the principles of restitution are out of her reach.

As an interesting remark about Briony's supposed desire for atonement and restitution, she seems to describe in her story a scene which could be argued to resemble the process of restorative justice. The scene takes place as Briony has a day off from the hospital, and goes to find Cecilia in order to explain what ultimately caused her to commit her crime. Robbie turns out to be at Cecilia's apartment as well, and after Briony has admitted that she knows that Robbie is innocent, Robbie then demands a very precise list of things that Briony must do to make up for her crime (p. 345). Briony agrees to tell the truth and to retract her previous statement, effectively absolving Robbie of his conviction. Although there is no one officially representing the law in this scenario, it does nonetheless resemble the ideal way to restoration, that is, an open forum where the means of restitution are mutually agreed upon, and some type of closure achieved (Skotnicki 2006, 189). However, just like the happy ending that Briony gives in her novel for Robbie and Cecilia, so is this scene where she stands accountable before the two victims of her crime, entirely fictional. As she is finishing her book in 1999, she admits that the "cowardly Briony limped back to the hospital, unable to confront her recently bereaved sister" (p. 370–371). She seems to be aware, then, what the means for restitution would have been, but simply never faces the obligation.

Whether we look at Briony's "atonement" from the viewpoint of retribution or restitution, there are some aspects that appear to correlate, at least to some extent. Unfortunately it seems however, that the most crucial ones of the requirements given in these views, she is unable to meet. Her "atonement", that is, the book, is at its best an offer of *something* in a situation where there really can be nothing given as a compensation for her crime. Had Briony published it on time, it would carry much more significance as at least a partial atonement, but she cannot bring herself to do this while the Marshall's and she herself are still alive. There is no punishment for Briony, nor is there restoration for Robbie or Cecilia. Although admitting that she feels guilty, it is questionable as to how genuine Briony's remorse is, since at the very final pages of the novel she still seems more

concerned with creating a good story than simply telling the truth (p. 370–371). Thus we arrive at the conclusion that according to the demands that both retribution theory and restitution theory place on her as the wrongdoer, she does not atone for her crime. Whether she even truly attempts to, is also debatable.

From the two different means of making amends for one's crimes we now turn our attention to what must follow, which is of course, moral reconciliation. Very often paralleled to atonement, reconciliation is considered to be "the ultimate goal" of making amends, whether it is achieved through retribution or restitution. Moral reconciliation between the wrongdoer and the victim is necessary, because reducing atonement into the idea of just "paying something back" is too simplistic (Radzik 2009, 75). The principle of moral reconciliation asserts that it is not enough to restore only the material harm that was caused by the crime, because the relationships broken by it must be mended as well. This applies to the wrongdoer, the victim, and the community they live in. In *Atonement*, then, the relationships most desperately in need of restoration are the relationship between Robbie and Cecilia, as well as Briony's relationship with both of them. Robbie also deserves to be reconciled with the community that shunned him because of the false accusations made against him, and this could be achieved only through Briony's confession. So even though there are many different dimensions in which reconciliation should happen, they all depend on the actions of the wrongdoer, in this case that is, Briony.

To be able to achieve reconciliation, there is again a very precise set of requirements that fall on Briony's shoulders as the wrongdoer. By her crime of false witness she has broken the relationship she had with Robbie, in which they stood as morally equal to each other. Moreover, they did have a personal relationship as well, as is shown by Robbie's remembering of the time that she taught Briony how to swim (p. 229). In order to arrive at reconciliation, Briony would have to restore at least their equal value as moral agents, if nothing else. The first demand placed on her if she wanted to do this, is the "subgoal" of moral improvement. Moral reconciliation cannot be achieved if the wrongdoer has remained exactly the same person as they were at the time of the crime. This would mean that they have not abandoned their false claim for superiority which led

them to commit the crime in the first place (Radzik 2009, 41). An acknowledgement of guilt, and feelings of remorse indicate that the wrongdoer realizes what their crime has caused for the victims. However, attempting to do better and promising to tell the truth does nothing to convince others of the wrongdoer's change of heart - this must be proven somehow (2009, 85). It is rather obvious, then, what Briony should do in order to prove that she has improved morally, since to admit her crime is the only thing she actually has the *ability* to do. Granted, she has set the process in motion, but fails to follow through with it by refusing to make her "atonement" public. To cast more doubt on her supposed moral improvement, it is worth remembering that to confess something is not the same as having been transformed as a person.

Related to this "proof" of moral improvement would be the requirement that Briony show at least some type of empathy towards Robbie as the victim of her crime. Rather than just understanding the harm caused by the crime on an intellectual level, the wrongdoer must also be emotionally affected by it. If the wrongdoer has the ability to empathize with the victim, they also allow themselves to feel the pain they have caused (Radzik 2009, 91). The question whether Briony actually shows signs of moral improvement or empathy is greatly debated in various articles about the novel. Brian Finney, for example, attests that Briony's book in its entirety, and the fact that she felt the need to write it, is proof that she now possesses "the compassion and understanding that she lacked as a thirteen-year-old-girl" (2004, 81). This is a problematic claim to either deny or confirm, because even though Briony admits that the reason for her writing the book is to atone, in my opinion from this cannot be directly concluded that she does this out of compassion. After all, what good is an expression of empathy if she does not make it known to its recipient?

Some critics have, instead of focusing on the book as a whole, referred to a particular scene in it as proof of Briony's new sense of empathy. In this scene Briony is ordered by her superior to sit by a French soldier, who does not have long to live (p. 305). The young man, severely wounded to his head, mistakes Briony for a girl he had loved in France, and after trying to explain to him a few times that she is a nurse, Briony decides to "go along" with the boy's delusions and pretends to be the girl he speaks of. Although this undeniably reveals a softer side of Briony's character (Ellam

2009, 30), I still would not consider this show of compassion to be the same as having improved *morally*. David K. O'Hara has also referred to this scene as proof of Briony's changed character by saying that the Briony that was "once so apt to hijack the narratives of others" now gives up this authority and goes along with the soldier's illusions (2011, 83). While I agree that Briony handles the situation with the soldier in an admirable way, I question whether this tells us anything about her understanding of her past. The fact that Briony is able to feel sympathy for the dying French soldier does not in my opinion contribute to her credibility as a reformed wrongdoer, because the soldier that she should feel sympathy for is Robbie. It is a different matter to feel sympathy for someone you have not wronged yourself, than it is to empathize with the one who suffers because of your actions. Briony succeeds in the former, but does not show any proof of the latter.

The second subgoal of moral reconciliation that Linda Radzik mentioned was the requirement that the wrongdoer actually communicates with the victim, if this is possible. There are many ways to do this, but the main purpose must always be to withdraw the insult that the wrongdoer has expressed through their crime, acknowledge their guilt and the victim's moral value, and thus show the victim the respect that they deserve (Radzik 2009, 86). If this principle is applied to Briony's atonement, then, her communicative act should include an admission of guilt, it should be communicated directly to Robbie, and he would be exonerated as a result from it. This is not an impossible goal to achieve in the situation that the characters are in the novel, at least before Robbie goes to war, that is. Briony would only need to retract her previous statement to the court, which would lead to Robbie having his name cleared, and a moral, maybe even personal reconciliation would be possible between the two.

In order to achieve reconciliation with Robbie, then, Briony is right to write down everything that happened that night in 1935 into her book. It provides an explanation on her part, and gives reasons for why she was so quick to accuse Robbie of attacking Lola. Her book thus serves as the communicative act that is required in moral reconciliation, or at least it begins to do so. Even though Briony by writing her book attempts to make a "literary atonement" for her crime, concerns can however be raised over the "fictive conceit" with which she has created her story

(Shah 2009, 45). In other words, the question of intention once again becomes the problem, as it remains unclear what the motivation behind Briony's communicative act is. While her book does appear to explain what happened, it is nonetheless done in the form of *a story* which Briony has created. Can it then be accepted as a communicative act of remorse as such? As Julie Ellam has described this contradiction, through writing her story Briony "pleads for understanding while flaunting the privilege she has attached to her role" (2009, 34). She should express remorse and admit guilt for the superiority she wrongly assigned to herself, not add insult to injury and make her "atonement" an expression of this superiority as well.

Another requirement for communication with the victim that Briony fails to accomplish is the fact that the apology, explanation, or admission of guilt, must have an audience. If possible, the wrongdoer must communicate it directly to the victim, and others affected by the crime. In some cases this however is not possible, and the wrongdoer should then acknowledge their guilt in public in some other way, for example to the rest of the community (Radzik 2009, 95). In this respect, I would argue that there is no defence that can be made for Briony's lack of communication with Robbie. She is aware of her crime from the very start of it, and has every ability later to write Robbie a letter (as she does to Cecilia), and apologize. Instead, she waits until it is too late, and makes her communicative act of remorse in the form of a book, which none of the people harmed by her crime will be around to receive. Her "inaction" in the aftermath of her crime, then, seems to do as much damage as her initial crime, if not more (Behrman 2010, 460). Robbie has died in the war and will therefore never receive an explanation or an apology from Briony, thus another crucial step on the road towards moral reconciliation proves to be an unattainable one. Briony does not reconcile herself with the community, either, because she will not publish it in her lifetime. So even though her book does carry significant value as an explanation for her crime, Briony herself ends up robbing her book of this value by refusing to publish it in time.

The third and final subgoal that Briony should attain in hopes of moral reconciliation is the restoration of the harm that she has caused. As has been discussed earlier, this could be done by material compensation, self-punishment, or even service for the community. The only demand that

Briony at least to some extent meets, is the repayment she gives back to the community through her work as a nurse. According to Linda Radzik, service work can become a form of atonement through its “educational effect”, in that by caring for others the wrongdoer becomes able to empathize with others, and ideally with the victim as well (2009, 100). While I agree that there is an element of nobility and perhaps even suffering in Briony’s service as a nurse, I do not however see the justification for this service work as qualifying for the restoration that her crime merits. How does Robbie, the true victim of Briony’s crime, benefit from her work as a nurse? No change follows for Robbie, no matter how completely Briony submerges herself into her work. In fact, Briony herself might achieve some restoration through her labour, which is an acceptable but not as important of an aspect in moral reconciliation, as restoration of the victim would be. There is nothing “wrong” in Briony’s choice to do care work, then, but the fact that she fails to do anything that would actually restore the harm she has caused *for Robbie* invalidates her service, regardless of its nobility.

The fundamental question that begs an answer is simple: does Briony atone in the manner that law and morality would require? From this analysis of her character it has become evident, that although there are aspects in her “atonement process” that would appear to abide by the requirements of law and morality, the recurrent stumbling block seems to be her inability, and refusal, to follow through with them. She is never retributively punished for her crime, nor does she offer any kind of compensation that restitution theory would require. It is debatable whether she has improved morally, even if she does confess her guilt in her book. She fails to communicate an apology to Robbie, or restore any of the harm she has caused him. Similarly, it is questionable what value her book holds as a confession, since she refuses to make it public in her lifetime. Can her book, then, be considered even a partial atonement? While Briony does seem to acknowledge her guilt in it, I would still reject it as even a partial atonement for the simple reason that her atonement does nothing for the actual victim of her crime. Robbie has been long dead by the time that Briony writes her novel, and thus moral reconciliation between them is also impossible. From this we must draw the conclusion that for Briony, no atonement exists in the sense that law and morality require. Let us turn our attention to Robbie, then.

5.2 “Let the guilty bury the innocent” - Robbie’s atonement as an innocent wrongdoer

To apply the demands of retribution, restitution, and finally reconciliation to Robbie’s role in the novel, first it must be more clearly defined what exactly this “role” of his is. By this I mean the complexity of his character as both the innocent victim of Briony’s crime, but also as the wrongdoer in the eyes of the community because of Paul Marshall’s crime, for which he carries the blame. Therefore, while the focus of my analysis is to determine whether Robbie atones for his “crime” in a satisfactory way, I cannot carry out my analysis without taking into consideration the fact that Robbie is essentially innocent, and no atonement should be demanded of him to begin with.

I would think it difficult for anyone to deny the fact that Robbie indeed is the victim of the story. Of course Lola is another, but I will focus my discussion only on the wrongdoer-victim dynamic of Briony and Robbie. As Briony was found to resemble the description given for the “persecutor” in René Girard’s *The Scapegoat*, so does Robbie match the definition he gives for the victim of mythical stories, with remarkable precision:

The victim is a person who comes from elsewhere, a well-known stranger. He is invited to a feast which ends with his lynching. Why? He has done something he should not have done; his behaviour is perceived as fatal; one of his gestures was misinterpreted.

(1989, 32)

The situation described here by Girard is near identical to what causes Robbie to be the victim of Briony’s accusations. He is a friend of the Tallis family, although of lower class; he is invited to dinner; and his fatal “mistake” is only his desire for Cecilia, and the letter he writes for her but mistakenly gives to Briony. The letter then leads to Briony’s misinterpretation of him as a maniac, and the consequences are tragic. Therefore, as we attempt to define whether an atonement is achieved by Robbie that satisfies the various demands placed for it in law and morality, we must take into account this “double-sided” role of his as both an innocent victim, and a falsely condemned wrongdoer. He is innocent of the crime that he is convicted of, but the demands of retribution, restitution, and moral reconciliation are nonetheless placed upon him as the wrongdoer that he is in the eyes of the law, and the community.

To begin with the concept of retribution, then, Robbie can certainly be said to meet its key requirement for the wrongdoer to suffer a punishment (Radzik 2009, 30). Of course I use the term “wrongdoer” about Robbie only in the sense that he is falsely considered to be such in the novel. Robbie is convicted of a terrible crime, and thus according to retribution theory, and as a wrongdoer in the eyes of the law, he deserves to be punished for it. The definition of punishment is generally understood as “a particular act whereby one *intends to harm* someone in response to an offense” (Kyle 2013, 204; emphasis mine). In other words, some type of harm must follow for the wrongdoer in response to the harm they have caused others, retribution theory needs no further justification for punishment.

The fact that Robbie is not, however, the actual wrongdoer in this scenario, begs for a distinction being made between the crime, and the person convicted of it. Surely it cannot be argued that Robbie, as an innocent person, deserves to suffer the punishment for a crime he did not commit? Rather, it seems that it is the crime in itself that calls for retribution. The true offender is Paul Marshall, but because of Briony’s accusations and claimed eyewitness, Robbie is condemned for the crime. The crime is what essentially demands retribution, and punishment is the means for the community to react to both the crime, and the person guilty of it (Farnham 2008, 607). The fact that Robbie is innocent of the crime is known only by a few people, who decide to remain silent.

One other crucial aspect of retribution that certainly is met in Robbie’s case is the fact that there is a third, objective party that imposes the punishment on him, and that this punishment is accepted as such by the community (Molander 2009, 186; 194). The punishment is not dictated by himself or by Lola, but by a higher authority, who by sentencing him to prison expresses the anger that the community feels towards the crime, and essentially towards Robbie as well as the “wrongdoer”. The process itself, then, is valid, but it is not without its problems. The first complication is the fact that Robbie does not deserve this anger expressed towards him. Relating to this, I would argue that it is actually Briony’s anger that causes these tragic consequences for Robbie. The objective authority (the law) would not have any cause to resent Robbie as the wrongdoer, had not Briony resented him first. Because Briony read the letter which Robbie never

intended to give to Cecilia, he becomes “a danger”, and a threat to their entire household in her mind (p. 114). So even though the law is right to express anger and impose punishment for the crime itself, for Robbie to be the object however is not just.

The fact that Robbie is innocent also complicates other requisites that are emphasised in retribution theory. The very basic requirement that a wrongdoer must be punished for their crime, seems to be met without any difficulties. However, some principles of retribution in fact appear to be broken by the fact that Robbie has not committed any crime. For example, the requirement that there must be an offense for which the person is punished (Kyle 2013, 208), is not true in Robbie’s case. This principle would only be met in the case that Paul Marshall was the one being punished for the crime, as the actual culprit. Brent G. Kyle adds to this with another principle, that states that it is necessary for the punishing authority also to “*believe that there was an offense*”, and furthermore, to “*believe that the intended recipient is responsible for the offence*” (2013, 208). So while the first principle is not met in Robbie’s case, the two following ones are. Robbie has not committed the crime, but he is believed to be the offender. The law must certainly be convinced of his guilt in order to punish him, although this is once again merely a result from Briony’s false accusations, and not a conclusion that the law arrived at on its own.

Another principle of retribution that would appear to be met by Robbie is the basic requirement for the punishment to be proportional to the crime (Radzik 2009, 39). There is a normative system of justice according to which Robbie is punished for the crime he is considered guilty of, and therefore his prison sentence is what the law (at that time) deems as proportional to the crime. The demand for proportionality is thus met in theory, but again the fact that the punishment is undeserved cancels out its justification in relation to Robbie. The punishment is proportional to the crime, but not to the person who must suffer it. If the principle to be followed in punishing the wrongdoer is that “no action may be taken against him that is harsher than his own offense” (Farnham 2008, 618), then certainly this rule does not apply to Robbie’s punishment. Not only is the prison sentence too harsh a punishment because of his innocence, but also his service and eventually, death, in the Second World War. The law, however, cannot be blamed for bringing

this injustice upon Robbie, because the law is not aware of his innocence.

The fundamental justification behind a retributivist punishment is the assertion that the wrongdoer has with his crime made a claim of superior value and authority over the victim. The basic rights of property, freedom, and physical integrity have been offended by the wrongdoer, and punishment is imposed in order to restore the moral equality between the victim and the wrongdoer (Radzik 2009, 43). It is certainly true that the crime against Lola has broken all of these rights that she as a human being holds, but they were not broken by Robbie. Robbie has not claimed superior value over Lola, or anyone else for that matter. Quite contrarily, the one deemed inferior in value in this scenario seems to be Robbie himself. The goal of restoring moral equality, which retribution should have as its main purpose, is met to some extent, but not in its entirety. It is true that Lola's value should be, and is restored by punishing the wrongdoer, but the assumption that prior to this Robbie has first violated Lola's value is not true. Therefore, if the purpose of punishment is to "bring low" the wrongdoer, and the extent to which this is done is dependent on the severity of the violation (Hampton 1991, 406), then surely Robbie's punishment is adequate. The problem is, however, that he has not elevated himself above others. On the contrary, coming from a lower class family (in comparison to the Tallises), the punishment imposed on him only serves to bring him *lower* than he already was. So even though Lola's value is restored by the punishment, there still is no moral equality between her and Robbie, because there never was.

In retribution theory, it is not enough that the authority ordering the punishment is aware of the moral laws that have been broken, but the wrongdoer must acknowledge these as well, if not before the crime then certainly after it (Radzik 2009, 40). To refuse a punishment for a wrong is to deny the authority of the law, which is another way for the wrongdoer to claim their supposed higher value. There is no reason to doubt that Robbie understands the moral laws and proceedings that led to his punishment, although he never really reflects back on this in the novel. However, to demand that he should also *accept* the punishment given to him is an entirely different issue. It is also a question for which opposing arguments can be made. For example, the hatred that he feels towards Briony while he is serving in the war (p. 228), would clearly suggest that he does not

accept what has been done to him, and this is hardly surprising given the fact that he is innocent. Also, he does not understand why Briony accused him of the crime so vehemently (p. 229), even if he does understand the legal process that followed. However, the nobility and honour with which he serves in the war (Shah 2009, 45), could also be seen as basis for the argument that he has at least somehow come to terms with his punishment, and decided to carry it out with honour, in order to return home a free man. Therefore the demand that the wrongdoer understands and accepts the punishment given to them in order to atone satisfactorily (Molander 2009, 188), seems to be met by Robbie, albeit an unreasonable demand to place on him.

Another means for atonement that Linda Radzik suggests for the wrongdoer that has come to understand their crime and its consequences, is self-punishment. This was possible for example through voluntary submission to punishment, service work for the community, or giving a gift to the victim that has required “significant effort” (Radzik 2009, 32). None of these deeds is enough on their own to fulfil the demands of retribution, but they offer a possible means for the wrongdoer to express their remorse and the acknowledgement of the fact that they deserve to be punished. Whether Robbie punishes himself is a question open for debate, because even though he has not done anything to truly deserve a punishment, he does not seem to rebel against it either. Surely serving in the war is the ultimate kind of community service he could do, and he does do it voluntarily. But what would he punish himself for, then? The only “offense” on his part was the wrong letter he took with him as he left for the dinner at the Tallises, and then gave to Briony. Even if he does feel guilty for it, he does not consider it as enough to explain Briony’s accusations against him (p. 229). The only expression of guilt on Robbie’s part seems to relate to the war, and the people he was unable to save there (Rooney 2006, 107). His determination to serve honourably in the war could then be regarded as a form of self-punishment, although the horrors of war can hardly be placed on the conscience of one man. Rather than self-punishment, then, his service in the war takes the form of self-sacrifice.

The question remains, then, whether Robbie can be said to atone as would be required by the retribution theory. Although he does not deserve the punishment given to him, the nobility with

which he suffers it is nonetheless enough basis in my opinion to argue that he does in fact atone in an adequate way. The fact that he is innocent of the crime that he is condemned for is a great injustice, but it does not negate the fact that he atones for the crime as retribution theory requires. Injustice is created also from the fact that when retribution should bring something good for both the victim and the wrongdoer, in Robbie's punishment the only ones to benefit are those that could have prevented his condemnation, that is, Briony, Lola, and Paul.

Robbie does not in any way benefit from suffering his punishment, but he still bears it with honour. Although the principle of proportionality is not met with his punishment, he is determined to survive it. The fact that he voluntarily serves in the Second World War, and indeed dies right before the evacuation of the troops, further emphasizes how unreasonable and disproportionate his punishment eventually is. Therefore, even if some important principles of retribution theory are not adhered to in Robbie's case, a satisfactory atonement through a retributive punishment is nevertheless achieved by him. He suffers the punishment that the crime against Lola deserves, even though he as a person is not the wrongdoer that deserves it. The law that condemns him believes that he is guilty, and thus he is given the place of the wrongdoer, where Paul Marshall should rightfully stand. To conclude, then, Robbie does atone for the crime according to the requirements of retribution theory, although he does this as an innocent victim himself.

Let us move on to the second "means" for achieving an atonement in law and morality, that is, restitution theory. Contrary to retribution, restitution does not demand the punishment for the wrongdoer, but considers a more important aspect of atonement to be the compensation that the victim deserves. The essential idea behind restitution is then quite simply "to restore the harm caused by crime" (Skotnicki 2006, 188). Because the crime that is committed against Lola is rape, it is thus one of the most severe crimes that cannot simply be repaid with material compensation. What Linda Radzik describes as "pure" restitution is not therefore possible in this case, because no material thing can be considered commensurable with the violation of Lola's physical integrity and value (2009, 49). The legal process that follows the crime is not described at all in the novel, so the reader knows only that as a result Robbie has been given a prison sentence, and no one else is ever

suspected of the crime. It would seem, then, that the means for Robbie to at least “offer something” as compensation, is through punitive restitution which in addition to some form of repayment demands that the wrongdoer also suffers, simply because the victim has suffered (Radzik 2009, 51).

The crime that Robbie is convicted of is the kind for which he cannot make any type of compensation, so to suffer a punishment is the only way for him to even attempt to atone for it. The purpose for this would essentially be to restore the rights (of Lola) that have been broken, but I think it remains questionable whether this can actually be achieved through Robbie’s sentencing to prison. Granted, it does satisfy the demand that a moral authority realizes Lola’s threatened value by punishing the wrongdoer, and moral equality supposedly is restored (Farnham 2008, 618). However, because Robbie was not the one who violated Lola’s rights as a human being, for him to be able to restore them is highly unlikely. Only the demand that the law punishes the offender is met here, Lola should hardly feel that restitution has been done when the true offender is still free, and she knows who this offender is. Punitive restitution is essentially what Robbie does through his prison sentence and service in the war, but this does little to actually restore Lola’s rights.

To make the injustice even greater, the people who seem to enjoy their rights fully as a result from Robbie’s punishment, are those that are to greater or lesser degree the true wrongdoers in the story. Lola is of course the victim of a terrible crime, but she does commit a wrong against Robbie by not identifying Paul as the true offender. The same kind of wrong is committed by Briony, who not only later keeps quiet of who the actual attacker was, but actively pursues Robbie’s condemnation for the crime. The worst wrongdoer in this scenario, however, is Paul Marshall, who obviously knows he is guilty, and lets an innocent man bear the blame for his crime. In addition to this, he does not have the same defence of “young age” for not having the courage to tell the truth, that Lola and Briony might be able to resort to if ever held accountable. If Robbie accomplishes any kind of restoration of rights through his punishment, then, it seems to benefit the wrong people. Moreover, the restoration of the offender should also be achieved through his punishment (Skotnicki 2006, 199), but this is denied of Robbie as well, even though he seems to be the only one who would truly deserve to have his previously held rights restored.

Another demand of restitution is that the compensation is equal to the loss that the victim has suffered (Radzik 2009, 46). What this would mean for Lola could only be defined by her, if even then, and furthermore it is not the way that punishment is ordered for a crime. The only two things that must be compared here then, at least to some extent, is the suffering of Lola, and the suffering that Robbie endures while he is working his way towards freedom. Are they equal in any way? Perhaps so, but I would argue that Robbie's suffering in fact turns out to be too severe, not because Lola's suffering does not deserve such a punishment, but because Robbie is not the one that deserves to bear it. Lola has certainly been terribly violated, and the punishment for it should reflect this. Therefore, some type of restitution is possible for Robbie to make through his imprisonment, because it robs him of his freedom, just as Lola's freedom was momentarily taken in the attack. This alone would suffice in restitution theory, but Robbie makes the further decision to go fight in the war. The horrors that he witnesses there, the loss of identity, physical and psychological damage that he suffers (Behrman 2010, 463), and eventually the death that follows, make his restitution the ultimate kind, perhaps even an unreasonable one. To suffer a punishment is the only possible means for restitution in this case, but the extent to which Robbie ends up suffering seems, again, disproportionate to the crime.

As was in retribution, so in restitution too it is considered crucial that the wrongdoer acknowledges their guilt, and offers restitution as an expression of the remorse and guilt that they feel for their offense (Radzik 2009, 50). Therefore, while the offer of compensation might not carry much monetary or material value, it should still always carry the symbolic value of an apology and expression of respect towards the victim. This is achieved by Robbie's punishment only in the sense that it has restored the moral equality that supposedly was threatened by Robbie. As an innocent man, however, no such expressions of remorse or guilt can be demanded of Robbie, even though Lola undeniably deserves to receive them. It is Paul Marshall upon whom this demand of an apology truly lies, not Robbie. Indeed, Robbie is the one that *an apology should be made to*, by Paul, Briony, and maybe even Lola. There is a great contradiction, then, in deciding whether Robbie's punishment satisfies the various demands of restitution, because while he suffers the

punishment of the wrongdoer, he is also a victim to whom restitution should be made.

As we established earlier, however, Robbie does bear his prison sentence without much rebellion, even though he does feel anger towards the injustice of it, and serves in the war with great nobility and integrity. The fact that he seems to face his punishment as if he truly was guilty of the crime, both serves as proof of his fundamentally honourable character, but also emphasizes the severity of the injustice that he suffers. To suffer a punishment is the only way that the crime against Lola can be at least to some extent repaid, and thus the punishment is justifiable, but it is imposed on an innocent man. The question remains, then, does any “good” follow from this restitution? What good does the suffering of the wrongdoer bring for the victim, if anything at all? (Radzik 2009, 51) The “good” that Robbie’s punishment brings is essentially the freedom that Lola, Briony and Paul enjoy as they remain silent of what truly happened that night at the Tallis’ house. The problem is, however, that none of these people deserve any of the good that Robbie’s suffering brings. It is problematic even to state that it is a kind of “good”, that a punishment has been sanctioned by the law, when this punishment is given to an innocent man.

When restitution at its best would bring about forgiveness, healing for the victim and the community, and restoration for the wrongdoer (Skotnicki, 2006, 199), these are all impossible goals for Robbie to reach because of the fact that he does not deserve this demand to be placed upon him. He cannot, nor is he obligated to restore the rights of Lola that have been violated, even though this is the purpose of his punishment, and he thus *could* be able to do this. He can only suffer as compensation for Lola’s suffering, and it can hardly be denied by anyone that Robbie does indeed suffer equally, and I would argue that even more, than what is demanded for the crime. The “double-sidedness” of his character is again evident, in that he does meet the requirements of restitution as he suffers the punishment for the crime against Lola, and yet he also very much deserves to have *his* rights and freedom restored to their previous state, because he is also a victim of a crime himself. His restitution is acceptable, then, although the injustice of it cannot be ignored either. To the degree to which restitution can be done for the crime against Lola, Robbie seems to accomplish, and indeed suffers a punishment beyond the requirements placed on him.

Whether Robbie accomplishes it through retribution or restitution, from the viewpoint of law and morality his goal, and his atonement, would in any case be moral reconciliation. The fact that he suffers the punishment imposed on him by law is a necessary step towards reconciliation, but on its own it is not enough to repair the relationships that have been damaged by the crime, mainly the one between the victim and the wrongdoer (Radzik 2009, 81). Robbie's atonement, then, would need to consist of the restoration of his relationship to Lola as moral equals, his relationship to the community, and essentially his own moral standing within that community. This largely depends on the actions of the wrongdoer himself, but on the victim's participation as well, as Radzik defines it: "when a wrongdoer atones, he gives his victim good reason to stop structuring their relationship to one another in terms of the roles of wrongdoer and victim" (2009, 82). Although the victim cannot mandate what an appropriate punishment for the crime should be, they do have a say in what they consider to be "good reason" for there to be moral reconciliation.

The three "subgoals" that Robbie would have to achieve in order for there to be moral reconciliation are moral improvement, communication of an apology, and the restoration of the harm caused by the crime (Radzik 2009, 85). To begin with the demand for moral improvement, then, the immediate problem seems to be the question whether Robbie is actually required to do this. In his own words, "he had done nothing wrong" (p. 228), so how could he then prove that he has transformed as a person and improved morally, when he has never violated any moral laws? To have improved morally would mean to acknowledge the guilt for the past wrongs, and to behave better in the future, but no such "change" is needed in Robbie's case. He has made mistakes, of course, but none so severe that they would require a complete transformation of his character.

Another perspective of moral improvement is the wrongdoer's ability (and obligation) to empathize with the victim, in order for there to be an atonement (Radzik 2009, 91). For Robbie, this demand could once again be proven unnecessary simply because he is innocent, but in addition to this, his character actually seems to be a very compassionate one. There are numerous scenes in the novel where his gentle and kind character is shown, such as the moment he has with his mother before leaving for the dinner at the Tallises (p. 89), his remembering of teaching Briony how to

swim (p. 230), and how in the war he stops to help a wounded major even though he is badly injured himself (p. 223). There seems to be no doubt, then, placed on the fact that Robbie is able to empathize with others, that is, to understand the point of view and emotions of another person. His thoughts about Lola are actually never presented in the novel, but I would think him very capable of feeling empathy for her as a victim of a horrible crime, for the sole reason that he has been a victim of a crime himself.

The demand for the communication of an apology is another problematic duty to place on Robbie, because in order for the apology to carry the symbolic value that is necessary for moral reconciliation, the apology must be given by the true perpetrator of the crime (Radzik 2009, 92). To apologize to the rest of the community, although needed for reconciliation, is also pointless for Robbie because he was not the one who broke the moral laws of that community. He in fact *cannot* apologize, because inherent in that would be an admission of guilt. Therefore Robbie, as “the most guiltless of characters” (Rooney 2006, 106), cannot be expected to apologize for a crime he has not committed, although the community clearly has condemned him as the wrongdoer. On the contrary, he is the one to whom apologies should be given, for there is hardly no one wronged as greatly in the novel as he is. In achieving this second subgoal of moral reconciliation he thus seems to “fail”, but only because an apology for a crime cannot be given by a man innocent of it.

The third and final subgoal mentioned by Linda Radzik is perhaps the most essential one, because it simply calls for the restoration of every possible kind of harm caused by the crime. For moral reconciliation, however, the emphasis is placed on the various relationships that have been broken by the offense, and are now in desperate need of restoration (Radzik 2009, 80). Earlier we came to the conclusion that material compensation is not possible to give for the crime against Lola, nor can Robbie express guilt or remorse for the crime as an innocent man. Is the reconciliation of relationships, then, any more possible for him to achieve? Theoretically, and partly, yes. If he had the opportunity to serve his prison sentence in full, he would then be considered as having atoned by the requirements set by the law, and his relationship to the community he comes from would be restored. He would have suffered the punishment given to him, and he would be able to return home

a free man, which is the hope that he clings to amidst the horrors of the war (p. 203). This way reconciliation would also occur between him and Lola, because through suffering his punishment Lola, as the victim, could consider the “debt” repaid, and the moral equality restored. The problem is, however, that Lola knows that Robbie is innocent, therefore even though she is a victim in the novel, she is not a victim of anything that Robbie has done.

If Robbie was able to return to Cecilia a free man, and their lives would “simply resume”, Cecilia’s relationship with her family would also have some hope for reconciliation. Because her entire family refused to believe that Robbie was innocent of the attack on Lola, she has cut off all connection to them and is only waiting for Robbie to come back (p. 208). However, only so much could be achieved by Robbie simply serving his complete sentence, because he would still carry on him the “moral stain” of a wrongdoer (Watkins 2005, 63). Moral reconciliation that would truly restore all of the harm that has followed from the crime, could only be achieved by Robbie’s exoneration, and the power to do this lies with Briony, not Robbie. Only after having his record cleared, could Robbie completely reconcile himself with the community he comes from, perhaps even with Lola, and certainly with Cecilia, who in any case never has doubted his innocence. The only ones he himself doubts that reconciliation might not be possible with even after being exonerated, are the Tallises, and especially Briony (p. 228).

The main reason for why Robbie cannot bring about restoration for the many broken relationships in the novel, is the fact that he is an innocent victim himself. He has not the ability to repair the damages caused by the crime because he did not commit the crime. At least, not according to the moral reconciliation theory advocated by Linda Radzik. There is, however, one way to argue that restoration in fact does happen in the community through Robbie’s atonement. This is possible if we examine it from the perspective offered in *The Scapegoat*. Robbie is the victim of persecution, but also the wrongdoer in the eyes of the community. This essentially is how the scapegoat mechanism functions, an innocent victim is for some reason chosen as the cause for all of the harm that has come to the community, and in hopes of restoring this harm the scapegoat is condemned, and banished from the community. The community thus is restored through the

condemnation of the scapegoat: “These victims are the spontaneous agents of reconciliation, since, . . . they unite in opposition to themselves those who were organized in opposition to each other” (Girard 1989, 165). The relationships within the community can therefore be said to have been restored by Robbie through his carrying of the stain of the wrongdoer, but this however has done little to restore the relationships that he, as a victim and a scapegoat, would also deserve to have restored. Furthermore, as the novel reveals in the end, Robbie dies during this “exile” of his, and thus is never able to bring about reconciliation for himself, or the many other relationships broken by the crime.

If a satisfactory atonement and moral reconciliation therefore cannot be achieved by Robbie in full, the solution offered by Linda Radzik is then the concept of an at least partial atonement (2009, 84). Not only is the crime against Lola so terrible that it in fact *could* never be fully atoned for, but in addition to this Robbie is not *able* to atone for the crime because he is not the one guilty of it. As the condemned wrongdoer, Robbie nonetheless carries the obligation to atone, and this essentially is what he attempts to do by suffering his punishment as is required. However, even in a partial atonement, the wrongdoer cannot be the one to define what this should consist of. To accept or refuse the wrongdoer’s atonement is the “prerogative” of the victim, and moral reconciliation can only follow if the victim is willing to participate in it (Radzik 2009, 120). It would then seem, that it does not really matter how great an effort is put towards an atonement by Robbie, because Lola is not a victim of his actions, but Paul’s. Even though Robbie is punished for the crime committed against Lola, she is not a victim of his in the sense that moral reconciliation would require. The wrongdoer-victim dynamic does not exist between them in reality, but it does in the eyes of the law, and thus Robbie must also satisfy the demands placed on him by the law.

To conclude this discussion, then, on whether Robbie atones as the requirements of law and morality would demand, my argument would be that even if his atonement might not be a complete one, it still satisfies a notable number of the various requisites given in the theories of retribution, restitution, and reconciliation. In fact, according to retribution theory, Robbie’s atonement actually would qualify as a complete one. When the only means for making amends is to suffer the

punishment that the wrongdoer deserves, Robbie certainly does this, and indeed suffers even more than what the law of retribution would require. Restitution, on the other hand, is a more problematic concept in Robbie's case, because the crime he is convicted of is the kind for which no compensation can really be given, and as an innocent man he would not even be able to try. Expressions of guilt, remorse, or an apology are not reasonable demands to place on him as an innocent victim himself, nor would they serve their intended purpose in restitution theory because they should be made by the true offender, that is, Paul Marshall. Robbie's restitution is, however, the punitive kind, because suffering is the only way he is able to offer compensation.

Whether moral reconciliation is possible for Robbie also seems to be divided into two competing answers, since he does have some ability to restore some of the relationships broken by the crime, but he could never restore them in full because he should not have been burdened with this responsibility in the first place. Furthermore, the fact that he dies in the war before completing his sentence and is therefore unable to ever return home, makes it impossible for him to bring about any type of reconciliation, to any of the relationships broken by the crime. In my opinion this should not, however, diminish Robbie's atonement in any way, because it is not a *choice* of his to only atone partially. On the contrary, he rightly begins his atonement process by enduring the punishment imposed on him, but is *denied* the opportunity to complete it because of his injury that ends up killing him. Robbie is a victim himself, yet he suffers the punishment of a wrongdoer, and atones for another man's crime as much as it is possible for him to do. Therefore, even if there are some aspects of atonement (as it is defined in law and morality), that do not apply to Robbie's atonement, there still are many that do. Indeed, I would consider his atonement a satisfactory one, simply for the reason that Robbie truly does atone to the best of his abilities, and suffers a punishment far greater than what could ever be demanded of him by any law. There is an atonement, then, because there is an ultimate price paid for the crime.

6. Conclusions

The objective of this thesis has been, firstly, to determine whether Briony's book as her atonement can be regarded an acceptable one as such, either according to the Christian atonement theories or to the atonement theories of law and morality. Secondly, the purpose of my analysis was to instead argue that it is in fact Robbie's character in the novel that atones in a way that can be considered satisfactory, according to the two different perspectives on atonement.

To begin with Briony's character, her book as her "atonement" proved to be a difficult concept to defend when compared to the characteristics given by the Christus Victor view, the penal substitution view, as well as the healing view on atonement in Christianity. Briony's character was considered to represent the "evil side" of the battle which an atonement should resolve, because of her questionable innocence and sense of superiority. This is the first aspect of a satisfactory atonement in Christianity that she fails to meet, although arguments can be made of the degree to which she actually is guilty of anything in the novel.

The concept of voluntariness was also a problematic one, because even though no one demands the atonement (her book) from her, she can be argued to have done it purely out of selfish motives. Rather than an atonement, it seems to be an effort to give explanations, and relief her own sense of guilt. Even if began out of free will, her book still fails to serve as an atonement because Briony does not want to publish it in her lifetime. Her story, even though containing an admission of guilt, will not reach the people it would be most crucial to receive it. The domain of her atonement is thus not the one that a satisfactory atonement would require.

The outcomes of an acceptable atonement as described in the three Christian atonement paradigms, are another key aspect for why it can be argued that Briony's book as her atonement is not adequate. The most crucial of the outcomes would have to be freedom for Robbie, which clearly does not happen in the novel. There is no "deed" on Briony's part which would suffice as a payment for the debt against Robbie, and result in his freedom. Furthermore, no healing of any kind follows for Robbie, Cecilia, or even Briony herself from her "atonement", because she is not willing to

make it public. Granted, Robbie loses his life in the war before Briony would have the chance to face him, but Briony's desire to avoid her guilt is nonetheless evident in her decision to postpone the publication of her book.

This proved to be the very issue that renders her atonement unacceptable also according to the atonement theories of law and morality. Because she does not make her confession public, Briony will also never be punished by the objective, higher authority (the law), which retribution theory requires. Although Briony can in some respects be said to suffer in her work as a nurse in wartime England, I would not however accept this service work as the kind of punishment that retribution theory demands for the wrongdoer. Not only does she benefit something from it in that it keeps her distracted from the thoughts of guilt, her work as her punishment fails to restore anything for Robbie or Cecilia as the victims of her crime.

Her book, instead of being a complete atonement, suffices only as a partial offering of compensation, as the "something" given in a situation where nothing else can. Restitution is therefore another concept which Briony's book as an atonement appears to fall short of. The goal achieved by either retribution or restitution should be moral reconciliation, the principles of which turned out to be problematic for Briony's character as well. Firstly, the question whether she has improved morally was one that opposing arguments could be made of. However, once again her decision to postpone the publication of her book would indicate that she has not truly acknowledged her guilt, nor is she able to empathize with Robbie. Secondly, there is no communication of an apology or an admission of guilt that would have been directed at Robbie. This is far too late to achieve by her book, but she does not do this even when Robbie is still alive. Thirdly, her apology is not ever made public, that is, known by *anyone*, even if it could not be known by Robbie.

Whether examined from the perspective of Christianity or morality, then, Briony's book as her atonement seems to fail on many accounts. Several different factors play into this conclusion, but the most crucial is her refusal to make her atonement public. The fact that she procrastinates with the publication of her book, diminishes the value that her book might otherwise carry as an apology, an admission of guilt, or even a partial atonement. Not only does her atonement fail to be

such according to both the Christian atonement paradigms as well as the atonement theories of law and morality, it fails to be an atonement by Briony's *own choice*. Just as she waits too long to tell the truth about what happened that night in 1935, she waits too long with her attempt at an atonement, and thus it will always remain an attempt.

The same cannot be said about Robbie's atonement in the novel, whether examined from the Christian or the legal perspective. To begin with his character in itself, Robbie seems to fit nearly all of the characteristics that were present in the three Christian atonement paradigms. He was inferior in status and power, an overall good character, and most importantly, innocent of the crime he was condemned for. Although his atonement process did not begin out of free will, there can be argued to exist a sense of submission in how he nonetheless is determined to endure his prison sentence, and survive the war with honour. He was publicly condemned, and thus he also entered the correct domain needed for the atonement by going to prison. He does not have an ulterior motive for completing his atonement, nor does he benefit anything from it. His only motive is to survive, and to be able to return home to Cecilia as a free man, and this can hardly be called a benefit.

The outcomes of Robbie's atonement can also be considered as more or less acceptable ones, although highly problematic. The freedom that follows from his atonement is not for himself, but for the ones that actually are truly guilty of committing some kind of wrong. His suffering of the punishment that would rightfully be Paul Marshall's, enables Paul, Lola, and Briony to live freely with the secret that they all are guilty of keeping. This, however, is exactly the element of injustice that makes Robbie's atonement satisfactory according to the Christian atonement paradigms. It is greatly unjust that an innocent man suffers for the benefit of others, but this nevertheless makes the atonement an acceptable one. Robbie's "deed" is therefore adequate, because it is given in the correct domain, his atonement is received by the authority needed (the law), and he is the innocent substitute needed for the atonement. Although not perfectly in line with every aspect of it, Robbie's atonement can nonetheless be considered an acceptable one from the viewpoint of Christianity.

The theories of retribution, restitution and moral reconciliation were also problematic to connect to Robbie's character, but a satisfactory atonement seems to be achieved by him from this

perspective as well. Out of the three atonement theories in law and morality, Robbie's atonement is the most compatible with the one defined in retribution theory. If the basic demand for an atonement is to suffer a punishment, then Robbie clearly meets this requirement, and more. Even though he is a victim of a crime himself, he bears the condemnation and punishment deserved by the wrongdoer, as an innocent man. Not only is he punished, he is punished in public, and by the objective, higher authority that retribution theory demands. His atonement is therefore also proportional to the offense, because his prison sentence is what the punishing authority (the law) regards as proportional to the crime committed against Lola. Robbie however ends up suffering far more than the offense would actually require, because he eventually loses his life while he is attempting to survive the war. Even so, this does not negate the punishment as his atonement.

Restitution theory was a bit more problematic to connect to Robbie's character, for many different reasons. Firstly, the crime against Lola is a very serious one, and therefore any offer of compensation would be difficult, maybe even impossible to make. Secondly, Robbie cannot offer the compensation required by restitution theory because he is innocent of the crime. Because he is innocent, he similarly cannot offer any expressions of guilt, remorse, or apology, which restitution theory normally would demand from the wrongdoer. The only form of restitution that Robbie is able to achieve thus is punitive restitution, in which his only offer of compensation is the punishment he suffers. The fact that he suffers more than the crime actually would demand, once again shows the injustice of his atonement, but does not diminish it as such.

Moral reconciliation as atonement is also a seemingly impossible goal for Robbie to achieve, simply because he never makes it back home from the war. He therefore is not able to bring about reconciliation, but moreover, this demand does not belong to him as an innocent man anyway. He is a good, honourable man throughout his whole life, and never commits any kind of crime. Therefore to demand moral improvement from him is unfounded. He is not the one from whom an apology for the crime against Lola should be demanded, as it would not carry the meaning it should as an admission of guilt from the actual wrongdoer. Any kind of restoration, and indeed reconciliation, is not achieved by Robbie for the sole reason that he dies in the war and thus never

returns back home.

What turns out to be the most significant difference, then, between Robbie's atonement and that of Briony's, is the fact that even though Robbie fails to meet some of the requirements given for an acceptable atonement either in the Christian or the legal atonement theories, this is never a conscious choice on his part. Contrarily, what invalidates any effort supposedly made by Briony to achieve an atonement, is her conscious choice to not make it public. Nevertheless, there is a significant number of demands that Robbie's atonement in fact does manage to meet, and therefore the argument that his atonement actually is the only satisfactory one in the novel is justifiable to make. He suffers, as an innocent victim himself, the punishment meant for the wrongdoer guilty of a terrible crime, and despite of his public condemnation, exclusion, and all of the horrors he witnesses in the war, his character never ceases to be an honourable and noble one. Robbie atones for a crime he is not guilty of, by suffering a punishment that he does not deserve. But this is exactly why his atonement is an acceptable one. Although incredibly unjust, and at times unable to meet all of the requirements given for it, his suffering and the ultimate sacrifice of losing his life, are what eventually make his atonement an adequate one, and indeed the only satisfactory atonement to be found in the novel.

Ultimately, what has been established through this "atonement analysis" of the novel and its main characters, is the conclusion that to simply attempt to atone is not enough, nor is it enough to just ostensibly abide by the requirements placed for atonement in either Christianity or law and morality. What seems to matter almost as much as the actual process of atoning, are the intentions behind it and the manner in which it is carried out. To claim to have atoned for something without having actually changed in any way inwardly, is a crime in itself. Furthermore, this claim should never be made by the atoning party themselves, for the power to judge whether a satisfactory atonement has been achieved lies with the victim, and/or the receiver of the atonement. A satisfactory atonement, in both its Christian as well as legal definitions, thus comprises much more than merely certain tasks for the wrongdoer to complete. It is a way of life.

7. Works Cited

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