# McEwan Paraphrases McEwan: The Paraphrase of a McEwan Short Story in a McEwan Novel

**Péter Hajdu**

**Abstract:** One of the protagonists of Ian McEwan's *Sweet Tooth* is a young writer, and the novel contains several samples, excerpts or summaries of his writing. Some of these show strong similarities to Ian McEwan's own early writings. The paper analyses the textual connections within the framework of paraphrase, a notion going back to ancient rhetoric, focusing on one pair of similar plots, "Dead as They Come" (a McEwan short story from 1975) and its 2012 rewriting. While ancient theory of paraphrase seems to focus on wording, McEwan's paraphrase of his own early writing puts more emphasis on sophisticated ways of narration. The narrative complexity of *Sweet Tooth* makes the interpretation of the embedded short story paraphrase complicated too. However, when a narratological analysis faces the questions of who is speaking, whose voice is to be heard in various parts of the narrative, it comes close to the focus of ancient rhetoric about actual wording in a paraphrase.

**Key words:** paraphrase; narratology; rhetoric; Ian McEwan; *Sweet Tooth*; "Dead as They Come"

**Author: Péter Hajdu**, is Visiting Chair Professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and academic advisor at the Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His research interest includes classical philology, comparative literature, and narratology (E-mail: pethajdu@gmail.com).

**标题：**麦克尤恩改述麦克尤恩：麦克尤恩短篇小说在其长篇小说中的改述

**内容摘要：**伊恩·麦克尤恩《甜牙》的主人公之一是位年轻的作家，小说中包含了这位作家的作品的几段样本、节选或摘要。其中某些片段与伊恩·麦克尤恩本人早期的作品十分相似。本文从"改述"这一起源于古代修辞学的概念出发，在改述框架内集中分析了《既仙即死》（麦克尤恩 1975 年写作的短篇小说）与这部小说在 2012 年被重写的文本中一对相似情节的联系。古代改述理论似乎聚焦于措辞，麦克尤恩对自己早期作品的改述则更强调复杂的叙述方式。《甜牙》的叙事复杂性也的确使读者在阐释其内嵌的短篇小说时十分

棘手。然而，当叙事学分析面对叙述各部分中“谁在说”“谁的声音被听到”的问题时，它又更接近于古代修辞学所关注的改述中的实际措辞了。
**关键词：**改述；叙事学；修辞学；伊恩·麦克尤恩；《甜牙》；《既仙即死》
**作者简介：**彼得·海居（Péter Hajdu）是上海交通大学客座讲席教授，匈牙利科学院人文研究中心学术顾问。主要研究经典语文学、比较文学和叙事学。

It did not take long for the critics to realise that Tom Haley, a young writer in the England of the 1970s in Ian McEwan's 2012 novel *Sweet Tooth,* shows many similarities to the young Ian McEwan of the 1970s. These similarities have been mapped in most detail by Peter Childs (140-42). Not only their backgrounds and their biographical data are similar, but also some of their writings. However, readers of *Sweet Tooth* do not have direct access to Haley's writing. The narrator-protagonist, Serena Frome, is commissioned by the British secret service to make Haley accept a generous scholarship. The writer, of course, must not know where the money actually comes from. When Serena prepares for her mission, she reads Haley's short stories published in various literary magazines and reports both their content and the impression they have made on her. The first one (McEwan, *Sweet Tooth* 61–66) does not show any connection to any earlier piece of writing by McEwan, nor does "Pawnography" (90-96), despite the homonymous pronunciation, have anything in common with "Pornography," the opening piece of McEwan's second short story collection (McEwan, *In Between* 11-30). Between these two, however, is the summary of a short story that could be rather similar to "Dead as They Come" from 1975, which figured as the fourth (maybe central?) piece of the collection *In Between the Sheets* (71-75) about a rich man who falls in love with a shop-window dummy, buys her, takes her home, but gets jealous after a while and kills her. The uncertainty implied by my expression "could be similar" follows from the narrative situation that Serena offers her own summaries or paraphrases with some sentences in direct quotation (if the italics signal direct quotation, which is far from certain — a problem I will discuss later in detail) rather than inserting whole short stories into her memoirs. To put it another way: The fictive protagonist of a story from the 1970s summarizes a non-existent short story by a fictive writer, and it is this summary that shows similarity to a 1975 short story by Ian McEwan. Serena's summary is approximately half as long as McEwan's short story "Dead as They Come." I suppose that this summary can be called a paraphrase with a special purpose.

Paraphrase is a notion rather of rhetorical training than descriptive rhetoric, but paraphrasing is a practice in many areas of textual culture from journalism to

literary criticism. Journalists tend to paraphrase rather than extensively quote other people's texts, and literary historians insert paraphrases of the discussed literary works in their narratives all the time, but these are just arbitrary examples of the widespread practice of paraphrasing the texts of others (or sometimes another text of one's own). What may make paraphrase an interesting topic for narrative studies seems to be the supposed sameness of what is said despite the obvious difference in how it is said. This formulation also suggests why paraphrase is important for the art of rhetoric, which is concerned with ways of expression. Several basic notions of narrative studies also focus on the what and how question from plot/story to narrative viewpoint, to focalisation, to scene/summary, to direct/indirect/free indirect discourse and beyond. In the case of paraphrases we can compare two different texts that aim to say the same differently.

Both versions of the love story of the shop-window dummy are ultimately created by the biographical author Ian McEwan, but a narratological analysis suggests a rather complicated situation in the short story paraphrase in *Sweet Tooth*. The narrator of the novel is the old Serena in the early 2010s remembering the events of her youth. She thus recalls now how a short story affected her several decades ago. An unexpected turn at the very end of the novel reveals a new trick of narration: it is declared that what we have read is the manuscript written by Tom Haley in the early 1970s, which remained unpublished for a long time. When the writer learned that the generous scholarship which had promoted his career so greatly by securing him a decent living and plenty of free time to write came from the secret service, and that Serena, who had pretended to be the representative of an arts foundation (the "Freedom International Foundation") and whom he had fallen in love with, was an undercover agent, he decided to write their love story from Serena's viewpoint — without, of course, telling the girl that he knew. This means that he found inspiration in observing the secret observer even more secretly. The fictive Haley, who has some autobiographical traits, imagines the old Serena who recalls the young Serena, and this I-narrative tells what kind of experience it was for her to read Haley's short story. Eventually it is Haley who paraphrases his own short story using the viewpoint of the narrator-Serena he imagines, therefore it may not be a harsh extrapolation to say that Ian McEwan paraphrases his own short story from the viewpoint of the narrator-Haley he imagines. However, Haley's viewpoint does not show directly, but through the memory-Serena constructed by the old Serena constructed by Haley. Moreover, there is a significant chance that sometime between the early 1970s (when Haley wrote the text) and the early 2010s (when he or they decided to publish the finalized version) Serena helped him revise the text

and make all the details accurate (Ksiezopolska, *Turning Tables* 429-31). This last option makes the identity of the narrator really uncertain. It could be young-Haley corrected or approved by old-Serena (which is short for young-Serena remembered/constructed by old-Serena imagined by young-Haley corrected by old-Serena) or old-Serena influenced by young- (but maybe also by old-) Haley, if they have basically revised the manuscript together before publication. And while this narrator of uncertain identity paraphrases a fictitious short story of the fictitious young-Haley, which readers do not have access to, author old-McEwan paraphrases a short story by young-McEwan.

Such a complex interplay of narrative levels was far from characteristic of McEwan's early short stories, which seemed to shock through thematic novelty (that is why they were described by the category of "shock lit" by Dominic Head (30–46)) but did not tend to experiment with narrative tools. Although Günther Jarfe appreciates the young McEwan's experimentation with incoherent narration, obfuscation of the difference between the experiencing and the narrating selves, avoiding moral judgement, and present tense I-narrative (Jarfe 15–24), David Malcolm was closer to a general consensus when he wrote a whole chapter on the traditional nature of McEwan's early short writing (Malcolm 20–44, esp. 29). *Atonement* might be regarded as a turning point in the writer's progress, since that was his first novel which made the narrative itself the subject (Ksiezopolska 415). From this viewpoint, Tom Haley is more similar to the advanced novelist McEwan than the young short story writer. This can be proved by another short story, which Haley writes later, already as a stipendiary of the Foundation. Serena reads it furtively as a manuscript during their relationship and gives its very short summary in six lines:

> One story [...] was narrated by a talking ape prone to anxious reflections about his lover, a writer struggling with her second novel. She has been praised for her first. Is she capable of another just as good? She is beginning to doubt it. The indignant ape hovers at her back, hurt by the way she neglects him for her labours. Only on the last page did I discover that the story I was reading was actually the one the woman was writing. The ape doesn't exist, it's a spectre, the creature of her fretful imagination. *No*. And no again. Not that. Beyond the strained and ludicrous matter of cross-species sex, I instinctively distrusted this kind of fictional trick." (McEwan, *Sweet Tooth* 114)

This text can be easily identified as a paraphrase of the second piece in McEwan's short story collection *In Between the Sheets* entitled "Reflections of a Kept Ape"

(McEwan, *In Between* 31–48). However, a significant difference is created by the lack of any narrative trick in the end of the earlier (and really existing) short story. If Serena had read the "Reflections of a Kept Ape" as we know it, there would have been nothing on the last page that would have made her think that the ape did not exist and that the text was actually written by the woman. However grotesque and improbable a creature the speaking ape is, its existence in the represented reality is not challenged by any textual marker. From Serena's remarks we can conclude that the "fictional tricks" or rather the experimentation with narration are basic characteristics of Haley's style, which make him a different kind of writer from the young McEwan.

Despite this difference, readers can hardly help taking Serena's summary as a paraphrase of the "Reflections of a Kept Ape," a short story with a very similar plot by the same biographical author. Serena speaks of her own subjective reading experience; when she says that she discovered eventually that the story was told by the woman, but does not entail any information about what in the text (if anything) made her discover this, she leaves open the possibility that the discovery was completely her own without any textual basis, and the story was in fact something rather similar to the "Reflections of a Kept Ape." However, *Sweet Tooth*, among several other works, definitively proves that the old McEwan loves the kind of fictional tricks Serena "instinctively distrusts." It is therefore also possible that in this paraphrase McEwan "corrects" his own early short story, showing how he would write it now, or slyly highlighting a potential of the plot he did not (or failed to) use that time.

At this point it seems necessary to take a look at the history of the notion 'paraphrase' to avoid a usage unreflective of the term's implication for literary criticism. The word seems to be of Greek origin, and to imply the dialogic nature of the practice. *Para-phrasis* means 'speaking along' in ancient Greek, putting my speech or my version beside somebody else's. Michael Roberts' monography on Christian paraphrases in Late Antiquity posits paraphrase among *progymnasmata*, i.e. preparatory exercises in rhetoric (Roberts *passim*), although he cannot pinpoint one single locus which would mention a *progymnasma* called *paraphrasis*. Moreover, Quintilian stated that paraphrasing is an activity that requires great skill and experience. Paraphrase could clearly be the name of a stylistic exercise, but the ancient usage of the notion is not by far as definitive as one would wish. There are several exercises in ancient rhetoric which we would call paraphrase, none of which is actually called paraphrase in the Antiquity. When we look up paraphrase in the ancient handbooks of rhetoric, we ask ancient writers about a modern notion, even if

the word itself is Greek and can be found in ancient texts.

In one of his letters Pliny the Younger gives some advice to a friend who wants to do some rhetorical exercises alone. Pliny first suggests translations from Greek into Latin and from Latin into Greek then continues as follows:

> *Nihil offuerit quae legeris hactenus, ut rem argumentumque teneas, quasi aemulum scribere lectisque conferre, ac sedulo pensitare, quid tu, quid ille commodius. Magna gratulatio si non nulla tu, magnus pudor si cuncta ille melius. Licebit interdum et notissima eligere et certare cum electis. […] Poteris et quae dixeris post obliuionem retractare, multa retinere plura transire, alia interscribere alia rescribere.* (Plinius, *Ep*. 7.9.3 and 5)
>
> [When you have read a passage sufficiently to remember the subject-matter and line of thought, there is no harm in your trying to compete with it; then compare your efforts with the original and consider carefully where your version is better or worse. You may well congratulate yourself if yours is sometimes better and feel much ashamed if the other is always superior to yours. You may also sometimes choose a passage you know well and try to improve on it. […] You can also revise the speeches you have put aside, retaining much of the original, but leaving out still more and making other additions and alterations. (Pliny 503)]

It seems that Pliny lists three different exercises, all of which we would be ready to call paraphrase: rewriting (1) some previous reading from memory, (2) one of the best-known texts (which every literate person was supposed to know by heart), or (3) one's own previous speeches. We may put these three exercises in the same category, but we make a clear distinction between them and translation, while Pliny regarded Greek–Latin and Latin–Greek translations as items in the same series of five exercises. In pre-Christian Antiquity few people cared about equivalence or accuracy in a translation and free elaboration in another language was completely acceptable and usual. In the practices Pliny lists we transpose something from the other's language into our own, and if the other happened to write in Greek, that amounts for a minor difference, not more significant than that the other is a more or less canonical writer or our own previous self.

What we tend to regard as paraphrase among the exercises Pliny describes seems to be mostly stylistic exercise of no real importance. When Cicero speaks of paraphrase, he means by that only Pliny's second type, namely rewriting the texts

of the most canonical writers; he insists that paraphrasing is useless especially from the viewpoint of the writer's own stylistic development: *si eisdem uerbis uterer, nihil prodesse; si aliis, etiam obesse, cum minus idoneis uti consuescerem* (Cic. *De or*. 1.34.154 [Thus I saw that to employ the same expressions profited me nothing, while to employ others was a positive hindrance, in that I was forming the habit of using the less appropriate. Cicero, *De oratore*, v.1 107]). The word plays a central role in Cicero's concept of the paraphrase: one tries to say the same with different words, therefore everything depends on the words. Cicero believes that a perfect formulation must exist, and what for him makes paraphrase useless or even harmful is that the best authors have already found the best solutions.

Since it is highly questionable if exactly the same can be said with different words, a way is open here towards a dialogic concept of the paraphrase. Saying the same with different words must imply the act of interpretation. Quintilian describes the exercises that one can do with the rewriting of poems as follows: *uersus primo soluere, mox mutatis uerbis interpretari, tum paraphrasi audacius uertere, qua et breuiare quaedam et exornare saluo modo poetae sensu permittitur* (Quint. *Inst*. 1.9.2 [they should begin by analyzing each verse, then give its meaning in different language, and finally proceed to a freer paraphrase in which they will be permitted now to abridge and now to embellish the original, in so far as this may be done without losing the poet's meaning. Quintilian, v.1 15]). Roberts thought that Quintilian described three stages of the same exercise (Roberts 16), but I think they are three different exercises. In the first one, only the word order can be changed to make (possibly elegant) prose from the verse; in the second the text is interpreted (rewritten, translated) with different words, but the number of the words remains the same; Quintilian calls paraphrase only the third one, which is already bold translation with both abridgements and extensions. How can the poet's meaning be preserved intact when one changes the words, skips some parts, and amplifies others? Perhaps if we elaborate one of the possible interpretations of the meaning, which still can be regarded as intact.

What is to be found in *Sweet Tooth* may recall Pliny's last type of exercise, namely when a writer paraphrases his or her own earlier text. The example of the "Reflections of a Kept Ape" may have suggested that the paraphrases of McEwan's own earlier texts also show that he can find different (maybe better) solutions now. The importance of the "fictional trick," however, shows that in these paraphrases the rewriting does not focus on the level of vocabulary or ways of expression (as Cicero's approach was centred around "the words") but on narration.

Although a narratological approach may show important differences between

McEwan's "Dead as They Come" and Haley's short story, it will not attribute too much experimentation to the latter. The former was a consistent I-narrative, in which readers are not informed of anything that the protagonist does not experience directly, while they are informed of his thoughts and his interpretations of the events. It goes without saying that Serena's paraphrase uses third person narration. Theoretically it would be possible for her to transform an I-narrative into a He-narrative when summarizing the story, but some passages, especially the exposition, exclude this possibility. The protagonist (who also has a name here: Neil Carder) is first introduced from the collective viewpoint of the inhabitants of his Highgate neighbourhood. Even the gossip is quoted which discusses his showy car and the nature of his relationship to his housekeeper Abeje. The limitedness of the focalising neighbours' knowledge can be demonstrated by the conclusion of their gossiping: "If Neil Carder had a sex life it was indoors and strictly nine till five" (71). The exposition tells what the neighbours know and think about him, and they simply are not informed about what happens indoors. The first sentence of the next paragraph switches to an omniscient mode, answering the first question of the exposition; "No one knew how Neil Carder came by his money," says the first sentence of the paraphrase, and the second paragraph starts by mentioning "a large and surprising inheritance." The narrator knows what no one knows. Despite this switch, which makes it possible to inform readers that Neil Carder actually had no sex life and only fantasied about his housekeeper "a fair bit," the focalisation does not always stay with Carder, but moves to Abeje for a paragraph in the middle, and for two sentences close to the end. The narrator does not only tell what Abeje thinks about the signs of Carder's affair, but also translates what she said about it at home to her husband in Yoruba and Kanuri languages. The Abeje scenes exclude the possibility that Haley wrote an I-narrative, not even one with a collective-focus introduction, since Carder as narrator could not tell what happened between Abeje and her husband in their home, probably could not understand their tribal languages, and could not harmonize in his narrative his love experience with Abeje's completely different interpretation, not to mention the impossibility of keeping his calm when narrating how Abeje, the object of his jealousy, took home all the clothes and jewellery he bought for Hermione. We must imagine Haley's short story as using omniscient narration with shifting focalisation.

Serena is not the only one who reads this short story in the novel. Max Graetorex, the supervisor of the operation gets involved in a discussion about it with her in a short briefing:

He said, 'What about that Paris Review story, the one about the shop-window dummy?'

'I thought it was interesting.'

'Serena! It was completely implausible. Anyone that deluded would be in the secure wing of a psychiatric institution.'

'How do you know he isn't?'

'Then Haley should have let the reader know.' (82)

What Serena's remark, namely that the whole story may have happened only in the fantasy of a lunatic, seems to imply is a possible interpretation of McEwan's "Dead as They Come" (as Ansgar Nünning actually discussed it among the short stories applying the perspective of mad monologists, (Nünning 36–50)), but does not fit at all with Haley's piece of writing. For such an interpretation one needs a consequent I-narrative. There can be a way out of this contradiction if we understand Max's remark and Serena's answer as referring to a possible after-story, supposing that long after the narrated events Carder must have been admitted to a psychiatric institution. Such an extradiegetic speculation about what could happen to a character much later than the story ends would be both nonsensical, and contradicted by the actual ending of the short story paraphrase, which explicitly states that "thereafter, Carder lived alone and 'did' for himself" (131). Ksiezopolska thinks that "Max actually points out the precise difference between the original story and Tom Haley's rewriting" (Ksiezopolska 424). Of course there are many differences between them, but that of the narrative tools, the difference between the possibly unreliable I-narrative and the omniscient narrator's unquestionable report is probably the most eye-catching. Ksiezopolska evaluates this difference as an improvement highlighted by the bad reader Max's comments (425). There are readers who appreciate unreliable narrators, and they will hardly see the removal of every epistemological doubt as an improvement. Serena and Max might be bad readers from the viewpoint of literary criticism, but we should not forget that their readings are totally instrumental, since they want writers to influence the political preferences of a wide audience. They simply do not believe that the fantasies of a madman, completely improbable stories with no references to everyday public reality can do the job. It is true, however, that when they read McEwan's original story rather than Haley's paraphrase, they open up an intertextual space in which "Dead as They Come" can contribute to the meaning making process.

In "Dead as They Come" the shop-window dummy was called Helen. The mythical incarnation of perfect female beauty (and unfaithfulness) seems an obvi-

ous choice. In *Sweet Tooth* her name is changed to Hermione, in which Childs saw only a reference to the statue coming to life in *The Winter Tale* (Childs 142). In Greek mythology, Hermione was Helen's daughter; therefore the name can be interpreted as a signal of family relations. The paraphrase in the novel is a descendent of the earlier short story, since the dummy in the novel is called the daughter of the dummy in the short story; they are similar to each other, but they are not the same. There are too many differences even in the story-line to let us imagine that Serena paraphrases McEwan's "Dead as They Come." I would like to mention just two important differences. Carder is jealous of Ajebe, a female housekeeper, instead of Brian, the driver; even if the heterosexual/homosexual shift of jealousy is regarded as insignificant, the differences in the lifestyles of the protagonists are highlighted. Carder is a lonely figure who seems to seldom leave his house, instead of being an active businessman who needs a professional full time driver. The I-narrator of the short story is also a collector, and in the final scene, after "killing" Helen he destroys his art collection. In *Sweet Tooth* there is no reference to Carder's appreciation of fine arts, and consequently any equivalent of that finale is also missing. Both the protagonist's active lifestyle (which, however, according to Ksiezopolska can also be a madman's fantasy (24)) and his destroying of the collection were important features for some interpreters of "Dead as They Come."

David Malcolm finds "the obsessive businessman" exceptional among the inert characters of the early McEwan stories, and "almost a relief," since "at least he cares about something" (Malcolm 38). The art collection is at the centre of V.S. Pritchett's interpretation of "Dead as They Come." He thinks that "it is an attack on the corrupting influence of connoisseur tastes: they turn one into a voyeur." The protagonist acts this way because he has "been deceived by a juvenile masturbator's taste for 'dead' works of art" (Pritchett 31 = Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 23). Jeannette Baxter described and applauded the final destructive act as avant-garde performance art (Baxter 23). Ksiezopolska thought that an intertextual link to John Fowles' *The Collector* (created according to her by the style of the narrative, but I think mostly by the motive of collecting beauty) strongly suggests that he will kill a living person next time (Ksiezopolska 23–24). Such interpretations based on the protagonist's active lifestyle and art collection, respectively, are invalid for Haley's story.

More concise summaries of the plot (like the one I offered in the first page of this paper) equally apply to both elaborations, and many interpretations of "Dead as They Come" seem perfectly valid for Neil Carder's story too. Dominic Head, despite calling it "a relatively 'flat' story" appreciated that "the culmination of the

narrative enables McEwan to imagine the perspective of an unhinged sex killer" (Head 43). C. Byrnes thought that the millionaire always tried to enact a script of love, and he could eventually reach closure through enacting it from start to finish; his script runs as follows: "His script begins with an intense infatuation, followed by growing suspicions of infidelity and eventually coldness and rejection, culminating in rape and murder" (C. Byrnes 70–71). Although he was adamant in 2002 that the dummy has to be taken at face value — therefore the story is not about "simultaneous rape and murder" (Kemp 11) or "sex with a corpse" (Billen) — in 2004 he was open to another interpretation of Helen's figure: "it is possible to understand her as to symbolise a depressed, dependent, passive woman who allows herself to be treated as if she had no will" (B. C. Byrnes 2004, 18). Angela Roger describes the mannequin as "a classic rape prototype: innocent, unresisting, vulnerable," which makes the story suggest that "women may be treated as possessions, even bought" (Roger 12). All these interpretations can be easily transferred to the story Serena reads in *Sweet Tooth,* and they all seem essential, since the minor differences (like the number of the protagonist' marriages — three or one, respectively) do not really matter from the viewpoints they provide.

The change of the I-narrative into a He-narrative, however, does something more than expel every epistemological doubt. The shifting focus may contribute to the abridgement in the paraphrase. The speaker-protagonist in the short story provided some explanations about his wealth and daily routine in business (McEwan, *In Between* 75). In the He-narrative, which is focalised from the neighbours, it is enough to say: "No one knew how Neil Carder came by his money" (McEwan, *Sweet Tooth* 71). The imagined love rival, Brian, the driver, must be introduced in detail (McEwan, *In Between* 85-86), while what the neighbours know about Abeje can be summarised in three lines: she is the "young, cheerful, colourfully dressed Nigerian housekeeper," who shops, launders, cooks and is attractive (McEwan, *Sweet Tooth* 71). The happy man boasts about his first night with Helen in much detail (McEwan, *In Between* 79-81), while an impersonal narrator of the paraphrase can jump right to a psychological conclusion about him (if it is the narrator's conclusion and not Serena's, a point I will soon come back to): "He was one of those men for whom passivity in a woman was a goad, a piercing enticement" (McEwan, *Sweet Tooth* 73); and the focus can shift to Abeje, who interpreting "the extreme disorder of the bedlinen" (*ibid*.) can describe Carder's new relationship with an exotic Yoruba metaphor: *"They are truly singing"* (74, italics in the original). Instead of the long descriptions and confessions of the I-narrator, from which readers are supposed to come to some psychological conclusions, the paraphrase offers ready-

made, well-formulised interpretations of the protagonist's psyche. Such interpretive comments spare a lot of effort both for the presentation and the reader, but their status remains somehow problematic.

It may be useful to have a look at one, but maybe the most important, of such comments. In "Dead as They Come" it remained a mystery why the man became jealous in the first place, or why he suddenly started interpreting the girl's silence as an expression of contempt towards him, while previously he experienced it as devoted attention. In *Sweet Tooth* this change receives well-based explanation.

> "Even in the most richly communicative and reciprocal love affairs, it is nearly impossible to sustain that initial state of rapture beyond a few weeks. Historically, a resourceful few may have managed months. *But when the sexual terrain is tended by one mind alone, one lonely figure tilling the frontiers of a wilderness, the fall must come in days*. What nourished Carder's love — Hermione's silence — was bound to destroy it." (McEwan, *Sweet Tooth* 74, italics in the original.)

Whoever speaks here has a general knowledge of love affairs and therefore can explain that the starting fire cannot be kept with an inanimate object exactly because of its silence, even if his "woman's" total passivity is the major turn-on for the kind of man Carder is. But who is actually speaking here? It is equally possible that Serena inserts her own interpretations and comments into the paraphrase, as that she summarises or literally quotes the narrator's comments from Haley's text. Are we listening to a narrator explaining what is going on, or are we overhearing Serena's thoughts as she understands it? Previously Serena once stopped paraphrasing her reading experience and started to narrate how she took a break, made some tea and thought about how the story was going to end (173). We can legitimately think both that if she once inserted her reflections into the paraphrase, she can do it again, and that if once it has been made it explicit that some thoughts belong to her and not the text being read, it cannot be done again without explicit signals (namely that if she does not tell a thought is hers, it is not).

One can wonder about the function of the italics. In the paraphrase of Carder and Hermione's love story, fifteen passages are emphasised by italics. In the summary of a story similar to the "Reflections of a Kept Ape" quoted above, the italicised "*No*." belonged to Serena; it was her reaction (maybe a literally quoted exclamation) to the story just read and summarised. Or at least it signalled a shift from summary to reflections on what has been read. However, it is highly

improbable that the italics in the sentence that describes sexuality as "tilling the frontiers of a wilderness" can be explained in the same manner. The exquisite literariness of the metaphoric discourse rather suggests that it can be a literal quotation from the short story. But not all the italicised sections are so literary. Some of them contain very short, truncated clauses and paratactic lists of items. Simple expression may suggest that Serena makes the narrative simpler in the following example:

> *The assistants and the managers stood around him. Here they had on their hands, not for the first time, an eccentric. A man in love. All present knew that a mighty purchase was under way.* (72-3 italics in the original)

But the staccato style of short clauses may suggest that Serena literally quotes the narrator formulating Carder's thoughts when Hermione is first presented:

> In one hand she held *a small black and orange beaded purse, while the other trailed at her side, wrist turned outwards as she lost herself to her idea. Or perhaps a memory. Her head was slightly lowered to reveal the pure line of her neck. Her lips were parted, but only just, as though she was formulating a thought, a word, a name … Neil.* (72 italics in the original)

It must be Neil Carder who refers to the shop window dummy as "she" and describes her lips as though formulating his name. Serena should not explain the first sight with Carder's focalisation without reflecting upon the delusional nature of his experience. While the italics may suggest the high importance of a passage, the shift to italics inside the sentence rather signals literal quotation. That her purse was small and black can hardly be so much more important than that she held it in one hand. Serena's use of italics is ambiguous. They sometimes mean (or at least may mean) that she starts speaking in her own person, sometimes that she quotes literally, sometimes that a formulation is precise and important, and in the case of Abeje's utterances in tribal languages, that something has been translated into English.

The ambiguity of a material (para)textual sign, Serena's italics may highlight the ambiguities encoded in the paraphrase. If the same thing is said in another way, it probably cannot stay the same. If somebody rewrites someone else's text, it will be difficult to distinguish those places where the original meaning is explained from those where new meaning is added. And in the context of the complicated

narratological plays of *Sweet Tooth*, the ambiguities multiply. When it is explained in italics why Neil's love for Hermione was terminated so fast, it seems to be a literal quotation from Haley's short story, but one cannot be sure. Since the narrator is "actually" Haley impersonating Serena, it is possible that it is Haley interpreting his own writing, maybe imagining how Serena would understand it. But this very sentence might be a sensitive interpretation of McEwan's 1975 short story as well. When McEwan makes Haley rewrite his own short story "Dead as They Come" and makes him explain the dynamics of the asymmetrical relationship represented there, he paraphrases his own early writing. On a fiction level Serena Frome and Tom Haley are engaged in a dialogue, in which, however, voices of intradiegetic characters (Neil Carder, Abeje and the neighbours) are also heard. On an intertextual or metafictional level, we can speak about a dialogue between McEwan of 1975 and McEwan of 2012. I do not think we should read it as a rhetorical exercise and ask in the manner of Pliny the Younger if the present McEwan succeeded in writing the story better than forty years ago. One rather may enjoy the choir of the surprisingly numerous voices that sound in the complex play of a sophisticated paraphrase.

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