

Portrayal of Mental Illness: Characterization in Ian McEwan's Short Stories ('Homemade', 'Solid Geometry', 'Butterflies')

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Abstract

The article aims to examine the portrayal of mental illness in three character-narrators of the selected Ian McEwan short stories from his collection 'First Love, Last Rites'. By taking the psychiatric diagnostic criteria as the methodical basis for the analysis, this article traces how and to what extent do characters' actions, words and behavior correspond to the symptoms ascribed to one of the mental illnesses in question. Thus, the article explores how through the ways of direct and indirect characterization Ian McEwan creates complex images of the characters that suffer from mental illness and closely examines how such a complicated topic is reflected in the three short stories that were chosen for the analysis. Furthermore, through close reading the article attempts to show the intricate design of the characters and the stories in general, that in complex create a powerful and detailed image, and provide an angle for viewing the influence of mental illness on one's life.

Keywords: characterization, mental illness, psychoanalysis, first-person narration

1. Introduction

Many of Ian McEwan's stories are filled with difficult, often strange events, frequently involving perspectives on human psyche in the face of adverse circumstances. A collection of author's earliest works 'First Love, Last Rites' contains a number of stories that are particularly interesting in regard of their portrayal of human mind. In some of these short stories, characters' thoughts and actions raise a question whether or not those characters are psychologically stable, which contributes to the general effect that the narratives create.

Out of the short stories that are included in Ian McEwan's 'First Love, Last Rites', three have been chosen for the analysis: 'Homemade', 'Butterflies' and 'Solid Geometry'. They are, undoubtedly, very different, but there is a feature that unites the three main characters of these stories—all of them partake in immoral, normally unacceptable activities ranging from pedophilia to murder, and in one way or another the stories suggest that these characters might be suffering from mental illness. As it is stated in Sebastian Groes's (2009) 'Ian McEwan. Contemporary Critical Perspectives': 'McEwan strives to make his work revolting and aims to trigger the reader's rejection of it by confronting him or her with the promise of incestuous rape' (or, assumingly, of other questionable actions) (18). The way in which McEwan creates characters and stories that provoke such powerful emotions of revulsion and disgust is, therefore, in the focus of this article, as well as the portrayal of mental illness, that, as will be shown, correlates accurately in many ways with the psychiatric definitions and parameters.

Thus, the main objective of this analysis is to examine characterization in three chosen short stories in order to establish how Ian McEwan creates complex images of human psyche, and to attempt to demonstrate how mental illness is presented through the narrators.

The article is divided into two sections: the first one mainly focuses on characterization that is built by characters' own thoughts, feelings and actions, and it attempts to demonstrate that all three characters have mental problems which drive the events in the narrative; the second section is dedicated to other aspects of characterization that contribute to the construct of character and enhancement of the effect of characters' actions.

The analysis is conducted taking as its basis the diagnostic criteria that are used in psychiatric practice and the 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (III)', issued by the American Psychiatric Association is a primary source of information on symptoms, characteristics of and diagnostic criteria for the mental disorders

that are discussed in the course of interpretation. The approach that is taken to the analysis in this article is to track those instances and signs in the narrator-character's behavior that match or fit the medical criteria for the diagnostic of particular mental illnesses. This method is used to uncover ways in which Ian McEwan creates such complex characters, as well as to explore the correlations between the three narrators and the mental illness.

2. Characters and Mental Illness

The stories by Ian McEwan often provide insights into complicated, morbid situations that are by no means pleasant. The main question to be answered in this section is: do the main characters of these stories suffer from mental illness and if their behaviors correspond to official diagnostic criteria that are established in psychiatry? By the means of detailed analysis of their thoughts, feelings and actions it is attempted to demonstrate how the mentally unstable characters are created.

2.1 'Homemade'

The first and, probably, the most complicated case of the three is a character/narrator in the 'Homemade'.

The first-person narration of this story is conducted by a character in his mature years, while the story itself is concerned with his memories of the events that had happened when he was fourteen years old. This way of narration opens the opportunity to analyze the character in more detail, since the reader is provided not only the details of his past actions, but can also rely on the judgments of these actions from the character's present, older self. In narrator's recollection of his juvenile years, it can be seen that from a young age he has been indulging in various questionable activities such as alcohol and drug abuse, occasional violence, shoplifting and more, all this progressing under the influence of the character's friend—Raymond. The pinnacle of character's immoral actions is the focus of the short story—the rape of his ten-year-old sister.

The character of this story displays features that are characteristic for antisocial personality disorder which is defined as 'pervasive disregard for and violation of rights of others occurring before 15 years of age' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2083). According to official diagnostic parameters, three or more features have to be present in an individual in order to suggest antisocial personality disorder, and, as it will be subsequently shown, the character displays seven of them, along with several associated features that sometimes occur in persons with this disorder.

First two features can be analyzed together: 'failure to conform to social norms' and 'deceitfulness, including lying and conning others for personal profit or pleasure' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2083). The narrator's recollections of his childhood start with descriptions of the things that he and Raymond used to do together, namely: drinking, smoking cigarettes and marijuana, shoplifting, hurling rocks 'at the couples fucking in the arbor' (25). As narrator himself puts it: 'I smoked about ten cigarettes a day, I drank whisky when it was available, I had a connoisseur's taste for violence and obscenity, I had smoked the heady resin of cannabis sativa...' (24). While these activities could be viewed as mere teenage ignorance and curiosity, in complex they become alarmingly close to deviant behavior, especially the named taste for violence and involvement in persistent criminal activity for personal gain.

It can be inferred from the first two pages of the story that the character does not hesitate to partake in all sorts of socially unacceptable for his age activities, and he also frequently lies to others with no apparent shame. Lying and pretending can be noticed in the character's relationships with most of others including Raymond, his parents and family etc.

Further two diagnostic features can also be examined close together: 'irritability' and 'irresponsibility' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2083). As to irritability, the character displays plenty of instances of immediate irritation and annoyance at moments where anything does not happen according to his wishes. The most prominent examples of this can be found in the scenes of the evening that he spends with his sister. As one of the examples: 'I was beginning to lose my temper with Connie, with myself, with the universe, but mostly with my underpants which snaked determinedly round my ankles' (35). Adding further to character's emotional instability is his proneness to violence and tendencies to mockery, along with his irregular emotional reactions.

There is little need to discuss the issue of 'irresponsibility' at length because apart from theft, substance abuse, truancy and violent behavior the character intentionally rapes his little sister while being left to babysit her.

Moreover, there are such features as 'impulsivity or failure to plan ahead' and 'recklessness, with disregard for safety of self and others' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2083). Both of these features, once again, can be clearly traced from the example of the episode with character's sister. In the course of one evening, starting with dinner, the character, stimulated by his fear of failure with other girls, decides to rape his sister, but he fails to plan his actions thoroughly or execute the decision properly, as he makes three attempts and almost gives up on his intention twice before the actual act.

First of all, it took the character only the time he had to walk up the stairs in order to decide that he would rape his sister, but as soon as his first poorly thought-out plan with playing hide-and-seek failed, he turns straight to violence ('to relieve my feelings I kicked her shins') and then proceeds to 'considering forgetting the whole plan' (32). Secondly, he then comes up with a new plan involving the game of 'Mummies and Daddies', but it is also abandoned by him quickly, as it does not serve his purpose well. The character gives up on his attempts at the first signs that everything may not go as simply as he imagined it to be, and, eventually, he sits 'on the edge of the bed to consider my hopeless failure' (36). His emotional instability and impulsivity are most clearly seen in the last few minutes before the rape, and in the speed with which he changes his mind. After his initial failure, he 'sat there... numbed by this final humiliation into the realization that this was no real girl beside me, this was no representative of that sex... it was my sister, after all' (36). Soon after, in fact, in the next paragraph, his sister revives his hopes to finish his attempt and in the next moment character's mood changes radically to: 'I forgot my sister and my prick rose inquisitively' (37).

As to the matter of recklessness with no regard to the safety of others, the character's actions in raping his sister with barely any regard to consequences or the destructive influence it would have on her are self-evident. The only time when he considers possible retribution for his actions before actually raping Connie, the character is focused only on unpleasant nuisances for himself: 'that [Connie telling their father everything] would mean a scene of some sort, laborious lies to invent, shouting and crying and that sort of thing...' (31). It is obvious from this quote that the character displays not only irresponsibility, detachment and egoism, but also complete incomprehension of the seriousness of his planned action and its potential outcomes.

The episode with the rape has been also interpreted, as an example, by Jeannette Baxter (2009) as the "'sensibility", of course, [that] is stripped of emotion, to reveal an ugly core of base human emotion' (34). This view, however, may be put to question, because, despite character's impulsivity and changeability, his persistent attempts to plan the rape show the presence of certain calculation and, thus, make it impossible to justify his actions with a reason such as 'base human emotion'.

Lastly and most importantly, one of the substantial features that characterizes persons with antisocial personality disorder is the 'lack of remorse, indicated by indifference or rationalization of having hurt, mistreated or stolen from others' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2083). First and foremost, it should be mentioned that in recounting his memories the narrator does not give any indication that he ever regretted his past actions such as theft and others, as well as that he provides quite a few clear instances of his complete indifference and emotional rigidity to other humans including his parents. Of the main interest here, however, is the character's attitude towards the matter of rape. As Dominic Head (2009) notes, '... narrator fails to pass judgment on his scheme to rape his sister' (35). Nor, moreover, does his fourteen-year-old self feel any guilt for his actions at the time.

The character's feelings on the committed rape are indicated at the very beginning of the story: '...while I filled the sink with warm water and whistled—such was my elation' and, in the end: '...I was pleased with it [sex], myself, Connie, pleased to let things rest a while, to let the matter drop' (21, 37). Needless to say, these expressions demonstrate that character hardly feels any guilt for his action.

This lack of remorse can be viewed together with the character's general attitude towards his sister, after, as well as, before rape. He views her indifferently, with barely any emotion. As an example, as he watches her play, his thought is: 'It was almost a shame I had it in mind to rape her' (34). Even here, the word 'almost' emphasizes his insensitivity and detachment, and neutralizes the possible admission of guilt of the wrongness of his plan. Furthermore, the character's reaction to his sister's tears is of note, as on multiple occasions his thoughts are such as: 'I found the noise depressing after a while so I went downstairs' and, immediately after the rape: '...she began to cry. Hardly noticing, I got up and started to get dressed' (32, 37). Thus, not only does the character not experience any remorse straight after the rape, but from the narration it can be inferred that, even in his older years, he does not feel guilt for what he had done.

Apart from the noted indifference to others and to the consequences of his actions, rationalization of character's actions can be found in the story. In the opening lines of the 'Homemade' the narrator, from the point of his older years, states that:

'but only lately have I fully realized that... it was Raymond who occupied, so to speak, the beginning and the middle [of the episode], and if in human affairs there are no such things as episodes then I should really insist that this story is about Raymond and not about virginity, coitus, incest and self-abuse' (21).

Here, the narrator displaces the focus of the story, for one, and, secondly, attempts to transfer the responsibility, to shift the attention from his own role in the events. The rationalization of and distancing from the reality of his action are also present further in the narrative, as on multiple occasions the narrator stresses that the story is

either about Raymond or, as he calls the intercourse with Connie, ‘only one fuck’, but does not focus on the implications or consequences of the rape. In addition to this, from the character’s perspective the purpose of rape is distorted, since the first impulse for doing it rises from his fear of embarrassing himself with the ‘real girl’ and, as he mentions sex to Connie, he gives an interesting formulation of his purpose: “‘Fuck?’” [asked Connie]. On her lips the word sounded strangely meaningless, which in a way I suppose it was, as far as I was concerned. The whole idea was to give it some meaning’ (34). This, in turn, makes it seem like the character, once again, turns the attention away from his own selfish motives, by displacing the purpose of his action.

Lastly, apart from the seven diagnostic features mentioned above, there are two others that are sometimes associated with the disorder in question and that the character of ‘Homemade’ displays: ‘lack of empathy, cynicism, and contempt for feelings, rights or suffering of others’ and ‘inflated or arrogant self-appraisal’ (Sadock, 2005, p. 2084). Many examples have already been provided, that support the first feature, as to the second one, there are two things of note. One is narrator’s recollections of how he mocked the hardships of others’ lives and out of feeling of his own superiority: ‘I used to laugh when I thought of the twelve-hour shift my father worked in the flour mill... I laughed because I knew that a good afternoon’s work in the bookshop earned more than they scraped together in a week’ (27). The second one is the character’s feelings during sex:

‘...if my wishes had been granted, I would have had all my friends, all people I knew, file through the bedroom to catch me in my splendid pose... I felt proud to be fucking, even if it were only Connie...’ (37).

This passage discloses several traits simultaneously: the character’s vanity, wish to be acknowledged, praised, and also his complete disregard for his sister.

As it has been demonstrated, through the exposition of both character’s mind in his older years and in his teenage years Ian McEwan creates a character that is an exemplary representative of a person with majority of the features typically ascribed to antisocial personality disorder in psychiatric practice. Therefore, it can be proposed that the character is not merely an average teenager lured into immoral actions by his friend and his desperate wish to enter the world of adults, but the individual suffering from the progressing mental disorder, which is supported by numerous textual cues and narration in general.

2.2 ‘Solid Geometry’

Being less extreme than the character of ‘Homemade’, the character/narrator of ‘Solid Geometry’ generally gives more stable impression of himself. Nevertheless, in the end of the story he sends his wife to the ‘plane with no surface’, which, considering that it is done against her will and causes her to disappear completely, can in other words be equaled to murder (15). Generally, the character’s behavior can be viewed as an effect of tension and long deterioration of his marriage, resulting in his wish to get rid of his wife, but in close reading a pattern emerges, that allows to suspect that he is, too, not in the perfectly stable psychological state.

In the course of the short story, the character displays certain behavioral features that in diagnostic terms are ascribed to the schizoid personality disorder, that is, ‘a pervasive pattern of social detachment and a restricted range of expressed emotions in interpersonal settings’ (Sadock, 2005, p. 2083). To suggest this disorder, at least four of the diagnostic features must be present, and the character displays five of them to some extent.

There are two closely related features that are notable in the character: ‘preference for solitary activity’ and ‘pleasure experienced in few, if any, activities’ (Sadock, 2005, p. 2081). Throughout the whole story, the character is preoccupied solely with one activity – editing his great-grandfather’s journals with intention to publish them. The narrator himself describes his afternoons as follows: ‘Usually I was going through old newspapers, compiling indexes, cataloguing items, putting down this volume, picking up another’ (5). From another perspective, character’s excessive involvement in his ancestor’s work is portrayed through his wife’s words: ‘...all you have is books. Crawling over the past like a fly on a turd’ (11).

It can be inferred from the text as a whole, as well as from the narrator’s own admission that ‘All I wanted to do was turn the next page of my great-grandfather’s diary’, that he indeed does not receive much pleasure from any activities other than working on the journals, which is subsequently proven with the progression of plot (13).

Relevant to the aspect of pleasure, is the next diagnostic feature—‘lack of interest in sexual interactions’, and, furthermore, two others: ‘lack of desire or pleasure in close relationships’, ‘emotional coldness, detachment or flattened affectivity’ (Sadock, 2005, p. 2081). The first feature does not need to be inferred from the text, as there is a direct display of the character’s indifference towards sex, and then there is an outward admission of his lack of sexual desire. In one episode, when his wife comes in, interrupting the character’s studies, and offers him to go to the bedroom, he refuses, with the following thought: ‘I felt no desire for Maisie or any other woman’

(13). The most notable aspect in this admission is that the character is apparently indifferent to all women, that, in turn, makes it impossible to ascribe his lack of sexual desire solely to his failing marriage.

The last two of aforementioned features are closely linked and pervasive in the character's relationship with his wife—there is an undeniable lack of pleasure between them, and his attitude towards her is cold and detached. There are many instances where the character's lack of affection is apparent, such as: 'I had little sympathy for her'; 'I tried to prevent my resentment towards Maisie filling my mind' and so on (6, 15). There is also narrator's recollection of an instance of physical violence, where he first provoked his wife into hitting him and then quite calmly (as indicated by: 'I picked up the shoe and stood quietly and patiently outside the bathroom') hit her in return (7).

The progressive deterioration of the marriage culminates, in a way, when Maisie, driven by emotions and lack of attention from her husband, breaks a jar with Captain Nicholls's genitalia that has high emotional value for the character. Then, a particularly interesting passage occurs:

'... as I looked at her my resentment merged into a familiar weariness of our marriage. I thought, why did she break the glass? Because she wanted to make love? Because she wanted a penis? Because she was jealous of my work, and wanted to smash the connection it had with my great-grandfather's life?' (18).

A few prominent aspects can be noticed here, such as the character's immediate negative reaction to his wife as well as his general frustration with their marriage. Moreover, there are signs of de-realization, a misunderstanding of the actual circumstances by the character, as he ascribes the wrong motives to his wife's actions.

Following Maisie's outburst and destruction of a jar, the character responds with a quite radical reaction—using his grand-grandfather's method to, essentially, make his wife disappear. This action, however, has not been done under a sudden influence of emotion, since the character had decided to do it a few hours before the event itself occurred, as can be seen from the following: 'I hesitated, and then, because my weariness had blossomed into a sudden resolution... to be as kind as I possibly could be to Maisie that evening' (19). The character's last gesture of attention and kindness as he spends the evening with his wife in a pleasant way, does not cancel out that the "murder" of his wife has been intentional and pre-planned, an act of revenge much similar to the instance to their first 'exchange of blows' (7). The action of making one's wife disappear against her will can hardly be regarded as normative behavior, even if the character did it partially as a scientific experiment.

In the behavior and emotional reactions of the character some aspects may be explained by the difficulties in his marriage, but the close analysis of the information provided in the narrative exposes a set of characteristic features that are evident in a person with schizoid personality disorder. Through specific thoughts and reactions of the narrator, the character is created, that can arouse a specter of different emotions in the reader, from sympathy, to bemusement.

2.3 'Butterflies'

The third character in this analysis is the character/narrator of 'Butterflies'. While with the previous two characters direct links could be drawn to certain mental disorders, the character of the last short story is more complicated in this regard. Since the first-person narration is focused on the recent demise of a nine-year-old girl and the character's thoughts are mainly occupied with this event and he is, in fact, the killer, his psychological state before the murder can only be inferred from his recollections. Since the character is recounting recent events of a murder that has been committed with no previous planning and was much defined by the circumstances, it is hard to define to which extent he is influenced by this traumatic experience or rather mental illness.

There are, however, certain traits and aspects, that can be found in the character that are characteristic of borderline personality disorder which is generally defined as 'pervasive and excessive instability of affects, self-image and interpersonal relationships, as well as marked impulsivity' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2085). In order to suspect the presence of this disorder five or more diagnostic features have to be found in an individual, and the character of 'Butterflies' does possess five of the features.

The evidence of the first feature—'unstable and intense interpersonal relationships with alternating between idealization and devaluation', can mostly be inferred from the text (Sadock, 2005, p. 2085). The character seems to be a somewhat extreme example of the case, since it becomes obvious from the story that there are no close interpersonal relationships in the character's life. The direct confirmation of this can be seen in: 'No one had touched me intentionally like that for a long time, not since I was a child' and 'I had never touched another person's lips before' (65, 67). Apart from a few mentions of the character's mother, there appear to be no

interpersonal relationships in his life.

During the brief connection, however, that the character develops with the little girl before killing her, his attitude towards her can indeed be described as one changing rapidly from idealization to devaluation. At the beginning, when their encounter is starting, the character's thoughts are of such nature: 'I wanted her to be my friend', 'I thought of nothing but of how to keep her with me' (64, 68). As soon as he got the pleasure that he wanted from her, though, there is a quick change from admiration to 'I no longer wanted to touch her' and calling her 'silly girl' right before pushing her into the canal (71).

The following two features are also relevant to one's changeability and they are 'instability of affect due to reactivity of mood', along with 'inappropriately intense anger or difficulty controlling anger' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2085). There are various occasions where the character's instability is noticeable in the course of his walk with Jane. However, the most self-evident example of the both features is the character's reactions and decisions when the girl did not want to walk with him anymore. It is indicated in the text that 'I had no idea what was going to happen when we came to the end of the path. She would want to run home, and I just knew I could not let her go' (70). Soon after this, when the girl starts crying, the character forces her into the tunnel and, as it seems, suddenly decides to make her touch his penis. When she resists, his anger is excessive as he 'took her in both hands and shook her hard and shouted' (71). As it can be seen, the character's emotions are unstable, subject to rapid change and his anger reactions are rather intense, as for an average person.

The next feature is 'chronic feeling of emptiness', which can only be supposed from the information about the character's lifestyle. From what he discloses in his thoughts, he does not have a job, does not have close people, and much of his time is occupied by the walks with no obvious destination or goal, which, altogether suggests a rather pointless existence devoid of emotion and purpose.

Finally, the last feature is 'stress-related, transient paranoid ideation or dissociative symptoms' (Sadock, 2005, p. 2085). For this, the supporting evidence can be found in the text itself from the repeating thoughts of the character. The character is preoccupied with recurrent thoughts about everyone else suspecting him of murder that are verging on paranoid. In almost every interaction recounted in the story, the character makes a point out of asserting that people suspect him of something: his neighbor Charlie, police sergeants, and even the women in the hospital whom the character does not know, which render in him such reaction as: 'They suspected me of something, they always do' (61). On top of that, the character is convinced that: 'I am a suspicious-looking person, I know, because I have no chin... My chin and my neck are the same thing, and it breeds distrust' (59). This particular quote first of all demonstrates character's paranoid tendencies, as well as an alarming sign of misinterpretation of reality as indicated by his belief that his chin is the reason of people's mistrust.

In addition to the associated features, there also are two other factors that support the foundation to suspect the character of suffering of mental illness—one of the predisposing factors for borderline personality disorder and the typical impairment resulting from it. As indicated in the disorder's specifics, the predisposing factor for its development are early traumatic experiences. The presence of such experiences in the character's early life can only be suspected from a few references and can be traced back to his mother. In his thoughts on him being a suspicious-looking person, he notes: 'My mother's [chin] was like that, too. Only after I had left home did I find her grotesque. She died last year' (59). This is the first instance in the text where the character is referencing and comparing himself to his mother, but not the last one. It is also noticeable here how the information of her death is given as part of a series of dry, slightly inconsequential statements. Following this, the character reveals his attitude to his mother even more and at the same time draws another parallel: 'And when my mother died, I stayed away, from indifference, mainly, and a distaste for my relatives... I imagine my death to be something like hers' (60). There is a peculiar contradiction between the character's stated indifference to his mother and the randomly appearing references to their likeness. From what can be gathered from the text, there is a possibility to suppose that character's childhood could have been marked by traumatic experiences.

Moreover, the impairment that typically results from borderline personality disorder is described as 'considerable interference with social or occupational functioning', which corresponds to the character's lack of job or relationships (APA, 1980, p. 22).

The complicating issue in this character's case is that the character also shows signs of suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder which is 'a severe psychological reaction to intensely traumatic events' (Alloy, 2005, p. 157). The main symptom of this disorder is re-experiencing the traumatic event, either in painful recollection or nightmares. From the very structure of the story or, in other words, the course of character's thoughts it becomes obvious that he cannot refrain from going back to thinking about the girl and the murder. At times, rather free associations bring him back to the thoughts about the event, as example: 'It [water] tasted

metallic. It reminded me of the stainless-steel table they put the little girl on, her corpse' (59). In complex with the haunting paranoid thoughts, this constant return to the memories of the murder signals of a possible PTSD. According to the sources on abnormal psychology PTSD is comorbid with borderline personality disorder.

3. Complementary Aspects of Characterization

Apart from the character construct that emerges from the close analysis of the narrators' thoughts and actions, there are certain additional features that influence and complement the image and effect of the character. According to Rimmon-Kennan (2005), the indirect presentation of a character may include other characters' words to or about the character and one's external environment and landscape (63–72). Hence, this chapter will be concerned with such specifics as they are found in the three short stories and how they contribute to the general construct of the characters.

1) In the three stories in question, the other characters and the interactions with them are a rich source of additional information for characterization. The notable feature is that in all the analyzed stories each of the characters/narrators are juxtaposed with the female characters that share similar to each other traits such as vulnerability, defenselessness, susceptibility to influence and the need for attention.

In 'Butterflies' and 'Homemade' these female characters are little children, which only strengthens the effect of contrast with the main characters. Both girls, Jane and Connie, are naïve, curious, playful and majorly ignorant of the issues of the adult world.

In 'Homemade' the narrator himself describes Connie to be 'petulant, demanding, spoiled and want[ing] to play games all the time', by this, establishing an image of a careless, active and innocent child (31). In context of contrasting the characters for the enhancement of effect, the sequence of scenes in 'Homemade' should be distinguished, in particular, the two episodes of Connie playing 'Mummies and Daddies' and the rape scene straight after that, because such arrangement of events puts the images of childish 'ecstasy of it all' and the 'adult' rape into direct opposition (33).

Another issue of note regarding Connie is her complete ignorance of what is being done to her, despite some signs of suspicion on her part. The atrocity of the character's action is enhanced, again, by the contrast with his sister's inability to comprehend the event. As one of the examples: 'Connie was quite excited too, still delirious with the happiness of the game and pleased at the novel turn it was taking' which demonstrates that she has no idea of what is going to happen in reality (34).

Another child-character, Jane, the girl that the character murders in 'Butterflies' plays much the same role as Connie in strengthening the image of the character/narrator by means of juxtaposition. She is full of interest, is not afraid of strangers and, more importantly, is easily manipulated and susceptible to lies. The fact that she believes the character's lie that there are butterflies along the canal and follows him there, violating her parents' prohibition, shows her childish recklessness and ignorance of the danger she puts herself in. Such image of the child, which is lured along, molested and killed by the character only intensifies the feelings of revulsion and disgust, provoked by his actions in the reader.

While Maisie, the wife of the character in 'Solid Geometry' is not a child, she is, nevertheless, very sensitive, unlike her husband. Her sensitivity and desire for the character's attention are easily found in the text: she frequently suffers from nightmares, takes interest in psychology and Tarot because she wants 'to get [her] head straight' (9). Moreover, almost each husband-wife dialogue shows how her husband's coldness negatively influences her, as is apparent in her words: 'Why are you always trying me out?'; 'Why are you trying to make things worse for me?' (8, 10).

Thus, the importance of the female characters in these stories for characterization lies in the contrasting and enhancing the impression of the main characters' aloofness, coldness, detachment and strengthening the effect that their actions produce in the reader.

2) As to the role of the surrounding environment to the construction of the character, there are some points of note in the short stories that should be mentioned.

The richest in this aspect is 'Butterflies' where the descriptions of the character's surroundings greatly contribute to the events of the story and to the specifics of narrator's character in particular. The short story is filled with vivid descriptions, such as the portrayal of a group of boys apparently preparing to roast a cat alive, a depressing description of the mortuary and, most importantly, the image of the canal, along which the character walks with Jane and where he drowns her. The canal is described as a rather unpleasant place: 'brown stinking water running along the backs of factories... The path goes by an old scrap yard' and so on (66).

The special significance of the canal in the characterization in this story is the affection that the character has to it, despite all its obvious flaws. According to the character's words, he walks by the canal almost every day and he 'like[s] the canal and find[s] it less of a confinement there by the water than anywhere else in this part of town' (66). From this attachment to the seemingly revolting place another supporting conclusion can be drawn as to the strangeness and isolation of the character. In Rimmon-Kennan's (2005) terms, this example may be considered as reinforcement by analogy, since the canal can be interpreted along with the character himself.

Turning to 'Solid Geometry', the significance can be found in the two main locations as well as implications of one's attachment to them. The two recurring places in the course of the story are the bedroom, that can be seen as primarily Maisie's space, and the study, where the character spends the majority of his time. The study, where the character spends as much time as he can and where his desk is occupied with his great-grandfather's journals and a glass jar with Captain Nicholls's genitalia is suggestive of the character's preoccupation with his research, obsession with the past and estrangement from the family life.

Reinforcing this impression is the counter-image of the bedroom, where numerous verbal exchanges with Maisie happen and which the character rarely visits. At some point he himself notes: 'It was a long time since I had taken an interest in the bedroom' which can be interpreted as both his lack of sexual desire and as a spatial opposition to his study, which occupies all his interest (20).

Another detail of note, concerning environment's role in 'Solid Geometry', is found at the beginning of the story where the character notes: 'When my work is over, I will take a long holiday, travel somewhere cold and clean and treeless' (4). Right away, such preference exposes certain characteristics that are later supported by the text, as an example, the character's coldness and detachment.

Finally, 'Homemade' is distinguished by the image of home, where the character rapes his sister. Even though there is no special emphasis on the space, the descriptions of the home in passing and the fact that their location does not at the very least stop the character from incest, solidifies the image of him as inconsiderate, insensitive and reckless. Additionally, there is also an episode with the imaginary home, constructed during the game of 'Mummies and Daddies' that can be seen as the fictional analogy of the character's own home. In this light, his attitude towards it also becomes characteristic, since he describes the game as:

'the microcosm of the dreary, everyday, ponderous banalities, the horrifying, niggling details of the life of our parents and their friends, the life that Connie so dearly wanted to ape' (33).

Through the images of home and his attitude to it, too, the effect of character's symptomatic behavior is strengthened.

3) The very last components related to the characterization are the specific use of words and associations as well as the structural organization of all three stories.

There is a common trait for the stories in question and it is the abundant use of words and images of a revolting, unpleasant nature. That is, in 'Homemade' the character often lunges into recounting sequences such as: '... scratching and tearing, licking and shitting...of pus and swellings, cankers and regrets, of poisoned ovaries and destitute testicles...' (26). Each of such wanderings of thought is overflowing with negative adjectives, and overtly sexual and triggering images are mixed together, which does not mirror the narrator's character in a favorable way.

Even though 'Solid Geometry' contains a considerably smaller amount of repulsive associations, there is one episode of note—the character's associations while he looks at Captain Nichols's genitalia. His thoughts, at that moment, are abundantly full of images such as: 'the homunculi which swarmed down its length... dark and fetid inside of Captain Nicholls's leather breeches...' (14).

The most noticeable instances, in this context, of the 'Butterflies' is the implications behind the action of touching and the presentation of information at one particular moment. The touch plays a significant role in the events of the story and is brought up on many occasions. The character's recollection of his encounter with the police sergeant and, especially, his formulation: 'while he touched me, he had the power' may be a background to interpreting all subsequent occurrences of touching as a matter of power play (59). Such interpretation can also be supported by the character's following fixation on touching Jane, which, in turn, may be seen not as a mere fact of pedophilia, but as an attempt to attain power over her.

As to the specific presentation of information, I would like to distinguish the following: "'I want my mummy' [Jane cried]. I unzipped my fly' (70). This placement of the evidence of a child's vulnerability and the character's crudeness only intensifies the effect from the unfolding events.

At last, all the three stories are similar in a way of their narration, since the characters do not recount the events in a linear way, in each story there are frequent interruptions to the main chain of events. In 'Butterflies' the character is telling both the events of a present day and the day in the past when the murder has occurred, the narrative frequently and rapidly switches between the two days as the character's thoughts constantly span back to the past. Similarly, in a way, the narration in 'Solid Geometry' is split between the events at the character's home and the journal entries that he reads, the two also interchanging in a rather quick manner. Finally, 'Homemade' generally proceeds as the sequence of changing, sometimes disconnected thoughts and memories up to the point when it arrives to the evening of the rape which then develops in a mostly linear fashion for the exception of the occasionally straying thoughts of the character. For all the analyzed stories such way of narration creates the impression of a narrator that is inconsistent, unstable and, sometimes, unreliable.

4. Conclusion

The characterization in Ian McEwan's stories is intricate and employs various means of indirect presentation that allows an attentive reader to construct a complicated and rich image of each character. The first-person narration provides a deeper insight of the characters' mind and makes it possible to create rather complex characters through providing readers with their memories, thoughts, reactions and at the same time avoiding simple direct characterization.

As it has been shown in the course of this analysis, information and clues that are provided in each of the three stories make it possible to interpret the characters/narrators as each struggling with mental illnesses that impair their lives to some extent and influence their actions. The proposed interpretation that is based on the characters' actions and thoughts is richly supported by other aspects of indirect presentation and the specific organization of the narratives.

All the combined ways of characterization in Ian McEwan's stories and the images of the characters/narrators that emerge as a result, provide enough foundation to conclude that the main characters of 'Homemade', 'Solid Geometry' and 'Butterflies' display signs of mental illness and, therefore, with a complex means of characterization Ian McEwan creates vivid characters through which mental illness is represented in a distinctive way.

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