

## Capital and Habitus in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in Terms of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Class Distinction

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**Abstract:** The present study aims at reading Ian McEwan's *Atonement* according to Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) theory of class distinction. The novel depicts the society as a field in which autonomous forces function. The characters can be considered as agents of society whose strategic interactions define their social aspects. In the other words, they are affected by the power in society which can be transferred through what Bourdieu calls 'habitus'. According to him, habitus refers to an individual system through which the subject sees the surrounding society. What affects this system is mostly the social background of the subject during his life. Accordingly, different and distinct social classes with their own unique capital and taste are shaped. *Atonement* depicts how two opposite poles – symbolically reflected between Robbie's and Cecilia's intimacy – fail to attract each other in the social field by different habitus of distinct social classes. The study attempts to account for different forces that have affected characters' habitus and distinct classes.

**Keywords:** *Atonement, Capital, Class Distinction, Habitus, Ian McEwan, Pierre Bourdieu.*

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### Introduction

Ian McEwan, an English Novelist, was born in 1948. Since his father used to serve in Army, Ian experienced living in different countries. Academically, Ian McEwan has studied English and creative writing which could be considered as the reason of his success at writing since his works "works have received both popular and critical acclaim" (Head 2). This means that McEwan could attract the attention of two different groups; ordinary people and literary critics. The reason is traced in his style since his narration depicts the experience of real life in the fictional world as Schemberg mentions "Ian McEwan's novels are characterized by a keen awareness of the important structuring and meaning-giving task that narrative in general and fictional storytelling, in particular, perform in our lives" (Schemberg 9). Another reason which might be the reason for McEwan's popularity as a writer would be his openness to different subject matters; in fact, McEwan's writing range from the world of politics to the issue of gender. Not only does Ewan concentrate on human issues but also he shows his concern for "nature and ecology" (Head 2). However, among all the subject matters that McEwan has worked, the social one is more significant for the present article.

Pierre Bourdieu is considered as a French sociologist, whose works are a mixture of different fields including literature and criticism, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and psychology.

Bourdieu's work is not merely abstract or practical; rather it is a combination of both theory and practice. What he has done is that he has used data and empirical proof along with different theories to prove his claims. Bourdieu attempts to account for forces which influence subjects in the society.

The sociology of literature is one of the branches of general sociology which aims at studying and investigating the social aspects of literature. Pier Bourdieu, a French sociologist, assumes that literary and artistic tastes are exerted by various fields in which they have been living. The mentioned fields cover a variety of institutions like family, education, literary, and artistic. In fact, Bourdieu is considered as a great figure in the field of "sociology of literature" (Eastwood 149). In fact, Bourdieu provides "a new relational approach to the study of fields of domination and struggle, a new way of thinking about how power operates within social life" (Emirbayer and Williams 689). Due to the fact that power resides in every layer of society, Bourdieu's notions are regarded as a novel perspective in the realm of sociology.

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It is indispensable and vital to point out the origin of Bourdieu's critical notions which are all rooted in experimental data and practical experiments. According to Bourdieu, people might fail to obey the codes and rules and act upon them. Based on this claim, the agents of the society are not considered as the proponents or "bearer of the structure" (Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* 179); rather, social codes in the society would penetrate the subjects' minds and exert them drastically. Bourdieu attempts to account for the social, political and cultural practices that influence and mold a subject; in other words, he wants to "restore to people the meaning of their actions" (*Célibat et condition paysanne* 109). Bourdieu's analysis of a subject's social condition contrasts with the progress of history in which the subject is situated. Bourdieu's theory is applicable to different fields; since his work is rooted in philosophy including the philosophy of phenomenologies, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl, in philosophical field, his ideas are utilized.

Pierre Bourdieu has contributed to the science of sociology and structuring society in different manners. Bourdieu has devised different terms which are explained. According to Bourdieu's philosophy, each field embraces the elements which mark both dominant and dominated aspects of the field. The mentioned fields must be analyzed and probed according to other rules and codes in the society. The rules and codes which are associated with the fields in the society are regarded as 'capital' in the society. This concept does not refer to the material form of objects; rather, this concept is more comprehensive, and it covers all types of capitals; the capitals are regarded as resources with particular mechanisms in which different actors contribute to the structure of the capital.

Throughout each field, different institutions are involved in a constant struggle within the fields which are made of various capitals. The capitals provide the actors with different degrees of benefits depending on the rules and codes of the field. Although capitals determine the course of each field, the field and the capital are deeply connected as "a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field," and this means that the way capitals are distributed "constitutes the very structure of the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 101). The function of capitals in the fields must be regarded as a way which could be both constructive and destructive. In fact, the mechanism of the field is directed towards obtaining the domination over the course of the field since each one is a unique course in which power relations exist to disturb the balance of power within it. According to Bourdieu, capital can be explained in the following sense:

It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory. Economic theory has allowed to be foisted upon it a definition of the economy of practices which is the historical invention of capitalism; and by reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit, i.e., (economically) *self-interested*, it has implicitly defined the other forms of exchange as non-economic, and therefore *disinterested*. In particular, it defines as disinterested those forms of exchange which ensure the *transubstantiation* whereby the most material types of capital – those which are economic in the restricted sense – can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa. (Bourdieu *the Forms of Capital* 105–6)

What Bourdieu means regarding the sense of capital refers to the vast meaning of capital which is not limited to just material form. In Bourdieu's theory, capital functions in a complicated system of relations and they have their own unique system of value. As a result, capital is not defined just in the form of economic sense; capital can take other forms which would be explained.

According to Bourdieu, two types of capitals exist as the main forms of capital; the economic capital and symbolic one. However, symbolic capital is divided into other forms namely cultural, scientific, literary, and linguistic. In Bourdieu's philosophy, the value of symbolic capital is not explicit and exchangeable; rather, the value of symbolic capital lies within itself; in other words, the value is intrinsic. Throughout symbolic forms of capital, one particular capital represents the value of other elements. It is noteworthy that one type of capital is formed of smaller parts of values. Symbolic capital goes through different processes.

The first process regarding symbolic capital is referred as 'misrecognition' in which one type of capital is regarded as superior form. In other words, how a certain type of symbol capital is shown to be

superior or higher is completely subjective. This means that symbolic forms of capital do not have intrinsic values. Accordingly, “this systematic denial of the fact that symbolic capitals are transubstantiated types of economic capital involves the process that Bourdieu calls misrecognition” (Grenfell 104).

The second process through which symbolic capital moves is 'objectification' which is in sharp contrast with habitus. In this process, a certain type of symbolic character is shown in a material form. The effect of field is tangible in their processes referred as an embodiment. Accordingly, "the principle of a field is incorporated within the corporality of the person as principles of consciousness in predispositions and propensities and in physical features such as body language, stances, intonation and lifestyle choices"(Grenfell 104). Therefore, each form of symbolic capital can take different aspects; it can be objectified; it can be embodied, and it can have habitus. As it has been mentioned earlier, symbolic capital refers to different types of capitals; cultural capital can be regarded as all cultural codes and rules of a subject's behavior in a social context which is related to the subject's economic, social, and educational capital.

Linguistic capital refers to the subject's ability at the use of language and his awareness of structures and grammatical rules as well as the contextual use of language. Moreover, there are other forms of capital which can be used to represent different aspects of a subject. According to Bourdieu, such forms of capitals are the results of a subject's interaction with the social context and the class in which he has been located:

What we have to do is to bring into the science of scarcity, and of competition for scarce goods, the practical knowledge which the agents obtain for themselves by producing – on the basis of their experience of the distributions, itself dependent on their position in the distributions – divisions and classifications which are no less objective than those of the balance-sheets of social physics. (Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique* 483).

Habitus is a problematic term which is significant to Bourdieu's sociological methodology in the realm of field theory, and philosophy of practice. In fact, what keeps his philosophy original and genuine is his notion of habitus. The ambiguity and problem of Bourdieu's concept of habitus lie in the fact that it has been misused and could not be understood well. Habitus goes beyond the structuring system of the society in which society is divided into opposite forces. In other words, society is not made of just two opposing forces; rather, it is comprised of multi-dimensional forces.

How Bourdieu could reach a decision at the concept of habitus is rooted in his interpretation of both theoretical and practical efforts in the society. According to Bourdieu, human beings are independent subjects with freedom of choice since their decisions can be made upon the interpretations and experiences of the society. The reason is that society provides them with a wide range of predictable patterns of behavior in which how people behave and how they think can be foreseen. In the society, the social conducts are made of predestined codes; this means that society is made of different segments in which distinct classes have particular rules and live based on their unique context. Based on this type of segmentation in the society, each class follows the objectives associated with their own class; the working class chases objectives associated with their own type, and so forth the middle and high classes of the society. This segmentation of the society triggered Bourdieu's philosophy of habitus as he believes that this modeling is caused unconsciously. Bourdieu states, “all of my thinking started from this point: how can behavior be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?” (*In Other Words* 65).

Bourdieu's main question is how different structures of the society interact with each other to produce different and predictable type of people. To answer this question, Bourdieu points out that a subject's experiences within the family and different educational institutions are indispensable since he is brought up within the ideology of that particular class. It is known that ideology is an unconscious process in which subject is not aware of its existence. It is “...the set of discourses in whose terms we understand our experience – it constitutes the world of our experience, our ‘world’, itself” (Fretter 77). The context of life is made of different types of ideology and through them, life can be understood. Hence, ideology molds an imaginary relation between subject and its surrounding world and what the subject witnesses are just an illusion. Therefore, structuring of a society and its subjects is deeply related to the mechanism of the society.

The process of structuring a subject's conduct and his subsequent practices depends on the habitus which Bourdieu has developed; this process of structure shaping is conducted systematically through predictable patterns in the society, and this is how habitus is molded for every individual. The particular feature of every society is regarded as 'habitus' which is defined as:

A system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends of an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice* 53).

To put it simply, 'habitus' is regarded as a course that determines how social mechanism functions. How phenomena are shaped and take place in the society depend on all rules and other external factors exerting society. Bourdieu assumes that every subject in the society possesses a particular type of culture which signifies the class to which he belongs. Moreover, habitus depicts the tendency of an agent towards different phenomena in the world.

This habitus is an integral part of the mind which has been internalized through having interaction with the society and it mostly relies on the context in which the subject has been brought up. Habitus can be considered as a mental process which internalizes and institutionalizes the standards of a subject's life; this mental process takes place unconsciously, and it is influenced by the social codes and logic of the context in which they are situated. The habitus creates the subject's expectation from the society, and consequently, he would act. In fact, it is habitus which regulates a subject's conduct according to the social requirements of context.

The function of habitus depends on different forces in the society, and the practices that are shaped in the society are the result of a complex network of relationships. Throughout this web of relationships, the subject is affected by invisible forces that penetrate unconsciously into his mind. How these forces exert a subject depends on his status and role in the field of that context. Habitus is deeply related to other elements in the society which are field and capital. Throughout the relationship between a subject's habitus and his condition in the society, practice is produced. It depicts a subject's place in the society is structured and this type of structure can generate habitus of the subject. The habitus refers to the cognitive system of the mind that realizes the surrounding world.

However, as it has been mentioned, the effect is unconsciously on the mind. According to Bourdieu, habitus is the most important base of human's life since it is habitus which guides human through his social life: "On one side it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus . . . On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 127).

It should be stated that Bourdieu's notion of habitus is common, and it is applicable to different aspects of social life. In other words, Bourdieu's notion of habitus ranges from the smallest members of the society to the largest ones. Regarding the complexity of habitus, it has been claimed: "this very appealing conceptual versatility sometimes renders ambiguous just what the concept actually designates empirically" (Swartz 109). Accordingly, social practices are produced by the habitus; therefore, all practices suggest evidence of the structures of the habitus that generate them.

## Discussion

Cultural capital, as a significant concept by Bourdieu, can be traced throughout the whole characters in the society. Therefore, all the main characters possess cultural capital which signifies the richness of their work and art. Briony, as the younger daughter of the Tallises, is skillful at the field of creative writing. The account of her cultural capital is shown since the beginning of the novel to the end. Briony's brother, Leon, is supposed to come back home with a friend so that Briony has written a play to perform in the honor of her brother's arrival. Consequently, what she does during those days is working on her own play. Her story fluctuates and depicts different feelings which are sometimes contradictory; in fact, the tone of the play is "at some moments chilling, at others desperately sad" (*Atonement* 1) which reflects the state of Briony's psychology. However, it is worth mentioning that Briony is not mentally problematic; rather, she is just a kid who enjoys her imagination to make stories which are admired by the others. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is influenced by the social status of a subject in the society. What McEwan presents in the beginning of the novel is a mixture of her cultural, and social

background, and also her personality. Regarding Briony's description of her play, Brian Finney addresses that "we meet an instance of Briony's literary imagination as a personality" (70). What Finney intends to address could be interpreted as the effect of imagination on personality. Literary imagination is Briony's cultural capital shaped by her social context. What Briony produces as an objectified form of cultural capital is the harbinger of her mentality which brings about tragic consequences. In other words, "Briony's overactive imagination ruins lives and relationships in *Atonement*" (Sgarlata 7). Consequently, Briony's cultural capital is destructive rather than constructive which signifies what she writes based on her imagination is rooted in the way she has been brought up as an aristocratic girl.

Briony's cultural capital is "conveyed in a rhyming prologue" (*Atonement* 1) which enriches her capital. Moreover, to show how Briony's power imagination functions, McEwan gives a short background of her character's cultural capital:

At the age of eleven she wrote her first story—a foolish affair, imitative of half a dozen folktales and lacking, she realized later, that vital knowingness about the ways of the world which compels a reader's respect. But this first clumsy attempt showed her that the imagination itself was a source of secrets: once she had begun a story, no one could be told. Pretending in words was too tentative, too vulnerable, too embarrassing to let anyone know. (*Atonement* 4)

Briony has started writing since she was a little kid, and she could write her first short story at the age of eleven. Although her short story had some drawbacks, her capital culture in the form of text is not inevitable. It was during writing her first short story which she realizes that there is a deep bond between the power of imagination and creation of secrets that must keep hidden from the others. According to Bourdieu, Briony's cultural capital in the form of artistic practices is supposed to bring her fame and put her in the center of attention. However, she realizes that "not all recognition is helpful" (*Atonement* 5). As a bourgeois member of the society who is socially and economically qualified, Briony is able to reflect her own cultural capital efficiently. She is both the writer and the director of the play which is going to be performed; Briony herself chooses the crew for the performance and arranges the stage. Her cultural capital can be later traced in what she does with Robbie's case. In other words, her false accusation and fabricated story are the product of her artistic practice.

However, Briony comes to an understanding of reality in which the fabrication of imaginary stories should be replaced by a depiction of reality. In the letter that Cecilia has written to Robbie, another side of Briony's cultural capital is depicted:

The first surprise is that Briony isn't at Cambridge. She didn't go up last autumn, she didn't take her place. I was amazed because I'd heard from Dr. Hall that she was expected. The other surprise is that she's doing nurse's training at my old hospital. Can you imagine Briony with a bedpan? I suppose they all said the same thing about me. But she's such a fantasist, as we know to our cost. I pity the patient who receives an injection from her. Her letter is confused and confusing. She wants to meet. She's beginning to get the full grasp of what she did and what it has meant. Clearly, not going up has something to do with it. She's saying that she wants to be useful in a practical way. But I get the impression she's taken on nursing as a sort of penance. She wants to come and see me and talk. (*Atonement* 122)

In her letter, Cecilia remarks the transition of Briony's cultural capital as she has changed from a spoiled and delusional subject into a supportive and realistic subject. Such a transition is bewildering for Cecilia as she would imagine a different destination for her sister; failure at entering Cambridge, failure at writing, becoming a nurse, and admitting her mistakes are indications of her differences regarding cultural capital. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is disguised behind the complicated relations of different elements including education, knowledge, and social matters. Briony has grown up in such a relationship of these elements; she has been suffering throughout her life because of her fabricated story regarding Robbie's raping her cousin. Therefore, she has become haunted by her memories and tortured; to release herself from this painful feeling, she has become a nurse to help the wounded. In fact, her total cultural capital could be detected just in her responsibility as a nurse.

What Briony attempts to do becomes just finding her own identity through her supportive career where she is able to demonstrate her devotion and love that becomes her only cultural capital: "She was

abandoning herself to a life of strictures, rules, obedience, housework, and a constant fear of disapproval. She was one of a batch of probationers...and she had no identity beyond her badge. There were no tutorials here, no one losing sleep over the precise course of her intellectual development” (*Atonement* 159). Throughout her practice as a nurse, Briony can enhance her knowledge and understanding; therefore, she moves from a selfish subject towards a selfless one: “Reading these letters at the end of an exhausting day, Briony felt a dreamy nostalgia, a vague yearning for a long-lost life. She could hardly feel sorry for herself. She was the one who had cut herself off from home” (*Atonement* 160). This is how Briony’s later cultural capital is shaped when is an adult and grown up.

There is another flashback to Briony’s childhood in which her cultural capital is filled with her passion and imagination regarding love, admiring, and adoring Robbie:

There was a day in June 1932, all the more beautiful for coming suddenly, after a long spell of rain and wind [...] she said, “If I fell in the river, would you save me?” “Of course.” He was bending over the basket as he said this and he heard, but did not see, her jump in. Her towel lay on the bank. Apart from the concentric ripples moving out across the pool, there was no sign of her. Then she bobbed up, snatched a breath and sank again. Desperate, he thought of running to the weir to fish her out from there, but the water was an opaque muddy green. He would only find her below the surface by touch. There was no choice—he stepped into the water, shoes, jacket and all. (*Atonement* 132-33)

What here is depicted by Briony’s flash back could be related to both her sense of cultural and educational capital which signifies her feeling, cultural position, and fabricating stories. According to Bourdieu, education capital is the product of the mixed effects of cultural alteration, the status of the family, and what they learn. Through such a relation, Briony imagines how her love story goes on while she would jump into the river and Robbie would save her. Her childish desire for Robbie is, in fact, the outcome of both educational system and her own family which form her cultural capital.

Cecilia’s economic capital refers to what she possesses as material assets; although her family and great father were rich, McEwan attempts to show that man can prosper if he wants. In fact, this would be the ideology of American dream which highlights man’s individual effort in the society. Cecilia’s grandfather has not been a rich person from the beginning; when he was younger, he used to be a member of a working class. However, as he grew up, he changes into a well-to-do person by doing business and having established some patents. The mansion in which they are living has been decorated by the grandfather according to his taste. This would show how rich Cecilia and her family are, and why she attempts to hold her power and superiority over Robbie. According to Bourdieu, the economic capital is acquired through employing different elements within the system of society including job and inheritance. This is how Cecilia has been able to collect her own economic capital; she has just finished university, and she does not make any money; however, since she is a member of an affluent family, her economic capital brings her superiority. In fact, “the familiar place she is born in—a state which is mostly associated with stagnation and upper-middle-class snobbish ordered way of life” (Rohani et al. 103). Cecilia has always looked from an upper stance to Robbie, and for her, Robbie could not play a real friend. However, for this reason, it could be realized that she could grow a different type of feeling rather than being a friend. In other words, their economic differences did not allow Cecilia to accompany Robbie as a friend; however, unconsciously she has been attracted to Robbie. Cecilia’s economic capital reflects other forms of capital that she has acquired and collected during her own life.

Throughout the social web of relations in which individuals can acquire different types of assets, symbolic one can characterize a subject more distinguishably since it builds a direct relationship between all types of the capitals. Moreover, a mutual relationship between habitus and symbolic capital exists, so that the higher symbolic capital is the more acceptable habitus would get. Cecilia’s symbolic capital is originated from several elements. The first element which has constructed her symbolic capital is her cultural one. Cilia is an educated woman in a prestigious academic place who “returned from Cambridge” (*Atonement* 39). Therefore, her symbolic capital is reflected through “the cozy jargon of Cecilia’s Cambridge—the Halls, the Maids’ Dancing, the Little-Go, and all the self-adoring slumming” (*Atonement* 39). Moreover, Cilia did not attend any schools when she was a child or teenager. However, when she turned sixteen years old, she was registered in an educational institution in Switzerland which was significant for her since she got the chance to visit another culture.

To give a full realization of Cecilia and her social status for the readers, McEwan draws a tree of her family in which her social capital which is the sum of different resources about her can be actualized. Cecilia has done a quite research regarding her own “paternal side” (*Atonement* 14). Throughout her research, she has realized that her ancestors were members of working class since they had “hardware shop” or they were “ in a bog of farm laboring” (*Atonement* 14). To keep their honor, they attempt to change their family names and made their marriages unregistered; however, her grandfather could find his way down to wealth and money. Throughout her life, Cecilia was able to get recognition of other relationships which affected her social capital. Her father was one of the recognitions for Cecilia who has shaped her social capital since “Jack Tallis’s clandestine job for the Home Office” (Dobrogoszcz 118) is both exciting and highly prestigious. Potentially, Cecilia’s father’s job could provide her the opportunity of meeting up with well-known and significant people. This is her social capital which brings her up as a proud person. While Cecilia is out of home studying, her financial situation does not seem desirable. Consequently, once she is offered to take a minor job, she cannot accept the job since it would be disturbing to her both social capital and dignity. In other words, Cecilia’s social capital according to Bourdieu is the social credit and titles which have been collected by her through the element of membership in an elite group. Cecilia’s uncle Clem is another manifestation of her social capital whose bravery during to war could bring Cecilia social capital:

The story of how he had come by the vase was told in one of the last letters the young lieutenant wrote home. He was on liaison duties in the French sector and initiated a last-minute evacuation of a small town west of Verdun before it was shelled. Perhaps fifty women, children and old people were saved. Later, the mayor and other officials led Uncle Clem back through the town to a half-destroyed museum. (*Atonement* 14)

Cecilia remembers how the story of his uncle as a brave man has been told frequently. In fact, his immediate action could save the lives of some souls which is considered an honor for Cecilia. Moreover, according to Bourdieu, Cecilia’s social capital is determined based on her connections with other significant beings. In her conversation with Robbie, Cecilia reflects her Social capital by based on the connections which bring benefit for her. The Tallises are preparing for the arrival of Leon, and to show her social capital and make Robbie jealous, Cecilia mentions Leon’s arrival with a friend who is a “chocolate millionaire. Oh no! And you’re giving him flowers!” (*Atonement* 15-16). Cecilia’s social capital that used to be her family changed when she fell off with her own family. In fact, she holds her parents responsible for the unfair arrest of Robbie; therefore, she has no social capital regarding her family and it is replaced by indifference towards them:

Cecilia had not spoken to her parents, brother or sister since November 1935 when Robbie was sentenced. She would not write to them, nor would she let them know her address. Letters reached her through his mother who had sold the bungalow and moved to another village. It was through Grace that she let her family know she was well and did not wish to be contacted. Leon had come to the hospital once, but she would not speak to him. He waited outside the gates all afternoon. When she saw him, she retreated inside until he went away. The following morning he was outside the nurses’ hostel. She pushed past him and would not even look in his direction. He took her elbow, but she wrenched her arm free and walked on, outwardly unmoved by his pleading. (*Atonement* 120)

Cecilia’s failure of social capital is rooted in her love and feeling for Robbie. In other words, adoring Robbie makes Cecilia abandon all members of her family whom she loved. This would depict that how feelings and the romantic relationship would win over familial relations and social capital. This holds true for Cecilia who does not communicate with her family members even through writing letters and attempts to avoid them.

Cecilia’s cultural capital plays a significant role in her social field. Her cultural capital is shown mostly in an embodied form which is the result of her training in the society. Moreover, her cultural capital makes her approach to Robbie and grows a passion for Robbie since both have regarded literature and poetry significant. It might be for this reason that Cecilia has a strong passion for Robbie but dismisses Marshal and considers him “incomplete as a human being” (*Atonement* 89) since he has

studied science. This mismatch between Robbie's and Marshal's cultural capital unfits them to be with each other.

Cecilia's educational experience can be regarded as her cultural capital and makes her attracted to Robbie. Like Robbie, she was sent to Cambridge University and there she studied different types of books. The books she has studied are literary ones by great authors which have shaped her attitude.

Robbie's symbolic capital refers to all his assets in his life. According to McEwan, Robbie's cultural and social assets contradict each other since they do not match each other. Robbie, as a bright child, has always been bothering Cecilia due to the fact that his symbolic capital was lower than her. Therefore, Robbie has always been the target of Cecilia's underestimate; when they were at Cambridge, Cecilia would tell her friends about Robbie and his inferior social status. The statement "that's our cleaning lady's son" (*Atonement* 46) would signify "a focus of symbolic struggles" (Grenfell 96) in which two different classes of the society fight their ideologies. On one hand, Cecilia attempts to preserve her social and symbolic capital by expressing her contempt indirectly; on the hand, Robbie is determined to defend his dignity through an inverse technique. In fact, he acknowledges who he is and admits it openly without shame. In other words, by showing his ignorance, Robbie evades his own vulnerability. It becomes his strong power as his symbolic capital by accepting it. Consequently, Robbie states "I am what I am. She was like a sister, almost invisible" (*Atonement* 46). This attitude would bother Cecilia and unconsciously she has grown feelings towards Robbie. Her later feelings for Robbie could be rooted in Cecilia's desire to hold power and possess Robbie like a commodity. Therefore, Robbie would have a symbolic exchange of value for Cecilia since socially she is superior and she can be the owner of Robbie's cultural capital.

Robbie's cultural capital contradicts his social capital; in fact, since Robbie is socially lower than Cecilia, his cultural capital is potentially higher. Robbie is a working class society and as a result, his cultural capital must be in the range of forms related to this class. However, how Robbie is shown in terms of cultural capital is shocking since his cultural capital does not belong to his field as a social being. Robbie has studied Freud's theory regarding psychology and it has formed part of his cultural capital. Therefore, he makes an interpretation based on his cultural capital; when Cecilia takes off her clothes before the fountain, he reaches a conclusion and assumes that Cecilia was expressing her desire for him. What helps Robbie to think in this way is the theory of unconscious in which Cecilia is hiding her desire behind her act. It is his cultural capital and his interpretation which prompt Robbie to write a letter for Cecilia. In other words, it was due to his cultural capital that Robbie's affair with Cecilia began.

Writing letters is the product of Robbie's cultural capital in the form of objectified state; in other words, his capital makes Robbie as a productive agent who can express his thoughts and feelings by writing them down. McEwan attempts to depict the richness of Robbie's cultural capital in a visual description. The author alleges:

His best drawing so far, done in ink and colored pencils and showing a cross section of the esophageal tract and the airways, was tacked to a rafter above the table. A pewter tankard with its handle missing held all the pencils and pens. At the outer reaches of the desk, various photographs: the cast of *Twelfth Night* on the college lawn, himself as Malvolio, cross-gartered. (*Atonement* 48)

The physical condition of Robbie's room reflects the cultural capital which he possesses; all the tools including desk covered in ink, typewriter, pens, pencils, and photos do not belong to a working-class member. This is the contradiction which can be found in Robbie's cultural capital and his social field. Moreover, this contradiction is the feature of his romantic relationship with Cecilia which signifies they do not belong to each other since their field and social capital are different.

Fields are shaped differently based on the game which is taken place in it. Robbie's field has been shaped based on his social status. Since his field signifies his belonging to the working-class, Robbie plays by the rules which are appropriate for his class. However, he does not show vulnerability regarding his class. When he is asked about his social position, or his field in the society, he is not afraid, to tell the truth. In other words, he "answered pleasantly" (*Atonement* 50) regarding his field in which his father ran away and her mother was forced to do the drudgeries in to provide for the family. This is how he plays his own game; he does not have many cards that put him in an advantage stance; however, he uses what he has tactfully.



Habitus provides Briony with different choices and it is the result of her interaction with different with different experiences in the society. In other words, how she acts and behaves in the society is the result of different practices in her childhood life. Since she wants the world to be orderly and neat, no complexity and complication must be arisen out of it; no secret must be kept, and as a result “she had no secrets” (*Atonement* 4). This type of habitus has made her reveal any secrets around her as she cannot keep them. For Briony, her habitus of “writing stories not only involved secrecy, it also gave her all the pleasures of miniaturization” (*Atonement* 5) in which she is able to summarize the entire world. Although as a free agent, Briony assumes that her decisions are controlled by her, they are not; how she thinks and how she writes are the results of her social field. She has been brought up in a rich family so that what she tends to write follows this social pattern of her superiority and particular writing. As she looks at her sister and Robbie standing before the fountain in the middle of the garden, she finds it odd. Her field of life in the society has made her write a story in which the characters are from her real life:

She herself had written a tale in which a humble woodcutter saved a princess from drowning and ended by marrying her. What was presented here fitted well. Robbie Turner, only son of a humble cleaning lady and of no known father, Robbie who had been subsidized by Briony’s father through school and university, had wanted to be a landscape gardener, and now wanted to take up medicine, had the boldness of ambition to ask for Cecilia’s hand. It made perfect sense. Such leaps across boundaries were the stuff of daily romance. (*Atonement* 22)

According to Bourdieu, social codes influence individuality and shape it, so that Briony’s habitus and her conducts in the society are the results outer structures. Consequently, she considers herself as a prince to be saved by a woodcutter in the woods. This fantasy tale reflects Briony’s view about the bourgeois and working-classes in the society. In other words, a member of a working class, Robbie, has to protect and save a bourgeoisie member, Briony, and then he is pressured to satisfy her through a social contract.

Bourdieu believes that habitus is an integral part of an individual social life which forms “structured and structuring structure” (1994d: 170). This holds true for Cecilia as a social being. According to Bourdieu, Cecilia’s social performance has been structured by her previous experiences and the social codes to which she has been exposed. Cecilia’s social and educational background has shaped her pattern of behavior as a systematic construction. According to McEwan, Cecilia and Robbie have been friends since they were kids. However, because of their social differences, she would not like talking and communicating with him. Their awkward relationship is rooted in their relative condition towards each other. How both of them act is the result of different social interactions; from the beginning of the novel, the tension between Cilia and Robbie is depicted.

Their relationship is the result of hidden elements in their own fields which have trained them. Since Robbie’s father left when he was a kid, and he is a member of working class, Cecilia’s father has taken the responsibility of his expanses and “it was her father who would have to pay” (*Atonement* 12). Therefore, she cannot bear the thought of socializing with Robbie, and her habitus is traced in her treatment of Robbie as “she refreshed the flowers by plunging them into the fountain’s basin, which was full-scale, deep and cold, and avoided Robbie by hurrying round to the front of the house—it was an excuse, (*Atonement* 12). Cecilia’s habitus is not the result of her own subjective conduct; rather, it is the product of different elements. The function of her habitus as she cannot deal with Robbie is rooted in her past since “they had known each other since they were seven, she and Robbie, and it bothered her that they were awkward when they talked” (*Atonement* 14). Cecilia’s habitus is an outcome of “unconscious relationship” (Bourdieu 76) from her social background. In spite of the fact that both Robbie and Cecilia have known each other for a long time, whenever they face each other, no meaningful communication exists. As a daughter of a rich family, Cecilia’s habitus is focused on her act, and her feeling which depicts her choice of friends must follow the patterns of her own class. However, by the progress of time in the novel, Cecilia’s habitus goes into changing; she grows feeling for Robbie and her feelings could be traced in the library scene in which their first love affair takes place. Therefore, Cecilia’s habitus alters:

He opened his eyes. It was a library, in a house, in total silence. He was wearing his best suit. Yes, it all came back to him with relative ease. He strained to look over his shoulder and saw only the dimly illuminated desk, there as before, as though remembered from a dream. From

where they were in their corner, it was not possible to see the door. But there was no sound, not a thing. She was mistaken, he was desperate for her to be mistaken and she actually was. He turned back to her, and was about to tell her so, when she tightened her grip on his arm and he looked back once more. Briony moved slowly into their view, stopped by the desk and saw them. (*Atonement* 81)

The habitus refers to the objective relationship between different entities, which enables an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between social practices in a given field. For Cecilia, the function and meaning of habitus are originated through an observable social condition that becomes internalized within her. Although at first, Cecilia's habitus did not allow any romantic or friendly relationship with Robbie, later it changes and makes her fall for Robbie. Moreover, the social practices including Robbie's arrest and put him into jail causes a new type of habitus for Cecilia. Therefore, while Robbie is in prison, Cecilia writes him letters and even she makes love to Robbie. The author writes:

During his time inside, the only female visitor he was permitted was his mother. In case he was inflamed, they said. Cecilia wrote every week. In love with her, willing himself to stay sane for her, he was naturally in love with her words. When he wrote back, he pretended to be his old self, he lied his way into sanity... Robbie and Cecilia had been making love for years—by post. In their coded exchanges they had drawn close, but how artificial that closeness seemed now as they embarked on their small talk, their helpless catechism of polite query and response. As the distance opened up between them, they understood how far they had run ahead of themselves in their letters. This moment had been imagined and desired for too long, and could not measure up. He had been out of the world, and lacked the confidence to step back and reach for the larger thought. I love you, and you saved my life. He asked about her lodgings. She told him. "And do you get along all right with your landlady?" (*Atonement* 118-119)

Robbie is the indication of a particular group in the society which is considered to be the lower group of the society. Therefore, his lifestyle must depict Robbie's belonging to such a group. According to Bourdieu, in categorizing these classes which are made of different agents and the criteria for grouping them would be the type of career and the status of people in the society, Robbie would be located among working class of the society; therefore, "through the mechanisms which control access to positions and produce or select a particular class of habitus" (Bourdieu *Class Distinction* 102), Robbie's habitus would be determined. Robbie's lifestyle would obey the predetermined patterns which have been assigned to him as a working class member. Although he attempts to deviate from his patterns of behavior, eventually he would be committed to acting it out. The early portrait of Robbie is a subject who is voraciously into writing, literature, art, and intellectual activities.

Such actions which are employed by Robbie are defiant and turn down his belonging as a member of working class; however, in the second part of the novel when Robbie is released, he has to act according to the habitus of his own class. Robbie is released on the condition of joining the army and fighting for his own country: "Turner walked on, and they followed him, as they had followed him for two days now. Or was it three? He was lower in rank, but they followed and did everything he suggested, and to preserve their dignity, they teased him" (*Atonement* 111). Although he has a lower rank in his squad, others follow him which depicts the importance of working class people during the war. In fact, such people have no value except being killed in the war; therefore, the only main habitus of Robbie is survival: "He didn't owe them explanations. He intended to survive, he had one good reason to survive, and he didn't care whether they tagged along or not. Both men had hung on to their rifles" (*Atonement* 111)

At a sound, she started. The bedroom door was opening and Robbie stood before them. He wore army trousers and shirt and polished boots, and his braces hung free at his waist. He was unshaven and tousled, and his gaze was on Cecilia only. She had turned to face him, but she did not go toward him. In the seconds during which they looked at each other in silence, Briony, partly obscured by her sister, shrank into her uniform. (*Atonement* 198)

According to Bourdieu, the class fraction is defined through different positions and in the relations of production; also class distinction can be realized and identified through indices such as job, revenue

or even educational background; moreover, geographical elements play a vital role in shaping the characteristics of habitus. The above extract demonstrates Robbie's habitus which signifies his class regarding different elements of the society and also according to the geographical aspect; Robbie is a soldier, with the minimum amount of revenue and he lives in England which is in the middle of a war. Therefore, as a working class member, his habitus which consists of his dressing, appearance, and action must follow his class distinction. Eventually, Robbie fulfills his destiny and role as a working class member, and "Robbie Turner died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940" (*Atonement* 217)

## Conclusion

Habitus was the main concept developed by Bourdieu which signifies behavior and act of people in the society; it is affected by the social position of the characters. Each character had a particular and unique habitus which represented the social class to which she belonged. In *Atonement*, habitus provided Briony with different choices and it was the result of her interaction with different with different experiences in the society. Briony had been brought up in a rich family so that her writing reflected the social pattern of her superiority. In fact for Briony, creating unreal stories and expressing her fantasy signify her habitus which was the direct result of the social position of her family.

Cecilia's social and educational background had shaped her pattern of behavior as a systematic construction. Cecilia's habitus was the product of different elements and her unconscious relationships in the society. Cecilia's education and choice of friends depended on the aristocratic position of her family and her social features. However, it should be noted as she fell in love with Robbie, her habitus started to change and her feelings and the new situation affected her habitus.

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