

TRAUMA AND SHATTERED SELF IN IAN MCEWAN'S *THE CEMENT GARDEN*

Ian Mcewan'ın Beton Bahçe Adlı Eserinde Travma ve Parçalanmış Benlik

Neslihan GÜNAYDIN ALBAY

Asst. Prof, Doğuş University, Faculty of Arts-Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature,
Istanbul/Türkiye.

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Doğuş Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, İstanbul/Türkiye
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1933-0125> | E-Posta: nalbay@dogus.edu.tr

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyse the intricate lives of the characters in the novel *The Cement Garden*, in which the themes of incest, trauma, and shattered self-prevail, through a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective and trauma theory. A 1978 novel by contemporary British writer Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden* (1978), reflects the tragic changes observed in the behaviour of the children who lost their parents. The novel explores how the four siblings, grieving the loss of their mother, withdraw into their own isolated realities, unprepared for the harsh world beyond. Through their story, it paints a vivid picture of the death and devastation that haunts them, revealing the far-reaching effects of turmoil on their lives. It sheds light on the dark aspects of the human soul. Being deprived of people who will guide them at an age when they have difficulty making sense of their emotions can lead to a reluctance to enter the dark corridors of the soul. Since fear is an emotion acquired through knowledge and aimed at protecting oneself, fearlessness is sometimes a sign of ignorance rather than courage. The absence of adults causes these children to be morally corrupt and to experience an identity crisis. This study also addresses the dilemma that may arise when sexuality touches the lives of children.

Keywords: Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, psychoanalysis, sexuality, identity, trauma.

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı ensest ve travma temalarının baskın olduğu *Beton Bahçe* romanındaki karakterleri Freudyen psikanalitik bir bakış açısı ve travma teorisiyle analiz etmektir. Çağdaş İngiliz yazar Ian McEwan'ın 1978 tarihli romanı *Beton Bahçe* (1978), ailesini kaybeden çocukların davranışlarında gözlemlenen trajik değişimleri yansıtır. Roman, annelerini kaybeden kardeşlerin, dış dünya için hazır bile olmadıkları bir dönemde, kendi dünyalarına nasıl çekildiklerini tasvir eder. Dört kardeşi çevreleyen ölüm ve yıkım izlerini okuyucuya aktarırken, huzursuzluğun ne kadar ileri gidebileceğini gösterir. Aynı zamanda insan ruhunun karanlık yönlerine ışık tutar. Duygularını anlamlandırmakta zorluk çektikleri bir yaşta onları yönlendirecek insanlardan mahrum kalmak, ruhun karanlık koridorlarına girmede isteksizlik yaratabilir. Korku, bilgi yoluyla kazanılan ve kendini korumaya yönelik bir duygu olduğundan korkusuzluk bazen cesaretin değil, cehaletin göstergesidir. Yetişkinlerin yokluğu, bu çocukların yozlaşmasına ve kimlik bunalımı yaşamasına neden olur. Bu çalışma, cinselliğin çocukların hayatına dokunması durumunda ortaya çıkabilecek ikilemi de ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ian McEwan, *Beton Bahçe*, psikanaliz, cinsellik, kimlik, travma.

Introduction

Ian McEwan, who has a distinctive place among contemporary English novelists, is outstanding with his unusual dark style. As his father was a soldier, he spent almost his whole life in Singapore and Tripoli. In 1967 at Sussex University, he continued his education in literature. When he turned 40, he had already written many short stories short novels and scenarios for television. The disturbing and grotesque topics he uses in his works both received harsh criticism and great praise. His unique style of writing made him distinguished. His topics are usually psychological and sensitive. Especially in male-female relationships, while the female character is sane and intelligent, the male character's confusion leads to a different point of view for the readers. This point of view is also evident in *The Cement Garden*, which is McEwan's most known work so far. He presents the themes of love, family, friendship, and perversion in the novel in a mysterious way.

This novel, which questions the innocence of the term 'child' in literature, explores the changes in the behaviour of siblings, who have lost their parents. It also deals with the absurdity that emerges when the words sexuality and child come together. Physical trauma arises from severe harm or injury to the body such as accidents, illness, war, or rape, while psychological trauma stems from emotional damage that disrupts an individual's sense of self, safety, or perception of the present (Caruth, 1996: 3). In both forms, trauma manifests as a deep emotional disturbance, often marked by anxiety or intense stress caused by "an extraordinary catastrophic experience which shattered the survivor's sense of invulnerability to harm" (Figley, 1985: xviii), by directly referring to McEwan's vision of trauma. Unlike physical wounds that may heal over time, psychological trauma persists, resurfacing as a recurring, painful, and fragmented experience of the present (Leys, 2000: 2). As depicted by Judith Herman, "it is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep (Herman, 1992: 37). In this article, I will analyse the intricate emotional experiences of characters in *The Cement Garden* in which the themes of incest and trauma prevail, from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective.

McEwan is one of the prominent writers who use the classical fiction structure most successfully. McEwan constructs his fiction around "extreme situations, deranged narrators, obscenity, and shock" (Begley, 2010: 91), grounding his narratives in unsettling and provocative contexts. As a result, his works often revolve around intense moments of crisis and psychological upheaval (Begley, 2010: 97). The most distinctive feature of Ian McEwan's novels is that he takes the fiction to a new turn in each chapter. Each episode of *The Cement Garden* ends with high tension. Some novels develop around one major climax; McEwan's novels develop around more than one climax at an ever-increasing pace. Each episode leads to the next with a lot of questions and leads to the unknown. According to Malcolm (2002), traumatic events in McEwan's novels often stem from seemingly ordinary moments by "opening the

wrong door, turning down the wrong street, losing attention for a moment and stepping into a nightmare” (p. 32). McEwan situates these traumatic experiences within both confined and public settings, emphasizing their disorienting impact on individuals. His narratives reveal how such events profoundly disrupt the victim’s sense of identity and alter their perception of time. McEwan is well-known for depicting the details of daily life through the creation of visual images. Indeed, his narration with a certain atmosphere of ordinariness makes his texts unique, especially the fact that he describes even the most perverted sexuality in this novel with the same intonation, which gives both mystery and depth to the work. The symbols in the novel are also very crucial, especially cement, which is among the primary motifs of the novel in many ways.

Ian McEwan’s fictional world has been greatly enriched by the influence of his literature education. Especially in his novels, the author questions the complex structure of human relations, particularly male-female relationships. The characters he creates and their actions within the structure of his novels not only disturb the reader but also make them suspicious. In *The Cement Garden*, McEwan challenges the hidden dynamics of British society, questioning the very concept of childhood innocence and its foundations. Moreover, McEwan’s focus on “detailed, solitary introspection” allows readers to delve into the conflicted and fragmented perceptions that follow trauma (Courtney, 2013: 185). Through his exploration of “personal, temporally warped experience” (Courtney, 2013: 185), he offers a profound glimpse into the inner workings of the traumatized mind. This study contends that *The Cement Garden* serves as a compelling example of this narrative approach.

Ian McEwan has long occupied a distinctive place in contemporary British literature, not only for his stylistic precision but also for the provocative themes he consistently chooses to explore. His novels and stories interrogate some of the most pressing cultural and psychological questions of modern life, ranging from the interplay of class and gender to the legacies of colonialism and the anxieties of ecological crisis. As Dominic Head points out, McEwan’s fiction also turns inward to examine more intimate domains - “the construction of identity, the complexities of love, family structures, innocence, and moral ambiguity” (2007: 2, 5, 15). By situating these private concerns alongside larger political and social issues, McEwan’s writing refuses easy separation between the personal and the public, the psychological and the historical. Furthermore, Head cogently emphasizes how Ian McEwan mirrors Iris Murdoch’s philosophy that “human consciousness is so structured to generate for us a mode of moral being in which we seek to find unity out of randomness, order out of chaos, and to pursue ‘truth’ in the process” (Murdoch, 1993: 46) For Murdoch, the novel should echo this dynamic moral thought.

What has drawn equal attention, however, is the unsettling subject matter of McEwan’s narratives. His reputation for presenting harrowing or violent scenes has led some critics to label him with darkly playful nicknames. As Vajda remarks, the writer has been called “Ian McAbre” (2020: 66), a moniker that captures the gothic

unease pervading much of his work. Such descriptions situate McEwan within what has been termed a “literature of shock” (Head, 2007: 30), a body of fiction designed to unsettle its readers and compel them to confront uncomfortable truths such as death, abuse, sexual tension and distressing adolescent fantasies. The way McEwan handles these disturbing subjects further complicates his critical reception. Rather than offering straightforward moral lessons, his narratives often resist judgment and invite readers into ethically ambiguous realm. Head characterizes this tendency as an “amoral view” (2007: 35), one that privileges psychological depth and complexity over conventional moral frameworks. This refusal to provide closure or clear ethical direction is precisely what makes McEwan’s work so disquieting and so compelling in the landscape of contemporary British fiction. Peter Childs (2005) acknowledges McEwan’s status as a serious literary scholar through his delicate engagement with contemporary humanist and liberal concerns, particularly the difficulties of steering a rapidly changing world and reconciling personal freedom with ethical responsibility.

A prominent example of this narrative strategy is found in *The Cement Garden* (1978), a novel that has been described as a “perverted bildungsroman” (De Coning, 2011: 98) due to its unsettling portrayal of a family’s descent into psychological and moral disarray following the sudden death of their parents. *The Cement Garden* reflects the tragic changes and some dysfunctions observed in the behaviour of the children who lost their parents unexpectedly. Having condemnable but acceptable motives regarding its topics, the novel explores how the four siblings, grieving the loss of their mother, withdraw into their own isolated realities, unprepared for the harsh world beyond. Through their story including incest and perversion, it paints a vivid picture of the death and devastation that haunts them, revealing the far-reaching effects of turmoil on their lives. It sheds light on the dark aspects of the human soul. Trauma originates in sudden, devastating experiences that occur outside an individual’s ability to anticipate or control. Such events are not fully processed at the moment they happen; rather, they are absorbed by the psyche and pushed out of conscious awareness. Over time, they settle into the unconscious and may re-emerge when similar conditions arise, producing reactions that are deferred rather than immediate (Ashmawy, 2022: 20).

The novel’s exploration of taboo subjects such as incest, grief, and the disintegration of social order is rendered particularly disturbing through its use of a first-person adolescent narrator. This focalization, filtered through the consciousness of the teenage protagonist Jack, presents traumatic and morally fraught experiences in a tone of unsettling normalcy, thereby amplifying their psychological and emotional impact. As Dodou (2021) notes, this narrative technique disrupts “idealized representations of the child” (p. 241), compelling readers to confront the dissonance between innocence and corruption. In doing so, the novel not only unsettles the reader but also invites a deeper reflection on the symbolic dimensions of childhood, familial roles, and psychic trauma. “Representations of trauma allow the audience to experience their fears vicariously. However, if representations are too safe and over-

mediated, they lose their authenticity and deprive the audience of the experiential link to trauma. To avoid this trauma, one should create what La Capra terms as ‘empathetic unsettlement [...] or performative engagement with unsettling events’” (Vickroy, 2002: 124). Trauma narratives make the reader engage with controversial manifestations of violence. This study aims to explore how trauma shapes the characters’ shifting perceptions of self in Ian McEwan’s *The Cement Garden*, by examining the diverse ways in which they respond to their traumatic experiences. By placing his protagonists into traumatic occasions McEwan paves the way for moral development, implying that a life marked by moral ambiguity can turn into a meaningful experience through self-examination and conscious choices.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in Freudian psychoanalytic criticism and trauma theory in order to analyze the psychological and emotional complexities of the characters in *The Cement Garden* by Ian McEwan. The research is based on close textual analysis, with greater emphasis on narrative voice, character psychology, symbolism, and recurrent motifs that reflect repression, desire, trauma, and the fragmentation of the self.

Freudian psychoanalysis provides the primary theoretical framework for examining unconscious drives, particularly those related to incest, repression, death instinct (Thanatos), and the collapse of moral and social boundaries following parental loss. Concepts such as the Oedipal complex, repression, the uncanny, and defence mechanisms serve to interpret the siblings’ behaviour, emotional withdrawal, and distorted familial relationships. These psychoanalytic tools enable a systematic exploration of how unresolved grief and forbidden desire shape the children’s internal worlds and interpersonal dynamics.

Complementing this approach, trauma theory is employed to analyze how loss, neglect, and isolation affect the characters’ perceptions of reality and selfhood. Drawing on critical discussions of trauma’s impact on narrative form and consciousness, particularly the notion of temporally disrupted and inward-focused experience (as discussed by Courtney), this study analyses McEwan’s use of fragmented introspection, emotional detachment, and narrative ambiguity. It also highlights how trauma manifests through silence, regression, and the breakdown of conventional childhood innocence.

The methodology also places the novel within its socio-cultural and literary context, considering McEwan’s challenge to post-war British ideals of domestic stability and childhood purity. Rather than regarding incest and trauma as sensational elements, the analysis approaches them as symptomatic expressions of psychological collapse and social failure. Secondary sources, including psychoanalytic theory and trauma studies scholarship, are used to support and contextualise textual interpretations, ensuring theoretical coherence and critical depth. Overall, this

methodological framework enables an interdisciplinary reading that combines psychoanalysis and trauma theory to reveal how *The Cement Garden* comes up with a disturbing yet psychologically subtle portrayal of childhood, loss, and the shattered self.

Psychoanalytic Criticism in *The Cement Garden*

In McEwan's fiction, trauma marks a decisive end to innocence. With the mother's death in *The Cement Garden*, the garden that once symbolized childhood is literally buried under cement, and the orphaned children are left to construct a distorted and unsettling imitation of the childhood they have lost. The novel portrays a family with four children living in a large old house in a neighbourhood where old houses are demolished to make way for skyscrapers. The father's curiosity is to turn everything into concrete in order to rid the garden of mud. He plans to turn kilos of cement into a concrete garden with his eldest son, Jack, but before he can complete his plans, he dies of heart failure on the concrete. After the sudden death of the father, the mother, who was initially thought to be depressed and never left her bed, turns out to have cancer, and within a few months the children lose her too. In a big house, the children, the oldest of whom is only sixteen years old, are starting to build a life on their own. Thanks to the fact that all this happens during the summer months when schools are on holiday, they are able to hide their mother's death for a long time. Ian McEwan describes childhood in the most rude and sincere way in his exploration of sexuality. The opening sentence of the novel, "I did not kill my father, but from time to time I felt like I made his job easier," (*Cement* 13) introduces the reader to Jack's not-so-innocent expression in the first line. The intense Oedipal strain that runs through this brief yet unsettling portrayal of the Father's death reflects McEwan's own acknowledgement that Oedipal situations repeatedly surface in his work ("Points of Departure," 16). Accordingly, Oedipal dynamics are central to the text and are inseparable from its focus on the nuclear family, the primary setting in which the Oedipus complex takes shape.

Whether it can be called a kind of "adolescent bullying," one can feel the effort to explain the events as if they were unimportant in Jack, the fifteen-year-old protagonist of *The Cement Garden*; the writer makes you feel very good about what's gnawing at him while trying to ignore it. Typical of a male adolescent, Jack adopts this indifferent attitude, especially when it comes to the deaths of his parents, to whom he is very sensitive: "Our father was a frail, angry and obsessive man with yellowish hands and face. The reason I mention his little death story here is just to tell you how my sisters and I had so much cement." The words "little death story" help us understand this weary tone. He talks about his mother's illness in the same careless tone. It does not give the details of the illness of the mother, who becomes more and more tired and immobile in bed. "Jack and his siblings are unaware of the dysfunction in their behaviour. The world depicted in *The Cement Garden* is a place where

traditional rules are not enforced" (Malcom, 2002: 64). The four children of the house are adapting to the slowly progressing disease, in the rhythm of the same disease. The mother's presence fades away in the house at the same slow pace. The themes of *Cement Garden* wander around the edges; children's games, which begin "innocently," quickly slide to the extremes when there is no authority. Hence, this study employs trauma theory to analyze how the characters' sense of self and experience of time are disrupted by trauma, and to evaluate the extent to which they are able to cope with or recover from these psychological wounds. The novel centers on characters who, in the aftermath of trauma, lose their coherent grasp of identity and temporal reality.

Trauma carries an unconscious dimension that disrupts the victim's sense of self, which, in Freudian terms, consists of unconscious, preconscious, and conscious layers. As a result, "the victim's view of self and world can never be the same again" (Rieker & Carmen, 1986: 362). The traumatic experience blurs the boundaries between past and present, leaving the mind overwhelmed and disoriented. This disruption challenges core assumptions about the self and the world, such as a belief in personal safety, a positive self-image and trust in others, and the notion of a stable, meaningful reality (Janoff-Bulman, 2002: 272). Consequently, the traumatized individual no longer engages with the world as a coherent whole but instead perceives it through a fractured lens, often experiencing profound alienation, hopelessness, and a loss of meaning. In *The Cement Garden* (1978), Jack's family is completely isolated from society and kinship ties. Jack, who is just developing his teenage sexual desires and fantasies, is isolated from his school friendships and social life. He spends most of his time pleasuring himself and reading a science fiction novel. The only people Jack communicates with are his mother, father, and siblings, who display personality traits that are quite pugnacious and refuse to obey the rules. The bond between Jack, Julie, Sally and Tom is far from normal. Although it does not seem unusual to them at first glance, the games they play contain sexual elements, which form the basis of abnormal sexual behaviour.

Jack's father is depicted as a very unsympathetic and scary character in the family. He often argues with his wife. The jokes he makes at his children do not make them happy; on the contrary, they disturb their peace. He has a harsh attitude towards Tom, the youngest member of the family, and constantly scolds him. The children think that their father is taking out his anger on Tom to get more attention from their mother. While the father is working to fix the garden of the house, the peace and order in the family gradually break down after his death from a heart attack. After finding their mother dead, the children do not know what to do. Sistani (2014) argues that "[t]he children, in spite of the freedom which has been granted to them, find their lives empty and hollow [...] the state of being separated from the primal loved object is unbelievably painful" (Sistani, p. 453). Moreover, because they do not want others to hear about their mother's death, they bury their mother in the basement of the house, using the cement that her father had previously bought to use in landscaping the garden. At this point, family management passes into the hands of children. Julie, the

oldest sibling, took on the role of mother in the family, although not entirely. Jack, who often refuses to comply with the social order in the family and shows rebellious behaviour, cannot fully assume the role of father. On a political unconscious level, as denoted by Cihan Yazgi in his doctoral thesis entitled "An Exploration of Political Unconscious in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden*, *The Child in Time*, and *Amsterdam*", the novel reflects a nation struggling to confront the collapse of the British Empire and the painful reshaping of its self-image. The text's failure to resolve this tension mirrors both Britain's and McEwan's difficulty in reckoning with imperial decline (Yazgi, 2022: 31). He also implies that by reshaping the family into a maternal, imaginary space, the narrative suggests a refusal to accept the loss of the Empire, figured as the mythic mother of the nation. The children's decision not to bury the dead mother and their resulting paralysis echo Britain's stagnation in the 1970s. Similarly, their reluctance to leave childhood behind and engage with the outside world parallels Britain's resistance to abandoning imperial fantasies in the face of an emerging neoliberal global order after the Second World War (Yazgi, 2022: 32). The other male characters in the novel also experience and reflect the same "distance between the ideal and the actual self, which has caused Jack's father's feeling of insecurity and vulnerability in *The Cement Garden*" (Hosseini, 2015: 197). Jack feels sexual intimacy towards his older sister Julie and his sister Sally and satisfies himself by imagining them. Jack's brother, Tom, whose mother and father are dead, is subjected to violence from another student at school. He claims that girls do not get beaten, and he suffers from a sexual disorder. He wants to be a girl and wears girls' clothes. Although problems arise from time to time, the children, except Sally and little Tom, get used to the absence of their parents and do not tell anyone about this incident. Hosseini notes:

In *The Cement Garden*, the father, whose death is semi-consciously wished by his son, dies and afterwards a matriarchal order with Julie as the head of the family develops. The new condition and the loss of the father make their construction of masculine identity for Jack and Tom more difficult than ever, as there is no father with whom the orphan sons can identify. Deprived of any model of masculinity, they become more and more dependent on Julie, their surrogate mother, who gives them the love and care they need, only in return for an unconditional obedience and absolute submission that can be acquired through regression only (Hosseini, 2015: 210).

Human consciousness and subconscious are the main subjects that the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud was closely interested in. The main component of describing a person is to go into the consciousness of a person and reveal what is there. Freud's theories on this subject aim to do this. Freud focuses on sexuality when analysing the mind and using psychoanalysis. In the theory of Psychoanalysis, it is argued that humans should be held responsible for two mental impulses. These are "sexual" and "aggressive" instinct. Many theorists, in contrast to Freud's views, argue that early childhood experiences are not the sole factors shaping personality development. They emphasize that experiences during adolescence and early

adulthood also play a crucial role in forming one's personality. Furthermore, these theorists contend that Freud places too much focus on instinctual influences, overlooking the significant impact of cultural and social factors in shaping human behaviour. Freud asserts that sexuality and instincts shape human behaviour and divides this theory into 3 main titles. These are dynamic, economic, and typographic. Briefly, if we touch upon these articles, dynamics is based on instincts. Instinct is one of the basic principles that enable a person to stay alive. We can define it biologically as vital needs such as hunger and thirst. Desires such as sexuality or libido can also be included in this definition. These are the instincts that make a person human. Another article, economy is about how people meet their needs. It examines the structure of the mind by examining in depth how it provides the vital needs we mentioned concerning dynamics, such as hunger or thirst, and the concepts in the dynamic model. The last one, the typography article briefly discusses the functioning of the mind structure. This article emerged as a result of dynamic and economic articles. It is an article what aims at understanding the functioning of the mind in a more systematic way, starting from instincts and principles. Freud conceptualized the human psyche as comprising three interrelated components as the id, the ego, and the superego, each of which plays a distinct role in shaping thought, behaviour, and desire. The id embodies the primal, instinctual impulses of an individual, while the ego works to regulate these drives in alignment with the reality principle. The superego, on the other hand, acts as an inner moral compass, guiding the individual to distinguish right from wrong based on internalized ethical standards.

The Oedipus Complex is a significant psychoanalytic theory that explores the dynamics of family relationships and their impact on individual development. One of the most famous examples of this theory is King Oedipus from Greek Mythology. The theory suggests that children's first love from birth is towards the parent of the opposite sex, leading to complex emotions and behaviours as they grow. Freud explains that in the "phallic" period, children become aware of their own sexual organs and develop feelings for a parent of the opposite sex. This can result in jealousy towards the same-sex parent, feelings of rivalry, and even hatred. Such dynamics can be seen in characters like Jack in *The Cement Garden*, who challenges his father's authority to establish his role in the family. These nuanced relationships between family members can shape individuals' behaviour and emotional intimacy as they navigate through the development stages of the Oedipus Complex.

According to Freud, the concept of family is very important in the development of the individual and in the process of gaining awareness of the world. In boys, jealousy for the father figure, inability to share the mother, and seeing the father as a rival are gradually interpreted negatively. Freud explains: "In my rather extensive experience, the primary role in the mental lives of those who later become psychoneurotic is played by their parents. To be in love with one parent and to hate the other is among the essential components of the sequence of psychic impulses formed at that time, which are crucial in determining the symptoms of later neurosis"

(Freud, 2010: 278). According to Freud, the negative process is the “phallic” period. This is the period when children between the ages of 3-6 begin to become aware of their own sexual organs and develop a love for a parent of the opposite sex. During this process, different psychological changes such as hatred towards the father by the boy and seeing him as a rival may occur. Similarly, girls may try to grab all of the father’s attention and not like the mother. As children grow up, they realize that these thoughts are wrong and their behaviours are transformed into situations such as loving and even acting like their father, whom they hate. However, this situation can mostly be observed in older children. The best example is the character Jack in the novel *The Cement Garden*.

We often witness that he is against his father in the novel, as it can best be understood from the following statement: “After his first heart attack, he stopped working in the garden altogether. Grass grew through the cracks in the paving stones, the rockery collapsed, and the pond dried up. The Pan statue toppled over and split in two, and nothing was said about it. The sight of him slumped weak and pale in his chair filled me with a mixture of fear and pleasure.” Jack wants to shake his father’s authority at home by describing him as weak and pale. That’s the reason why he avoids helping his father with gardening. The difficult situation of the father makes him happy. Because the weakening of the father’s authority at home eliminates the obstacle for Jack in reaching his mother and other sisters. Especially with the loss of his mother, this thought starts to become more dominant. He thinks of his sister Julie as the mother of the house and himself as the father of the house, and shapes his behaviours in this way. He thinks that these feelings are quite normal. These thoughts create feelings of sexual and emotional intimacy to his sister. Even from the first sentence of the novel, we realize Jack’s sick thoughts: “I didn’t kill my father, but I sometimes felt I had helped him on his way.” (McEwan, 1997: 9) By dismissing his father’s death as meaningless and later wiping away the imprint of his face in the cement, Jack suppresses the entire episode, pushing it out of his consciousness.

Lynn Wells interprets Jack’s removal of his father’s impression as a symbolic gesture that erases and absorbs the mark of paternal authority (Wells, 2010: 35). Among the three types of father figures identified by Lacan, the symbolic father is the most important one synonymous with the term ‘paternal function’ that releases the child from the imaginary order into the social order (Evans, 62-63). Lacan discusses that when the paternal function breaks down, the subject is unable to fully enter the social order or separate himself from the mother. He describes the child’s bond with the mother as an overwhelming, engulfing relationship that the child must ultimately break away from in order to develop as an independent subject (Evans, 120). From the opening episode of the novel, the narrative points to the collapse of paternal authority. This breakdown of the father’s symbolic role is immediately evident when Jack disregards the death of his domineering father as trivial, refusing to grant it any emotional or narrative significance. Hosseini explicates the psychological depression

and regression all male characters go through with the loss of authority at home like that:

It should be noted that regression in its extreme form becomes a radical renunciation of the symbolic order and one's identity as an individual. The symbolic order as the realm of differences and the recognition of otherness that constitutes language, law and culture is the site of constructing one's notion of self as a social being. In fact, while one's entrance into the symbolic order involves the experience of separation from others and the perception of one's identity, the exit from it in order to retrieve the preverbal world of idealized union with the mother is essentially an act of rejection of identity, hence a psychological death. In *The Cement Garden* and *The Child in Time* three characters who are traumatized by hegemonic masculinity go through regression (Hosseini, 2015: 197).

If we were to describe the family in the novel, it would be more accurate to mention a few people living under the same roof rather than the word family. Although they live together, they do not have very close family ties. Indeed, the fact that the child characters in the book grow up alone and unattended, even before their parents die, can be considered equal to the situation of a child growing up with lions in nature. Perhaps their mother and father figures are responsible for all that happens in their life. If we start with the father figure first, even though he is biologically their father, he never makes his presence felt as a compassionate father figure within the house. In the novel, the person that children are most afraid of and avoid communicating with is the father. At the same time, Jack's archenemy is also the father figure. So, what is this father model like actually? Although Jack presents us an exaggerated description of his father's character in the novel because he is jealous of him, we know that he has a pale and wrinkled face, slumped shoulders, rough and cracked hands because he works in the garden, and he is tall. This father figure is not very different from a traditional father figure. We see the elements of authority, power and emotional inadequacy as quite dominant in our figure. The father's patriarchal thought continues to be revealed to us throughout the book. Although the character of the father is not directly mentioned in the book except for his lack of communication with the children and his involvement in gardening, we can clearly feel his authority as a cruel and oppressive father figure. Most of all, he tries to establish this authority over the children. We can see this in the short and dull dialogues he has with them at the dinner table or during gardening. To give an example from the novel, Jack says, "My father spoke little to us, but his silence carried a weight that filled the room."

In McEwan's novel, the absence of responsible adult figures profoundly destabilizes the children's moral compass and sense of self, leaving them vulnerable to corruption and disorientation. Critics have observed that this vacuum of authority not only distorts childhood innocence but also forces the children into roles for which they are unprepared. As Dominic Head explains, "left to their own devices, the children's games result in the infantilizing and gender transformation of Tom, the promotion of Julie to the maternal role, and the eventual incest between Julie and Jack,

which is the culmination of the book's Oedipal theme, since Julie is identified by all as a surrogate mother" (2007: 48). Head's observation highlights the way McEwan uses the children's play as a disturbing mirror of adult structures, revealing how quickly innocence collapses into perversity when boundaries are absent. Head develops this reading further by situating the children's crisis within the broader dysfunction of the family itself. He remarks: "One reading of this is that the overdependence on the family unit as a source of reassurance and repair is an extension, merely, of the parents' regime: by damaging the children emotionally, while simultaneously cutting the family unit off from outside contact, the parents have established a dysfunctional home in which emotional need and emotional damage have become inseparable" (2007: 48). This interpretation makes clear that the children's descent into confusion and taboo behaviour is not simply a matter of childish mischief gone wrong; rather, it reflects the poisonous legacy of parental neglect, control, and supervision. The family, instead of nurturing, becomes a closed system of harm where emotional deprivation and unhealthy dependence reinforce one another.

Particularly, the loss of paternal authority causes a huge problem in the domestic order, especially with the death of the father. Like other fathers, this father figure acts as if he were doing housework that requires physical strength, or doing maintenance work, or gardening. We can see that the respect and fear for fathers increase depending on the difficulty of the work they do. One of the malicious things this father character causes after his death is the destruction of authority over children. It seems that there is no real concept of family. For this reason, they do not have very strong family ties. However, the father's authority is still one of the elements that keeps them standing. With the death of the father, this also collapses, and everyone starts to move through a free and chaotic order. There is a confusion in the minds about who should be the next leader. We can add Jack's words to this confusion about death: "With him gone, it felt as though the walls of the house had grown weaker, and we were left to keep them standing ourselves."

Another major character is the mother, who keeps the house standing. Both the father and mother represent traditional parents. In general, the sacrifice and love the mother gives for her children throughout the novel is a fact that does not go unnoticed. Unlike the father, the mother figure is a character who always supports the children emotionally. The mother's strength tries to balance the father's weakness in compassion. The mother character, like every traditional mother, is someone who always wants her children and family to be together, is physically weak but emotionally strong and does her best. The blow that came with the death of the father is met with a second blow when the mother gets sick. The period when she gets sick causes an unstable relationship within the family. The fact that the four children go their own ways and stay apart from each other is another factor that causes the walls of the family to gradually crack. The mother figure suddenly turns into a passive and ineffective character when she gets sick. The best example of this can be given with the following words: "She moved slowly, her body frail and her face pale, as though the

life was being drained out of her with each passing day.” Perhaps the worst blow occurs when the mother falls into bed, exhausted from the disease. During this process, the children even bring a couch to the room where their mothers are staying to be with them. They do not get caught up in the thought of their mothers dying for long, which causes them to do things they should not do because they are not prepared for the shock. We see that the mother is struggling for Jack, from whom we hear the events throughout the book. The advice that Jack always gives against his sexual habits or neglecting his self-care due to puberty during his growth process is a fact that does not go unnoticed. As the mother feels that her death is approaching, she starts to have private conversations with her children, especially Julie and Jack. According to the mother, Julie was the most sensible person to lead after her death. This idea is an example of the gender issue in McEwan’s books. While the female figure Julie is thought to be sensible and has leadership qualities, the character Jack is reflected as a character who has not yet recognized himself and does not know what he is doing, contrary to the general patriarchal idea of male leadership.

The novel presents traumatic events unfolding within a confined and public setting and examines their effects on the individual, illustrating how trauma reshapes a victim’s sense of identity and temporality. From this perspective, moments of crisis in McEwan’s works reveal the degree to which individuals are able to endure, react to, or ultimately succumb to extraordinary circumstances over time (Begley, 2010: 97). The part where everything goes wrong in the novel starts with the mother’s death. Authority completely disappears. The children are completely left alone after this incident and begin to move away from the term family. As the main characters of the novel, the children are the ones who are affected by the changes or events in the novel most. The four child characters in the novel are different from each other and have their own characteristics. Each one of them has a different role in the plot. I would like to start with Jack, the first and most important character, and the character from whom we hear the events. We learn about the main events from Jack’s perspective through a stream of consciousness technique. Just like the family that he comes from, his consciousness is also very complex. He is in the most intense period of puberty. That is the reason why he is emotionally unstable. Sometimes we see him being rebellious against his family but also candid as well. The condition he is in due to puberty and being stuck in the darkness is cold just like the place where his family lives. Throughout the novel, we witness the collapse of Jack and the whole family simultaneously. Even if he feels relieved after his father’s death, this situation makes him stumble and feel at a loss. His relationship with his father might be difficult but with his father’s death he comes across obscurity. These words of Jack might be a good example for this: “I didn’t feel grief when my father died. I felt relief, though I didn’t know what to do with it.”

Centring around the post-traumatic trials of four siblings after their mother’s death, the novel focuses on traumatized individuals grappling with the loss of conscious awareness of their selves and temporality under the effect of their traumatic

experiences. Jack is just a teenage boy who goes through the process of learning and knowing himself. This raises the question of sexuality on which characters are tested, and thus they fall victim to their sexual orientation. A kid needs a parent that can guide him through life after being born. Everyone is nothing at birth but tries to survive while developing themselves through the road of puberty and the toddler phase which are a child's cornerstone in life. The biggest helper for the kid about right and wrong or even in communication is a parent. Children live in a house with only individuals called mother and father. Not knowing what is morally right and wrong leads them into a dead end. Sexuality is also an effort for this, of course. Jack's sexual desires for his sister, which are immoral because of this deficiency and even cause great controversy, are proof of this. It is an unnoticed fact that Jack approaches his sister with curiosity and desire throughout the novel: "She knew I watched her, and she didn't seem to care. If anything, she encouraged it, as though teasing me was a game she enjoyed." Repressed feelings, uncertain desires and identity confusion are one of the greatest foundations of immorality. Jack's psychology is complex just like this book.

One of the most important characters in the novel is Julie, who is the eldest child in the house. The most striking feature of Julie's character is her authoritarian personality and attractiveness. Throughout the novel, we see the order she tries to maintain in accordance with her own picture of the family. Following the loss of her parents, she assumes the responsibilities of both "mother" and "leader" within the family. The siblings are quite young and still need a mother. Julie takes care of her siblings, especially Tom and Sue. This tires her after a while. Both the management of the house, the role of motherhood and her individual search for herself exhaust her after a while and cause her to escape from responsibilities. Although she is the oldest in the house, she is still not able to cope with so many responsibilities due to her age. Her other characteristic is that she is manipulative. In some places, her establishing authority over Jack and even being aware of Jack's feelings and using them against him is another fact that does not go unnoticed. In the novel plentiful with instances that underscore Jack's incestuous tendencies toward Julie, his sentences such as "she didn't have to say much; a glance, a smile, and you were already doing what she wanted" prove this situation.

On the other hand, Sue is the quietest and most introverted character among the siblings. She became very sensitive with the death of her mother, if not with the death of her father, and devoted herself to books and writing. We can see in the book with the following words: "Sue always had a book in her hands, her eyes following the words like she was escaping into another world." With the tragic loss of her mother, she lost her former joy and childlike spirit and became a more introverted child. She has difficulty in reflecting her emotions and self, and an example of this is given in the book as follows: "I wrote down everything I couldn't say aloud." Unlike other children, Sue tried to protect herself from the incident in a more mature way. Psychologically, she defended herself by withdrawing into herself in this way and

created her own world in books or in the writings she wrote. The youngest brother, Tom is the only character in this novel who reflects a little bit of the innocence of the word "child". He is the only character who really fits the definition of the word child. He is very young and therefore still needs his mother's affection and help. Even though he is the most affected by the events, he does not yet have the consciousness and psychology to realize this. Since he cannot understand the concept of reality, he continues to ask curious questions such as "where did his mother go even after his mother's death," an example of this is as follows: "He asked when Mother was coming back, his voice trembling. No one could tell him the truth." The fact that he continues to ask questions with the curiosity and desire to learn that this kind of childhood brings is an indication that he is a typical child. His older sister Julie has taken over his need for a mother figure. In Tom's eyes, Julie has moved more towards a mother-child relationship than a sister figure. However, the person he sees in the mother role is his sister who is only a few years older than him. Due to the lack of a parent who shows what is right and what is wrong, Tom has no idea what genders are. The indication of this is the separation from his gender, which is the result of the identity confusion he experiences, and the changes that gradually occur in his behaviours, both physically and emotionally. This tendency started with her wanting to try on the clothes of her older sisters and continued with her playing the mother character with a boy of her age in the neighbourhood under the name of "house playing." This situation is due to his innocent curiosity. He has a mother figure who is neither old enough to be aware of social norms or to form the concept of parenthood in his mind nor a demonstrator. This character is another subject of in-depth analysis for McEwan that he deals with comfortably in terms of gender roles. He skilfully handles this sensitive subject that is open to discussion in his novel.

In this way, we can easily understand that McEwan is not one of the bigoted writers who does not get hung up on social roles or gender distinctions. Psychologically, there are two main themes that emerge when we consider the characters. These are death and unacceptable love. We witness how the theme of death in the novel is met with the mind of a child. Throughout the novel, we see two deaths that shake the family from the inside. It is more possible to see the effects on the characters rather than the mourning felt for the deaths. Unacceptable love is another psychologically significant theme. Normal and unacceptable loves are handled together in the novel. Julie and Jack's incestuous tendencies and Julie and Derek's so-called normal love play a major role in shaping the whole novel.

Conclusion

Trauma fiction seeks to give voice to the complex inner worlds of those affected by psychological distress. In this context, Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* functions as a trauma novel by portraying the elusive nature of traumatic experience and the fragmented realities of post-traumatic life. Through disjointed and nonlinear narration

that mirrors the characters' dissociative memories, the novel reflects how trauma fractures both identity and temporal awareness. A critical examination of the characters' responses reveals that trauma fundamentally disrupts their sense of self and time, severing their connection with reality and the external world. When individuals are unable to process and integrate their traumatic experiences, this fractured perception compels them to reenact their trauma in destructive ways, further destabilizing their lives.

In *The Cement Garden* we see the psychological change that four siblings go through after the death of their parents. This novel is generally considered as a thriller novel and has been adapted to both theatre and film. We see that each individual, both physically and emotionally, turns to themselves and becomes lonely and acts with the awareness of the necessity to survive. They try to build the warmth of home that they have not seen with their own efforts, but unfortunately, they can never achieve this family atmosphere that they have not experienced. Each death creates a new problem, and these problems lead to their end. In this book by Ian McEwan, we witness the dark side of human nature. Jack represents adolescence, Julie represents authoritarianism, Sue represents emotionality, and Tom represents innocence. We witness the reactions of these characters, who may be in society, to a tragic event. We see the consequences of decisions made with the fear of the unknown.

If literary works, especially novels, are considered as the written version of a therapy session in which patients explain their feelings and thoughts, as they do in psychotherapy, they often create a suitable space for expressing the dark pleasures that people are afraid to express and their desires that will not be approved by society. As a result, in his novel *The Cement Garden*, Ian McEwan reflects the disturbing structure of sexuality within the family, which has been considered a taboo throughout human history, and the complex nature of humans, with a plot and character structure that can be discussed with the psychoanalytic theory. Furthermore, a trauma theory-based analysis of *The Cement Garden* reveals that the ability of traumatized individuals to cope with their suffering largely depends on their personal efforts to confront and process their experiences. Whether they succumb to the escalating psychological burden or move toward healing is shaped by their internal resilience. When the weight of trauma proves too great, it can lead to tragic consequences, plunging the characters into deeper psychological despair. However, if they manage to reconcile with their traumatic past, they may find a path toward recovery and the possibility of a renewed, hopeful existence.

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