

## Transforming the Past Trauma into Graphic Art in David Small's *Stitches*

David Small's *Stitches* (2009) is a graphic memoir about trauma. In *Stitches*, through a visual medium, Small narrates various traumas in childhood and *adolescence* caused by the loss of his voice in a literal and metaphorical sense, the failure of communication with other family members, the oppressive atmosphere of his house, the absence of parental love or affection, and emotional and physical abuses both at home and in school. Small, who has no voice in childhood and adolescence, visually illustrates his past traumas memorably and touchingly, and shows gradual, ongoing reconciliation with his past.

The relationship with his unaffectionate, unloving mother cannot be overlooked in *Stitches*. Instead of blaming the mother for his deep-seated traumas, Small tries a retrospective understanding and acceptance of his mother in his graphic art. In *Stitches*, Small's mother, Betty, who emotionally neglects Small in his childhood, in addition to physically abusing him, is described as cold, stern, unhappy, expressionless, grotesque, mentally unstable, hysterical, unloving, and uncommunicative. Small publicly exposes his own potential insanity, which might have been inherited from his mother, but refuses to follow her path. However, Small's firm, deliberate decision to break apart from his mother's sense of reality should not be seen as an effort to build a barrier against the psychotic world that his mother belongs to. Rather, it should be construed as a sign that he is ready to make peace with the past and move on with a better understanding of his mother and his traumatized self.

Creating *Stitches* is certainly a therapeutic act for Small, since it is a process through which Small, who is voiceless, nevertheless finds a way to humbly accept what he could not face in the past and take steps toward self-recovery and self-reformulation. Small's graphic art proves that he is not only living with trauma scars in his mind, but is also 'slowly and surely' moving forward, without forgetting the past, which is part of himself. For the narrator who cannot speak, visual imagery might be the only tool with which to tell a story and give voice and face to the long-lasting scars carved on the mind during traumatizing childhood and adolescence. Graphically showing and telling what he could not put into words with a voice, Small chooses to no longer remain silent about and victimized by the past traumas, and exhibits his remarkable ability and power to transform his past sufferings into art in *Stitches*.