



## PRESENTATION OF TRAUMA NARRATIVE THROUGH STYLISTICS IN *CHILD IN TIME*

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### Abstract

*This trauma study analyses McEwan's novel The Child in Time (1987), narrated with third-person perspective, where the protagonist is the victim of a traumatic experience. His trauma affected consciousness is brought forward through stylistic devices as free indirect speech, anacoluthon and variations in syntax. The versatility of indirect speech under the third-person perspective and the free indirect discourse enrich the sympathetic narrative attitude for the protagonist in the syntactic hybrid of narrative discourse. Thus this novel presents a traumatological narrative highlighting the post-traumatic stress borne by the major character through stylistic devices.*

**Key terms:** McEwan, *The Child in Time*, trauma narrative, free indirect discourse, anacoluthon, variations in syntax, the post-traumatic stress

### Introduction

Ian Russell McEwan (1948- ) is a well-known British contemporary fiction writer. Some of his major novels are: *The Child in Time* (1987), *Enduring Love* (1997), *Saturday* (2005), and *Sweet Tooth* (2012). His starting works had made him “literary bad boy” (McEwan, 2018), however, in the beginning of the 21st century, his novels were viewed under the framework of a broader historical, political and social contexts such as 9/11 terrorist attacks. These later works made him “a latter-day humanist” (Bradbury, 2004, 536). And in these great works, the narrative perspective remains a central focus in combination with psychological, social and ethical concerns. The current study of *Child In Time* (1987) also brings together the narrative perspective and the psychological manifestation of trauma where the trauma is presented through Stylistic devices of Free Indirect Discourse (FID), Anacoluthon and variations in syntax.

Bernie C. Byrnes' *The Work of Ian McEwan: A Psychodynamic Approach* is the first PhD dissertation on McEwan in the West, published as a monograph in 2002. Taking into account of McEwan's own life experience, Byrnes proposes there is a “metaplot” in McEwan's novels, composed of the plausible Oedipus complex, infantile neurosis and other psychological impetus implicit in the characters' personalities, which marks the first peak of McEwanian

psychoanalysis. Byrnes' psychoanalytic attempt is of great help in illustrating the exteriorization of the characters' psychological problems, whose thematic projection into McEwan's recent novel is undermined by his growing ideological and political engagement. The representation of character's psychological situations in McEwan's writing is perceptible enough, preoccupied with certain historical and social surroundings (Crosthwaite, 2009, 159).

As a novelist, McEwan explores psychological consciousness through narrative strategies, as is mentioned by Courtney: "McEwan favors narrated thought. Narrated thought is not summary – it relays the step-by-step thought progressions of a character" (Courtney, 2013, 186). An analysis of McEwan's works shows that McEwan's traumatic characters exhibit stream-of-conscious narrative via Stylistic devices of Free Indirect Discourse (FID), Anacoluthon and variations in syntax. Furthermore, the narrative follows a pattern called as "the belatedness of trauma (coming back of trauma repeatedly in slow fashion)" by Cathy Caruth (1996, 4). Free Indirect Discourse (FID), or interior monologue in the field of narratology, is linked with stream-of-conscious in modern fiction and has been a focus in narrative study. FID is defined as that expression in a narration where "the narrator represents a character's speech or thought by blending the character's thought" (James Phelan and Rabinowitz, 2005, 545).

Trauma defined as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is composed of disorders such as nightmare, insomnia, anorexia, self-disclosure and other long-term negative effects on survivors of a catastrophe (Caruth, 1996, 3). This study is an attempt to analyze trauma in McEwan's novel *Child In Time* (1987) through stylistic devices.

## Discussion

Ian McEwan has retained the endeavor for psychological representation via narrative amelioration in trauma fiction. "Noted for the revelation of psychological and emotional disturbances" (Head, 2007, 217), McEwan's maturer narrative manipulation in such fundamental elements as discourse, perspective and structure of narrative works indisputably towards an implicit ethical commitment within and beyond the textual border of trauma representation. McEwan used to state that he is "interested in how to represent, obviously in a very stylized way, what it's like to be thinking" (1987,113), the narrative technique in link with trauma representation in *The Child in Time* necessarily abides by this narrative intention.

Published in 1987, *The Child in Time* highlights the traumatic misery borne out by the protagonist, Stephan, whose three-year-old daughter is abducted in a supermarket. McEwan ascribes this novel to an innovative beginning in his series of "novel of ideas", in which the narrative focus is conscious representation rather than plot configuration. The traumatic moment of loss haunts the protagonist's conscious throughout his life. The traumatic moment, the victim's hysteric syndrome, and his self-reflexive conscious underlie the fundamental facets of trauma representation in the juxtaposition of traumatic recollection and post traumatic life recordings.

With the grammatical benchmark of quotation mark, discourse in narrative text enumerates two basic notions of direct or indirect speech: the former usually appears in conversations with quotation mark, while the later, without direct reference to the subject of parole, is aimed for disclosing the character's psychological movement under third-person perspective. The integral of the two styles supplies readers with convenience to probe into the character's psychological

conscious as it transfers objective narrative into emotional expression based on the characters' plausible soliloquy. In the fiction targeted with trauma representation, the character's post traumatic stress unfolds with the detour "in the narrative level consisting of indirect discourse, free indirect discourse and the narrator's text" (Bal, 1997, 51), the multiplicity of rhetoric effect, consequently, gives prominence to the belatedness of trauma in conscious layout. Jago Morrison reminds us that the text in this novel has been framed "not as a continuous narrative but as a series of carefully crafted vignettes" (Morrison, 2004,72), which explains that the structural inter-relations are established when the reader explores and re-rereads this text more and more. The narrative incoherence mainly intensifies in the semantic transition from third-person perspective to the combination of direct discourse and indirect discourse, whereas the picturesque of post- traumatic life conforms to the inherent tendency in the traumatized character's psychological conducts. Predominant with objectively panoramic overview, the third-person narrative in *The Child in Time* is endowed with a great extent of authority in delineating Stephan's post traumatic life; at the same time, the indirect discourse complements the omniscient narrative reconstruction of the trauma in accord with direct discourse, to which the emotional unease in the minds of victim adheres.

To begin with, Stephan's conscious presentation emerges in the semantic phrases of "he thought" or "he guessed", what follows up the clarified pronoun is the victim's perseverant intention of finding Kate back. Stephan keeps thinking about the past memory of staying with Kate, while his torture of losing her lays out immediately in the direct discourse, when "he thought that if he could do everything with the intensity and abandonment with which he had once helped Kate" (McEwan,2005,115). The subjunctive mood transmutes Stephan's sorrow with an imperative sentence within which the sympathetic implication of "the narrator's words and deictic orientation are retained" (Toolan, 1988, 120). Notably, the indirect discourse in the novel is not a stereotyped stylistic phenomenon, and its variable forms, such as free indirect discourse aimed for mimesis of character's flow of the conscious, obtrusively aggravate the traumatic effect upon victims.

Free Indirect Discourse (abbreviated as FID), or termed as free indirect speech, interior monologue, narrated monologue in the field of narratology, used to be the favor of stream-of-conscious writing in modern novelists, and has remained to be the focus in narrative study. FID is frequently used in the portrayal of character's subjective recollection of the traumatic moment. When Stephan brings Kate to the supermarket, he notices the people around and doubts "who was there when his hand reached for these items? Someone who followed him as he pushed Kate along the stacked aisles, who followed him" (11). This is the apocalyptic conscious presentation from the perspective of Stephan after losing Kate, but it transcribes Stephan's contemporary psychological status from a late retrospective hindsight. Obviously, the FID indicates that "the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the instances are merged" (Genette, 1988, 174) in the primary objective narration and the psychology-oriented observation. The inquiry into the contemporary traumatic scenery intertwines with a more cautious pectionation of the trauma origin, and progressively alters the objective narration into a sympathetic conscious self-exposure. What comes next in the function of FID is amelioration of Stephan's self-blame, as the alternation of narrative time has already indicated, the subjunctive mood clarifies the emphatic rhetoric effect in the supposedly neutral narrative. After Kate is abducted, Stephan is enchanted

with exhausted searching all day long even though he is aware of the slim chance. Stephan interrogates himself in the fantasy: “if he could walk faster, maintain his concentration” (21-22).

The more illusion of finding Kate back permeated in the FID, the greater sympathy would be invigorated in the exposure of Stephan’s self-criticism. The post-traumatic stress, therefore, weaves a huge web of emotional refrain in which the traumatized victim bears stress from oneself and others. The grudge between Stephan and Julie, for instance, is an estrangement that belongs to one of the conducts of post trauma syndrome. Unlike Stephan’s another identity as trauma perpetrator in the abduction of Kate, Julie, whose hysteria is precisely the same as the syndrome of trauma victim, has the privilege to accuse him of carelessness in taking care of their child. In the ethical swirl, Stephan could not stand the emotional accusation from his wife who is expected to go through the trauma altogether, but he is more annoyed at Julie’s coldness because when he could not find her [Kate], Julie put blame on him and departed, “The proper way! Who was she to lay down rules about that?” (147). The exclamation and rhetorical question in FID, as Cohn notes, depends on “the narrative voice that mediates and surrounds it” (116) which reflects the trauma victim’s bewildering meditation. Among the synthesis of FID shouldering variable rhetorical functions, the reader would notice Stephan’s latent memory of the traumatic moment, his great effort to find Kate, and his desperation in the post traumatic estrangement to his wife. The utilization of free indirect discourse not merely uncovers Stephan’s psychological harassment, but exposes his flaw in the trauma of losing Kate. The narrative bias, in the oppositional representation of Julie and Stephan’s divergent post traumatic conducts, is subordinate to expose the ethical implication of the ostensibly objective third-person narrative. It could be concluded that FID in this novel, on the whole range of compunction, helps readers recognize the truth for the source of the trauma and endows more sympathy with the traumatized characters.

The most noteworthy point in the mixture of various discourses is the semantic phenomenon of anacoluthon. Rhetorically, it interprets “a syntactical pattern in which there is a shift in tense, number, or person in the midst of a sentence” (Miller, 1998, 141). This narrative scheme enacts the tension between the two-level conscious of characters which aims to arouse more sympathy in readers. This semantic entanglement of discourse in *The Child in Time*, apart from the parallel of indirect discourse and free indirect discourse in the dominant third-person perspective, stimulates the ethical unease in the character’s post traumatic psychological status. For instance, when Stephan takes a girl in a secondary school granted for his abducted daughter Kate, the discourse contorts the third-person narrative into first-person monologue, without any canny semantic hint. The moment Stephan looks at the girl that he has assumed to be Kate, he thought: “I want you. I want you back” (141).

The above lines are typical combination of free indirect discourse and free direct discourse (abbreviated as FDD), as the pronoun “he” mixes with “I” in the same lexical range, through which Stephan’s lunacy of calling Kate back is poised to the ambiguous semantic transference. When the girl refuses to regard Stephan as her father, he “wanted to bellow down the corridor for all the children to hear”, by declaring himself to be real father, “You’re my daughter, you’re mine, I’ve come to take you home” (162). The second-person pronoun, “you” not only indicates the straightforward talk between the traumatized father and the abducted daughter, it addresses the readers in a rhetorically direct way, by which the uncompromising pain

of psychic trauma deploys the narrative effect of sympathy. In this way, these sentences juxtapose in a stylistic matrix, impinging upon readers with a polemic of Stephan's yearning for getting Kate back while the conscious in the traumatized father externalizes as an emotional exclamation, in contrast to the very truth disseminating in the third-person narration that the girl is not Kate at all.

The rhetorical resonance introduced by anacoluthon is unlimited in the alliance of FID and FDD, more palpably, it incepts the parallel of FID and omniscient narration that enables the narrator to probe into the exterior focalization of Stephan who is dubious about Kate's favorite toys. When Kate's 6th birthday comes, Stephan walks into a shop to buy her a gift even if she has been abducted for almost two years. When he cautiously picks up the gift, being pestered with memory flashback about Kate's taste in toys, his presumption of Kate's favor gets certified in the following long passage illustrating in anacoluthon: She liked to dress up. He reached for a witch's hat, then he went back and changed the grey hat for a black one. Now he thought he had had his theme (CT 138-139).

The above lines give a clear clue of the way McEwan handgrips his material in this fiction with the embodiment of direct discourse, indirect discourse and FID. The anacoluthon hints a concentrated sorrow in the mind of Stephan through the FID as the narrator is in empathy "with a character's view of the fictional reality" (Hernadi, 1972, 37). The reader would notice the unbearable figment that Kate never comes back, and yet the father still prodigiously retains the slim hope. In this sense, the intricacy of anacoluthon in *The Child in Time*, is "a technique that serves only the intentions of narrator" (Sotirova, 2005, 124) who provokes reader's sympathy with the traumatized characters. This strategy ameliorates reader's engagement to the possible process of the victim's psychological trauma recovery, as Kakutani evaluates, it's McEwan's "marvelous control" to stabilize his "sympathy as a writer to put across the point of view of decidedly unappealing characters" (3). The complex anacoluthon consisting of free and indirect discourse thrusts the belatedness of trauma indulged into the temporal duration that is deeply rooted in the conscious of the traumatized Stephan, out of which McEwan draws a trauma's environment apprehensively with a narrative curvature that stresses "the possibilities of repetition, recurrence, and return" (Diemert, 2013, 219) in individual traumatic experience. The variations in discourse, either in the form of sole FID or the synthetic anacoluthon, foist readers to be concerned with the predicament of trauma victim in aligning sympathy beyond the third-person narrative neutrality.

Thus, this study refers to other similar works as "Blend of Ethics, Politics and Stylistics in Trauma Narrative" (Ahmad, et. al. 2021)" where it is emphasized that McEwan blends ethics, politics and stylistics in psychic exploration of the characters by the use of linguistic and stylistic sources with great expertise. It correlates with the view that the trauma representation in *The Child in Time* is best presented via narrative technique using linguistics (Ahmad, et al., 2020, p.165). Furthermore, this study is also in line with what Ullah et al point out about dangers of living in a dream world which can make one detached from outside real world (Ullah, et al., 2020), so it is utmost important that one must be on guard against the forces that cause trauma and its after affects.

## Conclusion

Trauma in McEwan's novel is retrospection over a characters' immediate response and the long-term aftereffect. The trauma representation in *The Child in Time* brings fore a narrative order in association with the haunting memory and years of self-blame via multiple stylistic narrative devices as free indirect discourse, anacoluthon and variation in syntax. This novel is set in retrospective perspective, under which the dominant past tense serves to provide an overview of personal suffering. Featured with third-person perspective, the protagonist Stephan is endowed with all the characteristics of traumatized victim devastated by the adversity of trauma aftereffect. The narrative in this novel depicts the trauma in a narrative pattern composed of memory flashback, flash-forward and repetitions in free direct or indirect style.

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