

## Images of Children in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

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*Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* defines the term “authority” as “the legitimate capacity to implement and enforce rules governing political institutions.”<sup>1</sup> The same source indicates that authority “is considered necessary for the preservation of political society, and that the analyses of authority often have assumed a central role in moral, political, and legal theories.”<sup>2</sup> The encyclopedia categorises the term authority as follows: premodern, modern and postmodern. According to this distinction, premodern views assume authority as the “dominance of religion”. Modern views, on the other hand, identify authority with reason which arises from “cultural transformations of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century”. Therefore, modernism puts emphasis on rationality as the basis of “political authority.”<sup>3</sup> Yet Foucault underlines the fact that this does not mean that there is no distinction between authority and repression. Authority, consequently, cannot be categorised as a unique form of action “opposed to power” or as an institution that “merely wields power”, but it can be assumed as such an instrument of “political management that is composed by the fluid exercise of power throughout society.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, postmodernism does not eliminate authority, but points out that authority is constituted through the shifting and contextual uses of power, such that its legitimacy does not transparently derive from either natural right or rational consent.<sup>5</sup>

Since postmodernism clarifies disbelief in authority, it cannot be legitimised by considering natural rights or rational consent. Nevertheless, authority inevitably has a purpose. Its existence arises through the intention of enforcement for its own benefit. Therefore, the connection between authority and repression establishes its dynamics

1. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E., Winquist, *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*, p.23.
2. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E., Winquist, *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*, p.23.
3. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E., Winquist, *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*, p.23.
4. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E., Winquist, *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*, p.23.
5. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E., Winquist, *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*, p.23.

which are merely the ideologies of authority. Since it is not relevant to rational consent and elimination, it also functions as a totalitarian entity. Mendel shows how this authority can be blind or wants consciously to ignore the result of its own purposes. That is to say, if we consider the oppression on children, authority can be destructive for them. If it is institutionalised through government, it can even be extremely exploitative and violent.

Mendel, while discussing children as the most colonised group in a society by adults, shows the other function of authority. He says that authority sets forth pedagogic changes to control children. For this reason, it strongly underlines the necessity of an education started at an early age. This early education is supposedly required to teach children how to live.<sup>6</sup> According to him, adults use violence on children under the guise of “for their own sake.”<sup>7</sup> Socio-political institutions do not seem so strong on any subject but on the legitimization of using violence on children. Mendel, in that sense, does not use the term violence simply to refer to physical context, but expands its meaning to social and cultural contexts.

Authority gets its legal basis through various institutions or hierarchical order. Authority uses its power from up to down, from big to small.<sup>8</sup> The child is the last step of the authoritarian hierarchy. Everybody above them becomes authority: God, government, parents, teachers, even a passerby can adopt authoritarian power on them or scold them. But the child has no effect on the adults, even on him/herself.<sup>9</sup> Mendel here makes a bold generalisation which is difficult for us to accept since we have very dangerous child personages who not only unintentionally but deliberately harm other children or adults or even their parents in life and in arts. Nevertheless, we can agree upon the idea that adults have authoritarian power over children who are mostly incapable of getting together when faced with unfair situations. They generally cannot get organised like adults.

This paper thus discusses that the image of the children has a function as vehicles to reveal the intimate and close relationship between themselves and adults who victimise children under the oppressive authority for their social and ideological benefits in McEwan’s novel *The Cement Garden*. The image of childhood is a social and cultural

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6. Gerard Mendel, *Son Sömürge Çocuk (Decolonizing the Child)* (İstanbul: KabalcıYayınevi, 1992), p.19.

7. Gerard Mendel, *Son Sömürge Çocuk*, p.47.

8. Gerard Mendel, *Son Sömürge Çocuk*.

9. Gerard Mendel, *Son Sömürge Çocuk*.

construction. As Pifer asserts “for novelists this image has undergone radical transformation since the nineteenth century, when Charles Dickens and his contemporary Ariès translated the Romantic idyll of natural innocence into touching versions of ‘poor children’ set adrift in a harsh and inhumane world.”<sup>10</sup> As the child image has changed from period to period, its reflection has been altered in fiction as well.

Children in fiction have always and inevitably been narrated, described and explained without their interpretations, by adults in children’s literature and in adult fiction. As mentioned above, the children are under the oppression and (in Mendel’s term) authority of adults who exploit children for their social construction. Despite their voiceless circumstances, they are nevertheless used to represent the conditions and situations of the period of the written texts.

Characteristics of children in fiction have been nourished by historical changes. While the sinfulness of the newborns was the dominant idea in the Middle Ages, this idea of original sin was deconstructed by Locke’s idea of tabula rasa. Later, Rousseau’s search on human nature deconstructed Locke’s neutral idea for Rousseau points the innocence of human beings as they are born innately good. His innovative and optimistic thought had significance on pre-romantic idea. Aspiring from the innate goodness of children, in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries the Romantics, for the first time, depicted childhood via adorable characters in their poetry. The innocence of childhood was predominant. It was a desirable state that adults missed or lost, therefore idealised. Idea of the innocence of childhood had been topics of the romantic poets who meanwhile stressed the children as labourers who are exploited by the adults’ jobs. The poet William Blake used the child characters and sentimentalised their existence. In the Victorian period, child characters, on the other hand, eluded from innocence of romantic view and their symbolised entity; instead they appeared in an atmosphere where they have had to struggle in the harsh, more realistic lives of adults. They became more humanised creatures at the cost of painful, powerless representations. They were portrayed as carrying the potential to commit crimes like their model adults; they were also represented as “the victims of adult power, emotional or physical brutalities, social neglect, illness and early death.”<sup>11</sup> Edwardian literature, on the other hand, defined the term childhood in respect of its own idiosyncratic realm. Far away from the adult world,

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10 Ellen Pifer, *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.1.

11. Adrienne E Gavin, “Unadulterated Childhood: The Child in Edwardian Fiction,” in Adrienne E. Gavin (ed.), *The Child in British Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 165-182), p.9.

children were depicted in a neo-romantic way by giving them their nature and imagination back. They were mostly portrayed in their own playground, gardens or at least isolated from adult society. In the Twentieth century, however, literary children were depicted as “ideal, victimised, a model for adults, threatened, happy, lost, and sought after and old beyond its years”<sup>12</sup> as much as they were portrayed as harmful, violent, evil-like. On the other hand, with the diminishing of the effect of religion they are also represented as significant “not because they are heaven sent or set for heaven, but in and of themselves.”<sup>13</sup> Through Freud’s theories, it is understood that they have sexual intentions in a very early age. This sexualised image converted the idea of innocent child. It is realised that they, like adults, become more complicated, and they can act insidiously too. In contemporary British literature, the Utopian aspect of the children has been deconstructed. The idea of innocence of children has been scrutinised. Dodou, like many other critics, depicted the child image as a “source of adult anxiety and a threat to the societal order.”<sup>14</sup>

McEwan’s novel, in this sense, clearly discloses “the modern concept of childhood while increasing the cultural value placed on children, often worked against them restricting their spontaneity and freedom and subjecting them to greater institutional control and punishment.”<sup>15</sup> This evaluation is underlined in contemporary literature where the children are scrutinised more closely within the parental institutions. “In recent years the Romantics’ worship of the child’s divine or transcendent origins” says Pifer “has revealed a shadowy underside and the cult of sacred childhood has turned satanic, supplanting angelic children with demonic ones who serve the powers of darkness.”<sup>16</sup> Pifer’s statement of childhood as sacred refers to the idealised and nostalgic image of Romantic texts. Yet according to us, as Gerald Gillespie states, Romantics assumed “childhood as a period of life in which mankind is very close to the natural state.”<sup>17</sup> Still agreeing on Pifer’s idea that contemporary literature has changed the perception of childhood from positive to negative image at a certain point, it is still debatable that there is not a clear cut. The conditions and the situations of children may vary in different

12. Adrienne E Gavin, “Unadulterated Childhood: The Child in Edwardian Fiction,” p.11.

13. Adrienne E Gavin, “Unadulterated Childhood: The Child in Edwardian Fiction,” p.11.

14. Katherina Dodou, Examining the Idea of Childhood: The Child in the Contemporary British Novel,” in Adrienne E. Gavin (ed.), *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary* (London Palgrave, 2012, 238-250), p.240.

15. Ellen Pifer, *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture*, p.13.

16. Ellen Pifer, *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture*, p.15.

17. Gerald Gillespie, *Romantic Prose Fiction* (Amsterdam; J. Benjamins Pub, 2008), p.184.

circumstances. McEwan's novels prove that "demonic" attitudes of the children do not arise from their instinctive pulses, or they are not innately bad, but these attitudes are mostly established as a reaction to adults' dominant world or are implicitly supported by adults.

In McEwan's texts, authority as a steamroller appears in different guises. His child characters, consequently, become the victims of this repression. In *The Cement Garden*, for instance, children are portrayed as characters who are under the oppression of their parents and the government. This hierarchical and societal order that is above the children functions as a force to victimise them, although the children can be harmful or cause catastrophic consequences that the adults cannot bear because of their societal order, taboos, and political views. While representing their period, McEwan's child characters also borrow thematic characteristics from previous centuries.

In *The Cement Garden*, for instance, the child characters are used as a depiction of the deconstruction of the family structure where the parental authority is questioned. The children, in this sense, are the vehicles to scrutinise how the unethical and unconventional or, more than this, illicit actions (burying the mother and incest relationship among themselves) which make them villainous characters, in fact, turn out to be a sort of self-defence against the oppressive societal order of adults. In this sense, McEwan's novel absolves the unacceptable practices of the children through revealing the dominant and insistent effects of the adults over them.

The child characters in the novel seem to be gothicized because of their family's neglect and harsh treatment. Eventually, they stand alone after the death of their father and mother. To survive and separate from the government and society which have already abandoned the family in a desert-like urban city, in an attempt to save the nuclear family they have incestuous relationships and transvestite desires, norms which their society cannot accept. While they may represent William Golding's devil-like child characters in *The Lord of the Flies* at a certain point, McEwan's child characters will be discussed under the dilemma of survivors and their ignorance of social values.

In his novel, McEwan changes the Edwardian garden into a cement floor, thus reversing the idea of it being a space where children are allowed to play. *The Cement Garden* ironically reminds the Edwardian notion of childhood to depict how children survive in their nuclear family, and how they are abused and how they abuse each other. Besides, as through their incestuous relationship, they will be discussed as the potential characters who ignore the societal order. Yet their reaction will be explored as a reason to prevent victimisation by adult authority.

McEwan's first novel, for some critics, seems one of the most unendurable novels in which the child characters can act maliciously. The novel with its evil-like child characters has been reviewed by many writers to point out the potential of children to behave villainously. One of them is Anne Tyler, the author of *Searching for Caleb* and *Earthly Possessions* (1978). She in her review underlines the "cruelty" of the children: "what makes the book difficult is that these children are not—we trust—real people at all. They are so consistently unpleasant, unlikable and bitter that we can't believe in them (even hardened criminals, after all, have some good points) and we certainly can't identify with them... And this is not the first book in which a pack of determined children bury their mother in secret, but it's almost certainly the first to cover, with such meticulous care, the putrefaction of her body."<sup>18</sup> More than this Tyler, without revealing the reasons behind the children's attitudes at the given instances, goes a step further and criticises the child characters: "nor is their reason for the burial a positive one; it's not love or loyalty that holds them together, but a hostility toward the rest of the world. Generally they're callous with one another, if not downright cruel."<sup>19</sup> Tom Paulin, too, in his review, specifies the dangerous potential of the child character with an oxymoron: "McEwan has a strange notion of a sort of demonic or delinquent innocence which seeks to reflect itself in the blankness of a tabula rasa. It refuses experience and yet engages in sexual games that are part childish, part adult—the between state of early adolescence is his chosen territory."<sup>20</sup> Some other critics also focus on the anarchy of freedom after the separation of children from the adults' dominance. Pifer, the author of *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (2000) for instance, asserts: "*The Cement Garden* describes the primitive anarchy that results when children are released from the constraints of society and the adults' 'civilized' order."<sup>21</sup> Pifer's statement may imply that whenever children are free from the adult governing, there is inevitably a chaos stimulated by the unacceptable practices of the child characters in the society. There is definitely a chaos after the release from the dominant adult world however it seems that the critics' understanding of the notion that freedom is equal to anarchy and villainous treatments is questionable. The criticisms which conclude the

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18. Anne Tyler, "Damaged People: The Cement Garden," in *New York Times Book Review*, November 26, 1978, (Online), <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/12/27/specials/mcewan-cement.html>, February 15, 2013, p.92.

19. Anne Tyler, "Damaged People: The Cement Garden," p.92.

20. Tom Paulin, "Abandoned Prefabs: Recent Fiction," in *Encounter*, 52:1, January 1979, 49-50.

21. Ellen Pifer, *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture*, p.189.

actions of the children as villainous or demonic lack seeing the interaction between the suppressive authority of adults and the child characters. Although the novel questions the idealised representations of the child, it also utilises the child characters not merely to depict them as villainous, but more particularly to underline the oppressive and authoritarian impositions of the adults over the children. In one of his interviews, McEwan declares that his novel's subject would include the suffering of children rather than intoxication from the absence of the adult. He says:

“What was so attractively subversive and feasible about Golding was his apparent assumption that in a child-dominated world things went wrong in a most horrible and interesting way...The novel brought realism to my fantasy life... and years later, when I came to write a novel myself, I could not resist the momentum of my childhood fantasies nor the power of Golding's model...I had no doubt that my children too would suffer from, rather than exalt in, their freedom.”<sup>22</sup>

Unlike an experimental and humorous aspect of the incest relationship between the siblings in his early short story “Homemade”, in the novel the villainous-like attitudes of children arise from the perspectives of adults, limited by their political and social values. The child characters are used for a depiction of the deconstruction of the family structure where the parental authority is questioned. The children, in this sense, are the vehicle to scrutinise how the unethical and unconventional or, more than this, illicit actions (burying the mother and incest relationship among themselves) which make them villainous characters, in fact, turn out to be a sort of self-defence against the oppressive societal order of adults. In this sense, McEwan absolves the unacceptable practices of the children through revealing the dominant and insistent effects of the adults over the children. McEwan's child characters are also the mediums to criticise the parental and governmental authority over them.

This domination of the parent and the government, in Mendel's term, represent the authorities over the children who are defeated under these dominant powers of adults. Critics see McEwan's novel *The Cement Garden* “with a mixture of fascination and slight horror;”<sup>23</sup> it is “in many ways a shocking book” writes Robert Towers in the *New York Review of Books* “morbid, full of repellent imagery—and irresistibly readable.”<sup>24</sup> And some of them saw the book as “unsavory.”<sup>25</sup> It is about the survival of the four siblings in their home after the death of their parents. Some critics such as Dodou

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22. Jack Slay, *Ian McEwan* (Detroit: Twayne Publishers, 1996), p.37.

23. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p.1.

24. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p.1.

25. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.46.

associate the novel with gothic elements. Gothic fiction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as Fred Botting states in his book *Gothic* (1996), included “tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits.”<sup>26</sup> While monsters, demons, corpses, evil aristocrats, skeletons, monks, nuns were popular in this genre in the Eighteenth century; in the Nineteenth century scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals are added to this categorization of the gothic.<sup>27</sup> Gothic landscapes are naturally “desolate, alienating and full of menace” but in the Eighteenth century the landscape specifically turned out to be “wild and mountainous locations.”<sup>28</sup> Later the castle and forest are included and in the modern era the setting gradually became much more domestic and narrow. As Botting says “the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family decline, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present.”<sup>29</sup> More than this, he also underlines that the source of anxieties related with gothic elements changed such as: “political revolution, industrialization, urbanization, shifts in sexual and domestic organization, and scientific discovery.”<sup>30</sup>

The story starts with the adolescent Jack’s narrating his unloved and unlovable father’s death while he is trying to concrete over the family garden. Jack continues to describe his mother’s slow end from an unspecified disease. On her death, Jack, his brother and his two sisters fear that they will be parted as the government, the ultimate authority to decide what to do about the orphans, will take them to the orphanage. Therefore, they decide to bury their mother’s body in a metal trunk filled with cement in the cellar. Finding themselves released from a tyrannical father’s oppressive attitudes and a careless mother’s passivity, they start to behave in a free way, far away from any parental and social authority. Jack wastes his time mostly sleeping and masturbating, his younger sister Sue deals with her diary. She and her elder sister Julie dress up in girl’s clothes, the younger brother Tom who wants to be a girl as he realised that if he becomes a girl, he will not be kicked by the boys at school any more. Meanwhile, they do not care about the house which is gradually filling with decaying refuse. Besides, as the ill-made concrete in the basement starts to crack, the odour of the mother’s corpse fills the house. Jack’s narration about the incestuous attempts between himself and Julie reaches its peak point- the novel’s climax- when Julie’s boyfriend, Derek watches Julie and Jack have

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26. Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.2.

27. Fred Botting, *Gothic*, p.2.

28. Fred Botting, *Gothic*, p.2.

29. Fred Botting, *Gothic*, p.3.

30. Fred Botting, *Gothic*, p.3.

sexual intercourse. Eventually, the orphaned siblings are taken into custody by the government.

In contemporary fiction children are seen as a threat to the societal order. The child is the “source of adult anxiety”<sup>31</sup> says Dodou. Contemporary fiction questions the image of the innocent child. McEwan’s *The Cement Garden* as Dodou asserts “treats the child in a comparable manner by attaching to childhood a sense of unease.”<sup>32</sup> The novel questions children’s morality and the idealization of children. Like the boys in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954), the children first experience a sense of exalted freedom after the deaths of their parents, but soon after this exultation is replaced by an “increasing restlessness as they question sexual, gender, and moral norms.”<sup>33</sup> In this sense, Malcolm underlines the frightening aspect of McEwan’s novel in terms of failing of usual standards: “The utter lack of any moral norms or expression of traditional morality in the text differentiates McEwan’s novel from Golding’s. The everyday, domestic setting of the later novel also distances it from the earlier one with its exotic, desert island location, perhaps making McEwan’s text all the more frightening in its depiction of the collapse of traditional rules and order.”<sup>34</sup>

When the children are far away from adult authority, their attitudes under the circumstances may differ. While Golding’s children run wild, frightening and kill each other, they, in fact, imitate the adults’ mistakes to survive. McEwan’s children, on the other hand, get close. Peter Childs comments on these two novels as follows: “McEwan does not suggest that if adults are removed, children revert to any kind of savage state but they will adapt, and adapt to, the role models that the removed adults provided for them.”<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Childs’s argument is not completely valid since the children do not necessarily take the adults as their role models. What is interesting for McEwan’s characters is that they experience an incestuous relationship. McEwan points to the incestuous relationship between the siblings as forces that keep them together under a difficult situation. The children’s solidarity, in McEwan’s novel, does not appear through the adults’ being “role models” but through their need of unity. In McEwan’s words:

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32. Katherina Dodou, “Examining the Idea of Childhood,” p.240.

33. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.52.

34. Peter Childs (ed.), *The Fiction of Ian McEwan: a Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.34.

35. Ryan Roberts, *Conversations with Ian McEwan* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), p.17.

“I didn’t want a situation in which, because the parents have died, the children just assumed roles which are identical to those of the parents. I had an idea that in the nuclear family the kind of forces that are being suppressed- the oedipal, incestuous forces-are also paradoxically the very forces which keep the family together. So if you remove the controls, you have a ripe anarchy in which the oedipal and the incestuous are the definitive emotions. From Jack’s point of view Julie becomes something he aspires to sexually, even though she is his sister and also, in the circumstances, acting as mother to his younger brother and to some extent to Jack himself. I suppose I’m suggesting a situation in which the oedipal and incestuous are identical.”<sup>36</sup>

McEwan’s self-criticism has a post-Freudian aspect which focuses on incestuous and oedipal circumstances. Inevitably, incestuous relationship between the siblings is among the predominant issues of the plot in the novel. The novel “seeks to unsettle assumptions about the moral nature of children in post-Freudian terms by portraying the protagonists as egotistical, abusive, and incestuous.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, in doing so although the novel questions the idealised representation of the child, this paper suggests their incestuous and violent interactions are the results of their exploitation by authoritative adults. To be precise, the presence or absence of adults both cause their victimisation by oppression of adults. In Dodou’s words: “both the presence and absence of adults cause problems for child characters. Absence causes neglect, victimisation, or feralization of the child, while presence causes restrictions on childhood freedom, excessive adult dependence on the child, or abuse of children.”<sup>38</sup> Here, the aim is not to absolve the children as innocent, pure creatures, but to depict how they have the capacity to provide a defence mechanism against adults’ pressure.

After the deaths of their parents, the situation of the four children evokes earlier Romantic and Edwardian visions of childhood in which their lives are separated from the adult world. The setting in an isolated British suburbia reinforces the presence of gothic elements. The house has a mystic atmosphere with its dark cellar creating a gothic setting which echoes Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher.” The other gothic elements, too, deepen the impression of a gothic atmosphere. For instance, the men who bring the cement to the garden are “covered in a fine, pale dust which gave their faces a ghostly look.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, Jack has a nightmare in which he sees a box with a small, captive, stinking creature inside it;<sup>40</sup> moreover, while he torments Julie in their play, he

36. Ryan Roberts, *Conversations with Ian McEwan*, p.17.

37. Adrienne E Gavin, “Unadulterated Childhood: The Child in Edwardian Fiction,” p.219.

38. Katherina Dodou, “Examining the Idea of Childhood: The Child in the Contemporary British Novel,” p.245.

39. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden* (Vintage Books, 1994), p.13.

40. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.23.

uses his father's "enormous" gardening gloves.<sup>41</sup> All these instances allude to gothic elements which have been supplied by adults. The desire of the father to cover the garden with cement at a certain point symbolises the deconstruction of the playground of the children and his aim to turn the garden into a wasteland. The first imposition of the adults on the children starts with creating a sense of an uncanny place even in their house. The father accomplishes to create such a place by "surrounding the house, front and back".<sup>42</sup> When he is asked, the father explains the reason: "it will keep the muck off your mother's clean floors".<sup>43</sup> It is an attitude that diminishes a natural environment for the children. Besides, the father's reason is hypocritical since the mother does not approve his idea. But he ignores her when she says "that was quite unnecessary."<sup>44</sup> However, this does not mean that all the gothic elements are created by the adults. The gothic atmosphere of the novel strengthens when the children bury their mother in the trunk filled with cement in the basement and after a few weeks the smell of her decayed body floats through the house.<sup>45</sup> But above all, the oppression of the father and the parents (in a way) are abandoning them in the house and even keeping their children far away from society and the outside world, thus this oppression employs the main entities of a gothic atmosphere. The children, in this sense, are like the characters in a gothic atmosphere created by adults.

Through the ambiguity between cement and semen, the novel depicts the struggle between adults' lifeless garden which is full of cement and the children's desire for new life and change with the symbol of semen. McEwan plays with the word cement. The father buys the cement to cover the garden. The father's authority embraces the house with his tyrannical treatment. He, as a typical patriarchal figure, does not need any agreement from the members of the family. He imposes his idea on them. Therefore, cement may also refer to the deconstruction of family unity. Truly, the siblings' relationship with the father does not show any peaceful or harmonious resolution. At the very beginning of the novel the father dies while he is plastering the cement on the garden. As he turns the garden with flowers and other plants into a dead concrete jungle, he dies. While he is dying, Jack's first investigation of his semen is in sync with his

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41. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, pp.36-37.

42. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.16.

43. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.17.

44. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.16.

45. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p.130.

father's death scene. As the cement of the father may symbolise death, Jack's semen may also refer to rebirth, regeneration, new life since he learns how to masturbate and satisfy himself many times. He also experiences how his semen is for the first time:

"I passed a bucketful to my father and then, addressing myself to his shape, told him I needed to go to the toilet. He sighed and at the same time made a noise with his tongue against the roof of his mouth. Upstairs, aware of his impatience, I worked on myself rapidly. As usual, the image before me was Julie's hand between Sue's legs. From downstairs I could hear the scrape of the shovel. My father was mixing the cement himself. Then it happened, it appeared quite suddenly on the back of my wrist, and though I knew about it from jokes and school biology books, and had been waiting for many months, hoping that I was no different from any other, now I was astonished and moved. Against the downy hairs, lying across the edge of a grey concrete stain, glistened a little patch of liquid, not milky as I had thought, but colourless. I dabbed at it with my tongue and it tasted of nothing. I stared at it a long time, up close to look for little things with long flickering tails. As I watched, it dried to a barely visible shiny crust which cracked when I flexed my wrist. I decided not to wash it away. I remembered my father waiting and I hurried downstairs... My father was lying face down on the ground, his head resting on the newly spread concrete."<sup>46</sup>

The synchronization of the father's death and his semen experiment foreshadows the change of roles. Jack metaphorically kills his father when he gives up helping him. But, his experiment with his semen, on the other hand, also indicates the necessary change and a new life to be born away from the authority of the father. The father's authority is replaced by Jack. The incest fantasies of Jack while masturbating and also incest relationships between him and his sisters are the exact symbols of the biological potential that will provide the continuation of the family.

Nevertheless, after the death of their mother, they cannot create a peaceful way of living at a certain point. It is the continuation of the problematic atmosphere in another fashion. After the mother's death, their reluctant behaviours appear more clearly. They do not clean up, clean the house, or even they do not help their three-years-old brother Tom when he shits in his pants. The kitchen becomes "a place of stench and clouds of flies."<sup>47</sup>

However, it is also noteworthy to point that Jack symbolises rebirth, renewal of life and besides, as he metaphorically kills his father by not helping him, he also reflects the dark side of human being; in this sense, he has similarities with Golding's Jack and Ralph. He resembles Golding's Jack with his violent action to Tom. He cannot endure the fact that his mother dies before she notifies Julie about dividing of money in her will.

46. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, pp.18-19.

47. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.82.

Her mother, before going to the hospital, says “‘Julie and you will have to be in charge.’ ‘You mean Julie will.’ I was sullen. ‘Both of you,’ she said firmly. ‘It’s not fair to leave it all to her.’ ‘You tell her then,’ I said, ‘that I’m in charge too.’”<sup>48</sup> However, the mother cannot explain what she has said to Jack about the shared task they have. Similarly, Golding’s Jack tries to attain the same authority as Ralph, his antithesis. He, on the other hand, draws a parallelism with Ralph who symbolises order towards the end of the novel. In other words, he changes from Golding’s Jack to Ralph. As we will see in the following pages, he will be able to realise his untidiness, and he will try to put everything in order in the house. As a result, McEwan’s Jack is much more humanised than Golding’s Jack. He indicates a process from negative attitudes to a civilised one.

While a shipwreck causes Golding’s children to experience a social exclusion from the adult world, in McEwan’s novel, the first imposition of the adults on the children is the social exclusion of them by means of the cement. The cement kills their natural playground: “[cement] transforms the garden, that symbolic urban surrogate for the Rousseauian schema that designates ‘nature’ as the child’s rightful place, into a cemented and insipid wasteland”<sup>49</sup> The change of the garden from a natural place to a cement ground also symbolises forcing children into the ruined or demolished industrial world of adults. Since the houses around their house have been broken down due to the plan of constructing a motorway<sup>50</sup> there is no place to play outside for them. Jack and his sisters and brother are not the only children who are affected by this unskillfulness of adults, but also the other “kids from the tower blocks”<sup>51</sup> who come to play “near [their] house, but usually they [go] further up the road to the empty prefabs to kick the walls down and pick up what they could find.”<sup>52</sup> This wasted and ruined environment created by adults indicates that the children are not only secluded from their natural playground, but also they are relegated to a ruined chaotic urban space. The concept of play for the children is changed in such a ruined atmosphere so that they “kick the walls down” and more than this, the novel also reveals the deep indisposition between the adults and the children as “once they set fire to one [wall], and no one cared very much.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, we may say that adults in the novel are reflected as clumsy and inadequate, besides, they cause degeneration and demoralisation to the young.

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48. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.50.

49. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.241.

50. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.22.

51. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.22.

52. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.22.

53. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.22.

The child characters of McEwan are beyond the societal order. They deconstruct the pre-established social and moral values. McEwan with his “lethargic and morose protagonist” portrays a version of childhood that is the opposite of the spontaneous, wondrous child exalted in the Romantic pattern of thought.<sup>54</sup> Patricia Holland in her book *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (2004) explains Christopher William’s statement that “this anti-sentimental vision of childhood is rooted in concerns voiced about the morality of children at the time of the novel’s publication in 1978. McEwan devises an unruly and seemingly amoral group of children that embodies anxieties that the permissiveness of the 1960s and 1970s had produced a ‘Savage Generation’ of ‘iron hard, unfeeling boys and girls without any sense of moral values or sexual values, without any ambition or desire to be worthwhile citizens or to be part of a decent society’.”<sup>55</sup>

But, it is debateable whether McEwan’s child characters can be accepted in a ‘Savage Generation’ or not. It is true that McEwan’s child characters experience an incestuous relationship which is against the moral values of their society. The novel portrays, in adults’ perspectives, morally corrupted children. But the novel also scrutinises the reasons of the children’s unethical deeds which mostly arise from lack of communication between the adults and the children, and also from the need of the children to survive despite exploitative attitudes of the adults. Throughout the novel we never see that their parents have introduced the values accepted by the society. The society is itself a question in the novel. They live in an abandoned suburb. They do not even have a television in the house which is a strong proof of their distance from the outside world.

As Jack narrates their house’s location, we understand that they have no connection with the outside world: “Our house had once stood in a street full of houses. Now it stood on empty land where stinging nettles were growing round torn corrugated tin. The other houses were knocked down for a motorway they had never built on.”<sup>56</sup> The deconstruction of the communication with the outside by knocking down the other houses indicates the worthlessness of the society. The stinging nettles which surround the house also stand for the children as a threat by the society. The setting shows that the children are restricted by the adult’s constructions: the houses around them have been knocked down due to the

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54. Katherina Dodou, “Examining the Idea of Childhood: The Child in the Contemporary British Novel,” p.241.

55. Ryan Roberts, *Conversations with Ian McEwan*, p.121.

56. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.22.

unfinished project of a motorway. This isolation goes on through the father's "damaging" the garden which is a natural playground for the children. And the destroyed nature sets its natural prison-like walls: stinging nettles, an image which belongs to fairy tales where the child characters are usually in danger of an unknown outsider or confined to a space disadvantageously. As the characters in fairy tales are rushed into a place from which they cannot escape, Jack and the other siblings are metaphorically imprisoned in their own house. Dodou and some other critics assert that "besides Gothicizing the child, a way in which recent fiction has troubled childhood innocence is by foregrounding the question of what the child knows and of what she is capable."<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, in this novel, the gothic or the gothicised elements are not only the children but even more the adults. In the novel the house is described with gothic images reminiscent of a fairy tale: "Our house was old and large. It was built to look a little like a castle, with thick walls, squat windows and crenellations above the front door. Seen from across the road it looked like the face of someone concentrating, trying to remember."<sup>58</sup> The house with its physical appearance like "someone concentrating" and "trying to remember" stands for the theme of oblivion in the novel. The house, in this sense, may symbolise the easy forgetting of adolescent ages. Towards the end of the novel when Jack asks Sue about their incestuous games: "'Don't you wish,' I said slowly, 'that we still played that game?' Sue's answer 'I can hardly remember anything about it'" is remarkable to indicate the temporariness of incestuous relationship between the siblings.<sup>59</sup> The house's feature contributes to the difficulty of remembrance with its thick walls, with its image like a castle. The image gives the sense of a barrier to enter the house. The distance between the children and the outside world is also reflected through the house metaphor. Yet, ironically the house also, in a way, serves to keep the children in the house isolated from the outside. The gothic image, in this sense, does not frighten the children but, on the contrary, it protects them from the adults.

Towards the end of the Twentieth century the idea that domesticity is the protective place for children has started to be deconstructed. One of the best examples of this is *The Cement Garden* (1978). However, over the eighteenth century the concept had been the opposite. As Gavin states "over the eighteenth century, the concept of the nuclear family and the idea of the home as a protective sphere governed by the mother and innately

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57. Katherina Dodou, "Examining the Idea of Childhood: The Child in the Contemporary British Novel," p.241.

58. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.23.

59. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.96.

suited to the safe, moral upbringing of young children, in short the ideas we associate with domesticity, were being consolidated, as many historians and scholars have noted.”<sup>60</sup> McEwan twists this idea through depicting his child characters left orphan. Besides, before their parents’ deaths, what the siblings have experienced is not a safe and peaceful life. They are abused by a tyrannical and authoritative father and could not socialise properly because of a passive mother. Consequently, the children, to be able to survive, create their own way of life which is against the taboos of adults: Jack and Julie’s incest relationship, Tom’s desire to be a girl, and of course burying the mother in the cellar. These treatments sturdily represent their self-defence mechanisms.

In an interview with McEwan, he points out his idea about the incest among the siblings: “in the nuclear family the kind of forces that are being suppressed- the oedipal, incestuous forces-are also paradoxically the very forces which keep the family together.” Jack and Julie, in this sense, experience exactly what McEwan offers for his own novel. The relationship between them “moves inexorably from normal sibling affection to incest.”<sup>61</sup> Jack and Julie are always in power struggle which Julie always wins. Besides, Jack the narrator describes her as a subject of affection and admiration. The influence of her physical descriptions by Jack foreshadows the incestuous outcome. Jack gazes at her and tries to define her appearance: “half-smiled, half-pouted, her lips softly pursed.”<sup>62</sup> Jack’s creaming onto his sister’s back is one of the clearest innuendos, especially since we know that he spends most of his time masturbating. He describes the creaming scene with erotic images: “he kneels ‘between her open legs’ and ‘squirts pale, creamy fluid’ into his hand. While he does so, he is described as stealing a glance at his sister’s breast.”<sup>63</sup> The incestuous relationship is not only between Jack and Julie but it also includes Sue. Their games, the way they play does not allude but particularly point to incest relationship even pornographic gestures:

“Together we rapidly stripped Sue of her clothes and when we were pulling down her pants our hands touched. (11) ‘Vell?’ We rolled Sue on to her side and then on to her belly. We stroked her back and thighs with our finger- nails. We looked into her mouth and between her legs with a torch and found the little flower made of flesh. ‘Vot to you think of zis, Herr Doctor?’ Julie stroked it with a moistened finger and a small tremor ran along Sue’s bony spine. I watched closely. I moistened my finger and slid it over Julie’s. ‘Nothing serious,’ she said at last, and closed the slit with her finger

60. Adrienne E Gavin, “Unadulterated Childhood: The Child in Edwardian Fiction,” p.95.

61. Peter Childs (ed.), *The Fiction of Ian McEwan: a reader’s guide to essential criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), p.38.

62. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, pp.23-24.

63. Peter Childs (ed.), *The Fiction of Ian*, p.39.

and thumb. 'But ve vill votch for further developments, ja?' Sue begged us to go on. Julie and I looked at each other knowingly, knowing nothing. 'It's Julie's turn,' I said. 'No,' she said as always. 'It's your turn.' Still on her back, Sue pleaded with us. I crossed the room, picked up Sue's skirt and threw it at her. 'Out of the question,' I said through an imaginary pipe. 'That's the end of it.' I locked myself in the bathroom and sat on the edge of the bath with my pants round my ankles. I thought of Julie's pale-brown fingers between Sue's legs as I brought myself to my quick, dry stab of pleasure. I remained doubled up after the spasm passed and became aware that downstairs the voices had long ago ceased."<sup>64</sup>

Their game ends here. Although it includes erotic scenes, what they try to do is playing a game but with the influence of uncontrollable libido of Jack. Strangely enough except the incestuous games among them, their relationship is always in a sort of quarrel, or they mostly ignore each other. The vivid and happiest scenes are during the incestuous games they play. One of the reasons of their coming close to each other is their inevitable asocial characteristics because of the parental attitudes. The siblings create a nuclear family through incest among themselves in the figures of mother and father after the death of their parents. Although for a Twentyfirst century adult perspective, this incest relationship is a taboo which cannot be accepted by adult authorities, it is this incestuous interaction between them that holds them together, makes them feel close to each other. Here our intention is not to support this incest relationship but to reveal the fact that if the siblings need solidarity against unknown governmental procedures for orphans, incest is one of the ways that helps them to interlock.

"The Western Taboo against incest is fairly universal" says the author of *Sex for Grownups: Dr. Dorree Reveals the Truth* (2010). During this research I have contacted the author; she stated that incest among the siblings sometimes helps them survive, especially under the circumstances of problematic parent experiences:

"Siblings have been abandonment or feel abandoned; they have turned to each other for sustenance that then becomes sexual. Perhaps without it they might have died? The Western Taboo against incest is fairly universal. However, when these children become adults and overcome whatever guilt or shame they may carry, they seem to go on to lead productive lives including healthy relationships with spouses or loving partners. Frequently talking to each other as adults about their childhood experiences, often with therapeutic help, appears to enable them to move on in appropriately well adjusted developmental ways in my presentation."<sup>65</sup>

The games including incestuous intentions between Julie and Jack are not necessarily erotic but they can also be gothic as well. In this scene, Jack wears the huge

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64. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.13.

65. Dorree Lynn, "Positive Aspect of Incest and Ian McEwan's *Cement Garden*," Email to M.S., April 19, 2012.

gothic garden gloves to frighten Julie in her room: “The last time I tickled Julie I waited till Mother was at the hospital, then I slipped on a pair of huge, filthy gardening gloves, last worn by my father, and followed Julie up to her bedroom.”<sup>66</sup> In this scene, Jack symbolically takes the role of his father by wearing the gothic gardening gloves. As he takes the representative role of authority and masculine power, the siblings do not have an incest relationship but Jack seduces her.

Jack accomplishes to twist their catastrophic situation into enjoyable experiences by using grotesque-gothic entity. But to create the conflict in their games, he needs an object that is frightening. The big size of the gloves also works to create an image of a fairy tale of a child and a giant. Besides, the gloves also represent an opposite image of nature since it is filthy. The association of the father, garden, and filthy gloves stand for a threat against children. Filthy and coarse material of glove does not refer to nature but the cement that the father has touched with the gloves. Jack, to be able to create a frightening atmosphere, uses these gloves which are the only mentioned objects left from their father. Through the gloves Jack takes the gothic image of outside and the garden into the house. While they do not react to the smell of the kitchen and the untidiness of the house that much, the gloves from outside symbolically frighten them.

Up until here the games between Jack and Julie seem incest giggling since Julie’s first serious reaction turns out to have pleasure from the game. Then Jack says: “as I moved forward to be in a better position to hold her down, I felt hot liquid spreading over my knee.”<sup>67</sup> The reader expects that the “liquid” is his semen after his ejaculation. But it is not. McEwan twists the implied reader’s mind by stating that the liquid is urine: “Horried, I leapt from the bed, and shook the gloves from my hands. Julie’s last laughs tailed away into tired weeping. She lay on her back, tears spilling over the trough of her cheekbones and losing themselves in her hair. The room smelled only faintly of urine.”<sup>68</sup> The narrator does not reveal who pees, either Jack or Julie. If it is Jack who pees, he will not be erected and ejaculated since physically it is impossible for a boy to pee while he has been erected. And his peeing indicates that he does not intend to seduce his sister. As soon as Julie understands that he has peed, the game finishes between them; while she gets angry, Jack gets shy and leaves the room: “I picked up the gloves from the floor. Julie turns her head. ‘Get out,’ she said dully. ‘Sorry,’ I said. ‘Get... out.’ Tom and Sue

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66. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, pp.30-31.

67. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, pp.30-31.

68. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, pp.30-31.

were in the doorway watching. 'What happened?' Sue asked me as I came out. 'Nothing,' I said, and closed the door very quietly."<sup>69</sup> If it is Julie who pees, the scene again indicates that what they experience is a sort of funny game that makes Julie pee because she dies laughing. As the subject is not revealed specifically the scene also alludes to the unity without any gender difference among the siblings.

Incest relationships till the end of the novel mostly include games among them. Even so, they do not play games during an incest relationship but they have incestuous intentions during their games. McEwan alludes to childish impulse and deconstructs any probable reason which sees Jack's sexual desire to his sister as a perverted intention by giving the name Jack to his protagonist. The name Jack implies the term jack-off which means to masturbate in slang. The term jack-off with its popularity of being used among the adolescents who recently experience themselves indicates the funny, game-like attitudes of the children rather than their villainous intentions. Nevertheless, at the end, Jack and Julie dare to have barely a sexual relationship on purpose, and it is not included in a game. But before commenting on this change, it is also remarkable to talk about Jack's change. Throughout the novel Jack who gradually experiences his personality development is in a transition period. And through his change, incestuous intercourse turns out from games to real sex. His haggard attitudes change as well. Since he learns how to masturbate and their parents die, he abandons all the rituals of personal hygiene. He "no longer washed (his) face or hair or cut (his) nails or took baths."<sup>70</sup> He tells "I gave up brushing my teeth."<sup>71</sup> His dirtiness and incest-games belong to childish attitude. What is interesting is that Jack finds a way to change himself under the traumatic circumstance. In this sense, he portrays a powerful personality. A book as a present given by his sister gives him the stimulative force to change in a positive way.

The siblings' portraying a social unity is, in fact, a conservative approach. McEwan twists one of the major taboos of the society that is incest, and deconstructs the family order. Yet, he also indicates the necessity of unification of the siblings. Through these conflict conditions of the siblings, the novel also reminds us of Thatcher's political impact on the society. McEwan, by deconstructing the family unity, and on the other hand keeping the siblings unified, foreshadows the traumatic transition of social order of Thatcherite government. In one of her interviews, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher talks to *Woman's*

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69. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, pp.30-31.

70. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.21.

71. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.21.

*Own* magazine on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October in 1987. The date is 9 year later of the publication of the novel, but it is still significant to mention the Prime Minister's remarkable speech which renarrates the lack of society in England. In her speech, Thatcher says:

"I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem; it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant.' 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation."<sup>72</sup>

Referencing to Thatcher's narrative, we may say that McEwan goes in parallel with her idea. Yet they differ at when the children are taken by the police to be sent to an orphanage which represents the government. In McEwan's novel, the motto "there is no such thing as society" does not work at a certain point. In other words, the children's unity (nuclear family) is a society in itself. And the society of the siblings through the novel accomplishes to survive. More than this, their tidying up, and getting clean indicate their positive progresses.

McEwan's children themselves have the power to create a positive change in their lives. They have the ability to see what is not good. Through the help of the book given to Jack as a present by his sister Sue, he daydreams not his sisters in an incestuous desire but "instead, this time about Commander Hunt."<sup>73</sup> Jack gradually overcomes his juvenile crisis, he "cut[s] [his] fingernails and comb[s] [his] lank brown hair."<sup>74</sup>

The siblings' interaction with the public is prevented by the father and mother. The urban desolation is created in various ways: the father changes the garden into a cement prison through its walls where the children cannot possibly find a room to play; the mother, on the other hand, is not interested in encouraging them to communicate with the outside world. Therefore, they are not interested in learning about the society they are in. In contrast, when their mother dies, they give up going to the school as well. Besides, under such circumstances it is difficult for them to know about the moral values and taboos of their society. Through the novel, the only advice is the mother's warning Jack

72. "Margaret Thatcher", *Woman's Own magazine*, The Sunday Times, <http://briandeer.com/social/thatcher-society.htm>, 2014.

73. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.86.

74. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.87.

not to masturbate that much. She says: “‘Every time... you do that, it takes two pints of blood to replace it’.”<sup>75</sup> As she warns Jack not to masturbate by explaining biologically, she also reminds him about the domestic rules. Her statement “these are things your father would have been telling you” once more underlines how limited and uncompanionable relationship the father has with Jack.<sup>76</sup> Since there is no intention of the mother and the father to introduce their children with the society, it is expected that the siblings can experience life through their own capacity. As Malcolm states, “It is noticeable that Jack and his brothers and sisters scarcely feel that their actions are reprehensible. The world of *The Cement Garden* is one in which traditional norms seem not to apply.”<sup>77</sup> Under the circumstances, their evaluation of immorality or abnormality would be far-fetched. When Jack, for instance, checks his mother’s tomb, he suspects “about the immorality and abnormality of his actions that is striking.”<sup>78</sup> They clean the kitchen on one occasion; Jack cleans up his room. But these “partial restorations of order” as Malcolm states “are not motivated by any sense of rules or norms, but rather by a desire for unity in the first case and simply for change in the latter.”<sup>79</sup>

The rules, taboos and norms of the society which are critical on these subjects such as nakedness, infantile regression, incest, transvestism are not seen “as deviant acts by the participants themselves.”<sup>80</sup> Their absence gives them the feeling of liberation or something that is perfectly normal and natural in itself.<sup>81</sup> Jack states that “the impossibility of knowing or feeling anything for certain gave me a great urge to masturbate,”<sup>82</sup> and he does not feel any moral disparity. They do not get ashamed of lying naked together and even Jack declares that “I felt weightless, tumbling through space with no sense of up or down.”<sup>83</sup> Here, we see that Jack does not only take the moral lesson from the book, he also tries to feel the universe in an empathy with Commander Hunt whose space ship, instead of travelling through the universe at speed, “had remained perfectly still, fixed in outer space.”<sup>84</sup> When Julie’s friend Derek sees Jack and

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75. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.29.

76. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.29.

77. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.149.

78. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.149.

79. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.149.

80. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.149.

81. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.149.

82. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.98.

83. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.135.

84. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.55.

Julie having sex, he asks how long their incestuous relationship has been going on. Julie answers this question in a timeless manner: “Ages . . . ages and ages”.<sup>85</sup> The suggestion of timelessness actually and metaphorically applies to a universally disacknowledged truth that the adults could not bravely talk about or ignore. Julie’s answer can be an allegoric answer as well, since it possibly refers to all the children in the world who are inevitably faced with incestuous relationship due to their oppressed, difficult situation by the adults, and just for the sake of keeping the unification among themselves.

To conclude, in McEwan’s *The Cement Garden*, the children who are not basically *gothicised* but who struggle to exist in a gothic-like environment which is created by adults are either exploited by their father’s oppressive and insulting treatments or have to be faced with the destiny imposed by their passive mother. Their incestuous intentions and burying their mother in cement in the cellar are for the purpose of protecting their unity against the disruptive society and government. Their actions, which seem against the taboos of the adults, keep them together in their abandoned house.

As I tried to read *The Cement Garden* with reference to *Lord of the Flies* as an account of self-protection of childhood against any of the institutions which would probably be tyrant-like their father, it can also be “read as a depiction of imposition of traditional values that marked British political life in the 1980s” says Malcolm: “*The Cement Garden* aims for, and achieves, a timelessness, but it is also a text very much for its own time, a kind of mini twisted ‘Condition-of-England’ novel.”<sup>86</sup> McEwan, in this novel, by portraying an adult figure that destroys the (Edwardian) garden, and putting the child characters into an inescapable domestic life, examines their sociopsychological attitudes. By doing so, it is revealed that the orphan siblings have the capacity to survive in any circumstances, although their way of life, incestuous relationship and burying the dead mother in the cellar are strictly unacceptable for the adults’ moral values and taboos. Yet, since the adult exploitation has the ultimate authority and power in its own hands, they, in the end, fail to make their nuclear family survive. It indicates that the children are still the victims of adult ideology.

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85. Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, p.150.

86. David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p.150.

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