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Research Article

Traumatized Perception of the Self and Time in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* and *The Child in Time*

Nilay ERDEM AYYILDIZ[1]

[1]Assoc. Prof., Fırat University, School of Foreign Languages, Elazığ, Turkiye

ORCID: N.E.A. 0000-0002-1779-8464

Corresponding author:
Nilay ERDEM AYYILDIZ,
Fırat Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, Elazığ, Türkiye
E-mail: nerdem@firat.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to decipher the relationship between trauma and the differentiating perception of the self and time by discussing varying post-traumatic responses of the traumatized characters in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978) and *The Child in Time* (1987). To this end, the study applies trauma theory to examine the traumatized characters' altered perception of temporality and the self, and to discuss to what extent the characters in the novels can overcome the impacts of the traumatic experiences they have. The two novels revolve around traumatized victims that lose the conscious perception of the self and temporality in reality after the traumatic experience. *The Cement Garden* depicts the post-traumatic challenges of four siblings, called Jack, Julie, Tom and Sue after their mother's death. *The Child in Time* unveils Stephen and Julie's process of working through their ordeal after the disappearance of their little daughter, Kate in parallel to Stephen's friend Charles's acting out his traumatic childhood by regressing to his boyhood. The critical approach to the characters' response to their traumas concludes that trauma disrupts people's perception of time and the self, leading either to tragedy when they lose the balance between their defense mechanisms and the trauma reality, or to awakening to their renewed life when they reconcile with their trauma reality.

Keywords: Trauma, Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden, The Child in Time*, temporality

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Introduction

Ian McEwan (1948-), the winner of the Man Booker Prize (1998), is regarded as a prominent author of contemporary English fiction (Head, 2007, p. 26). He sets his novels on "extreme situations, deranged narrators, obscenity, and shock" (Begley, 2010, p. 91); therefore, his fiction is about "moments of crisis" (Begley, 2010, p. 97). Malcolm (2002) describes traumatic incidents in McEwan's novels as "opening the wrong door, turning down the wrong street, losing attention for a moment and stepping into a nightmare" (p. 32). His novels depict traumatic incidents in claustrophobic and public spaces and their impacts on the individual, portraying how trauma distorts the victim's perception of the self and time. In this respect, the moments of crisis indicate to what extent an individual may withstand, respond to or fail to tolerate an extraordinary condition in time in McEwan's works (Begley, 2010, p. 97). Furthermore, McEwan's "detailed, solitary introspection" into the traumatized mind enables the reader to witness the ambivalent post-traumatic perceptions (Courtney, 2013, p. 185) providing insight into his characters' consciousness, traumatized through "the personal, temporally warped experience" (Courtney, 2013, p. 185). This study argues that he exemplifies it through his novels entitled *The Cement Garden* and *The Child in Time*.

The Cement Garden depicts the post-traumatic challenges of four siblings, called Jack, Julie, Tom and Sue after their mother's death. They dissociate themselves from the outer world and the conventional notion of time. Jack, Julie and Tom are lost in their distorted perception of the self and time acting out their traumatic experience whereas Sue works by getting involved in reading and writing, thus updating her perception of the self and temporality. The other selected novel, *The Child in Time* unveils Stephen and Julie's ordeal in the process of coping with their trauma after the disappearance of their little daughter, Kate. While the couple overcomes post-traumatic distorted perception of the self and time, Stephen's friend Charles, who is stuck in his traumatic childhood, is overwhelmed by his traumatized perception of the self and time.

The present study examines the traumatized characters in the selected novels focusing on their different defense mechanism, the alteration in their perception of time after the traumatic happenings and reveals to what extent they manage to work through their traumas. To this end, the study applies trauma theory to scrutinize the traumatized characters' altered perception of temporality and the self. It also discusses,

in the light of trauma theory, to what extent the characters in the novels can overcome the impacts of the traumatic experiences they have.

Trauma Theory

Etymologically deriving from the Greek word "traumata" meaning "wound" in English, trauma covers physical and psychological dimensions. While physical trauma is induced as a result of serious damage or injury to the body through rape, war, illness or a physical injury, the psychological one results from emotional harm to the individual's psyche by distorting the individual's perception of the self, security or the present (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). In both cases, trauma stands out as an emotional condition of anxiety or stress as a result of "an extraordinary catastrophic experience which shattered the survivor's sense of invulnerability to harm" (Figley, 1985, p. xviii). In this respect, psychological trauma is not "a simple and healable event" like the bruise on the body, but is constantly "reexperienced in a painful, disassociated, traumatic present" (Leys, 2000, p. 2). In all aspects, it is also difficult to decipher its depth and secrecy.

There are many factors triggering the growth of the interest in trauma and the studies related to it. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the periods of accelerated modernization through technological and industrial advancements along with the changed social and cultural structures of societies. Furthermore, the period between the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century coincides with the savageness of the World Wars, the Vietnam War and the Holocaust, thus resulting in devastating effects on humanity. They led to the rise of traumatic symptoms, which became the focus of Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, Marcel Proust, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra and Charlotte Delbo's work (Whitehead, 2009, pp. 84-85). Terms such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Dissociative Amnesia and Dissociative Identity Disorder were introduced by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, indicating the increasing interest in trauma and trauma-related disorders. The growing interest and increasing production in trauma studies along with memory studies was expressed as "the memory boom" in the twentieth century (Kattago, 2015, p. 8).

Trauma studies derive from Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet's studies on hysteria in the nineteenth century (Herman, 1994, p. 10). The further trauma studies of Freud

followed by other psychologists mentioned above contributed to modern trauma theory, in time expanding its scope to include a psychological dimension; thus, trauma began to be handled as the wounding of the psyche as a result of emotional shock, too. Trauma is caused by the power of the overwhelming event which surpasses the individual's ability to cope with it on the conscious level. Thus, it leaves a profound impact on the traumatized victim's psyche and self-image because, in Freudian terms, it is "powerful enough to break through the protective shield" of the psyche (1959, p. 23). Trauma is associated with belatedness because the reaction to the traumatic neurosis comes belatedly. Psychological trauma adversely influences both the inherent process of the mind and the victim's identity and ego (Wilson, 2004, p. 12). Another feature of trauma is repetition. It repeatedly takes the traumatized victim back to the situation, which abruptly penetrated his/her protective shield (Freud, 1959, p. 7), through hallucinations, flashbacks and dreams.

Trauma and memory studies have grown as complementary and interrelated fields of study. In this respect, to note the permanent trace of trauma in memory, Freud elaborates on Plato's metaphor of memory as a wax tablet, which represents the capability of the unconscious to trace the imprints left in memory, and he introduces the metaphor of "Mystic Writing Pad," comprised of two layers; the celluloid paper on the surface and the waxed one beneath it. For Freud, the latter one represents the unconscious and erasing any writing cannot guarantee its removal from the pad as it remains beneath on the waxed paper (2001, p. 229). Whitehead notes that "the Mystic Pad offers a model for the dual function of the psychical apparatus, for it is capable of both retention and infinite reception" (2008, p. 97) as independently from the limits of time. In this respect, the traumatic influence is maintained despite the culmination of the outer impact. Thus, trauma contains an unconscious meaning challenging the traumatized victim's sense of the self, which is composed of unconscious, preconscious and conscious in Freudian terms. In this respect, "the victim's view of self and world can never be the same again" (Rieker & Carmen, 1986, p. 362) because the traumatized victim's mind haunted by the traumatic impact within the blurring of the past and the present is confused with the challenge of some assumptions concerning "the self and the world such as the belief in personal invulnerability, the view of oneself (and others) in a positive light and the belief in a meaningful and orderly world" (Janoff-Bulman, 2002, p. 272). Thus, the traumatized individual lives in a sense of meaninglessness, alienation and desperation rather than an active participant of the world order because he perceives the world from a fragmented perspective.

Cathy Caruth, who elaborates on Freud's notion of "traumatic neurosis," associating it with "temporal delay, repetition and literal return" (1996, p. 135) underlines the belatedness of trauma making the truth remain "unknown in our very actions and our language" (1996, p. 4). Therefore, as parallel to the belated nature, traumatic incidents are represented in a fragmented form. Thus, Caruth reconceptualizes trauma in relation to the non-chronological act of remembering and highlights belatedness in the nature of the traumatic incident as it remains alive in the traumatized memory even years later through flashbacks, repetitive re-enactments and hallucinations. In Caruth's view, this feature inherent in trauma makes the distance between the past and the present collapse (1995, p. 9) disrupting the normal parameters of temporality and spatiality.

Similar to Caruth, who identifies trauma as a jolt, which "is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" more than a threat to the body (1996, p. 61), LaCapra (2004) also differentiates trauma from any stressful experiences along with its repetitive retarded impacts on memory in time through some "flashbacks, startle reactions and other forms of intrusive behaviour" (p. 118). According to him, when the traumatized subject is "acting out" after a traumatic experience, it means s/he cannot cope with the experience or emotions involved in it, thus repeats the experience compulsively or is living in the past. Trauma results in the disentanglement of the arrangement in the perception of the past, present and future through the flow of consciousness. Thus, the past survives in a way in the present retaining its effect towards the future along with the traces after the erasure of the trauma. The distinction between the main three periods of time; the past, present and the future, disappears and blurs in consciousness (LaCapra, 2001, pp. 143-144). In this sense, trauma is related to the impact not on the body but consciousness, accompanied by some alterations not only in human life but also the subject's perception of time. It also maintains its overwhelming influence until the traumatized subject can adopt a critical distance to the traumatic experience. It is called "working through trauma" and articulated from the traumatized individual as follows: "'Yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can't entirely disengage myself from it, but I'm existing here and now, and this is different from back then.'" (LaCapra, 2001, p. 144). Accordingly, the traumatized subject who manages to confront the reality can handle the negativities of the trauma in a way surviving it. It is necessary for the traumatized person to "work through" the event in order to go back to their normal life. (2004, p. 65). In this respect, memory can flow in the present towards the future only when reconciliation with the trauma reality is achieved (Tota & Hagen, 2016, p. 4).

Noting the relationship among memory, mourning and melancholia, Freud argues that forgetting is an act of mourning. An individual who mourns for the object he is attached to for a while accepts his loss and initiates his adoption of the traumatic truth. After that, as the person loses his sense of the loss of the object, the place of the object in his memory decreases or starts to disappear. On the other hand, the individual's failure to renunciate the lost object leads to melancholia, thus an ambivalence in the relationship between the self and the object resulting in the individual's alienation to himself and self-blame (1917, pp. 243-258) because as claimed by Teo (2014), "melancholy creates a significant loss of self-esteem in the individual in addition to the feeling of loss" (pp. 7-8).

Considering the approaches in trauma studies, repetition is an inseparable constituent of traumatic perception disarranging the subject's "very understanding of existing contexts" (LaCapra, 2004, p. 117) resulting from an unexpected experience or reality. In this respect, despite its abrupt occurrence in the subject's life, trauma leaves long-lasting traces on the traumatized consciousness through its delayed "symptoms" making the trauma permanent (LaCapra, 2004, p. 118). This study applies traumatic theory as a constituent of memory studies to examine the representative traumatized subjects' attitudes to the traumatic experiences in *The Cement Garden* and *The Child in Time*, which are trauma fictions articulating "the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" (Whitehead, 2004, p. 82).

Post-traumatic Tragedy in *The Cement Garden*

The Cement Garden depicts the post-traumatic life of four siblings at different ages after their mother's death. Courtney evaluates the burying of the mother in cement in *The Cement Garden* as a "pivotal moment of crisis" in the novel (2013, p. 186). The adolescent boy Jack and his elder sister Julie decide to bury their mother's corpse to refrain from the demolition of their familial ties and house. The novel is narrated from Jack's point of view enabling the reader to penetrate his traumatized consciousness and his siblings' distinct responses to the mother's demise which is "the moment of crisis" (Begley, 2010, p. 97), a traumatic incident for them. Following the mother's death, children are "entrapped in a mentally painful world fraught with psychic tensions and struggles" (Sistani, 2014, p. 454). Confining themselves in an isolated house in a barren environment, the siblings act out their domestic trauma throughout the novel.

Trauma arises when conscious is exposed to an abrupt breach because, in Freudian terms, a "stimulus barrier", which constitutes a defense for conscious, is transgressed through traumatic experience (2001, p. 31). The siblings' first response to their mother's corpse indicates that trauma is not perceived at the moment of occurrence and that they have a lack of "preparedness for anxiety" (Freud, 2001, p. 31) about their mother's death. Trauma creates an 'out-of-context experience' for the memory on the level of consciousness subverting the perception of "existing contexts" (LaCapra, 2004, p. 117). Therefore, when Julie tells Jack about the mother's death, he feels "close to blasphemous laughter" (McEwan, 2010, p. 101). They pull the sheet over the corpse and laugh "uncontrollably" when the mother's feet appear (McEwan, 2010, p. 106). They display traumatic responses to their mother's death which causes their self-defense to disrupt because as Herman notes, traumatic reactions are observed when "neither resistance nor escape is possible" when the traumatic incident occurs (1994, p. 34). After the "moment of crisis", the dead mother becomes "everyone's secret. Even [the youngest sibling at the age of six,] Tom rarely mentioned her and only occasionally cried for her now" (McEwan, 2010, p. 170). Jack tries to perceive the reality that his mother is dead. He says: "For a moment I perceived clearly the fact of her [my mother's] death, and my crying became dry and hard. But then I pictured myself as someone whose mother had just died and my crying was wet and easy again" (McEwan, 2010, p. 103). Jack's ambivalent response indicates "the uncertainty of knowing how to negotiate trauma" (Baxter, 2013, p. 24). Although they welcome "a new hierarchy that values spontaneity, harmony, vitality and independence" (Chalupský, 2006, p. 52), they cannot enjoy it much. Jack says: "[T]here was no excitement now. The days were too long, it was too hot, the house seemed to have fallen asleep" (McEwan, 2010, p. 133).

The traumatized subjects' perception of time and the outer world is distorted, and they feel stuck in such a world where hope, meaning and security are replaced by isolation, meaninglessness and desperation. They feel inactive in the management and perception of time and space. In this respect, the siblings in the novel break their bond to the outer world and temporality. Thus, time loses its linearity and turns out to be fragmentary and immeasurable in accordance with the reversible and unrepresentable trauma they have had. More concretely, even a single day lasts longer for the siblings who have nothing to do. Jack tells: "[I]t was no more than a few hours, but the time seemed to occupy a whole stretch of my childhood" (McEwan, 2010, p. 132). Jack, consolidating himself merely at home, feels "a strong sensation of having been away [from home] several months" when he goes out with Julie's boyfriend Derek for a few hours. Thus, the traumatic event

indicates its impact not at the moment of their mother's death but maintains its existence, as argued by Caruth "in another place and in another time" (1995, p. 8).

Trauma is not in the subjects' conscious state as they repress it in a way (Freud and Bauer, 2001, p. 7). Throughout the novel, the children appear to be anesthetized, wandering around like sleepwalkers, without perception of time. They have no conversation even when they are all together. Felman and Laub (1992) regard the silence of traumatized survivors as "a fated exile yet also a home, a destination and a binding oath" (p. 58). In this regard, the children's silence may be evaluated as a way of protecting themselves against their trauma reality by denying it as a defense mechanism. Jack feels stuck in the repetitive actions of repressing his mother's death in his unconscious. He does all the things which his mother has not approved and warned him about. He keeps masturbating several times a day sometimes without realizing even what he is doing because, as argued by Balkaya, the pleasure principle helps the human to escape from discomfort (2014, p. 59). He says that he feels the urge to masturbate because of "[t]he impossibility of knowing or feeling anything for certain" (McEwan, 2010, p. 169) because his traumatic experience is unavailable to his consciousness and exposes itself in his repetitive actions. He wanders in rooms and aimlessly finds himself lying on the bed sleeping, thinking that there is "not much point in getting up" (McEwan, 2010, p. 160). He refuses to clean his body and wanders around with his filthy nails, greasy hair and yellow teeth. Considering Felman and Laub's note that trauma entails the "crisis of truth" (1992, p. 5), this is Jack's way of rejecting his mother's death and repressing the truth which remains unrepresentable and indefinable for him. Considering that "apathy, lifelessness, somatization, addiction, weak notions of self, and inability to fantasize or to act at all in real life" are some symptoms that show up in traumatized people (Moreno & Coelho, 2013, p. 1), Jack's daily routine is shaped through the traumatic impact. To escape from the reality of his mother's death, he reads the same book several times and associates himself with the character in the novel, Commander Hunt, whose spaceship remains "perfectly still, fixed in outer space" (McEwan, 2010, p. 156). He often compares his room to Commander Hunt's neat and tidy spaceship in his daydreams. Jack's confusing perception of his world and the fictional character's world indicates how traumatic experience turns out to be, in Caruth's word, "a breach" in the perception of the self and the outer world (1996, p. 60).

Trauma is inherently incomprehensible and dissociative. It leads the memory to dissociate and makes the experience indecipherable in nature and hard to express

through language (Caruth, 1996, p. 141). Jack has flashbacks of the old days on the beach where he is crying and keeping up with his parents walking ahead of him (McEwan, 2010, pp. 252-253). Furthermore, he is sometimes haunted by nightmares in which he sees his dead mother still reproaching him for his excessive masturbation (McEwan, 2010, pp. 182-184). Such an obtrusive dream is the manifestation of Jack's, in Onega's words, "the compulsion to repeat or 'act out' the traumatic event" (2011, p. 84). His flashbacks and nightmares tell "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us the reality or truth that is not otherwise available" as the truth remains far away from the consciousness (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). In this respect, as a traumatized subject, Jack acts out the traumatic event repetitively maintaining its impact in his memory rather than recollecting it as a memory belonging to the past. His trauma, in Luckhurst's words, "falls out of our conscious memory, yet is still present in the mind like an intruder or a ghost" (2008, p. 499). Thus, the delayed remembrance hinders him from overcoming the impetus of the experience over the conscious. Therefore, time does not proceed in linearity for Jack anymore. He says to Julie: "Except for the times I go down into the cellar I feel like I'm asleep. Whole weeks go by without me noticing, and if you asked me what happened three days ago I wouldn't be able to tell you" (McEwan, 2010, p. 267)

Julie and Tom also lose their perception of time. Julie is mostly inactive during the day, either sitting and smoking in an armchair or sunbathing in the garden. She confesses that she has lost all sense of time and that the feeling that nothing changes renders her feeling fearless (McEwan, 2010, p. 267). Moreover, when her boyfriend Derek asks how long she has had an incestuous relationship with Jack, she says: "Ages…ages and ages." (McEwan, 2010, p. 269). As Pozorski argues, "[a]fter a traumatic event, there appears to be neither a before nor after. The time of trauma is what comes after. And before" (2006, p. 71). Therefore, Caruth argues that the notion of traumatic temporality urges "more traditional conceptual histories…to be rethought" (Pozorski, 2006, p. 78). In this context, Julie's traumatized perception of time is reset after her mother's death after which time it prolongs in an endless term. As for Tom, he spends his time playing around the house with his friend Michael without taking him inside the home. He sometimes regresses in time. He behaves like a little baby wishing Julie's care of him by speaking in a baby voice and sucking his thumb and still sleeping in a cot. On the other hand, he also wishes to grow up by throwing away his toys. Considering their manners, it may be argued that time becomes reversible and immeasurable especially for Jack, Julie and Tom.

As for Sue, she is the only child in the family attempting to catch the time by recording any details after the mother's demise. Felman and Laub (1992) note that traumatized survivors need to tell their stories to survive (p. 78). In this regard, Sue chooses to tell her and her siblings' ongoing daily life to survive their traumatic reality. She seems to hold time, remaining active in history through the diary she is keeping. The traumatized subject experiences "a crisis of language" which comes along with "a crisis of time perception" (Ehlers & Clark, 2000, p. 334), so he/she has difficulty in expression through oral and written terms. However, reading and writing all day, which are Sue's apparent defense mechanisms against the trauma in her isolated life, have healing effects on her. She is the only child who expresses herself in written words. It helps her overcome her traumatized perception of being "frozen in time" (Ehlers & Clark, 2000, p. 334). Thus, she works through the trauma through her efforts to represent what is unrepresentable. She preserves her perception of time through her diary; she writes addressing her dead mother and reporting to her what occurs every day (McEwan, 2010, p. 186). The diary helps her restore the distinction between the past and the present in her memory, thus work through her trauma.

The siblings cannot develop a healthy relationship among themselves because as Caruth suggests, traumatic shock impairs their perception of the self (1996, p. 4). Jack, Julie and Tom, who are all in the phase of sexual development, suffer from their oscillating perception of gender identities. Jack and Julie cannot adopt the role of brotherhood and sisterhood properly, instead they replace their parents both in terms of the roles and particularly sexuality by being involved in an incestuous relationship. Likewise, Tom cannot decide not only whether to become an infant or an adult but also whether to become a boy or a girl. He mostly wishes to become a girl and prefers wearing girls' clothes and wearing a wig to appear like a girl. He takes Julie and Jack as role models and imitates Julie while playing house with Michael who plays the role of Jack in games. From LaCapra's perspective, they act out their traumatic experience thus impeding their recovery from the trauma. Instead, they go in deeper through its adverse impacts with their distorted perception of the self and time. Thus, they cannot construct and secure their identities by confronting their trauma and post-traumatized current life.

Consequently, *The Cement Garden* portrays how trauma leads the young aged siblings, each of whom is in a critical stage of development, to lose their connection with the outer world escaping from the truth and its results by confining themselves in a claustrophobic world and surrendering themselves to a tragic end. Considering

their post-traumatic process, it is apparent that their perception of the self and time is distorted making them act out. Sue is the only one who appears to be on the way of disengaging herself from the dissociative, repressive and nightmarish nature of her trauma. She tries to work through the death of her mother by writing. On the other hand, trauma leads Jack, Julie and Tom to develop problematized identities, constructed through the blurriness of the world, the self and temporality on the level of consciousness.

Post-traumatic Awakening in *The Child in Time*

The Child in Time unfolds the traumatized life of the protagonist Stephen Lewis, a prominent children's author and a member of a commission concerned about child care in the English Government, in search of his three-year-old daughter, Kate, who has been lost for about two years. Stephen considers she has been abducted and lives with the "fantasy of her continued existence […without which] time would stop" (McEwan, 1992, p. 13). He calls the moment of her disappearance a "malevolent intervention" (McEwan, 1992, p. 331). This phrase identifies the abrupt and intrusive nature of the traumatic experience confirming Caruth's note of trauma which occurs "too soon [and] too unexpectedly" (1996, p. 4). It leads to "disempowerment" in the traumatized recollection (LaCapra, 2004, p. 45) as observed in Stephen's and LaCapra's words, "helplessness" like a child (2004, p. 45) while "taking long strides, bawling name as he pounds the length of an aisle" in search of Kate (McEwan, 1992, p. 37). The feeling of helplessness against the trauma reality damages the self. From the approach of trauma theory, like the children for whom the death of their mother is such a strong stimulus in *The Cement Garden*, Stephen is also defeated by the loss of his daughter, which is powerful enough to break through the protective barrier of his conscious. He remembers Kate's disappearance in the supermarket and lives this "moment of crisis" repetitively in his memory: "He had been back a thousand times, seen his own hand, a shelf, the goods accumulate, heard Kate chattering on, and tried to move his eyes, lift them against the weight of *time*, to find the shrouded figure in the periphery of vision, the one who was always to the side and slightly behind" (McEwan, 1992, p. 33, my emphasis in italic). The traumatized individual attempts to construct mechanisms of preparedness for anxiety after trauma through the re-enactment of the traumatic incident in dreams and nightmares (Whitehead, 2009, p. 96). In this context, Stephen seeks to establish defense mechanisms enlivening his anxiety to return him to the traumatic reality.

Stephen's traumatized consciousness plays with his memory through the subjectivity of time. The traumatic effects appear in "total or partial amnesia, temporal disorientation, and the compulsion to repeat or 'act out' the traumatic event in the form of intrusive thoughts, hallucinatory images, or disturbing dreams" (Onega, 2011, p. 84) as represented by Stephen. He lives along with the prevailing thoughts of Kate's existence somewhere. While travelling in a cab, he thinks of her playing in a school garden with her friends merely "fifty feet way" (McEwan, 1992, p. 345) after mistaking another girl for Kate. He is so convinced that she is Kate with "phantom growth" (McEwan, 1992, p. 13) in time which he cannot witness. His condition represents how traumatic memory is unintegrated and timeless. Therefore, it cannot be confined to the past because it preserves its topicality in the traumatized memory all the time. Stephen gets lost in time with Kate's disappearance, and while seeking for her, he finds himself in search of his own lost childhood. While searching for her in the classroom, his distorted perception of time reminds him of his old school days when he was proceeding towards "a vacant seat" with some crayons in his hand (McEwan, 1992, p. 352). Slay (1991) argues that Stephen is much more concerned about the child he has inside himself, like every adult, than his daughter (p. 243). He oscillates between his childhood and lamentation for Kate's disappearance for a while. He keeps watching cartoons on TV and often buys toys. The narrator says: "He had thought all this out quite carefully, and he was not deceived. He was doing this for himself, without illusions" (McEwan, 1992, p. 310). Childs regards Stephen's interest in cartoons and toys as "both presents for the missing Kate and sources of comfort for himself" (2005, p. 174). As mentioned by Felman and Laub (1992), the punchline of trauma is the victim's failure to contemplate the experience from a broad experience (p. 72). In this regard, Stephen has difficulty in accepting the truth that Kate is lost, and it is the crucial point of his permanent acting out of the traumatic experience because his trauma is active in his unconscious like "a haunting ghost" (Caruth, 1995, p. 17) and his disapproval of his daughter's being lost makes the traumatic effect deeper "in connection with another place and time" (Caruth, 1995, p. 17).

Stephen's post-traumatic perception of time is represented by anachronic events and flashbacks in the novel. The local pub called "The Bell" seems familiar to him even though he has never been there. Moreover, he encounters his parents before he is born and realizes that the couple, whom he sees in The Bell, are "beyond question" his parents (McEwan, 1992, p. 142). This confounding coincidence makes the reader interrogate the subjectivity of time and its fluidity in consciousness dismantling itself from chronological order. He witnesses the "delicate reconstruction of another time" (McEwan,

1992, p. 136). Afterwards, his mother talks about a child in the window of The Bell she looked at on the day when she learnt about her pregnancy with Stephen and assumed that the child looking at her is her boy forty-four years earlier (McEwan, 1992, pp. 218-220). The miraculous anachronism which allows two distinct periods to exist together in the same space arouses the relativity of time in regards to perception. Moreover, he feels his parents himself walking on the road where they have walked without him a long time earlier than that day. The narrator calls that moment "a tapering echo" (McEwan, 1992, p. 517) coming from the past. Stephen's experiences in the classroom and in the window of The Bell indicate the temporal displacement in his traumatized consciousness. He finds himself out of context through confusion. On the same day as his conversation with his mum, he has sex with Julie from whom he was separated for a long time and he feels sure that "what was happening now, and what would happen as a consequence of now, was not separate from what he had experienced earlier that day" (McEwan, 1992, p. 152) asserting that time has a nonconsecutive form not a linear one in progress. It is apparent that as argued by Caruth, the traumatic incident is "fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (1995, p. 8). Therefore, the traumatic phenomenon constructs its own time, maintaining its impact both in the past and the present belatedly through distinct settings.

The subjectivity of time perception is represented through another of Stephen's experiences, which is "out of context" because of its abrupt nature, when he considers the moment of the collision between his car and a lorry on his way to visit Charles and Thelma. Although the event lasts for "no longer than five seconds" (McEwan, 1992, p. 229), he cannot make sense of passing time because of his focus on the moment of crisis. He thinks "what had happened to *time*, how duration shaped itself round the intensity of the event" (McEwan, 1992, p. 229, my emphasis). On the other hand, the driver who is stuck in the overturned lorry supposes he has been there for two or three hours, instead of merely ten or fewer minutes (McEwan, 1992, p. 242). The narrator notes "the rapidity of events [which] was accommodated by the slowing of time" (McEwan, 1992, p. 225) underlining the contradictory perception of time for the driver who is stuck in the overturned lorry and Stephen who narrowly escapes injury in the accident. Time makes progress in distinct paces for both the men. Stephen's perception of time indicates the subjective representation of the time concept which varies in post-traumatic consciousness. Stephen feels lost within the discordance of time. Thus, time becomes "the promise of teasing paradox" through "sheer difficulty, the indignity of coming up against the limitations of one's intellectual reach" (McEwan, 1992, p. 289)

throughout the novel. In this respect, he is, indeed, "the child in time," suggested in the title of the novel.

The burden under which Stephen is overwhelmed after Kate's disappearance is combined with the loss of his best friend Charles. Unlike Stephen, Charles is an adult who cannot balance his lost childhood, which he regresses to, and his current life. Morrison compares and contrasts the difference between the situation of the two men and notes: "Whilst Stephen oscillates between obsession and catatonia, Charles ventures into a different universe of fantasy and nostalgia" (2003, p. 72). His post-traumatic life indicates how the traumatic memory is, in Caruth's words, "engrave[d] on the mind or etch[ed] into the brain" (1995, p. 153). "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). Charles fails to gain a critical distance from his past, rather becomes embedded in the world of fantasy which he creates to be inhabited in. His traumatic childhood seems to survive actively in his memory, in Freudian terms, as "an agent that is still at work" (Freud & Breuer, 2008, p. 56). He desires to get free of the limitation of adulthood including "money, decisions, plans, demands" (McEwan, 1992, p. 493) and intends to reverse time to embrace the innocence, spontaneity and simplicity of childhood which he cannot live as a motherless boy. He leaves London's city life, the representative of civilization, for the rural one, representing nature where he lets the child inside him free spending time like a child in the woods all day. He also replaces his wife Thelma with his mother whose death seems to have traumatized him as a twelve-year-old child leading him to have a traumatized self as a "child who could not have everything" (McEwan, 1992, p. 500). In this respect, his regression in time resembles Tom's regression to babyhood in *The Cement Garden*. Tom's situation represents Freud (1995)'s note that trauma is "fixed in the mind and not altered by the passage of time, or the intervention of subsequent experience" (p. 172). Tom compensates for the absence of his mother with his elder sister Julie and his babyish manners to repress his anguish and recover his unhappiness. He leaves his political career after the delayed reappearance of his traumatic childhood causing his loss of connection to reality. He asserts that "[c]hildhood is timeless. It's always the present. Everything is in the present tense" (McEwan, 1992, p. 74) because, at the age of 49, he resumes his childhood in casual clothes playing in his treehouse in the woods. The non-linearity of time is also confirmed by Charles's physicist wife, Thelma, who argues that despite common knowledge of time proceeding from the past through the present to the future, "[t]ime is variable…There's no absolute, generally recognized 'now'" (McEwan, 1992, p. 286).

In this regard, Stephen realizes that time is relative, fluid and variable; however, its damages are irreversible as he cannot get Kate back, and Charles cannot get his mother and childhood back causing traumatized impacts on the individual.

As for Stephen's wife Julie's response to Kate's loss, Julie undergoes, in LaCapra's term, "aporia, an endless mourning, impossible mourning, and resistance to working through" (2001, p. 23) by sitting all day watching TV with blank eyes. After the mourning phase, she faces Kate's absence and clears off her belongings which indicates the resignation from her trauma. After a short time, she prefers isolating himself from anything that reminds her of Kate and her loss, thus moves to the Chilterns where she leads a peaceful and lonesome life without technological devices such as a phone because, as argued by Etkind (2015), "[m]ourning merges with warning, shaping a temporal zone of indistinction, which combines the past and the future in a joint effort to obscure the present" (p. 256), and it helps her overcome a deteriorating traumatic impact on her life. She seems to have relieved her grief by accepting Kate's loss and finds a way out through "the idea of the new baby" (McEwan, 1992, p. 527) to restore their exhausted relationship, interrupted after Kate's loss. As Seaboyer (2005) argues, the baby signifies "a repetition with a difference of the biological mystery of love and changeful continuity that signals a shift away from melancholia" (p. 26).

Unlike Julie, Stephen remains in the phase of denial in relation to his trauma and evaluates her behavior as "a feminine self-destructiveness, a willful defeatism" (McEwan, 1992, p. 53). He evaluates Julie's grief as "the near ecstatic suffering" (McEwan, 1992, p. 55). He wanders around looking for Kate everywhere all day with a notice of loss in his hand, in a way, has "anaesthetised himself with [that] activity" (McEwan, 1992, p. 52), daydreaming or gazing at his hands for hours. He spends his days on these sedative activities negating Kate's loss. In time, he becomes "the father of an invisible child" (McEwan, 1992, p. 13) because he imagines Kate's presence with himself, remaining indifferent to the outer world. His way of responding to the trauma is similar to Jack's in *The Cement Garden* because both of them revert their crises to "a state of torpor" (Williams, 1996, p. 223). Thus, Stephen is controlled by the "weight of time" (McEwan, 1992, p. 32) until he works through his trauma. His approach to the process of working through his trauma is indicated in the narrator's words: "Stephen came to feel that if he had not exorcised his obsession, he had blunted it. He was beginning to face the difficult truth that Kate was no longer a living presence [...]. He had been mad, now he felt purged" (McEwan, 1992, p. 374). Moreover, when the Lewis couple, who are estranged

from each other for a long time, recognize their "diminished family" with Kate's absence by "cry[ing] together at last for the lost, irreplaceable child who would not grow older for them" (McEwan, 1992, p. 529), they undergo the process of working through trauma towards the arrival of a newly born child and improve a critical distance to their trauma both by acknowledging their loss of Kate and surviving this overwhelming situation with "the possibility of her return" one day (McEwan, 1992, p. 529). Their critical distance to their trauma helps them to welcome a new baby standing out as a representative of their reunion as parents and the commencement of a new order of life with another "beautiful child" (McEwan, 1992, p. 542).

Another impact which enables Stephen to overcome his enduring post-traumatic disruption impeding the flow of his life is writing. Literature has a healing impact on the traumatized subject. Onega explicates it through the capability of the narrative to bestow meaning upon the events in ordered and comprehensive temporal terms, and this aids the traumatized reader or author in the process of "working through" it (2011, p. 84). Like Sue, who handles dissociation resulting from her trauma by writing, Stephen confronts his childhood through his book *Lemonade*. Charles says to him that it is for Stephen himself: "It was your ten-year-old self that you addressed. 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" (McEwan, 1992, p. 74). Writing helps traumatic survivors get rid of being trapped between the traumatic reality and its re-enactment by "literally transfer[ing] it to another outside oneself and take[ing] it back again, inside" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 69) to face the trauma. Slay argues that Stephen's children's novel is a way of making his own lost childhood reversible (1991, p. 234). While *Lemonade* aids Stephen to defeat the overwhelming impacts of his trauma, it makes its reader, Charles, choose to compensate for his unhappy childhood and regress in time into childhood. In this regard, writing helps Stephen face the truth that Kate's absence and his childhood belong to the past, but his self is in the present. Thus, he achieves working through his trauma, and he can welcome his new-born baby merrily.

Thus, *The Child in Time* associates Stephen's search for his lost daughter with his own and his friend Charles's traumatized childhoods because they attempt to face or compensate for their losses in a way. The dissociative traumatized memory of the traumatized characters hinders them from distinguishing not only between the past and the present but also between the self and the outer world. The truth they act out

becomes their obstacle in continuing their lives, as observed through Stephen's initial traumatic responses and Charles's failure in struggling against his traumatized perception. Considering the characters' post-traumatic experiences, while like Jack and Julie in *The Cement Garden*, Charles proceeds into his tragic end by being stuck in his traumatic past, Stephen and Julie's later attempts at working through their traumatic experience enable them to connect with the present and the outer world once again. Like Sue, who appears to survive her trauma by means of keeping a diary in *The Cement Garden*, Stephen also recovers his distorted association with his trauma by writing a children's book, thus reconciling with his trauma.

Conclusion

Trauma is one of the research areas which is currently being investigated, and which still has a great void to fill. Trauma fiction attempts to articulate the complicated traumatized worlds of people. In this respect, as trauma novels, McEwan's *The Cement Garden* and *The Child in Time* reflect elusive traumatic experiences and post-traumatic lives in different aspects by fragmentary narration in accordance with the traumatized characters' dissociative memory. While *The Cement Garden* portrays trauma in a domestic and claustrophobic sense, *The Child in Time* broadens the angle illuminating different lives revolving around traumas related to children and childhood. Caruth's and LaCapra's theories of trauma illuminate the traumatized characters' distorted perception of the self and time in both novels. From Caruth and LaCapra's approach, the critical reading of the two novels reveals that there is a close relationship between trauma and the perception of the self and time. The critical approach to the characters' response to their traumas concludes that trauma disrupts people's perception of time and the self, resulting in their loss of connection with the outer world and temporality. When traumatized individuals fail to work through their traumas, their distorted perception of the self and time also makes them act out their traumas deteriorating their lives.

The analyses of the novels also indicate that the traumatized individual's modified structure of their timeless and fragmented memories, because of the trauma reality, affect their altered perception of the self and time, and that writing has a healing impact on the traumatized perception enabling the traumatized subject to work through the traumatic experience through restoring the impaired perception of the self and time. The critical reading of *The Cement Garden* and *The Child in Time* in the context of trauma theory reveals that it is the traumatized subjects' individual effort that determines

whether they can overcome or be defeated by the aggravating impacts of trauma. The increasingly overwhelming traumatic impact, against which they cannot prevail, may turn their lives into tragedy, or the traumatized subjects can embrace a hopeful life through reconciliation with their traumatic reality.

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