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J.Ramona

Asst.Professor of English

Bon Secours College for Women

India.

monajo3@gmail.com

TEMPORAL EXPERIENCES IN THE SELECT

NOVELS OF IAN McEWAN

Abstract

This paper exerts to analyze Ian's concept of temporal experiences in this postmodern world. Ian's novels stands out for its highlight on temporality and the tacit exigency to tackle one's moral identity. McEwan designs his novels as a fictitious narrative based on various themes, using them in hookup with his plots, characters and symbols, to add emphasis to the concepts and the ideas that shape his stories. His themes range from universal to the complex. The overriding temporal frame of his novels are uncanny.

Key Words: Temporal, Mundanity, Sacrosanct, Servitude, Ethical Vision.

“Temporal and spiritual things are inseparably connected, and even will be.”

- Joseph Smith

In the light of temporality the author appears to juxtapose the time of mundanity for the characters and a time that is sacrosanct and servitude, thus stressing an ethical vision,

possibly beyond what the self – centered British society in this postmodern world can foresee. All the underlying attention to temporal expressions and the prominent zerohour of life only reinforces the author's call for moral inquiries and search for accountable, ethical stances in an era of transition and deterioration.

McEwan continues to explore the impact on ordinary people of unusual or extreme situations, as they face sudden shocking violence or slip into acute psychological states. The Cement Garden is a clear metaphor of dysfunctional mourning of the characters Jack and his siblings. Encountering the bitter emotional deprivation in their maternal relationships due to the demise of their parents, the children struggle with psychosis and find it hard to survive both physically and emotionally. The novel goes beyond the normal limits in probing the impact of abnormal situations on human relationships. Ian has apparently dealt with the concept of anomie of contemporary society.

In the novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, Ian addresses the problematic relationship between values, ideas and literature and it shows that the author is unable, as yet, to generate vital social resonances instead he has focused on violence and psychosis. The disturbing climax of the novel suggests that McEwan is concerned with two main themes: the sadistic behavior and subservience and these two are the manifestations of a raw and haunting human sexuality.

As a matter of fact, the exploration of ethical problems persists throughout McEwan's novels, most explicitly in *Black Dogs* and *Enduring Love*. *Black Dogs* portrays the emotional turbulence of a daughter on witnessing the transformation and death of her mother and father respectively whereas *Enduring Love* speaks about the unhealthy obsession between same sex and the disastrous outcome of this relationship.

The underlying theme of *Atonement* is the consequence of a person's misjudgement out of ignorance. Throughout the novel, the reader follows Briony's character, as she recognizes the full extent of her actions. Her sister and Robbie are driven apart, the latter is accused of a crime he did not commit, and she is left with an overwhelming sense of guilt. Briony tries to ignore the truth of Robbie's innocence in an attempt to escape acknowledging the naivety of her judgements:

“By clinging tightly to what she believed she knew, narrowing her thoughts, reiterating Her testimony, she was able to keep from mind the damage she only dimly sensed she Was doing” (p.160).

McEwan has developed the concept of guilt through the central character of the novel and lucidly weaved the theme by narrating, how the sense of guilt can eat away a person without mercy. The novel revolves around a strong sense of lived experience that is morally moving and ends with the feeling of atonement.

Amsterdam is a morality fable disguised as a psychological thriller. It speaks about the disastrous euthanasia pact between two friends. Their mutual euthanasia agreement was to take effect if,

“I got to the point where I couldn't make the decision for myself, or act on it,”

Clive says. (p.53).

The conclusion is swift and shocking but Garmony, Vernon and Clive remained affected. As the novel ends, we can read that George Lane, Molly's husband, has been quietly manipulating the deeds of all three from behind the scene, taking his own form of revenge on Molly's former lovers. This turns out to be an act of nemesis.

In the novel *Saturday*, McEwan delves into a new form of social accountability in the light of befalling of characters and circumstances. Focussing on the life of the protagonist Henry Perowne, McEwan demonstrates how within a day everything, including a person's fate can change. The violent Baxter forces Perowne to re-evaluate the purpose of fate and seeks revenge on him for having the life that he can never possess. Before the day February 13, 2003, Perowne rarely thought about the meaning of his life beyond his work or about deeper issues in the world, never bothering to consider why things may happen. However, after a street thug named Baxter threatens him and his family, Perowne's life drastically changes, as he begins to understand what it feels like to be in a situation where he doesn't have control. Here McEwan touches another important theme: fear. Baxter, who is angered by his own life being cut short by a neurodegenerative disorder, aims to instill fear in the lives of others, so that they will know how it feels to suffer, as he does. It takes a confrontation with a dangerous man for Perowne to realize that there are things in his life far more important than work:

“All feels now is fear. He's weak and ignorant, scared of the way consequences of
An action leap away from your control and breed new events, new consequences,
Until you're led to a place you never dreamed of and would never choose” (p.287).

To be morally answerable, McEwan intimates pertinently that one has to take the initiative in ethical dilemmas so as to be a good human. While at first glance Ian's catalogue may seem bleak, but there is always an accurate reflection of our need for serious moral thought and philosophy.

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