

# **Sexuality in the Fiction of Ian McEwan**

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Bachelor Thesis  
2010



**Tomas Bata University in Zlín**  
Faculty of Humanities

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Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně  
Fakulta humanitních studií  
Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky  
akademický rok: 2009/2010

## **ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE**

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Martin VÁLEK**  
Studijní program: **B 7310 Filologie**  
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**  
Téma práce: **Sexualita v prózách Iana McEwana**

Zásady pro vypracování:

**Ian McEwan v kontextu britské literatury.**  
**Identifikace děl, která zobrazují různé aspekty sexuality.**  
**Výběr děl pro podrobnější analýzu.**  
**Srovnání děl v rovině tematické a kompoziční.**

Rozsah práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

**Abrams, M.H., and Geoffrey Harpham. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Boston, MA: Heinle, 2008.**

**Childs, Peter. The Fiction of Ian McEwan (Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.**

**Sanders, Andrew. The Short Oxford History of English Literature. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2004.**

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

**Mgr. Roman Trušík, Ph.D.**

Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

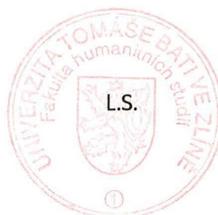
**8. ledna 2010**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

**7. května 2010**

Ve Zlíně dne 8. ledna 2010

prof. PhDr. Vlastimil Švec, CSc.  
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce se zabývá různými formami sexuality v prózách Iana McEwana. Práce definuje Iana McEwana v kontextu britské literatury a zaměřuje se na ranou tvorbu tohoto autora. Hlavní část práce popisuje jednotlivé aspekty sexuality ve vybraných povídkách a románech, zkoumá jejich funkci v daných dílech a srovnává vybraná díla v rovině tematické a kompoziční. Práce dochází k závěru, že přestože je Ian McEwan často považován za obscénního autora, zobrazení sexuality v jeho prózách má své opodstatnění v oblasti psychologie.

Klíčová slova: sexualita, Ian McEwan, psychologie, emoční vývoj, incest, sadismus, masochismus, transvestismus

## **ABSTRACT**

This bachelor thesis deals with various forms of sexuality in the fiction of Ian McEwan. It defines Ian McEwan in the context of British literature and focuses on his early works. The main part of the thesis describes particular aspects of sexuality in selected short stories and novels, explores their role in the works and compares the selected works on a thematic and compositional level. The thesis concludes that although Ian McEwan is often considered to be an obscene author, depiction of sexuality in his works has its foundation in the field of psychology.

Keywords: sexuality, Ian McEwan, psychology, emotional development, incest, sadism, masochism, transvestism

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank especially to Mgr. Roman Trušík, PhD., the supervisor of my bachelor thesis, for his patience, kindness, willingness and for the help he provided me with.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are themes in our lives that are by public considered as taboo and almost nobody wants to talk about them openly. Sex and sexuality is certainly one of these themes and Ian McEwan is one of the authors who are not afraid of writing about them openly. Nowadays he is considered to be “one of the most significant post-war authors.”<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of different kinds of sexuality in Ian McEwan’s works and to describe the writer’s methods of expressing sexuality.

Ian McEwan’s career as a writer started in the mid-1970s. He published his first collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites* in 1975 and three years later the second collection of short stories *In Between the Sheets*. These are the only two collections of short stories he has written. Although he received Somerset Maugham Award in 1976 for *First Love, Last Rites*, he was often misunderstood and labelled as “dirty” because of the sexual themes appearing in the short stories.

He released his first novel *The Cement Garden* in 1978. This novel was thematically similar to what readers were used to from his short stories. There appeared sexual themes such as transvestism or incest. Incestuous relationship also appeared earlier in one of his short stories “Homemade” and the character of Jack in *The Cement Garden* is similar to the protagonist from this short story. The author also sticks to the tradition of child or adolescent as “I-Narrator.”<sup>2</sup>

Then he continued with other novels such as *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) which again shocked by the theme of the sado-masochistic violence; *Child in Time* (1987) where the author experiments with time; *The Innocent* (1990) which is a spy novel set in the times of the Cold War; *Black Dogs* (1992) dealing with the Cold War as well; *Enduring Love* (1997) dealing with the themes of reason and rationality; *Amsterdam* (1998) concerned with mid-life crises and the spectre of morality<sup>3</sup>; *Atonement* (2001) where author uses different points of view; *Saturday* (2005) which is a day-in-the-life narrative; *On Chesil Beach* (2008) exploring the theme of classism and recently author has finished his newest

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<sup>1</sup> Bernie C. Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work* (Nottingham: Paupers’ Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>2</sup> See Christopher Williams, “Ian McEwan’s *The Cement Garden* and the Tradition of the Child/Adolescent as ‘I-Narrator’”, *Le trasformazioni del narrare: Atti del XVI Convegno nazionale, Ostuni, Brindisi, 14–16 ottobre 1993 (Biblioteca della ricerca)*. (Fasano: Schena, 1995), 211–223

<sup>3</sup> John Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England 1945–2000* (London: Palgrave, 2003), 88.

novel *Solar* which deals with the problem of global warming and it was published in March 2010.

Besides novels Ian McEwan has also written two books of children's fiction, three screenplays and two librettos. Some of his novels have been successfully transformed into movies especially Andrew Birkin's *The Cement Garden* (1993) which appeared in the collection for Golden Bear award or Joe Wright's *Atonement* (2007) starring Keira Knightley and James McAvoy with one Oscar award for music and six nominations for this prestigious award.

This thesis will deal mainly with the short stories and also with selected novels where the theme of sexuality can be observed. The purpose of this thesis is to prove that Ian McEwan shouldn't be considered as a "dirty" author and that the sexuality in his fiction has deeper meaning related to the psychology and human unconsciousness.

## 1 IAN MCEWAN IN CONTEXT OF BRITISH LITERATURE

Ian Russell McEwan was born on 21 June 1948 and grew up in Aldershot. He also spent part of his childhood abroad in military stations such as in Singapore or Libya. McEwan has always considered himself very much “an only child” for his mother had just two other children from an earlier marriage who were much older than him.<sup>4</sup>

From 1959 to 1966 Ian McEwan attended Woolverstone state boarding-school in Suffolk. Later he read English and French at University of Sussex for three years and then he enrolled for the modern fiction MA degree at the University of East Anglia. Here, as a part of his degree, McEwan attended a course in creative writing which was principally taught by Malcolm Bradbury (1932–2000). Ian McEwan finished this one-year course in 1971 and then he spent part of the following year in Afghanistan and North-West Frontier Province.<sup>5</sup>

He started his writing career in 1970s and together with Martin Amis (born 1949) was considered by reviewers to be one of the *enfant terribles* of a new kind of writing emerging at that time.<sup>6</sup> This new breed of authors (lower middle-class, provincial and socially disaffected) emerged due to the postwar authors such as Kingsley Amis (1922–95) or Angus Wilson (1913–1991). As Ian McEwan himself said in one of his interviews when he became writing:

They showed me the world that seemed to be too tied to a form of social documentary. Too concerned with those things that the English novel has often done well – the nuances of class, the perils and attractions of social mobility, the furniture well-described. I think I was trying to make a strength out of my ignorance. I didn't know that world. I was a very *déclassé* sort of young man. I've been tucked away in a country boarding school where most of the boys were from a working-class background in central London, but the idea was to give them the kind of education that wealthier kids would have had. I was there because there was a small intake of army brat kids.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that the postwar generation really helped to form authors such as Ian McEwan or Martin Amis. However their early works met with both negative and positive reactions.

Ian McEwan's first published fiction, the collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites* came out in 1975. In the same year Martin Amis's novel *Dead Babies* was published and shocked people by describing a new transatlantic world of sex, drugs and violence. Both these books met with outrageous reactions. Whereas Amis had produced one

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<sup>4</sup> See Peter Childs. *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.

<sup>5</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 1.

comparatively conventional rites-of-passage novel before publishing *Dead Babies*, McEwan debuted with *First Love, Last Rites*.<sup>8</sup> That might be the reason why Ian McEwan was from the beginning labelled as “dirty”.

These two authors are now retrospectively positioned as “the mavericks of a new generation”<sup>9</sup> and as such they are considered to be forerunners of the writers of 1980s who are now the best-known contemporary British novelists, such as Julian Barnes (born 1946), Kazuo Ishiguro (born 1954), Graham Swift (born 1949), Salman Rushdie (born 1947), Jeanette Winterson (born 1959) and Pat Barker (born 1943). Nevertheless none of these authors, not even Rushdie, has been considered by critics and reviewers as shocking as McEwan or Martin Amis.<sup>10</sup>

While Martin Amis got the status of a celebrity and wrote even more provocative novels such as *Money* (1984) and *London Fields* (1989), McEwan has developed into serious contemplative writer in 1990s. His first book of the new century, *Atonement* (2001), “places itself firmly in the mainstream literary tradition running from Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), through Jane Austen (1775-1817), to Henry James (1843-1916) and beyond.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dwight Garner, “Salon Interview.” *Salon* (31 March 1998), 18.

<sup>8</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 1–2.

<sup>11</sup> Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 2.

## 2 SELECTION OF WORKS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

As was mentioned earlier Ian McEwan was from the beginning considered to be a writer of literature of shock. His early works are full of sordid sexuality, abused children and violent relationships. Later he left these themes and became more serious. Because this thesis deals with sexuality in McEwan's fiction it will mainly concentrate on his early works.

McEwan's first published work was collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites* on which he worked in East Anglia. It was already written in this thesis that this book met with as much outrage as praise. As Peter Childs remarks: "Its concerns seemed to reviewers at once to be bleak and compelling, squalid and unconventional, yet recognizably and disturbingly human."<sup>12</sup> This book was awarded Somerset Maugham Award in 1976. In March 1979 one of the stories from this book, *Solid Geometry*, was to be recorded as a play by BBC but few days before the recording the project was stopped. McEwan was told that the play was "untransmittable" and the BBC banned it because of grotesque and bizarre sexual elements in the play.<sup>13</sup> This also didn't help McEwan with his reputation although *Solid Geometry* is not as obsessed with sexuality as his other works.

In 1978 McEwan published his second collection of short stories *In Between the Sheets*. Although it received similar reactions as the first book, it is considered less striking perhaps because it lacks the impact of a debut. Stories are mainly concerned with the unconventional sexual relationships and adopts various narratorial perspectives. Stories are for example about a woman who keeps a monkey as a lover, another one about a man who has a relationship with two nurses at the same time and later is castrated by them.<sup>14</sup>

McEwan's first novel, *Cement Garden*, was written in the same year as *In Between the Sheets*. This novel is more similar to the first collection of short stories for it is "an introverted first-person narrative burgeoning adolescent sexuality"<sup>15</sup> that builds on the themes from his first book.

To McEwan's second novel, *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), the categorization of the "literature of shock" fits more than to his other novels although it may seem that it leans a bit towards conventional genre fiction. This novel was shortlisted for the Booker

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<sup>12</sup> Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 2.

Prize. It tells the story of a tourist couple in Venice. They become involved with a local man who turns out to be a sadistic murderer. Peter Childs compares this with Blanche DuBois's assertion in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) by Tennessee Williams (1911-83) "that she has always relied on the kindness of strangers."<sup>16</sup> According to Childs this novel turns this assertion on its head "to explore the ways in which travellers are at the mercy of others when holidaying in alien surroundings."<sup>17</sup>

In 1982 McEwan got married and the following year his son was born. In the same year he was identified as one of the Book Marketing Council's twenty Best of Young Novelists together with Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, Kazuo Ishiguro and others. McEwan became member of the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Literature in 1984.<sup>18</sup> After this McEwan developed into an author of more serious literature and left the shocking themes. As he himself said about his short story "Butterflies" that deals with rape and murder of a child: " 'Butterflies' is appalling; it's a story written by someone who had nothing to do with children. I couldn't possibly write that story now, it would frighten me too much. As children come more into your life the possibility of their death is not something you can play with lightly."<sup>19</sup> It is obvious that setting up a family had significant influence on McEwan's work and changed the way of his writing. Consequently this thesis will concentrate of his first four books as the themes of sexuality are most significant in them.

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<sup>16</sup> Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> John Haffenden, *Novelists in interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), 173.

### 3 DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SEXUALITY IN MCEWAN'S WORKS

Different types of sexuality appearing in Ian McEwan's work will be analysed in this part of the thesis. Sexual deviance and emotional development are important themes in the short stories and they are described in detail in this part. The novels are more concerned with relationships and the themes of incest, transvestism, sado-masochism and death are the most important with respect to sexuality. Some of the themes appearing in the novels have already appeared in the short stories but their role is slightly different in the novels.

Ian McEwan acknowledges the help of Dr M. Dunhill, University Lecturer in Pathology, Merton College to research his subject matter.<sup>20</sup> It must be a kind of relief for the readers that he does not write from his own experience as his early works are full of sexual deviance and emotional immaturity. He's using very convincing first person narrative so it may seem that the author has a personal experience with the subject but it is rather the art of McEwan to write about such things in such a way. He describes sex in explicit detail from the individual experience of narrator and manages to surprise readers in very frightening way but he never evokes incredulity in them. He gives the reader an experience of horror and perversion which the reader does not often fantasize of. McEwan integrates these themes with the characters' life situations so skilfully that the readers reluctantly identify with them. These aspects are hidden deeply in human unconsciousness and though they are preferred to be unaware, they're part of a human heritage.<sup>21</sup> McEwan himself describes this process: "it is this man again, a version of yourself ... someone you might have become if your luck had been really atrocious."<sup>22</sup> It seems that McEwan is aware of forces in human unconsciousness and uses this knowledge to make his works so macabre and real at the same time.

As Sigmund Freud puts it there are gaps in people's consciousness and the human psyche is not made only by conscious but there are things that are hidden deeply in human unconsciousness and they are the same in minds of healthy as well as sick people. The unconscious thoughts may appear in people's dreams or sudden thoughts that they can't explain. According to Freud relatively small part of human mind is conscious and much more is hidden in the unconsciousness. People can't recall the things from

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<sup>20</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ian McEwan, *A Move Abroad* (London:Picador, 1989), viii.

unconsciousness and there doesn't exist any mean to access them but Freud remarks that they are closely related with the consciousness and they may influence what we do consciously. Unconsciousness has the same form as consciousness which means that it can exist in form of ideas, resolutions or aspirations and the only difference between the consciousness is simply that they are not conscious.<sup>23</sup> It means that people who are emotionally sick or undeveloped (as many of the characters in McEwan's works) have the same kind of unconscious psyche as healthy people. Therefore even healthy people may be unconsciously driven to do things they wouldn't normally do.

From McEwan's works it is clear that every human being has his male/female, good/evil and child-like aspects. Therefore people are capable of expressing the whole range of human feeling and behaviour in particular circumstances. McEwan wants the readers to get in touch with their unconsciousness. He says that "The naming of what is there is important"<sup>24</sup> and his literature is so shocking because of the recognition that there "is a whole world of stuff which you have lived with since childhood, stuff which you supposed to be of its nature incommunicable, and somebody has managed to communicate it."<sup>25</sup> This corresponds to the theory of Sigmund Freud that human behaviour is driven by the forces of sexuality and aggressivity hidden deeply in people's unconsciousness.

Due to the fact that readers actually identify with the characters, however bizarre their behaviour may seem to them ordinarily, they may feel even involved. In "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" readers understand the fixation and regression of the narrator because McEwan gives a shocking picture of the destructiveness of mother love and damaging consequences of this type of relationship.<sup>26</sup> Scientific studies about this topic may provide accurate descriptions of behaviour and give explanations in terms of psychology but readers are unable to identify with those involved unless they experienced these situations themselves. McEwan manages to make connection between how situations look and how the people involved feel. He switches the perspective of reader from objective to subjective, which means instead of being outside the situation he pulls the reader inside unable to react to the events rationally.<sup>27</sup> The identification is so strong that it

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<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Unconscious* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 51–3.

<sup>24</sup> McEwan, *A Move Abroad*, xv.

<sup>25</sup> McEwan, *A Move Abroad*, xiii.

<sup>26</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 7.

leads the reader gradually further into the character and actually gets him “in touch” with the feelings that would in case of “Conversation with a Cupboard Man” lead a person to hide in a cupboard, unable to live an ordinary life.

Psychodynamic schools of psychology tell that the concept of development of the sexual instinct is made to some extent in well-recognised stages. According to Melanie Klein young children are unable to get the idea of the whole thing and instead of it they see only parts of the things that only later become understood as parts of familiar persons. She says that mother’s breast, mother’s inside, mother’s vagina and father’s penis play important role in the unconscious fantasies of young children.<sup>28</sup> In a short story “Solid Geometry” McEwan begins with introducing the obsession of the main character with his great-grandfather’s diary and his friendship with a mysterious man called “M.” These two friends bought in the auction “the penis of Captain Nicholls who died in Horsemonger jail in 1873.”<sup>29</sup> Captain Nicholls’s penis, preserved in formaldehyde, plays an important role in the protagonist’s life. It is placed on his desk, in his fantasies and in the relationship between him and his wife, Maisie. Maisie is neglected by her husband and makes demands for attention and affection. When she doesn’t get it she eventually smashes the bottle with the penis which really upsets the protagonist. In the first paragraph of the short story the protagonist is contemplating divorce from Maisie but in the last paragraph he finds it unnecessary because he has found a way how to make her disappear.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that the father’s penis and the great-grandfather’s penis, symbolised by the bottled penis of Captain Nicholls, is the original part-object for the protagonist. He escapes from the fear of the mother’s (and therefore all women’s) vagina by the obsession with this and it leads him to hate the women, especially Maisie. The femaleness of his wife disgusts the protagonist and it is also reflected in their relationship. People who have been treated as denigrated part-objects know what is it to be in this painful position and finally disappear as a person. McEwan writes at the beginning of the play script version of “Solid Geometry” that it is important to establish the protagonist as an unsympathetic character. It is intended to be a feminist story, showing how cruel and sadistic can men be when they

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<sup>28</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ian McEwan, “Solid Geometry” in *First Love, Last Rites* (London: Cape, 1975), 9.

<sup>30</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 8.

have problems with sexual and emotional development.<sup>31</sup> The cruelty of the protagonist seems to have its roots in regression to the early oral phase of infantile development.

It is agreed by all psychodynamic models that babies are totally egocentric. Development into the sexual functioning is oriented towards the erogenous zones of mouth and body surface. Babies are totally dependent on their environment, which usually means mother or mother substitute. According to these models, pathology in relationships is mainly caused by distortions between mother and baby. It is necessary that the mother is mature and in concordance with her culture. Then it allows the baby to grow through the genetically determined series of phases. In “Conversation with a Cupboard Man” protagonist’s mother was isolated and emotionally regressed at the level of narcissism. The reader is not told what caused her to be like this and that’s why it is so difficult to empathise with her. Nevertheless the reader has no problem to understand the narcissism of the protagonist expressed by the desire to return to the womb through hiding in the oven or cupboard.<sup>32</sup> It might be caused by the fact that the story is narrated by the protagonist and readers identify with him more than with his mother about whom they do not know much.

Another example of narcissism can be observed in “Last Day of Summer.” It is Alice’s mother Kate who is narcissistic in this short story. She dresses herself up and goes out leaving Alice with Jenny. Nevertheless she has grown to the point of understanding her maternal role but is simply unable to find any pleasure in it and devote herself to it. Kate refuses Alice’s attachment to Jenny as much as she refuses Alice’s dependency on herself. As well as protagonist’s mother in “Conversation with a Cupboard Man“ Kate solves her problem by running away with a man.<sup>33</sup> It is obvious here that Jenny makes mother substitute for Alice and she is actually happier with Jenny than with her own mother.

The theme of narcissistic mothers appears also in the short story “Disguises“. Mina is not actually the boy’s mother but as his aunt she takes him up after his mother has died. She mothers him at the time when her acting career is coming to an end and loneliness becomes a real possibility for her. In contrast to the protagonist’s mother in “Conversation with a Cupboard Man” who uses her son as an eternal baby, Mina uses Henry as her

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<sup>31</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 10.

audience and partner in her various dressing up games. When he refuses to dress up like a girl she forces him to do so which proves her narcissistic selfishness. She masquerades as a soldier and breast-feeds Henry as a little girl in a bizarre and carefully staged situation. This might be caused by her own fantasies of being babied by her father and she doesn't realise how inappropriate and disgusting it might be for Henry.<sup>34</sup> In this short story children are different from those in "Last day of summer" or "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" in a way that they are more independent. They also do not die emotionally or factually because of being victims of narcissistic behaviour. Nevertheless it certainly didn't do them any good.

Another example of narcissistic behaviour and exhibitionistic display of the body without meaningful relationship can be seen in the short story "Cocker at the Theatre" which is considered by David Malcolm as possibly the weakest of the stories in the collection *First Love, Last Rites*.<sup>35</sup> The story is about the play where actors should portray a sexual intercourse. The director has complete control over them including their private lives which is illustrated by the question: "Have you all masturbated boys? Well done."<sup>36</sup> On one of the rehearsals actors are directed by him in every detail and when in the end two actors are discovered to be actually having sex, they are greeted with disgust. It seems that although the director is trying to show the audience the most vivid picture of the sexual act he ignores the humanity of the actors. It is also connected with the oral phase, where this egocentric behaviour and lack of regard for others is a typical feature.<sup>37</sup>

The second phase, typically occurring in toddlerhood, is often called the anal phase. In this phase erogenous zone moves from the mouth and body surface to the hands and body orifices. Children in this phase are trying to influence their environment by means of anger and uncontrolled emotion. After gaining the trust of the parents there comes a testing of the limit of parents' patience. It is difficult for these children to empathise or sympathise with others and they're trying to control their environment completely. They often lack the sense of danger and have little experience of pain so they're often selfishly experimenting with the various ways of obtaining the pleasure regardless of the other's feelings. Children in

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<sup>34</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> See David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan* (Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>36</sup> McEwan, "Cocker at the Theatre" in *First Love, Last Rites*, 56.

this phase are often very aggressive and have no concept of death so it is dangerous to let them for example play with domestic pets without a strict adult supervision. If the supervision is not proper or the supervising adults are incompetent, acts of cruelty can be whole-heartedly enjoyed.<sup>38</sup>

Adults and older children who are fixated in or regressed to the anal phase often express their sexual desires by sado-masochistic practices. These practices in most cases include controlling or exploiting weaker or helpless being. In the short story “Butterflies” there is a dreadful scene of boys from neighbourhood roasting a cat as a substitute of playing football which shows the emotional development of these boys. Readers are therefore less shocked when the protagonist painlessly drowns a little girl in order not to be detected.<sup>39</sup> It is obvious here that the protagonist is fixated in anal phase because although he is an adult he is willing to play games with children. This might be caused by the fact that he is very isolated.

Sado-masochists usually start with playing various sexual games. In the short story “Psychopolis” it is demonstrated by Mary who wants to be tied to the bed for the whole weekend:

I met her there lunchtime on my second day in Los Angeles. That same evening we were lovers, and not so long after that, friends. The following Friday I chained her by the foot to my bed for the whole weekend ... I remember her extracting ... my solemn promise that I would not listen if she demanded to be set free.<sup>40</sup>

After these performances there is a tendency to grade the cruelty until the real death is demanded.

In another short story “Two Fragments: March 199-” the theme of sadism appears as well. It is expressed by the crowd of people, who give money in expectation of seeing the horrible scene. A man promises to run a sword through the belly of a girl. He says to gain the attention of the crowd: “Through her belly, out her back.”<sup>41</sup> However people are disappointed when the sword penetrates only about a half an inch into the girl’s belly and they demand their money back. This short story is set in the future and Ian McEwan might have wanted to show the degeneration of the society in a way that they will become sadistic

<sup>37</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 10–11.

<sup>38</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Ian McEwan, “Psychopolis” in *In Between The Sheets* (London: Cape, 1978), 103.

<sup>41</sup> McEwan, “Two Fragments: March 199-” in *In Between The Sheets*, 48.

and these scenes will give them pleasure which is closely connected with the anal phase. However it is contrasted with the affectionate relationship of the protagonist with his daughter Marie and also with his relationship with his mistress Diane. Descriptions of sadistic scenes that give the readers an experience of being tortured by disgusting imagery appears as well in the novel "The Comfort of Strangers" where they are expressed most vividly.<sup>42</sup>

In the short story "Pornography", which is the first short story from the collection *In Between the Sheets*, there are two nurses, Lucy and Pauline, who enjoy the sex with the protagonist, O'Byrne. O'Byrne is two-timing them but later they get together at work and find out what's going on. They even find out that O'Byrne infected them with the venereal disease and they decide to cooperate in surgically castrating him. This procedure seems to be enjoyed by the two nurses which indicates some inclination to sadism in them. On the other hand O'Byrne drops into a passive position as if he enjoyed the procedure as well. "Through his fear O'Byrne felt excitement."<sup>43</sup> It seems that that the protagonist from this short story has inclination to both sadism and masochism.

However there is a thin border between the sadism and masochism and in this short story it is vividly demonstrated on the two women characters. O'Byrne keeps sado-masochistic sexual relationship with the two nurses simultaneously and it is obvious here how the role of sadist and masochist can be easily exchanged. Psychoanalysts agree that: "masochistic and sadistic trends are always blended with each other. Although on the surface they seem contradictions, they are essentially rooted in the same basic need."<sup>44</sup> When O'Byrne visits Pauline, the younger of the two women who works in a hospital as a student nurse, he behaves in a very arrogant way, humiliating and hurting her. However when he's with Lucy, who is ten years older than Pauline and works as a ward sister, he adopts inferior role while she abuses and humiliates him. O'Byrne's brother Harold is ten year older than him and is also in a position of authority as he is his boss at work. Obviously O'Byrne projected these roles of master and slave on to the two women and by

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<sup>42</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> McEwan, "Pornography" in *In Between The Sheets*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Erich Fromm, *Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1942), 136.

deciding which one to visit he actually decides a role for himself and is therefore in control of satisfying his changing needs.<sup>45</sup>

The anal phase is followed by the phallic or genital phase where erogenous zones move to the genital region. The preoccupation with control and autonomy switches to an interest in sexual differences between the person and the children of the opposite sex. Children in this phase often play games that has sexual character such as “Mummies and Daddies” or “Doctors and Nurses.” This is shown in the short story “Homemade” where the protagonist plays the “Mummies and Daddies” game with his younger sister.<sup>46</sup> Whereas Connie wants to pretend everyday activities of their parents such as shopping, cooking, etc., her brother wants to have sex with her. Phallic phase occurs usually between the 3 and 5 years of age so it is obvious here that the protagonist is emotionally undeveloped as he is in his early adolescence.

Another example of the interest in developing body and reproductive organs can be observed in the short story “Two Fragments: March 199-”. It is demonstrated when Mary, the protagonist’s daughter, asks her father: “I’ve got a vagina... So I’m a girl, aren’t I?”<sup>47</sup> The protagonist in “Butterflies” may be also regressed in this phase because of his sexual exploration of the little girl whom he sexually abuses at first and then kills her in cool blood which was already mentioned as demonstration of the features of the anal phase.

“Reflections of a Kept Ape” is narrated by an ape that is kept by the writer Sally Klee who uses him as a lover. Although the protagonist is an ape he bears some features of the phallic phase. The protagonist hopes that Sally will marry him because he satisfies her sexually and because she is fascinated by his penis. He is used by her as a sexual object and she neglects him between the sexual acts. In the end she ignores him completely because she gets tired of him and his performance.<sup>48</sup> It is obvious that Sally might be arrested in phallic phase as well because of her interest only in the reproductive organs of her lover and complete ignorance of him in other situations.

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<sup>45</sup> See Christina Byrnes, *The Work of Ian McEwan: A Psychodynamic Approach* (Nottingham: Paupers’ Press, 2002), 57–8.

<sup>46</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> McEwan, “Two Fragments: March 199-”, 42.

<sup>48</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 14.

Phallic phase gives way to the latency period which appears after the age of five and usually lasts to adolescence. In this period sexuality becomes latent but it rarely means that sexual behaviour or fantasies are being repressed. The attention is drawn to group activities such as sports etc. In “Last Day of Summer” the protagonist is aware that his older flatmates have sexual relationships with their partners. He is aware of the fact that Jenny is not accepted by the collective of their flatmates and also that it’s probably because she is very fat and because she has ridiculous loud laugh. And although it is too soon for him to have a sexual relationship he is able to see what is it about because he lives in the collective of adults and observes these things.<sup>49</sup>

In the latency period children already know that it is inappropriate to speak openly about sex or to masturbate in public. The theme of sex in this period is talked about in small groups of friends of the same sex or with very special friends. Often there is a tendency to avoid children of opposite sex and the children in groups stick together as far as this matter is concerned.<sup>50</sup> This is demonstrated in the short story “Disguises” when Henry starts a friendship with Linda who is new to his class and is seated next to him. He spends a lot of time with her and enjoys her company but is at the same time afraid of being spotted by his friends because they avoid the contact with girls and they would probably segregate him from the group.

After the latency period there is an adolescence. This period occurs usually between the ages of 12 and 18. All erogenous zones are available for sexual experience and conception becomes possible in this period. Another typical feature is development from homosexual to heterosexual orientation.<sup>51</sup> This appears in the short story “In Between the Sheets” where the protagonist’s daughter Miranda brings home her friend Charmaine. In the night when protagonist goes to the bathroom he overhears the sounds of sexual character from the girls’ bedroom. This is an example of homosexual exploration typical for adolescent children. Another example of this feature can be observed in the short story “Homemade” where the protagonist has an intimate relationship with his friend Raymond who for example teaches him how to masturbate. Masturbation and experience of real sex

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<sup>49</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 15.

becomes relevant in this period. In the novel *The Cement Garden* when Jack discovers the pleasure arising from masturbation it becomes his main preoccupation.

Perhaps the most significant adolescent behaviour is described in the short story “First Love, Last Rites”. The protagonist and his girlfriend Sissel are left by their parents too early to take care of themselves and when they live together their room is messed up because they don’t care about tidying it and their everyday activity is sexual experimentation until they become bored with it in the end. Sissel spends the rest of her time listening to the records and looking out of the window and the protagonist is making eel traps. They have often unprotected sex which makes the protagonist fantasize of “the creature” growing in his girlfriend’s belly which he feeds with his ejaculate. Gradually this creature becomes indetified with the scrtatching sound they hear from behind the wall. Eventually the rat appears in their room and they kill it. When they look at the dead rat they find out that it was pregnant. This event make them change their lives and become adults which is symbolised by the eel they release back to the river at the end of the story.<sup>52</sup> The experience of real sex as well as the awareness of the possibility of procreation, which are some of the typical features of adolescent period, can be observed in this short story. It seems that their adolescence comes to an end when they decide to move forward into the adult life.

Jenny in “The Last Day of Summer” can’t solve the problem as easily as the couple from “First Love, Last Rites”. She is imprisoned in her role of a mother substitute for Alice and there is no way out of this situation for her. She accepts big responsibility by taking care of Alice but recieves no respect or authority from her flatmates including Alice’s real mother. Instead they keep their love affairs and sexual adventures and show no gratitude to Jenny. Byrnes points out that the drowning of Jenny at the end of the story is suicide that she commits because she can no longer stand this situation.<sup>53</sup> That is a possible interpretation of the story as the suicidal tendencies are typical way to solve the crisis in adolescence but it could also have been an accident. I disagree with the interpretation of Byrnes because Jenny was taking care of Alice and the protagonist all the time. She was very caring and kind so I don’t think she would intentionally drown herself with Alice and in front of the protagonist who was just twelve years old.

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<sup>52</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 16–17.

In almost all of the short stories readers meet with examples of psychopathology. In most cases they are connected with intra-psychic models that were described by Klein, Freud or Jung. These models deal with the personality as something isolated that develops in given phases which are the same for all people. Surrounding people may influence these development by supporting, regressing or preventing it but they are also viewed as self centred personalities. There are so called “mental mechanisms” which are actually processes of including other people into the roles of oneself’s own life script. It is for example when someone needs to feel subordinate or superior so he places the other to the roles he needs. Another example could be the need to be powerful and control other people or powerless and let the others control him.<sup>54</sup>

In “Dead As They Come” this behaviour is well described. Story is about a rich man who falls in love with the dummy from the shop window. At first he only comes to the shop window to see her but later he decides to buy her and carries her to his house. In the beginning he thinks she loves him and it makes his life much better. He is successful at work and very happy with his personal life. However later he becomes suspicious that she has a secret love affair with his chauffeur and becomes very jealous. When it comes to the climax he rapes a murders her.<sup>55</sup> It is obvious here that the protagonist places his lover to the roles he needs because the dummy is only object but he treats her as a normal person. It is obvious that his needs are changing. In the beginning he wants to be loved so he gives the dummy role of a person that loves, understands a listens to him. After some time his needs switch and he wants to be cheated so he makes up the love affair between her and his chauffeur.

Byrnes points out that the dummy could be in fact a passive woman who lets herself to be treated as if she herself had no will. Although the story is written in a way that it is obvious that she is a dummy, Byrnes thinks that it could not be truth that she is a real woman. It is similar as in the “Reflections of a Kept Ape” where we are told that the lover of Sally Klee is an ape but it can easily be symbol of a man who feels himself as a pet of his lover used only for sex and otherwise ignored. The difference between these two characters is that the ape has the option to leave his lover when she is not at home whereas

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<sup>53</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 17.

<sup>55</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 17–18.

the dummy cannot which may symbolise that men has more power than women in these situations.<sup>56</sup> It is a possible interpretation of the stories and I agree with Byrnes in case of “Reflection of a Kept Ape” because it is very unlikely that someone would keep an ape as a lover. The ape actually narrates the story and it can even read so it might be a man who only feels as an ape because of the way he is treated by his lover. However the dummy in “Dead As They Come” behaves like a dummy all the time. She does not speak nor move and everything she does or thinks is made up by the protagonist. Therefore it is probable that she is really a dummy and the protagonist might suffer from some mental illness that he thinks she is a real woman.

Most of the short sories concentrates on intra-personal matters of the narrator. Therefore readers are given only one point of view on the situation and the opinion of other characters is given only by an unreliable narrator. Readers are therefore forced to guess the reality of the situation concerning the fact that the narrator is often emotionally undeveloped. There are described mainly infantile stages of emotinal development in the short stories which is according to Byrnes on purpose. She remarks that McEwan concentrates on these themes in short fragmented stories because he wants to reflect “the disjointed nature and brief attention span of children.”<sup>57</sup> It is true that there appear mainly infantile stages of emotional development and that there are many children characters in the short stories but I wouldn’t say that it is the purpose of the form to demonstrate the nature of the children. It could also be that McEwan started writing short stories and after getting some experience and feedback he started writing longer pieces. This is supported by the fact that his first too novels are rather short and that the children appear also in many of his later novels.

However his first two novels are more concerned with the interpersonal relationship rather than with internal psyche of the characters. There are described long-term relationships where the characters do care about each others needs and they do not use them only as actors in their own life scripts as it was in many cases in McEwan’s short stories. Although these relationships may seem not ideal, they satisfy the needs of the characters involved to some extent.<sup>58</sup> This indicates the direction McEwan continued his

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<sup>56</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 18–19.

career. After the short stories full of sexual deviance and emotionally undeveloped characters he moved to novels that focus more on relationships. However he still sticks to the tradition of the “literature of shock” and his first two novels are thematically similar to the short stories.

As was mentioned before these novel are rather short but they are still longer than any of McEwan’s previous works. Themes of incestuous relationship, transvestism, sado-masochism and death, that appeared in some of the short stories, are further developed in these novels. McEwan himself remarks: “My novel, *The Cement Garden*, was in certain respects, a synthesis of some of the concerns of my short stories.”<sup>59</sup> However in these novels the perversions are set in continuing long-term relationships so the readers are less shocked by them than in the short stories. McEwan gives much more details about the environment and the characters and there are much more events than in the short stories that reveal some hidden motives.<sup>60</sup> It is obvious that McEwan chose to develop the most shocking themes from the short stories in his first two novels. However these themes have slightly different roles in the novels as they’re not used to demonstrate the disturbance of emotional development.

In *The Cement Garden* it is obvious from the beginning that Jack, the protagonist, suffers from that Oedipus Complex which means that boys have strong bond to their mothers to such extent that they are jealous of them and that makes them dislike their fathers. It is demonstrated in the first lines of the novel:

I did not kill my father, but I sometime felt I had helped him on his way. And but for the fact that I coincided with a landmark in my own physical growth, his death seemed insignificant compared with what followed.<sup>61</sup>

Jack also finds the pleasure in masturbation which is the sign that there are still some features of the phallic phase although he is entering the period of adolescence. The death of the father is not considered significant by the protagonist who also narrates the story. He mentions him mainly because he wants to make clear where they got so much cement. The father is described as not a good person and his death is a kind of relief for the family

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<sup>59</sup> Ian McEwan, *The Innocent* (London: Cape, 1990), 14.

<sup>60</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan’s Work*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden* (London: Cape, 1978), 11.

especially for the children.<sup>62</sup> This proves that the relationship between the protagonist and his father wasn't very good and the reason is probably that the protagonist suffered from Oedipus Complex.

After the death of the father family moves under the authority of the mother. Jack has two sisters, Julie and Sue, and one younger brother, Tom. Sexual games Jack used to play with his siblings are replaced by his new discoveries related to his upcoming adolescence. His mother notices the changes Jack is undergoing and she warns him that he can cause some damage to his growing body by masturbation. Parallel to this readers find out that the mother is ill and is getting worse. There is a contrast between the Jack's growing potency and his mother's looming disease. After the father's death the attention of the mother should be more available but her illness kind of obstructs the children to spend more time with her. This makes the children confused and insecure because they feel that there is a threat to the family and finally the oldest of the children, Julie, becomes a confidante to the mother and is supposed to take her place after the mother's death.<sup>63</sup> Although the death of the father comes as a kind of relief for the children, the illness of their mother makes the situation worse. They may feel that they are threatened by the death of their mother which would mean that they would be put into the children's home.

However Julie seems not to be ready for the role of mother because she is in her early adolescence. Jack becomes interested in her femininity which is the result of the early childhood sexual games of "Doctors and Nurses". Such an interest in sexuality between siblings would be normal in nuclear family where parents would set limits and forbid sexual games between their children. Nevertheless when their mother is ill and spends most of her time in her bedroom Julie gradually takes the role of the mother in the family and Jack's Oedipus Complex moves from the mother to Julie. Jack starts a tickling game with Julie which slowly leads to the incestuous relationship between them. Their relationship develops and they are closer to each other than to their other siblings. However they are still not able to talk intimately with each other. Their mother doesn't speak about her approaching death except to Julie but she also kind of indicates it to Jack telling him that she might be away for quite a long time: "Julie and you will have to be in charge ... Both of

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<sup>62</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 22.

you ... It's not fair to leave it all to her."<sup>64</sup> The mother seems to put her children into the roles of substitute parents herself and she doesn't realise the danger that there can develop a sexual relationship between them. She also tells them that they would probably put them into the children's home if she died. The mother dies three days after this conversation.<sup>65</sup> It seems that mother herself, probably unintentionally, helps to develop the incestuous relationship between Jack and Julie by this conversation. She also kind of incites them to the forthcoming actions.

After the loss of the mother children don't know what to do. Afraid of being put to the children's home they decide to bury her into the cement in the garden. However they are able to drag her body only to the cellar so they bury her there. They decide to not to talk about her death and behave as she was still alive. They use her rules when taking care of household and it seems to work. The only child who shows grief for their mother is the youngest boy, Tom. The other children are aware of the situation they're in and they try to keep on living as if their mother was still there.<sup>66</sup> It is obvious that the older children are conscious of the really tough situation they got into. And together with the advice of their mother they feel the necessity to keep their mother's death as a secret and take care of the household as if nothing happened. Tom is too young to understand the situation so he reacts to his mother's death in a usual way.

However the attempts to keep on living as if nothing happened seem not to be successful. Children look as if they have lost any motivation in life and they behave without any purpose or aim. The smell of decay fills the house and each of the children has it's own way how to deal with the situation. Jack often dreams about their mother and Tom spend his time with his sisters who play games with him and dress him up like a girl. Julie spends most of her time outside with her boyfriend Derek which makes Jack very jealous. Julie even brings Derek to their house and he offers to solve their problem by moving in and helping them. Derek is suspicious about the smell in the house and tries to find out where it comes from. He tries to use his suspicions to blackmail the others so that they would accept him. Meanwhile the relationship between Jack and Julie gradates and finally Derek discovers them having sex with each other. He is shocked and goes to the cellar

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<sup>64</sup> McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, 47.

<sup>65</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 22–23.

<sup>66</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 23.

where he discovers their bizarre secret and informs the police which finally puts the whole situation to an end.<sup>67</sup> Jack's jealousy to the relationship of Julie and Derek confirms that he suffers from Oedipus Complex and it is maybe the reason that leads to the incestuous relationship with his sister.

The incestuous relationship between Jack and Julie may seem inevitable as they put themselves more and more into the roles of father and mother. They gradually start to behave like their parents and the sexual relationship may seem to them as a way to strengthen the bond between them. It also distinguishes them from children and they feel more adult which may give them the feel of fulfilling the promise they gave to their mother.<sup>68</sup> This proves that the games like "Mothers and Fathers" may result in the sexual relationship between the children when they're not controlled by their parents. It is dangerous especially in the adolescence when children become interested in sexual matters and in this case the absence of both parents and the promise children gave to their mother makes the incestuous relationship seem really inevitable.

Another reason that makes the relationship between Jack and Julie develop to such stage is the presence of Derek. Jack sort of fights with him over the role of the father of Tom and husband of Julie. Children realise that he wants to be the authority in the family and they become to treat him like they treated their father. They share jokes behind his back and make fun of him. This alliance of Jack and Julie against Derek sticks them closer together. They join in the lie that the dead body in the cellar is their dog and it makes them feel for a while that their mother is actually alive. Derek finally loses the fight for Julie and when Julie has a sexual intercourse with Jack it's not because of sexual desire but it is rather supposed to make their relationship even stronger, to move it into the absolute intimacy. They unite through this act completely and show the absolute belonging to each other. The fact that what they did was illegal is symbolised by Derek and the police he calls.<sup>69</sup> The presence of Derek is really important in the novel because he represents the "outside world". If there wasn't the contact with this world situation would probably result differently. The resemblance of him and the children's father made them unite and probably led to such an intimate contact between Jack and Julie.

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<sup>67</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 23–24.

<sup>69</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 24–25.

When it becomes clear that the secret of the children will be soon revealed by Derek they finally give up their roles and talk together like brothers and sisters again. They talk about their mother's death and for the first time, they openly express sadness and grief. Jack and Julie give up the roles of mother and father and return to their proper identities. The title "The Cement Garden" is a metaphor which expresses the state of the children. First they experience the authority of the rigid father and later they try to fulfil the promise they gave to their mother which makes them kind of prevented from growing. When Derek finally reveals their secret by destroying the cement grave of their mother in the cellar and calls the police he actually ends the strange situation they were in and kind of liberates them from their roles.<sup>70</sup> Here is obvious the difference between the role of incest in this novel and in the short story "Homemade". Whereas in "Homemade" the sexual act between the protagonist and his sister represents only the satisfaction of the protagonist's sexual needs in "The Cement Garden" it is supposed to keep the family together. In "Homemade" it is proved by the protagonist's acknowledgement:

I felt proud, proud to be fucking, even if it were only Connie, my ten-year-old sister, even if it had been a crippled mountain goat I would have been proud...<sup>71</sup>

McEwan's second novel *The Comfort of Strangers* contrasts the attachment of the family from *The Cement Garden*. Whereas in *The Cement Garden* the children are dependent on each other after the death of both parents and they have to stick together to overcome the situation they got into, the couple of protagonists in *The Comfort of Strangers* is independent and they meet mainly to satisfy their sexual needs and enjoy leisure activities. Colin and Mary understand each other very well and their relationship is more like a deep friendship than love as they never intended to marry each other. They know each other for a long time and their relationship is good though it isn't the love others would expect of such a couple:

This was no longer a great passion. Its pleasures were in its unhurried friendliness, the familiarity of its rituals and procedures, the secure, precision fit of limbs and bodies, comfortable, like a cast returned to its mould. They were generous and leisurely, making no great demands, and very little noise. Their love-making had no clear beginning or end and frequently concluded in, or was interrupted by, sleep.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> McEwan, "Homemade" in *First Love, Last Rites*, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Ian McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers* (London: Cape, 1981), 18.

They spend a holiday together in an Italian city that isn't actually named in the novel but it is obvious that it is Venice. During their holiday they spend most of the time in a hotel and seldom go out which makes them fall into the boredom and they start to think that they would enjoy the holiday more if they were alone.<sup>73</sup> The relationship between the protagonists in this novel is complicated. Although they know each other very well and probably love each other as well, they do not want to marry each other. It seems that they are satisfied with the independence this kind of relationship offers them and they don't want to change anything about it. It seems to work although they get kind of bored with it on their holiday.

This stereotype is changed when they meet Robert on one of their walks through the city. They are lost and Robert offers them help which they accept and are led by him to his bar where he tells them his history which is not very pleasant and quite bizarre. They do not talk about it with each other but this experience changes their relationship a lot as they become to realise and value the differences between them which makes their relationship more passionate:

They woke surprised to find themselves in each other's arms. Their love-making surprised them too, for the great enveloping pleasure, the sharp, almost painful, thrills were sensations, they said that evening on the balcony, they remembered from seven years before, when they had first met.<sup>74</sup>

This change makes them speak more about their childhood and their most personal feelings including their secret sexual desires. Colin tells Mary that he envies the women's orgasm and they even talk about some sado-masochistic practices though they mean it only as a joke:

They clung to each other in talk as in sex. In the shower they joked about hand-cuffing themselves together and throwing away the key. The idea aroused them ... They took to muttering in each other's ear as they made love, stories that came from nowhere, out of the dark ... Mary muttered her intention of hiring a surgeon to amputate Colin's arms and legs. She would ... use him exclusively for sex, sometimes lending him out to friends.<sup>75</sup>

This is similar to the desire of Mary from the short story "Psychopolis" who wants to be chained to the bed for the whole weekend. Therefore it is obvious that the theme of women with masochist tendencies is reappearing in *The Comfort of Strangers* and it only proves that some of the themes from the short stories were used again in McEwan's early novels.

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<sup>73</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 25–26.

<sup>74</sup> McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*, 77.

The sado-masochist fantasies of Colin and Mary were probably woken by the fact that they had met Robert and Caroline who use these practices in their sexual life. They would probably never mention these thoughts to each other even in their private talks unless they met Robert and Caroline.<sup>76</sup> This encounter may be also the reason for the change in their relationship from boredom into passion. They might feel involved in the sado-masochistic fantasies of the strangers they meet and it might result in awakening their needs for power and control typical for anal phase of emotional development.

Colin is portrayed as a feminine and masochistic person in Mary's fantasies and together with the detailed description of his physical beauty there is a slight indication that he is going to be a victim. It is supported by the nightmare Mary has one night and when she realises that Robert actually showed her a photograph of Colin when they were in his flat their relationship returns to the previous state. "They were inhibited by a feeling that these past few days had been nothing more than a form of parasitism."<sup>77</sup> The term parasitism might relate to the relationship of Robert and Caroline who made them think about the sado-masochistic practices by talking about them openly. Despite the fact that Colin and Mary return to the previous state of careful relationship they accidentally visit the flat of Robert and Caroline again and thus fall into their world of sado-masochistic practices once more. Caroline tells Mary about her masochistic tendencies and confesses that she likes when Robert hurts her when they make love. Mary is given a tea with a paralysing drug in it and she is later forced to watch the sexual abuse and murder of Colin. Caroline is trying to explain to Mary that Colin was chosen to be a victim instead of Caroline:<sup>78</sup>

One night Robert came in from an evening of drinking, just as I was falling asleep. He got into bed and took me from behind. He whispered he was going to kill me, but he'd said that many times before. He had his forearm round my neck, and then he began to push into the small of my back. At the same time he pulled my head backwards. I blacked out with the pain, but even before I went I remember thinking: it's going to happen. I can't go back on it now. Of course I wanted to be destroyed.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*, 81.

<sup>76</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 26–27.

<sup>77</sup> McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*, 91.

<sup>78</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 27.

<sup>79</sup> McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*, 110.

It is already too late when Mary realises that she and Colin are in a serious danger. The drug makes her unable to do anything with the situation and she only idly watches the murder of Colin. At the end of the novel Mary is shocked as well as the readers because they didn't expect such a shocking end. There isn't described the grief of Mary at the very end of the novel and she is left in shock being interviewed by the police. The end is similar to *The Cement Garden* as there is police involved at the end as well.<sup>80</sup> Both novels don't deal much with grief from the loss of close persons. In *The Cement Garden* children do not show the grief for their father because they didn't like him much and when their mother dies they try to restructure the family as if she was still alive. In *The Comfort of Strangers* there is no space for grief Mary felt for Colin's death. She is shocked at first and the novel ends leaving her at this stage although she would probably grieve for Colin who was very close to her. Obviously McEwan didn't want to deal with the theme of grief in his early novels and he is occupied by these themes in his later novels that are however less important as far as the sexuality is concerned.

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<sup>80</sup> See Byrnes, *Sex and Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Work*, 28–29.

#### 4 COMPARISON OF SELECTED WORKS ON A THEMATIC AND COMPOSITIONAL LEVEL

This part of the thesis will deal with the themes and composition of selected works. The main themes reappearing in McEwan's works have mainly sexual character and although it may seem that the number of subject matters in his works is limited, it is not entirely true. I will compare the compositional features of selected works concerning mainly type of narration, setting and other features. Many of these features have been already described in the previous part so I will only add important information.

Most of the short stories are narrated in the first person. The narrator is often a child or adolescent who is emotionally undeveloped which makes him an unreliable narrator. Therefore the readers can't believe him fully. In "Homemade" the narrator is fourteen years old when the story takes place but he recalls the events in the past tense. The language he uses and his knowledge of the world indicates that he is older when he narrates the story. McEwan said in one of his interviews:

Well, I suppose he's meant to be a sort of Henry Miller-ish age, a wizened sixty. It's really about sexual aggrandisement. I mean I had noticed that people, men especially, when they recount episodes of sexual failure, are frequently indulging in the kind of self-regard – in other words, so successful they can afford to admit failure. And I wanted to write the story about total sexual failure.<sup>81</sup>

In contrast to this short story narrated by the protagonist in the past tense there is the short story "Last Day of Summer" where the protagonist is twelve years old and narrates the story in the present tense. The readers know it from the very beginning: "I am twelve and lying near-naked on my belly out on the back lawn in the sun when for the first time I hear her laugh."<sup>82</sup> It is the only short story written in the present tense and McEwan himself remarks: "I was not aware of any pattern, and each story seemed to me at the time of writing to be a fresh departure, often with very trivial rhetorical ambitions like writing a story in the present tense."<sup>83</sup> The fact that the boy narrates the story when he is twelve years old in the present tense makes the limits in his use of language. The central theme in this short story is coming of age and it shows how difficult it can be to turn into a man. That means to give up dependency and the need for the intimacy offered by the mother and the

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<sup>81</sup> Ian Hamilton, "Points of Departure", *New Review*, (Autumn 1978), 18.

<sup>82</sup> McEwan, "Last Day of Summer" in *First Love, Last Rites*, 41.

<sup>83</sup> Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, 170.

female body.<sup>84</sup> This theme appears also in the short story “Conversation with a Cupboard Man”.

The “Conversation with a Cupboard Man” is the first of McEwan’s many studies of people regressed in the infantile stage. Despite the chronological age of the narrator his use of language is limited as well because until he is seventeen his mother doesn’t want him to grow up and she treats him like a baby. However when she remarries her interest switches to her husband and the protagonist is forced to grow up practically overnight.<sup>85</sup> The story is narrated in first person but the form is different from other McEwan’s works. The protagonist is in a kind of interlocutor who tells his story to the readers and he sometimes directly addresses them: “Why didn’t I run off then when I was older? You might think there was nothing to stop me. But listen, it never occurred to me.”<sup>86</sup>

The weakness of masculinity is a central theme in another short story, “Disguises”. As in “Homemade” the story deals with the sexual abuse of a child, but this time the victim is a ten-year-old schoolboy Henry who is abused by his aunt Mina, a paedophile with transvestite tendencies. Mina becomes his mother substitute when his real mother dies and he is left orphaned. She involves Henry in her dressing-up games and he seems to enjoy it at first. Nevertheless this changes when Mina forces him to dress like a sweet little girl when she dresses herself as a soldier and involves Henry in her sexual games. However Henry falls in love with his schoolfriend Linda and through this he learns how to transform the oppression of his costume into a source of pleasure. His masculinity is hidden in the costume of little girl and he feels no guilt when he is dressed like a girl which makes him think that in the disguise he can do whatever he wants to.<sup>87</sup> “all disguised and no one knows who you are, anyone can do what they want because it doesn’t matter.”<sup>88</sup> In the short story “Disguises” the narrator is omniscient in contrast to “Homemade” which is narrated by the protagonist who is unreliable narrator as it is him who sexually abuses his ten-year-old sister. Therefore with the omniscient narrator in “Disguises” the story is more believable.

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<sup>84</sup> See Kiernan Ryan, *Ian McEwan* (Plymouth, Northcote House, 1994), 7.

<sup>85</sup> See Ryan, “Conversation with a Cupboard Man” in *Ian McEwan*, 7.

<sup>86</sup> McEwan, *First Love, Last Rites*, 76.

<sup>87</sup> See Ryan, *Ian McEwan*, 8–9.

<sup>88</sup> McEwan, “Disguises” in *First Love, Last Rites*, 117–18.

Almost all of the short stories from the collection *First Love, Last Rites* are concerned with adolescent, children and young adults. The title story “First Love, Last Rites” is narrated by the boy at the brink of adulthood. Its major themes are relationship and pregnancy and it is considered as “the most heavily symbolic story.”<sup>89</sup> The symbols appearing in this story have been already described in the previous part of the thesis.

In the second collection of short stories *In Between the Sheets* McEwan partly leaves the interest in children and adolescents. The opening story “Pornography” is narrated in the third person by the omniscient narrator and its central themes are sadism and masochism. The protagonist is an adult man who is two-timing two nurses and infects them with venereal disease. When they finally find it out they castrate him. As well as in “Homemade” there is a theme of rivalry between two men. In “Homemade” it is represented by the protagonist and his friend Raymond and in this short story it is O’Byrne and his brother.

The title story from the collection “In Between the Sheets” tells the story of a divorced man and his daughter. As well as the “Pornography” it is narrated by the omniscient narrator. When the daughter of the protagonist sleeps in his flat one night he overhears the sounds from her bedroom and he thinks they are of a sexual character. McEwan brings the readers to the point that they could expect that the incest will take place. But in the end the daughter of the protagonist turns out to be just an unsettled child which returns her father and the readers to decent normality.<sup>90</sup> The story ends with an image of “a field of dazzling white snow which he, as a small boy of eight, had not dared scar with footprints.”<sup>91</sup> The story is saved by this metaphor that suggests that the protagonist doesn’t want to destroy something pure. The theme of incest appears in more McEwan’s works so it is quite logical that the readers might expect it in this story when the situation tends to it. Therefore they might be surprised that nothing actually happens and they are assured in the end that the protagonist wouldn’t probably do it anyway.

The short story “To and Fro” is different from other short stories as it is a kind of prose poem. It is about a couple lying in the bed after making love. It is narrated by the man whose mind wanders between his day at work and night thoughts about his partner.<sup>92</sup> It

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<sup>89</sup> Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, 170.

<sup>90</sup> See Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, 171–2.

<sup>91</sup> McEwan, “In Between the Sheets” in *In Between the Sheets*, 93.

<sup>92</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 23.

seems to be a dream sequence where the images of the protagonist's boss and his partner are shifting in regular intervals.

Two of the McEwan's short stories are set in future. One of them is "Two Fragments: March 199–" which is an image of possible London in twenty year's time. The city is half destroyed by the war or revolution. The image of the city is very pessimistic and dark, people live in terrible conditions and they suffer from hunger. The story is narrated by the omniscient narrator and the protagonist and his lover reminisce about the past before the city became ruins.<sup>93</sup> This story is a dystopia set in London and McEwan uses the fragments of reality and fantasy here.

Another short story set in future is "Psychopolis". Unlike the most of the stories that are set in England, this one is set in Los Angeles. It is narrated by the protagonist, an English man living in Los Angeles. The theme of masochism appears here again when the lover of the protagonist wants to be chained to the bed for the whole weekend.

The short story "Dead As They Come" is about a rich man who becomes obsessed with a dummy from the shop window that he finally rapes and kills. It is also narrated in the first person by the protagonist but in this case the narrator is unreliable as he believes that the dummy is actually a living person. Although the dummy is only an object, protagonist's destructive behaviour is indicated by the fact that he believes that she is alive.<sup>94</sup> Here again appears the theme of sadism. Because everything the dummy do or thinks takes place in the protagonist's head, it seems that it is his intention from the beginning to kill her. He also imagines that the dummy has masochistic tendencies because when he kills her he convinces himself that she actually enjoyed the moment of her death.

As well as some short stories from the collection *First Love, Last Rites* McEwan's first novel *The Cement Garden* is narrated by an adolescent. The theme of incest appears again in this novel when Jack has sexual intercourse with his sister Julie. However the role of the incest is different than in "Homemade" and this difference have been already described in the previous part of the thesis. There is also the theme of transvestism and it relates to Tom, the youngest of the siblings, who after the death of their mother spends most of his time with his sisters who dress him like a girl.

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<sup>93</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 24–25.

<sup>94</sup> See Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, 26.

As well as “Psychopolis” McEwan’s second novel *The Comfort of Strangers* is not set in England. It is set in an unnamed Italian city but from the context it is obvious that it is Venice. This novel is narrated by the omniscient narrator and McEwan uses the prolepsis here when he tells the readers about Colin’s death before it actually happens. The themes of sadism and masochism are central to this novel.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the themes of sexuality and their roles in Ian McEwan's early works. The books that were chosen for this analysis are *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), *In Between the Sheets* (1978), *The Cement Garden* (1978) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981). The reason these works were selected for further analysis is that the themes of sexuality are most vivid in them. In 1990s McEwan developed into more contemplative author and follows more conventional themes.

McEwan's short stories are mainly concerned with children, adolescents and young adults. Protagonists are often emotionally undeveloped and they seem to be arrested in one of the stages of emotional development. Protagonist in "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" is arrested in oral phase of emotional development because his mother wants him to be an eternal baby and thus obstructs him to grow up. When he is forced to leave her he is not able to live normal life and closes himself in a cupboard to hide from the outside world.

People arrested in the anal phase often tend to sadism and masochism. The themes of sadism and masochism appear throughout the McEwan's early works. In the short stories they are often connected with the regression to the emotional development. The protagonist in the short story "Pornography" is an example of a person who has inclination to both sadism and masochism. These two kinds of sexual deviance are represented by the two nurses with whom he simultaneously keeps a sexual relationship. He is subordinate to one of them and superordinate to the other one and he chooses which one to meet according to his actual tastes. He projects the roles of master and slave on them but when he is discovered to be cheating on them he is surgically castrated by them.

The theme of sado-masochism is explored also in the novel *The Comfort of Strangers* where the couple of lovers meet a man on their holiday in Italy who turns out to be a sadistic murderer.

The phallic phase is represented by the protagonist in "Homemade" who becomes interested in the opposite sex and to satisfy his sexual needs he has sex with his younger sister. The theme of incestuous relationship appears as well in other McEwan's works. In "Disguises" the protagonist is sexually abused by his aunt and in *The Cement Garden* the protagonist has sexual intercourse with his sister.

However the theme of incestuous relationship in "The Cement Garden" is rather different from the previous two examples from the short stories. In this novel the children are forced to take roles of the parents as they are left orphaned and when they restructure

the family, their roles gradually lead to a sexual relationship. Its purpose isn't however to satisfy their sexual needs as it was in the short stories, but to strengthen the bond between each other.

All of the sexual themes appearing in analysed works can be explained in terms of psychology. Many psychological works can explain these phenomena but they give only scientific point of view. The art of Ian McEwan is that based on these scientific knowledge he can create the stories that make the readers feel involved and experience the bizarre and horror situations. To some people it may seem inappropriate but they shouldn't avoid it because these things might be hidden in their unconsciousness as well.

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