

The appearance of child within in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*

Jahanroshan, Shafagh

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Jahanroshan, S. (2015). The appearance of child within in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 65, 68-73. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-2019072713284003708723>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

The appearance of Child within in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*

Shafagh Jahanroshan

MA in English Literature, Iran

E-mail address: shafaghjahanroshan@yahoo.com

Keywords: Child within; healing child within; childhood dreams;

ABSTRACT. Child within is a phenomenon that show the existence of a child inside every adults. It could be hidden all through the life of a person, but it does not mean that the child does not exist there. This paper is devoted to Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987). This novel is about children with rare physical existence of children. It begins while the reader be aware of the abduction of the Stephen Lewis's Daughter, Kate, two years ago. Stephen who is the narrator tries to cope with the grief and problems afterward. He never has stopped looking for Kate and insistently keeps her alive by seeing her in other children and in his mind. The child who is alive in his mind is actually Stephen's own child inside. Stephen's friend, Charles Darke, is the one whose child inside is shown itself. The child inside must be controlled, otherwise; it can cost a lot. They show different reaction toward their child inside and differently deal with it. Stephen can heal himself, but Charles cannot heal himself and dies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child within is existed inside all human beings, although it could be hidden and does not show itself. "But just because we may have ignored the child doesn't mean she or he isn't there" (Hanh 2010, p. 9). Child within in different situations could pope up and come to show itself. "Even though our Child Within may have gone into hiding, it never dies. It is always there, waiting to peep its small head, sometimes with big eyes, and usually with an open heart, out into life" (Whitfield 1990, p. 2). One could be aware of the child within and one does not know anything about its existence inside while it is there and effect on his thoughts and works, although he is unaware of it. All the people have child who mostly was suffered in the childhood and brought the sorrows and difficulties with themselves into adulthood as a hidden child within. It is hidden because we as adults wants to protects ourselves so we somehow ignore that child and all the memories which remain in the consciousness along with that child. Hanh says that:

In each of us, there is a young, suffering child. We have all had times of difficulty as children and many of us have experienced trauma. To protect and defend ourselves against future suffering, we often try to forget those painful times. Every time we're in touch with the experience of suffering, we believe we can't bear it, and we stuff our feelings and memories deep down in our unconscious mind. It may be that we haven't dared to face this child for many decades. (2010, p. 9)

But sometimes this child within comes to show itself in some way that we cannot completely ignore it anymore. It come to alert us inside, even unconsciously it effects on us. Hanh talks about this child as:

The wounded child is always there, trying to get our attention. The child says, "I'm here. I'm here. You can't avoid me. You can't run away from me." We want to end our suffering by sending the child to a deep place inside, and staying as far away as possible. But running away doesn't end our suffering; it only prolongs it. (2010, p. 9)

The child inside the womb feeling safe and comfortable and is not willing to leave there, when it is forced to come out from its lovely place to an unknown place which from the first moment pushes the child to breathe by itself, from that moment the child experiences fear and danger. "When we were born, our fear was born at the same time with us. During the nine months in the womb of our mother, we felt safe. We didn't have to do anything. It was so comfortable. But when we were born, the situation changed drastically. They cut the umbilical cord, and we had to learn how to breathe for ourselves" (Hanh 2010, p. 42). When we grow up our child within still stays inside us and has brought all those fears with itself to adulthood, therefore; the child within must be dealt and healed. We accept its existence inside us, but we should not totally go inside this role. We should create a balance between adult body and child within, otherwise we should pay a big price.

Ian McEwan's third novel is *The Child in Time* and from this novel on his style of writing has changed. Weich noted: "The turning point for [him] was *The Child in Time*, when political, moral, social, comic, and other possibilities moved in" (qtd. in Kobrlová 2010, p. 10). McEwan in his first works uses shocking themes such as murder, sex, adultery, etc that make him to be known as 'Ian Macabre'. But from *The Child in Time* on he mostly writes about psychological, social, political, etc subjects. Eileen Batters points out that, "in his third novel McEwan has shifted away from the grotesque extremes and has instead become concerned with disturbed and disturbing psychological trauma" (qtd. in Reynolds and Noakes 2002, p. 72). This paper intends to show the existence of child within inside two male characters of the novel: Stephen Lewis, the narrator, and Charles Darke, Stephen's friend. And how these two characters deal with their child within in different ways.

2. THE CHILD WITHIN

In the novel, the presence of children has been omitted in the beginning, but the subject turns around child and childhood. "*The Child in Time* is thus far more concerned with the child within the adult than with children per se" (Bentley 2005, p. 128). Stephen lost his daughter, Kate, two years ago and continuously looking after her. By searching Kate, Stephen along with his eagerness to be a father once more looks after his own lost childhood. Stephen's unstoppable search for Kate for two years is not only for Kate herself, but also is an obsession of Stephen for his own childhood. Jack Slay writes that in *The Child in Time* Stephen looks for his own child which exists inside every adult more than Kate. (1991, p. 243) The child inside needs caress. "Using play to nurture the child within, we can sing, draw, and play. We can participate in the moment to fully love ourselves and our life. We can live as a child lives - fully in the moment. We can do this in a safe way that may not have been available to us as children" (McFarlane web, p. 22). Stephen goes to a toy shop to buy gifts for Kate's birthday while he himself knows that he is not mad and he does them all consciously to satisfy himself. At the first, he is in the girl's part, but then he deeply goes into boy's territory, guns, knives, flame-throwers, death rays, and toy handcuffs, unaware of anybody and fulfils his child within's desires: "until he came to it at last, a matter of instant recognition, Kate's present" (p. 52). Stephen in the toy shop lives in the moment. He buys toys not only for Kate, but for himself. He is suddenly impatient to be home to unpack the toys which he buys for Kate and for himself. At home, he is examining them until afternoon, but when he wants to wrap them for Kate, he feels disappointed and thinks that all of these things are useless. He does all of them for himself, for his child inside. "He was not mad, he knew what was real. He knew what he was doing, he knew Kate was gone. He had thought all this out quite carefully, and he was not deceived. He was doing this for himself, without illusions" (p. 52). And now he does not know why he buys this much toy. He packs them together in order that they look less. "He watches children in television and buys children's toys, which seem to be both presents for the missing Kate and sources of comfort for himself" (Childs 2005, p. 174).

Stephen is a successful writer of children's books, but he wants to be like Joyce, Mann or Shakespeare and writes for grown-ups. He does not want to write for children and sees himself insulted. He wants to be like grown-ups, he wants to be a real writer. But his first novel, *Lemonade*,

which contains his own childhood, magically gets to Charles Darke's office, a publisher then a close friend of Stephen's and later a political representative. Charles makes the book published as a children's book. The existence of a child inside him is shown in the thoughts of Charles about Stephen's book *Lemonade*. Chalupský sees *Lemonade*, "as a reflection of Stephen's search for some kind of reparation for [his] stolen childhood" (2008, p. 56). He should find a way to keep his inner child calm and being a children writer is the best way; although he does not want this job at first. Stephen feels sick by accepting that his book will be published for children, the pictures of cartoons hung from Charles's office wall welcoming him to their ranks. But then he was happy for being a children's writer, because Stephen is relieved by writing and calms his child inside.

Stephen unconsciously has written *Lemonade* for children and actually his own lost childhood: "McEwan creates a work that portrays the search for the child that exists in every individual" (Slay 1991, p. 234). The narrator talks about childhood as, "Childhood is timeless. It's always the present. Everything is in the present tense" (p. 11). Charles Darke thinks that *Lemonade* is about Stephen himself as a child who never stops living inside him and he says, "This book is not for children, it's for a child, and that child is you. ... *Lemonade* is a message from you to a previous self which will never cease to exist" (p. 11). The message is harsh in which makes all the children cry: "Reading you, they (children) get wind of the idea that they are finite as children. Instead of just being told, they really understand that it won't last, it can't last, that sooner or later they're finished, done for, that their childhood is not forever" (p. 11). He loses his daughter and his eagerness to find her leads him to search for both Kate and his child within. It also has a message for adults too that a child is alive within you which must be controlled and which must keep a balance with your adulthood; otherwise it leads you toward madness. This lost childhood has its root in one's childhood like Stephen's childhood whose father was a harsh man. He was absent in Stephen's life and Stephen has been scared of his father. "Bly addresses the issues of absent fathers and the hardship of the disappearance of male initiation rites from our culture" (Hutchen-Lay 2013, p. 7).

Charles looks for his lost boyhood like Stephen. They both are obsessed with their childhood and must do something. "Both Stephen and his friend, Charles Darke, attempt to bridge the gap between childish and adult selves, but with differing consequences" (Rowland 1987, p. 238). Becoming a child we are free from any duties, responsibilities and so on, so Charles totally go toward him child within and continue his life as a child without any responsibility as an adult and especially as a politician whose responsibilities was heavier than any normal person. Charles wants to be free from the pressure of adulthood which leads him to accept his child within as his real identity and prefers to forget that he is adult. "Our child within is who we really are ultimately alive, energetic, creative and fulfilled" (Whitfield 1990, p. 1). Charles become an alive person when he accepts his child within and starts to live like a child. Stephen is also happy when fulfil his childhood dreams and act as a child, but Stephen is aware of his adult body as well and knows that soaking completely into childhood is dangerous. Charles abdicates the politics and moves with his wife, Thelma, to a silent place and turns into a child. He does whatever he wants: climbing tree, having a private cage, sleeping early and waking up early in the morning, going to the woods and retuneing when he gets hungry just like a child, he somehow allows his child inside to comes out and captures him and Thelma plays his mother's role. When Stephen goes to see Charles and Thelma, he goes to the woods with Charles. Charles wants Stephen to climb the tree like him and Stephen wants to satisfy his friend and more deeply his own child inside, so he climbs the tree. He satisfies his child inside for minutes, but Stephen does not want to soak totally in his childhood and his self-love makes him begin to be afraid. "Stephen dared not look up, nor did he want to look down. He kept his eyes on the louse. 'I think I'll take it bit by bit,' was all he could say" (p. 44). He is afraid of falling. He is afraid of death. But Charles does whatever he can to satisfy his child inside and carelessly climbs the tree. "He wanted the security of childhood, the powerlessness, the obedience, and also the freedom that goes with it, freedom from money, decisions, plans, demands" (p. 83). Charles totally regresses into childhood.

Stephen searches without pause to find her daughter and his obsession and he faces it in the school. Charles does not do it and prefers to die. Adam Mars Jones says Thelma talks about Charles's problem, "It was just an extreme form of a general problem, men's inability to carry over the virtues of their immaturity into adulthood" (qtd. in Childs, *The Fiction* 63-4). So men have this problem and Stephen like other men is dealing with this problem as well, his child within and his maturity must be fulfilled, "concerns not only explicitly the character of Charles but also Stephen who as an adult has lost the child within himself and he tries to restore him throughout the novel" (Childs 2009, p. 65). Stephen and Charles have shown that there is a child in all the adults, but it needs something to come out. In Cary's words:

McEwan's narrative method suggests that Charles Darke and indeed Stephen Lewis's views are that children and adults are one and the same and that every adult has a child inside and vice versa. There are many examples throughout the novel that suggest children and adults have a strong connection, such as Charles Drake's regression later in Chapter. McEwan presents the idea that Charles Darke has regressed through his dialogue and infrequency of speech when he is at 'play'. (2010-2011, p. 39)

This child within is their own childhood's dreams which could be fulfilled but in balanced way; not to be returned totally to the childhood like Charles. "Yet, to return to thinking and behaving like a child, like the publisher-turned-politician Charles Darke, would be a kind of death; thus the novel suggests that the mature individual has to balance the child and the adult" (Bentley 2005, p. 128). The difference between Stephen and Charles is, "Whilst Stephen oscillates between obsession and catatonia, Charles ventures into a different universe of fantasy and nostalgia. Where Stephen seeks to conjure his lost child, Kate, from the strands of history and possibility, Charles too is engaged in prefabricating a childhood" (Morrison 2003, p. 72). If Stephen could have not balanced his child inside and his adult part, he was going to pay a big price like Charles.

3. DEALING WITH THE CHILD WITHIN

Children are powerless and dependent. They need adults for being alive, at the same time they do not need to decide, think about money or any other problems. There is some security in being a child even in returning to the womb. "In McEwan's work, childhood is a sleep from which everyone must awaken to face an adult world where their former actions will have unforeseen consequences. Childhood is also a realm adults seek to control but to which they also seek to return" (Childs 2005, p. 173). Stephen has returned to his mother's womb to capture this security and sees his mother as she is pregnant for him, but he must return and capture the control of his life. Stephen goes back in time and recaptures that the happiness he had before with his mother is useless, because he wants his life, as MacKinnon announces:

Some post-Freudians would have it that a powerful adult male fantasy involves a return to the symbiotic relationship with his mother that the male child once enjoyed. Whatever its appeal, though, the fantasy must be accompanied with fear - the fear that a restoration of unity with the mother will bring about the destruction of selfhood. In other words, as anthropologist David Gilmore puts it, manhood imagery is, from a post-Freudian perspective, a defence against the eternal child within the man. (2003, pp. 6-7)

Stephen's daydreams, imaginations, and déjà vu have their roots in his boyhood wishes which comes by weakness. "To compensate for feelings of weakness, worthlessness, and inadequacy, we create, with the aid of our imagination, an idealized image of ourselves that we endow with "unlimited powers and exalted faculties"" (Frager and Fadiman 2012, p. 119). Stephen fulfills these wishes in order that he could deal with his child inside. "Freud posited that the personality people most commonly associate with masculinity results from complex processes of

unconscious conflict resolution and emotional development that start early in life” (Darity, 5). Although as an adult it is difficult to be relevant with child, but Stephen does it. “McEwan confronts childhood’s uneasy relationship with the adult body” (Bentley 2005, p. 128).

At the end of the novel, when he is summoned by Julie to go to her cottage, he rides in an engine cab which was his boyhood dream. “We already know that Stephen still nourishes a boyhood ambition to ride in a railway engine cab” (Edwards 2013, p. 48). Stephen climbs the tree to satisfy his own child inside because he had never done this before in his childhood. “A satisfying fifteen minutes passed. This was something he could do, something he had missed out on in childhood, and he fully understood now why other boys bothered with it” (p. 44). When Stephen stands outside the school to find the girl whom he thinks to be his own daughter, he feels some pleasure. While he searches the school to find Kate, he enters a classroom and in there he treats like a child, drawing and then remembers that he is there to look for Kate. In those moments he feels like: “There were titters from the back. These were moments of intense pleasure” (p. 59). Stephen disobeys the rules, turns his back to the teacher and leaves the class which again was his schoolboy daydream and now he makes it done and it is an ecstasy for him.

Both Charles and Stephen deals with their child within. They both tries to fulfil their childhood dreams. But Stephen fulfils his dreams by being aware of his adulthood and does not totally soak into childhood, so make balance between his child and adult body and heals himself, but Charles in the way of fulfilling his dreams completely goes toward his child within and regress into childhood and ultimately doom to die. Thelma once says to Stephen that, “Charles never really wanted to delve. I think he was frightened of what he might find” (84), but Stephen faces them and makes himself back by balancing his child inside and his adult part. “Stephen, in essence, has a hand in saving himself” (Sgarlata 2009, p. 41). Stephen is obsessed with his childhood like Charles, but he does not want to lose his life and delves and somehow relieves.

4. CONCLUSION

Slay claims that McEwan’s intention in depicting Charles’s regression is to show that “although it is important for the adult to accept the child within him- or herself, it is dangerous, even suicidal, to become wholly that child-self or to surrender entirely to this desire ... [because] submersion in that child can lead to a breakdown of the adult spirit” (1991, p. 33). Stephen sees the way Charles treats and how he returns to his childhood and knows that he is like Charles whose child within is there and his eagerness to back to his childhood, but he does not want to be like his friend. Stephen wants his childhood, but more he does want his life; whereas, Charles does not want to be a child, he desires it. There is always a child within adults who is never going to die and must be kept in balance with adult body. To remain alive, you must heal your child within and make the balance between them which Stephen can do it and Charles can’t.

References

- [1] Bentley, N. (ED). (2005). *British Fiction of the 1990s*. London: Routledge.
- [2] Cary, P. (2010-2011). “Demonstrate the ways in which two twentieth-century realist texts help shape their depictions of the realities of human experience.” *University of Nottingham* 3: 92-98.
- [3] Chalupský, P. (2008). “Freedom, Spontaneity, Imagination and the Loss of Innocence: the Theme of Childhood in Ian McEwan’s Fiction.” *University of Patrdubice*, (pp. 51-65).
- [4] Childs, P. (2005). *Contemporary Novelists; British Fiction since 1970*. Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [5] Childs, P. (2009). *The Fiction of Ian McEwan. A Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

-
- [6] Darity, J. W. (ED). (2008). *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 2nd ed. Macmillan Reference USA.
 - [7] Edwards, P. (2013). "Time, Romanticism, Modernism and Moderation in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*." *Oxfordjournals*, (pp. 41-55).
 - [8] Frager, R. & Fadiman, J. (2012). *Personality and Personal Growth*. 7th ed. Peachpit Press.
 - [9] Hanh, T. N. (2010). *Reconciliation: Healing the Inner Child*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
 - [10] Hutchen-Lay, Sh. (2013). "Masculinities." Athabasca University.
 - [11] Kobrlová, A. (2010). "Critical Events and Their Subsequent Development in the Novels of Ian McEwan." Masaryk University.
 - [12] Mackinnon, K. (2003). *Representing Men: Maleness and Masculinity in the Media*. Great Britain: Arnold.
 - [13] McEwan, I. (1992). *The Child in Time*. London: Vintage.
 - [14] McFarlane, N. "Play to Nurture the Child Within". 2nd International Therapeutic [15] Recreation Conference. University of Missouri. Web.
 - [15] Reynolds, M & Noakes, J. (2002). *Ian McEwan: The Essential Guide*. London: Vintage Random House.
 - [16] Rowland, R. (1987). "Crumbling Motherhood: Reproductive Technology Creating Women's Procreative Alienation." Deakin University.
 - [17] Sgarlata, E. (2009). "Desire the Id Versus Conscience: Development of and the Ego in Ian McEwan's Fiction." Baylor University.
 - [18] Slay, J. J. (1991). *A Prevailing Ordinairiness: Society and Interpersonal Relationships in the Fiction of Ian McEwan*. University of Tennessee. Ann Arbor: UMI.
 - [19] Whitfield, C. L. (1990). *A Gift to Myself: A Personal Workbook and Guild to Healing my Child Within*. Florida: Health Communications, Inc.