
A Study of Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*: Ethics of Empathic Care and the Healing of Personal Trauma

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Abstract: Ian McEwan, one of the foremost contemporary novelists in Britain, insists that empathy is at the core of humanity and is the beginning of morality. McEwan's concern for empathy and morality finds its expression in his novels. In *The Child in Time*, one of Ian McEwan's representative novels, the protagonist Stephen Lewis suffers the trauma of losing his three-year-old daughter. This paper argues how Stephen under the influence of empathic care received from Thelma and his mother, gradually steps out of his narcissistic concern with searching for his lost daughter to heal his personal trauma and finally reconciles with his estranged wife Julie to begin a new life through practicing ethics of empathic care in his life. Stephen emotionally connects with his parents and his wife through rendering his empathic understanding and empathic care for them. Stephen's empathic understanding for his friend Darke's tragic death due to his failure to develop an authentic and balanced self that combines the inner child qualities with adult qualities makes Stephen have deep reflection about the relationship between childhood and adulthood and modestly learn from his lost child Kate to enrich his human nature, which prepares him to further reconcile with Julie with empathy. In their empathic communication and care, the estrangement between Stephen and Julie since Kate's loss finally melts away. Fully recovered from the trauma of loss of their child, Stephen and Julie will continue to practice ethics of empathic care to heal everyone and everything, starting from themselves. What Ian McEwan promotes in *The Child in Time* is to practice ethics of empathic care in relationships, with hope of healing not only individuals but also communities, from families to the Government, the country and the planet.

Keywords: *The Child in Time*, Ethics of Empathic Care, Empathic Understanding, Trauma, Healing

1. Introduction

Ian McEwan, one of the foremost contemporary novelists in Britain, generally praised as "the most technically accomplished of all modern British writers [1]" has published sixteen novels so far, with the latest, *Machines Like Me* (2019), since he published his first short story collection *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), having received various Awards like the Somerset Maugham Award for *First Love, Last Rites* in 1976, the Whitbread Prize for *The Child in Time* in 1987, the Booker Prize for *Amsterdam* in 1998, the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award in 2002 for *Atonement*, the Paddy Power Political Fiction Book of the Year award in 2012 for *Sweet Tooth*. As his works in the early stage explore dark themes like incest, regression, pedophilia, Ian McEwan was once nicknamed by his critics as Ian "Macabre"[2]. *The Child in Time* published in 1987, marks "a watershed in

McEwan's fiction [3]", a shift from his concern with relationships in the closed private space to relationships in a broad social and political context, which has established his reputation in the contemporary British literary circle. Since its publication, critics have discussed the theme of childhood, time, the public policy and individual liberty, with little concern about the ethics of empathic care McEwan tries to promote in the novel.

McEwan believes that novel is a mode of enquiry into human nature. He insists that empathy—"to think oneself into the minds of others", "imaging what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity"[4]. It is the essence of compassion and it is the beginning of morality [4]. McEwan's concern for empathy and morality finds its expression in his novels. The relations between deficiency in empathy and the emergence of violent behaviors are demonstrated in novels of *The Innocent*, *Black*

Dogs. The relationship between empathizing with others and the ethical existence of the self is examined in *The Child in Time*, *Atonement* and *Saturday*. McEwan in these novels explores the way the characters transform from a lack of empathetic concern to the enhancement of empathy for others. These protagonists are on their way to approaching an ethical existence by showing the empathetic understanding and empathetic care of others. Specifically *In Child In Time*, the protagonist Stephen Lewis suffers the trauma of having her three year old child stolen from a supermarket, first abandons himself in the misery, purposeless in life except for narcissistic concern for searching for the lost child, finally recovers from his trauma through practicing the ethics of empathetic care in his life. This paper argues how the protagonist Stephen *In Child In Time* heals his personal trauma through rendering empathetic care to others in light of the theory concerning empathy and ethics of empathetic care.

2. A Brief Survey of Empathy and Ethics of Empathetic Care

The emphasis on the moral function of empathy can be dated back to David Hume and Adam Smith in the 18th century. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie give an account of the long tradition of work on empathy in philosophy and psychology, which can be dated back to David Hume and Adam Smith in the 18th century. David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) invoked the concept of sympathy to describe a psychological mechanism that enables the fast and instantaneous spread of emotion. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie point out that what Hume called the process of sympathy is the same or at least very similar to what we call low –level empathy. Adam Smith (1723-1790) took up Hume’s concept of sympathy and revised it to be the basis of his moral theory. Smith’s concept of sympathy is different from Hume’s concept in that it involves imaginative perspective-taking, similar to what we call high- level empathy [5]. Since then some philosophers in phenomenology, psychologists and theorists of the ethics of care have stressed the importance of empathy in human life. Kohut defines empathy as, “the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person” [6]. Care ethics developed in the 1980s as a challenge to traditional principle-based ethical theories. Proponents of care ethics argue that moral thought and action require both reason and emotion, as well as attention to the needs of particular others. Many care theorists identify empathy as an important element in ethical life. Nel Noddings holds that care is closely related to empathy since caring means attending to the specific needs of particular others and attempting to understand situations from the other’s point of view [5]. For Philosopher Michael Slote, care motivation is based in and sustained by empathy [7]. These theorists’ emphasis on empathy in ethics of care corresponds to what Ian McEwan attempts to promote in *In Child In Time*, in that the protagonist who suffers trauma of losing his three-year-old daughter in a supermarket in an

alienated society first abandons himself to the grief, estranged from his wife and the outside world, finally heals his trauma through extending ethics care to the people in his life..

3. Stephen’s Personal Trauma of the Loss of His Daughter

The Child in Time is set in London a few years in the future from its time of publication in 1987, to hint the social world governed by radical conservative government characterized by monolithic Thatcherism. “ Longer and richer than his earlier work, this new novel interweaves private sorrow and public policy in hopes of capturing the mystery of time.[8]” Different from the earlier works that address private issues in a private world, this novel tries to combine the private with the public, as McEwan says, “ my prose tended to remain private. I always wanted to broaden it, find the fruitful ground where private and political could exist together. This novel is to some extent a fulfillment of an ambition” [9] Thus McEwan put the individuals in the political context to examine the detrimental effects of contemporary society on its individuals. “There are several fictional modes at work, ranging from a realistic account of wrenching personal loss to a satire on bureaucracy.[10]”

The protagonist, Stephen Lewis, a best-selling author of novels for children had her three-year-old daughter stolen 2 years ago while shopping with her in the local supermarket. The loss of the child has led to the breakup of Stephen’s relationship with his musician wife Julie, who retreated to a cottage in the country side to cope with the trauma while Stephen involves himself in a British government subcommittee of Reading and Writing, partly responsible for the report on *Authorized Childcare* by the government. In fact the committee’s work is useless since the report has already written by Stephen’s friend Charles Darke, an ambitious and promising Conservative politician, who helps Stephen secure the place on the subcommittee. It is ironic that child care is intimate for every family, while *The Authorized Childcare Handbook* is public. And it seems the government shows concern and care for children. However, Extracts from *The Authorized Childcare Handbook* at the beginning of every chapter indicate that the government just aim to expect parents discipline children rather than show empathetic care for children, “Those who find it naturally hard to wield authority over their children should seriously consider the systematic use of treats and rewards.” [11] *The Authorized Childcare Handbook* aims to cultivate the obedient citizens for the government, thus children become the tool of the politics rather than being cared with empathy in the public world.

Two years ago the abduction of Stephen’s three-year-old daughter in a local supermarket in the day time also speaks the lack of empathetic care for children in the society. Moreover, on his way to attend subcommittee meeting,

Stephen sees a group of licensed children beggars just before Parliament Square, who were not permitted anywhere near Parliament or Whitehall or within sight of the square [11]. These licensed children beggars out of sight of the politicians are further footnotes of lack of ethics of empathic care in the society under the conservative government. It is sarcastic that the government does not provide the children in need of help with social assistance, but gives license to the poor children to become beggars. Stephen is in ethical dilemma whether to give money or not to the beggars, since to give money ensured the success of the Government program, not to give involved some determined facing away from private distress [11]. The social world of the novel is “a dystopia vision of what one might call Thatcherite Britain [11]” At the committee meeting Stephen, absent-minded thought mostly about his wife and daughter and what he was going to do with himself. Except for this commitment at the subcommittee once a week, Stephen spent most his time at home drinking, reading magazines and watching the Olympic games, daydreaming to kill the time without attempts to contact anyone, indifferent to the squalor of his flat. Trapped in trauma of losing his child, Stephen is unable to live a normal life with vitality. Since loss was his subject, Stephen repeatedly recalls the frozen Sunday day when the nightmare of abduction of her daughter happened. During those days after the disaster, he goes out to search for her lost daughter alone every day while his wife Julie, violinist, first stayed at home in sorrow. “The loss has driven them to the extremes of their personalities. They had discovered a degree of mutual intolerance which sadness and shock made insurmountable. [11]” It’s on the day Julie left home for a retreat in Cilterns with a message left for him that Stephen began to cry to mourn his loss of her child. Even two years later after the loss of his daughter, Stephen could not recover from the trauma. His fanatical search for her lost daughter turns out to be failures, “Living through that year, however, he felt it to be empty time, dry of meaning or purpose. [11]” Trapped in his own narcissistic concerns for his loss of daughter, Stephen is indifferent to the outside world. Even when Olympic Games brought a sudden threat of global extinction and for twelve hours things went out of control, Stephen, “sprawling on the sofa in his underwear for the heat, did not much care either way. [11]” Only when Stephen is influenced by his friend Darke’s wife, Thelma’s ethics of Empathic care, is he on the way to healing his trauma of the loss of his daughter.

4. Practice of Ethics of Empathic Care and Stephen’s Preliminary Healing of His Trauma

4.1. Influence of Thelma’s Practice of Ethics of Empathic Care on Stephen

Thelma is a scientist on theoretical physics, older than her husband Charles Darke, the successful politician, like a

mother for Dark in their relationship. Stephen, interested in theoretical physics, when visiting her house often keeps her company in the evening to learn a little about science. Thelma is the kind of woman scientist who brings feminine thinking to science, which McEwan affirms. She told Stephen “how quantum mechanics would feminize physics, all science, make it softer, less arrogantly detached, more receptive to participating in the world it wanted to describe [11]” Thelma’s feminine perspective of science stresses the interdependence of time and space, likewise matter and energy, matter and space, science and art. Thus Thelma’s emphasis on the interdependence and relationships corresponds to the fact that theorists of ethical care stress the relationships and independence among people. Actually Thelma practices the ethics of empathic care in her relationships with others. The day after Julie left for her retreat, Thelma had arrived in a snow storm to collect Stephen [11]. She helped Stephen tidy up and supervised his packing, “she worked with brisk, maternal thoroughness, speaking to him only when it was necessary. [11]” Thelma shows her empathic understanding and empathic care for Stephen, who was at a loss how to confront his wife’s departure for retreat. Upon leaving, Stephen imagined his lost daughter may come back home and asked Thelma if they should leave a note on the door in case his three-year old daughter came back to find the house locked and deserted. “Rather than argue that Kate could not read and was never coming back, Thelma returned upstairs and pinned her address and phone number to his front door. [11]” Thus Thelma shows her empathic understanding about Stephen’s feelings and thoughts and extends her empathic care to help him. For weeks at Darke’s guest room Stephen experienced a chaos of emotions and became steadier before Thelma spent evenings with him to enlighten him with quantum magic.

Stephen himself not only receives Thelma’s empathic care, but also views Thelma’s empathic care for Darke. Science is Thelma’s child and Dark is Thelma’s another child. After reading the news about Darke’s resignation from his political position due to his health problems of breakdown, Stephen visited Darke’s house desiring for knowing the reason. Thelma told Stephen that Charles has an inner life, an inner obsession, and what he needs (desires) is quite at odds with what he does, frantic and impatient about his success, thus the resignation has to do with resolving the contradictions. Thelma fully understands her husband’s inner world with empathy and she fully supports Darke, retiring from her teaching to accompany Darke in the countryside to write her book. What Thelma demonstrates is her empathic care for Darke.

4.2. Stephen’s Practice of Empathic Care for His Parents

Influenced by Thelma’s ethics of empathic care, Stephen gradually begins to step out of his narcissistic concern with searching for his lost daughter, through empathically connecting with his parents and estranged wife through magic means of time. Just at Darke’s house after his talk with Thelma about Darke’s resignation from politics and his

conflicts, Stephen visions in his mind the picture of his parents, with his mother standing by the kitchen sink, his father at side with a clean beer glass in one hand and a dishcloth in the other [11]. “He could see their faces, the lined expressions of tenderness and anxiety. It was the aging, the essential selves enduring while the bodies withered away. [11]” Stephen for the first time felt the urgency of contracting time, of unfinished business. “There were conversations he had not yet had with them and for which he always thought there would be time. [8]” Stephen then had memory about his stay with his parents, which he hoped to get explanation from his parents. Also for the first time he is aware of his parents’ aging state with some illness, which means “he would confront the frustration and guilt of a conversation never begun. [11]” Stephen now has the strong desire to connect with his parents and to have more empathic understanding about his parents. “Only when you are grown up, perhaps only when you have children yourself, do you fully understand that your own parents had a full and intricate existence before you were born. [11]” Stephen hopes to know more about his parents’ past, which he just has some outline of the story, mother working in a department store, father as a soldier in the front during the second world war, unclear about the details about how parents met, what attracted them, how they decided to get married or how he had come about. Stephen realizes that “however familiar, parents are also strangers to their parents. [11]”

Moreover in his attempts to know more about his parents, Stephen feels the inner strength from his mother Claire who also practices ethics of empathic care towards her loved ones. In the episode of magical realism, Stephen goes back to the past and meets his parents. In the countryside, he comes across an old Bell Pub. Viewing a young couple talking to each other through the pub window, he gazes at the woman and finds her listening to the man attentively and she could not see Stephen. When the young woman looks through Stephen at the tree across the road, Stephen realizes that she is his mother. In the magic realism scene, before his existence, Stephen sees his parents, mother listening attentively while father talking. While he sees his father’s gesture of making a point with an open hand, “a cold, infant despondency sank through him, a bitter sense of exclusion and longing [11]. Then Stephen experiences of hopeless, “ he had nowhere to go, no moment which could embody him, he was not expected, no destination or time could be named...[11]”. Baffled by this incident, Stephen does not fully understand the scene of seeing his parents before his existence until later his mother Claire clarified the episode. From his mother, Stephen knows their parents’ courtship and their great dilemma when she is pregnant during the war time, his father still serving the front. It was in the pub where Stephen experienced his magic meeting with his parents that his father suggested an abortion. Just then Claire looked out the pub window and experience a magic time: “I can see it now as clearly as I can see you. There was a face at the window, the face of a child. sort of floating there.... But as far as I was concerned then, I was convinced, I just knew that I was

looking at my child. If you like, I was looking at you [11].” Thus Claire realizes that the baby was not “an abstraction. It was a complete self, begging her for its existence.... [11]” Thus during the dilemma Stephen’s mother adopts the ethics of empathic care, she could see with empathy the conceived child begging for existence and with motherly love and great strength, Claire decided against Douglas’ suggestion of abortion. It is Claire’s practice of ethics of empathic care that finally saves Stephen from abortion despite great difficulties his parents confronted during that war period. Drawing on the inner strength of affirming life from his mother, Stephen gradually extends his empathic understanding empathic care to his wife, Julie.

4.3. Stephen’s Connection with His Estranged Wife with Empathy

Before their daughter Kate is stolen, Stephen and Julie love each other deeply, “She loved him fiercely and liked to tell him. He had built his life round their intimacy and come to depend on it [11]” The disappearance of Kate, however, disrupted their relationship, as they cope with the trauma in strikingly different way, Stephen frantically searching for the lost daughter, while Julie collapsing into inactivity at home, then retreat later in the countryside. At that time Stephen could not understand Julie’s way angered and disgusted by her reaction, and interpreted as “a famine self-destructiveness, a willful defeatism [11]” At that time Stephen could not put himself in the position of Julie to empathize her feelings and her reaction. They just went in their different way, “Their old intimacy, their habitual assumption that they were on the same side, was dead. They remained huddled over their separate losses, and unspoken resentments began to grow [11]” Now influenced by the ethics of empathic care practiced by Thelma and his mother, Stephen gradually adopts ethics of empathic care in his relationship with his wife, Julie. On his way to Julie’s retreat in the countryside, he thinks about Julie’s reaction and regards it positively with empathic understanding, “Julie could set about transforming herself, purposefully evolve some different understanding of life and her place within it... She was not beyond confusion or irrationality, but she had an inviolably useful way of understanding and presenting her own morasses within the terms of a sentimental or spiritual education [11]. Thus Stephen gradually steps out of self-centered cognitive perspective and is learning to empathize his wife’s feelings and thoughts, with deeper understanding of her, “with her, previous certainties were not jettisoned so much as encompassed, rather in the way, according to Thelma, scientific revolutions were said to redefine rather than discard all previous knowledge.... she did not simply inhabit her inner life, she ran it, direct it... the work, the responsibility, was to fulfill one’s destiny. [11]” Stephen could positively view Julie’s responsible attitude towards herself and her unique feminine attitude about changes in a constructive way, “Such faith in endless mutability in re-making yourself as you came to understand more, or changed your version, he had come to see as an aspect of her femininity. [11]” With

empathy, Stephen not only appreciates Julie's feminine strength in remaking herself through embracing changes in a positive way but also has self-reflection about men's weakness of being confined to certain place rather than embracing changes as women do, "...Past certain age, men frozen into place, they tended to believe that, even in adversity, they were somehow at one with their fates. They were who they thought they were... [8]" Stephen's affirmation of Julie's feminine qualities indicates that he is the New Man, an alternative challenge to the concept of the power-driven male in the 1980s [12].

At Julie's cottage, it is Julie's maternal and empathic care that heals Stephen's heart which is still immersed in the terror of magic meeting with his parents before his existence in the Bell Pub. Julie tells him, For once you can stop pretending everything's all right. You are my patient. [11]" Julie's care warms him and "there was nothing but delight as he held Julie's head, the dear head, between his hands and kissed her eyes, where earlier outside The Bell, he had felt terror...[11]" The two moments are bound, "they held in common the innocent longing they provoked, the desire to belong. [11]" For Stephen, parents, wife, child are important Others in his life to construct his identity with the sense of belonging in the world. Only with connection with the important Others in his life can Stephen secure his belonging and his identity as well. With the intimate sex with Julie, Stephen felt the sense of home, "...home, he was home, enclosed, safe and therefore able to provide, home where he owned and was owned. Home, why be anywhere else?... Time was redeemed, time assumed purpose all over again because it was the medium for the fulfillment of desire...[11]" Though Stephen's reunion with Julie in the cottage conceives their new child, the emotional alienation between the couple does not melt completely this time, due to lack of deep empathic communication between them. Only Stephen develops deep understanding about ethics of empathic care after he has drawn lessons from Charles' tragedy and learnt from his lost child, does he fully reconcile with Julie and recover from the trauma of loss of his daughter to begin the new life.

5. Stephen's Further Development of Ethics of Empathic Care and Full Recovery from the Personal Trauma

5.1. Stephen's Deep Empathic Understanding of Darke's Tragedy

Charles Darke, first a successful publisher, then transfers to politics, promoted to the position of a junior minister with promising future in his political career, who is the idol and the guide for Stephen in his career as a famous children books writer and becoming a member of submission of writing the reports for *The Childcare Handbook*. However, Darke unexpectedly resigns from his aspiring political career and regresses into a child state living in a tree house

in the countryside. He experiences strong conflicts between his inner life of longing to enjoy the freedom of being a child and what he frantically does about his success in the real world. In Darke's childhood, there is a lack of empathic care to nurture his mind since his mother died when he was twelve years old. In his inner world, Darke has a narcissistic concern with his inadequate and lost childhood. His "regression into childhood can be seen to be an extreme attempt, a finally a failed one, to regain a lost childhood. [3]" Stephen can not understand that the harsh *Authorized Childcare Handbook* without any sincere empathic care for children is written by Darke who so desires to return to his childhood. Thelma's explanation with empathic understanding and care for Darke expels Stephen's puzzle and helps Stephen have deeper insight into Darke's tragedy, "It's a perfect illustration of Charles's Problem. It was his fantasy life which drew him to the work and it was his desire to please the boss which made him write it that way he did. That's what he couldn't square, and that's why he fell apart... He could never bring his qualities as a child... he could never bring any of this into his public life. Instead, it was all frenetic compensation for what he took to be an excess of vulnerability. All this striving and shouting, cornering markets, winning arguments to keep his weakness at bay... [11]" Darke fails to develop an authentic and balanced self that combines the inner child qualities with adult qualities. Thus, despite Thelma's empathic care for him, Darke so obsessed with reputation and success in the public world, far away from his authentic self, after taking off social masks after resignation, regressing into a child, is unable to regain his inner child qualities in a balanced and mature way, and tragically commits suicide in the end. Darke's tragic death makes Stephen deeply reflect about the relationship between childhood and adulthood and is learning to empathically understand his lost daughter Kate, drawing on Kate's qualities to enrich his human nature.

5.2. Stephen's Empathic Understanding of Kate and His Learning from Kate

From the extracts from *The Authorized Childcare Handbook* in the beginning of each chapter, children are not treated with empathic care to respect children's independent existence but are expected to be disciplined to be obedient citizen to serve the government. Similarly, recalling his time with Kate before the nightmare of abduction, Stephen realizes that he regarded Kate as a burden when Kate's need conflicts with his need. It is Kate who enables him to have the ethical identity as a father. However, the loss of Kate deprives him of his ethical identity as a father. In his frantical attempts to search for lost Kate, Stephen is obsessed with his own concern to project his needs of finding his lost daughter on whoever girl he meets, who he believes is his Kate. After two and half years, "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 understood how there were many paths Kate might have gone down, countless ways in which she might

have changed in two and a half years and that he knew nothing about any of them. He had been mad, now he felt purged. [11]" Thus Stephen begins to step out of his narcissic concern to confront the reality of abduction of Kate, with empathic understanding of the enlightening message Kate's existence has brought to him.

He recalls that he and Julie once took Kate for holiday and how Kate concentrated on building a castle seriously and realizes that "if he could do everything with intensity and abandonment with which he had once helped Kate build her castle, he would be a happy man of extraordinary power. [11]" Thus Stephen is learning to respect Kate's independent existence with empathy and modestly learns from Kate's strength of concentration on things to enrich his human nature to become a mature adult, "He was always partly somewhere else, never quite paying attention, never wholly serious. Wasn't that Nietzsche's idea of true maturity, to attain the seriousness of a child at play? [11]" Stephen's empathic understanding of Darke, Kate and his parents prepared him to further connect with Julie with empathic care.

5.3. Stephen's Further Empathic Connection with Julie and Full Healing of Their Trauma

At Thelma and Darke's retreat cottage, after talking with Thelma to have deep understanding of Darke's tragic fate, Thelma receives the call from Julie and reminds Stephen that "Julie was in front of you. She wants to speak to you. [11]" With Thelma's empathic care and support for Stephen and Julie, Stephen immediately leaves for Julie's cottage. On his way, Stephen also received the empathic understanding from the driver Edward, greatly supported, with confidence to achieve reconciliation with Julie and heal the trauma of loss of their daughter. "He had a premonition followed instantly by a certainty, borne out by Thelma's smile and Edward's instant understanding of the months, that all the sorrow, all the empty waiting had been enclosed within meaningful time, within the richest unfolding conceivable. [11]" Dominic Head comments that *The Child in Time* is an explicit example of the author exploring the "popular discourse of the new science, especially the form mediated for general consumption by Stephen Hawking and others [13]" Thus McEwan explores the relativity of time with reference to the discourse of new science concerning time. Also on his way to Julie's cottage it is on the spot near the Bell pub where he magically meets his parents before his existence that Stephen feels connected with his parents, that his experiences "had not only been reciprocal with his parents', it had been a continuation, a kind of repetition. [11]" When he arrives at Julie's cottage very hurriedly, amazed at the sight of Julie's pregnancy, with the baby coming out soon. "He had never seen her so beautiful [11]" In their empathic communication, the estrangement between them since Kate's loss completely melts away. Julie reveals to Stephen how she alone faces up to losing Kate, "I came out here to face up to losing Kate. It was my task, my work, more important to me than our marriage, or my music. It was more important than the new baby... There were some bad days, when I wanted to

die...I had to go on loving her, but I had to stop desiring her, for that, I needed time... [8]" And Julie says that finally she started playing violin again properly in her quartet, which is an important step to heal her trauma. Julie further says, "Now I was playing for its own sake, I was looking forward to the baby coming, and I was beginning to think about you and remember, and really feel how much we loved each other. I felt it all come back...[11]" Julie not only in her way heals her trauma and feels her love for Stephen coming back but also has her empathic understanding and trust about Stephen's way of coping with the trauma, "I had to trust that you were getting stronger to, going your own way. [11]" In her feminine way Julie not only faces up losing Kate while conceiving new baby with maternal love, but also takes the initiative to connect with Stephen through calling Thelma for help. Ultimately three years later, Stephen and Julie "Began to cry together at last for the lost, irreplaceable child who would not grow older for them... They held on to each other, and as it became easier and less bitter, they started to talk through their crying as best as they could, to promise their love through it, to the baby, to one another, to their parents, to Thelma. [11]" Thus in their empathic communication Stephen and Julie finally get reunion with deep love for each other to begin a new life over mourning together about their loss of Kate after their separately facing up the trauma: "In the wild expansiveness of their sorrow they undertook to heal everyone and everything, the government, the country, the planet, but they would start with themselves; and while they could never redeem the loss of their daughter, they would love her through their new child, and never close their minds to the possibility of her return. [11]" Stephen serves as midwife, welcomes their new baby in the moonlight. The image of Mars above moon was a reminder of a harsh world, "For now however, they were immune. [8]" Though the public word lack of ethic of care seems cruel, Stephen and Julie, through practicing ethics of empathic care, confident about their new life, in hope of extending empathic care and love to their new baby, parents, Thelma, and others to heal everyone and everything, from individuals to communities.

6. Conclusion

The protagonist Stephen, a children literature writer, in *The Child in Time* set in a public world lack of ethics of care is trapped in narcissistic concern with searching for her daughter who was abducted in a supermarket at the age of three years old, his relationship with his wife breaking apart as a result of the trauma. Female characters like Thelma, Stephen's friend Darke's wife, a woman scientist, and Clair, Stephen's mother practice ethics of empathic care to affirm life and extending empathic understanding and empathic care to others in their daily life, particularly in living through the crisis in their life. First influenced by Thelma, Stephen gradually steps out of his narcissistic concern for looking for his lost child, and attempts to have deep connection with his parents with empathic understanding of their pasts and empathic care for them in the present. Further influenced by

his mother's practice of ethics of empathic care, Stephen goes to visit his estranged wife in a retreat cottage, with more empathic understanding of Julie's way of facing up losing their daughter, and received empathic care from Julie, with estrangement between them melting to some degree in their empathic connection with each other. Furthermore with empathic understanding of his friend, Darke's conflicts between his inner longing to regress into a child and his strong desire for success as an aspiring politician in the real world, drawing lessons from Darke's tragic suicide, Stephen gets deep insights into the relationship between childhood and adulthood, to figure out the significance of maintaining the inner child qualities in his adult self. Drawing lessons from Darke's tragic fate, he has deep empathic understanding of Kate's existence before her loss, modestly learning from Kate's concentration on things, living in the present moment to enrich his human nature in hope of becoming a mature adult. Ultimately three years later after the loss of his child Stephen gets reunion with his alienated wife, Julie, mourning together their trauma of the loss of their daughter to begin their new life, estrangement between them melting away completely through their empathic understanding of each other's way of facing up the loss of Kate and Stephen's serving as a midwife to welcome their new child to the world. Thus fully recovered from the trauma of loss of their child, Stephen and his wife will continue to practice ethics of empathic care to heal everyone and everything, starting from themselves. What Ian McEwan promotes in *The Child in Time* is to practice ethics of empathic care in relationships, with hope of healing not only individuals but also communities, from families to the Government, the country and the planet. Besides *The Child in Time*, McEwan's emphasis on ethics of Empathic care also finds its expression in his works like *Atonement* [14] and *Saturday* [15], which leaves room for further research.

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