

Repentance in Nicholas Sparks' Novel *The Last Song*: A Literary Psychological Analysis

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: March 30, 2026 Accepted: April 30, 2026 Accepted May 11, 2026	This study examines the processes of repentance in Nicholas Sparks' <i>The Last Song</i> , focusing on the protagonist's experiences of resentment and reconciliation. The protagonist's emotional estrangement stems from misunderstandings toward his father and friend, as well as a lack of honesty and effective communication. The objective of this research is to identify and analyze the specific forms and sequential stages of repentance exhibited by the protagonist as a response to these relational conflicts. To achieve this, the study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, following the framework proposed by Creswell (2013), allowing the analysis and results to be presented in a detailed and interpretive manner. The findings reveal two primary forms of repentance: repentance toward his father and repentance toward his friend, each comprising stages of acknowledgment of wrongdoing, emotional reflection, and efforts to restore trust and relationships. The study underscores the broader significance of repentance, demonstrating how it functions as a mechanism for personal moral development and the repair of interpersonal bonds, highlighting its transformative impact on both the protagonist and the relationships he seeks to mend.
Keywords: <i>emotional reconciliation;</i> <i>hatred;</i> <i>interpersonal relationships;</i> <i>moral accountability;</i> <i>repentance</i>	
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1. Introduction

Literature serves as a significant medium for representing human experiences, moral values, and emotional complexities through imaginative narratives. It reflects not only external realities but also the internal struggles of individuals, including their ethical dilemmas and processes of self-realization. As one of the most comprehensive literary genres, the novel provides a broad space for authors to explore character development, particularly in relation to moral transformation and personal growth. Through characterization, readers are able to observe how individuals respond to conflicts, make decisions, and undergo changes that shape their identity.

One of the literary works that vividly portrays moral transformation is *The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks. The novel centers on Veronica "Ronnie" Miller, a teenage girl who experiences emotional conflict and rebellion following her parents' divorce. Ronnie's strained relationship with her father and her resistance to authority reflect her internal turmoil and unresolved anger. However, as the story progresses, she undergoes a process of repentance, marked by self-reflection, emotional reconciliation, and moral growth. This transformation becomes a central theme in the narrative, highlighting the significance of forgiveness, responsibility, and personal change.

Repentance is an important concept in both moral philosophy and psychological studies, as it involves recognizing one's mistakes, experiencing remorse, and making efforts to change behaviour. It is often associated with ethical awareness and emotional maturity, as

individuals reassess their past actions and strive to improve themselves. In literary contexts, repentance is frequently portrayed as a turning point in character development, where protagonists move from a state of conflict or wrongdoing toward resolution and self-improvement. This process not only enriches the narrative but also provides moral insights for readers.

Adolescence, as depicted in the novel, is a crucial stage of development characterized by emotional instability and identity formation. During this period, individuals are more likely to experience conflict with family members, particularly parents, as they seek independence while still requiring guidance. Ronnie's character exemplifies this condition, as her rebellious behaviour is influenced by emotional pain and miscommunication within her family. Her eventual repentance is shaped by significant experiences, including her renewed relationship with her father and the challenges she faces throughout the story. These experiences contribute to her emotional growth and transformation.

Previous studies have examined themes of family conflict and adolescent development in literary works, including Sparks' novels. However, limited scholarly attention has been devoted specifically to the representation of repentance as a process of moral and psychological transformation in *The Last Song*. While researchers have explored interpersonal relationships and emotional reconciliation in contemporary fiction, the systematic analysis of how repentance unfolds through stages of acknowledgment, emotional reflection, and behavioural change in this particular novel remains underexplored.

Although previous studies have examined themes of family conflict and adolescent development in *The Last Song*, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to the representation of repentance as a process of moral and psychological transformation. This study seeks to fill that gap by analysing how repentance shapes the protagonist's personal growth and interpersonal reconciliation.

Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What forms of repentance are portrayed in Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song*?
2. How does the protagonist's repentance develop as a response to relational conflicts with her father and friend?

Based on this background, this study aims to analyse the protagonist's repentance in the novel, focusing on how it is portrayed and what factors contribute to its development. By applying a literary and psychological perspective, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of moral transformation in fictional characters. Furthermore, this study is expected to contribute to literary analysis by demonstrating how narratives can represent processes of repentance and personal growth, as well as their relevance to real-life human experiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Character and Characterization

Character is a central element in literary works, particularly in novels, as it functions to convey the narrative and embody human experiences. According to Abrams (1981), characters are individuals presented in a story whose moral and psychological qualities are revealed through their actions and dialogue. Through characterization, authors are able to construct personalities that reflect real-life human behaviour, enabling readers to understand emotional and psychological dimensions within the narrative.

The protagonist, as the main character, plays a crucial role in the development of the story. This character typically becomes the focal point of events and conflicts, undergoing significant experiences that shape the narrative structure. As Holman and Harmon (1986) suggest, the protagonist is often involved in the central conflict and experiences

transformation throughout the story. This transformation may involve emotional, psychological, or moral changes, making the protagonist an essential subject for literary analysis.

In *The Last Song*, Veronica "Ronnie" Miller functions as a protagonist whose transformation from resentment to reconciliation drives the narrative. Her characterization—marked by stubbornness, emotional vulnerability, and gradual self-awareness—provides a rich psychological foundation for analysing repentance as a process rather than a single event. Recent scholarship on character development in young adult literature emphasizes that protagonists in contemporary fiction often undergo moral transformations triggered by relational crises (Nikolajeva, 2014; Trites, 2018). Ronnie's journey aligns with this pattern, as her repentance is not instantaneous but evolves through stages of denial, confrontation, acknowledgment, and action.

2.2 The Concept of Repentance

Repentance is generally understood as a process through which an individual recognizes wrongdoing, experiences remorse, and demonstrates a commitment to behavioural change. From a philosophical perspective, repentance involves acknowledging one's fault, accepting responsibility, and forming a resolution to act differently in the future (Swinburne, 1989). This indicates that repentance is not merely an emotional reaction but also a rational and ethical process that requires conscious self-evaluation and moral awareness.

However, scholars have debated the precise components of genuine repentance. While Swinburne (1989) emphasizes acknowledgment and resolution as sufficient, Griswold (2007) argues that true repentance also requires a "change of heart" that transforms the individual's moral self-conception. More recently, Qianyu (2018) proposes a four-stage model of repentance: recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change. This model is particularly useful for literary analysis because it provides observable textual indicators that can be traced through character dialogue and action.

This study adopts Qianyu's (2018) framework because it offers specific, analysable stages that are detectable in narrative progression. In *The Last Song*, Ronnie's repentance toward her father follows this model: she recognizes her prolonged anger as unjust (recognition), feels guilt and sorrow (remorse), admits her role in the emotional distance (responsibility), and actively cares for her father during his illness (behavioural change). Similarly, Will's repentance toward Ronnie involves full disclosure of his deception and efforts to make amends, reflecting the same structural components.

2.3 Moral Transformation and Development

Repentance is closely associated with moral and psychological transformation. It can be defined as a change in attitude, mindset, and behaviour accompanied by a sense of regret for past actions (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998). In psychological terms, repentance is often linked to the concept of metanoia, which refers to a fundamental transformation in one's perspective and orientation toward life, typically triggered by internal conflict or significant experiences (Mezirow, 1991). This highlights that repentance involves not only emotional regret but also a deep restructuring of personal values and identity.

Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development provides a complementary framework. Kohlberg proposes that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning, from obedience to authority (pre-conventional) to autonomous ethical principles (post-conventional). Repentance can be interpreted as part of an individual's advancement toward

higher levels of moral reasoning, where individuals become more aware of the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for them.

Recent research has extended these foundational theories. Hardy and Carlo (2011) emphasize that moral development is not only cognitive but also emotional, involving moral identity and self-regulation. Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Knafo-Noam (2015) show that prosocial behaviour, including reparative actions following wrongdoing, is strongly predicted by empathy and emotional regulation. In *The Last Song*, Ronnie's transformation exemplifies this integration: her repentance is not merely cognitive (recognizing her mother's deception) but deeply emotional (feeling guilt and compassion) and behavioural (choosing to forgive and care).

Critical life events often act as catalysts for repentance. Mezirow (1991) explains that transformative learning occurs when individuals encounter disorienting dilemmas that challenge existing assumptions. For Ronnie, her father's terminal cancer diagnosis serves as such a dilemma, forcing her to reevaluate her prolonged resentment. This finding aligns with recent scholarship on repentance in contemporary fiction, which shows that protagonists' moral transformations are frequently triggered by crises involving mortality or irreversible loss (Nikolajeva, 2014).

2.4 Psychological Literary Criticism

A psychological approach to literature provides a valuable framework for analysing repentance in fictional characters. This approach focuses on understanding characters' mental states, emotional experiences, and behavioural changes as representations of real human psychology. As argued by Wellek and Warren (1956), literary works can be examined through psychological perspectives to uncover deeper meanings related to human behaviour and inner conflict.

Contemporary literary psychology emphasizes that characters in fiction often mirror real psychological processes, enabling readers to interpret emotional and moral development in more nuanced ways (Miall & Kuiken, 2002). Recent studies have applied psychological frameworks to analyse moral emotions in literature, demonstrating how fictional narratives can illuminate real-world psychological mechanisms (Keen, 2020; Hogan, 2018).

In *The Last Song*, the protagonist's repentance is shaped by emotional experiences and interpersonal relationships. The character's journey demonstrates how personal reflection, family dynamics, and significant life events contribute to moral transformation. Emotional attachment and relational experiences, particularly within family contexts, are known to influence moral growth and prosocial behaviour (Eisenberg et al., 2015). Through a psychological lens, this transformation can be interpreted as a process of emotional maturation and ethical development, illustrating how literary narratives reflect real-life human experiences and moral change.

This study integrates the theoretical frameworks discussed above into an analytical model. From Swinburne (1989) and Qianyu (2018), it adopts the concept of repentance as a staged process involving recognition, remorse, responsibility, and behavioural change. From Kohlberg (1981) and Hardy and Carlo (2011), it incorporates the understanding that repentance reflects moral development and identity formation. From psychological literary criticism (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Miall & Kuiken, 2002), it applies the interpretive method that treats fictional characters as psychologically coherent individuals. The novel *The Last Song* serves as the primary text for applying this integrated framework, with the analysis focusing on how the protagonist's repentance unfolds through interaction with family and friends.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap

While previous studies have examined themes of family conflict, adolescent rebellion, and emotional reconciliation in Nicholas Sparks' novels, limited research has systematically analysed repentance as a staged psychological process. Existing scholarship on Sparks' works tends to focus on romance, loss, and forgiveness as thematic concerns rather than the specific moral-psychological mechanism of repentance (Trites, 2018; Nikolajeva, 2014).

Furthermore, the integration of philosophical (Swinburne, 1989; Griswold, 2007), psychological (Tangney et al., 2007; Eisenberg et al., 2015), and literary (Wellek & Warren, 1956) perspectives on repentance has not been systematically applied to a contemporary novel like *The Last Song*. This study seeks to fill this gap by analysing how the protagonist's repentance develops through identifiable stages and how this process is influenced by interpersonal relationships and critical life events. By bridging these theoretical frameworks, this research offers a more comprehensive understanding of repentance as both a moral concept and a narrative device for character transformation.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method within a literary psychological framework. The qualitative descriptive approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to analyse and interpret the protagonist's repentance as represented through narrative passages, dialogues, and character development in Nicholas Sparks' novel *The Last Song*. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attach to social or human problems, making this approach suitable for examining emotional and moral transformation in literary characters.

The primary data for this study consist of narrative passages and dialogues from Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song* that reflect the protagonist's repentance. The focus of analysis is on the character Veronica "Ronnie" Miller, particularly her interactions with her father and her friend Will, as well as her internal reflections throughout the novel. Secondary data are obtained from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other academic sources related to the concepts of repentance, moral development, and literary psychology (Suhadi et al., 2023).

Data collection was conducted through intensive reading, note-taking, and textual classification, guided by the methodological principles established by Sugiyono (2019) and Sutopo (2006), with an emphasis on selecting information relevant to the research questions rather than maximizing the quantity of data (Pardi & Ardescy, 2022). The researcher read the novel multiple times to identify passages relevant to the protagonist's repentance. Key dialogues and narrative descriptions that indicate recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioral change were extracted and documented. The data were then classified based on the types and stages of repentance exhibited by the protagonist.

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2013) procedural model, which includes data organization, coding, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. First, the collected data were organized thematically according to the research questions. Second, the identified passages were coded based on the forms of repentance (toward father and toward friend) and the stages of repentance (acknowledgment, emotional reflection, responsibility, and behavioral change). Third, the coded data were interpreted within the context of the novel's narrative and character development. Finally, conclusions were drawn to answer the research questions regarding the forms and development of repentance in *The Last Song*.

To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing textual evidence with theoretical frameworks from Swinburne (1989), Qianyu

(2018), and Griswold (2007). This cross-referencing ensures that the interpretation of repentance is grounded in established theoretical concepts rather than subjective impression.

4. Discussion

The analysis of this study is concentrated on specific aspects outlined within its scope, namely the protagonist's repentance for feelings of resentment toward her father and repentance for hostility toward her friend. These focal points serve as the primary basis for the analytical discussion, which is predominantly grounded in the narrative events of Nicholas Sparks's novel *The Last Song*.

4.1 Repentance toward Her Father

Repentance involves a transformation of one's mind or heart. It entails a person reflecting on past actions or inactions, feeling regret, and adopting a different perspective or judgment regarding previous decisions, with the intention of not repeating similar behaviour if given another opportunity. Qianyu (2018) explains that repentance consists of recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change.

In *The Last Song*, Ronnie's repentance toward her father is not spontaneous but develops gradually in response to three catalysts: her father's self-awareness, his terminal illness, and the revelation of her mother's deception. Each catalyst forces Ronnie to confront the gap between her perception of the past and the actual events.

4.1.1 The Origin of Resentment

Ronnie's resentment stems from the divorce of her parents and her belief that her father was solely responsible. The following exchange reveals how miscommunication has intensified her anger:

"That's not my fault. He's the one who left." (Sparks, 2010, p. 10)

Her father responds gently: "Yes, but you haven't taken these calls (Sparks, 2010, p. 10)."

Why does this resentment occur? Ronnie externalizes blame entirely onto her father, refusing to acknowledge her own role in maintaining emotional distance. This defensive mechanism protects her from the painful realization that her father loved her despite the divorce. Her father's patient response highlights that repentance requires both parties to recognize their contributions to relational breakdown.

4.1.2 Catalysts for Change

The first catalyst is her father's own acknowledgment of fault. The narrator reveals:

"He knew he had no one to blame but himself... burying himself in music had less to do with God than a selfish desire to escape." (Sparks, 2010, pp. 16-18)

This passage demonstrates that genuine repentance begins with self-awareness. Her father models the acknowledgment stage before Ronnie is capable of doing so.

The second catalyst is her father's terminal diagnosis:

"You have stomach cancer, and from the scans, it's metastasized to your pancreas and lungs." (Sparks, 2010, p. 359)

Why does this diagnosis trigger repentance? Facing the imminent loss of her father forces Ronnie to confront the finite nature of their relationship. The possibility of

reconciliation becomes urgent; she can no longer postpone forgiveness. This aligns with Mezirow's (1991) concept of transformative learning, where a "disorienting dilemma" (terminal illness) individual to reassess their fundamental assumptions.

4.1.3 The Turning Point: Truth and Acknowledgment

The third and most powerful catalyst is the revelation of her mother's deception:
"It wasn't Dad who had the affair, was it?... It was you (Sparks, 2010, pp. 400-401)."

This moment shatters Ronnie's entire framework of blame. She realizes that she has been angry at the wrong person for years. The quotation is significant not only for its content but for its emotional delivery: the repetition ("It was you") and the desperate question ("How could you do that?") convey her shock and dawning guilt. Ronnie's recognition of wrongdoing—stage one of Qianyu's model—is not self-generated but triggered by new information that recontextualizes the past.

4.1.4 Emotional Remorse and Reconciliation

Once the truth is revealed, Ronnie experiences genuine remorse:
"I'm so sorry, Daddy..." (Sparks, 2010, p. 398)
Her father responds: "No, baby please don't cry. It wasn't so bad back then (Sparks, 2010, p. 398)."

How does repentance transform Ronnie? Prior to repentance, Ronnie was defined by anger, defiance, and emotional withdrawal. After repentance, she becomes capable of vulnerability, care, and forgiveness. Her apology is not merely verbal but is accompanied by behavioural change: she neglects her own plans to care for her father during his illness. This behavioural change—stage four of Qianyu's model—demonstrates that true repentance is not performative but transformative.

What broader moral implications emerge? Ronnie's repentance illustrates that forgiveness often requires acknowledging one's own misjudgement. The novel suggests that resentment, however justified it may seem, becomes toxic when it prevents individuals from seeing the humanity of those they have condemned. Repentance, therefore, is not only about seeking forgiveness but also about restoring the repentant person's capacity for empathy and moral clarity.

4.2 Repentance toward Her Friend

Repentance also involves experiencing regret or sorrow over actions one has committed. In the novel, Ronnie's friend Will must repent for deceiving her to protect his friend Scott, who started a fire at a church.

4.2.1 The Offense and Confession

Will conceals Scott's involvement in the fire. When he finally confesses, he acknowledges his wrongdoing:

"There's something I need to tell you... I know it was wrong (Sparks, 2010, p. 390)."

Ronnie reacts with shock and anger:

"I don't want to talk to you!... It's over, okay? (Sparks, 2010, p. 391)"

Why does repentance occur here? Will's confession is driven by guilt and the recognition that continued deception would destroy any possibility of an honest relationship. Unlike Ronnie's repentance, which is triggered by external revelations, Will's repentance is self-initiated. This distinction is significant: Will chooses to confess before being discovered, demonstrating that genuine repentance can arise from internal moral discomfort rather than external pressure.

4.2.2 The Difference between Confession and Repentance

Ronnie's immediate rejection—"It's over, okay?"—reveals a crucial insight: confession alone does not constitute full repentance, nor does it guarantee forgiveness. Will has acknowledged his wrongdoing (stage one) and expressed remorse (stage two), but he has not yet demonstrated behavioural change (stage four). Ronnie's anger is a reasonable response to betrayal; trust, once broken, cannot be restored by words alone.

4.2.3 Restorative Action

Will's repentance becomes genuine when he takes action to make amends. He reports Scott's role in the fire:

"I told them about the fire at the church and saw him torching the scrub grass next to the church wall (Sparks, 2010, p. 428)."

He also expresses empathy for Ronnie's suffering:

"What happened to your dad is just so unfair... and I would do anything to help you (Sparks, 2010, p. 429)."

How does repentance transform Ronnie? Unlike her repentance toward her father, which transforms her from anger to care, Ronnie's response to Will's repentance transforms her from victim to forgiver. By accepting Will's apology and allowing him back into her life, Ronnie demonstrates that repentance creates the possibility of relational restoration, though it does not guarantee it. The novel implies that forgiveness is not automatic but is earned through sustained effort and demonstrated change.

What broader moral implications emerge? Will's journey illustrates that repentance requires both confession and restitution. Acknowledging wrongdoing is necessary but insufficient; the repentant person must also take concrete steps to repair the harm caused. Furthermore, the relationship between Ronnie and Will shows that repentance does not control the injured party's response. The injured party retains the right to anger and distance; repentance creates the possibility of reconciliation but does not compel it. This realistic portrayal resists simplistic moral lessons, acknowledging the complexity of repairing trust after betrayal.

4.3 Synthesis: Repentance as a Relational and Transformative Process

Across both relationships, the novel portrays repentance as a process that unfolds through stages: recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change. Ronnie's repentance toward her father is triggered by external events (revelation of truth, illness), while Will's repentance is self-initiated (internal guilt). Despite different triggers, both follow the same structural pattern.

Repentance transforms Ronnie in two significant ways. First, it shifts her identity from victim to responsible agent. She ceases to see herself as someone to whom wrongs have been done and begins to see herself as someone capable of doing wrong (by withholding love). Second, it expands her moral imagination. She learns to see her father as a flawed but loving

human being rather than a villain, and she learns to see Will as someone who made a mistake but deserves a second chance.

The broader moral implications of *The Last Song* are twofold. First, repentance is essential for personal moral development. Without repentance, Ronnie would remain trapped in anger, unable to mature emotionally or ethically. Second, repentance is essential for relational restoration. Without Will's repentance, his friendship with Ronnie would end; without Ronnie's repentance, her relationship with her father would end with his death, leaving her burdened by guilt. The novel thus suggests that repentance is not merely a religious or philosophical abstraction but a practical necessity for human flourishing.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song* presents repentance as a complex and transformative process that is essential for both personal growth and the restoration of interpersonal relationships. The novel illustrates through its characters, particularly Ronnie and Will, that repentance involves multiple dimensions: acknowledgment of wrongdoing, emotional reflection and remorse, honesty and full disclosure, and proactive efforts to repair the harm caused. Ronnie's journey toward her father highlights how recognition of past resentment and misunderstanding, combined with empathetic action, can lead to forgiveness and reconciliation. Similarly, Will's confessions and apologies reveal that taking responsibility for one's mistakes and confronting the consequences of prior deception are fundamental to rebuilding trust in friendships and romantic relationships. The narrative further emphasizes that repentance is not an instantaneous act; it requires patience, emotional processing, and willingness from both the person seeking forgiveness and the affected party. By portraying these gradual transformations, the novel underscores that repentance is both an ethical and relational practice, fostering moral accountability, emotional healing, and the reinforcement of trust.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on repentance in three significant ways. First, it demonstrates the applicability of Qianyu's (2018) four-stage model of repentance—recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change—to the analysis of a contemporary literary text. While Qianyu's framework has been applied to classical literature, this study extends its relevance to modern young adult fiction, showing that the psychological structure of repentance remains consistent across different literary eras and genres. Second, this study integrates philosophical perspectives (Swinburne, 1989; Griswold, 2007) with psychological theories of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Eisenberg et al., 2015) and literary analysis (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Miall & Kuiken, 2002), demonstrating that repentance is not merely a theological or ethical concept but a multidimensional psychological process involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. Third, this study identifies two distinct pathways to repentance: externally triggered (Ronnie's repentance, catalysed by new information and crisis) and self-initiated (Will's repentance, driven by internal guilt). This distinction, largely unexplored in previous scholarship, suggests that repentance can emerge from different motivational sources without affecting its moral validity.

The findings of this study have practical implications for several domains. For literary educators, the analysis of repentance in *The Last Song* can serve as a teaching tool for illustrating moral development in character-driven narratives. Students can trace Ronnie's and Will's journeys through the four stages of repentance, making abstract ethical concepts tangible through textual evidence. For readers of young adult fiction, the novel offers a realistic portrayal of how resentment can distort perception and how repentance can restore relational bonds. This may help adolescent readers recognize similar patterns in their own

lives, encouraging self-reflection and emotional maturity. For counsellors and therapists working with adolescents, the novel's depiction of repentance—particularly the role of family secrets, illness, and the fear of permanent loss—can serve as a reference point for discussing forgiveness, accountability, and relational repair with young clients. The novel demonstrates that repentance is not a sign of weakness but a courageous act of moral responsibility.

This study is limited to a single novel by Nicholas Sparks, focusing specifically on the protagonist's repentance in two relational contexts (father and friend). Future research may expand the scope in several directions. First, comparative studies across Nicholas Sparks' broader oeuvre—including novels such as *A Walk to Remember*, *The Notebook*, *Dear John*, and *The Lucky One*—could examine whether repentance follows similar patterns across his works or varies by narrative context, character age, or relationship type. Second, comparative studies between Sparks' novels and other contemporary young adult fiction (e.g., works by John Green, Jandy Nelson, or Angie Thomas) could identify genre-specific conventions in the representation of moral transformation and repentance. Third, cross-cultural studies examining how repentance is portrayed in young adult literature from different national traditions (e.g., Indonesian, Japanese, or Latin American coming-of-age novels) could illuminate whether the psychological stages of repentance are universal or culturally specific. Fourth, reception studies investigating how adolescent readers interpret and respond to depictions of repentance in literature could bridge the gap between textual analysis and reader-response theory, revealing whether exposure to repentant characters influences readers' own moral reasoning or forgiveness behaviours. Fifth, longitudinal studies tracking how the representation of repentance in young adult fiction has evolved over the past fifty years could identify broader cultural shifts in understandings of moral responsibility, accountability, and relational ethics. Such research would extend the findings of this study while contributing to the interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies, moral philosophy, developmental psychology, and educational practice.

Ultimately, *The Last Song* demonstrates that true repentance is transformative not only for the individual who acknowledges their mistakes but also for the broader network of relationships in which they are embedded, highlighting its critical role in sustaining meaningful, honest, and morally responsible connections.

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