ABSTRACT

Desire Versus Conscience: Development of the Id
and the Ego in Ian McEwan's Fiction

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Throughout the course of McEwan's writing career, his books have dealt with interpersonal relationships, society, history, and the human condition, but his later works have grown and become more introspective, less shocking, and even more challenging because of their depth. This thesis will argue that the maturation has resulted in a shift from an extremely postmodern position to a more nuanced modern style, thus explaining the tension between and evolution of the concepts of the Freudian id, ego and super-ego or, more simply put, desire and conscience in his works.

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and the Ego in Ian McEwan's Fiction

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To my family and to Ken
I love you all

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Perhaps Ian McEwan has lost his edge over the years. He no longer writes unapologetic stories of incest and lust, and the moniker "Ian Macabre" no longer applies. Throughout the course of McEwan's writing career, his books have dealt with interpersonal relationships, society, history, and the human condition, but his later works have grown and become more introspective, less shocking, and even more challenging because of their depth. In this thesis I will focus on his published books, arguing that although McEwan "wishes to disassociate his writing form any fixed literary movement or pigeon hole" (Slay 4), this maturation has arguably resulted in a shift from an extremely postmodern position to a more nuanced modern style, creating a new and individualized style of writing which incorporates elements from both movements. This stylistic maturation helps explain the tension between and evolution of the concepts of the Freudian id, ego and super-ego or, more simply put, desire and social conscience in his works.

Like most literary theories and movements, modernism and postmodernism are subject to many interpretations and attempts to define the features that characterize them. The terms are fluid and unstructured, and themes or trends that are said to define the movements can easily be excepted for

certain authors categorized within the movement. For the purposes of this paper, "modern," as a literary term, characterizes the artistic and social movement in which genres are blurred or combined, works are often reflexive or self-conscious, metafiction is employed as a method to finding a meaning and purpose within literature, and history and human subjectivity are fragmented. The writers classified within this movement do not accept the Romantic ideas that there are universal truths, clarity, and continuity in history and narrative structures, although there is nostalgia for this universality. And, as McEwan asserts in an interview with Daniel Zalewski, he is weary of the Romantic assumption that "intuition is good and reason is bad" (46). Modernism struggles with the individual's role in society, and the isolated individual trying to make sense of an increasingly scientific and urban world.

Postmodernism is, very simply put, the period or movement after modernism. The term "postmodern" has been the topic of much debate, as have been the theories and ideologies that characterize postmodern works. The distinction between "modern" and "postmodern" can be problematic, because many critics see postmodernism as a contemporary extension of modernism, thereby making the term "post" somewhat misleading. Postmodernism shares the characteristics above and "emphasize[s] pastiche, parody, bricolage, irony and playfulness . . . and emphasize[s] the destructured, decentered, dehumanized subject" (Klages 165). Postmodern literature, like modern literature, often aims to shock and revolt, refuses to make moral judgment,

challenges social mores, and occasionally finds entertainment in perversion and deviance.

However, critics often make some key distinctions between modernism and postmodernism. Modernism views the fragmentation, discontinuity, and subjectivity as tragic, "something to be lamented and mourned as a loss. [Modernist works] try to uphold the idea that art can provide the unity, coherence, and meaning which has been lost in most of modern life; art will do what other human institutions fail to do" (Klages 165-6). Although modernists agree that there is no universal truth to be found in religion or spiritual matters, the modern movement wishes for a time when humanity believed in universal truths, and tries to make reparations to the fractured world through art. Furthermore, modernists find faith and value in "depth" as opposed to the surface. Postmodernism upholds that the fragmentation and incongruence of history and grand narratives is not something tragic, but something to be embraced and with which the artist can play. Postmodern authors contend that there is no universal truth to be found through spirituality, science, or otherwise, and postmodern works embrace the world and life's meaninglessness rather than try to fix it. The postmodern critic, Jean Baudrillard, argues that, experience is hyperreal, that it is superficial and simply a simulation of the real.

> The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models – and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. In fact, since

> it is no longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at all. It is hyperreal. ("Simulacra and Simulations" 366).

There is no depth, only surface. There is no control, only chaos. There is no transformation, only existence.

Freud, generally thought of as a modern thinker, argued that the human psyche was divided into three functions: the id, the ego, and the super-ego. The id is driven by impulse, the seat of passion, focused on selfishness and self-gratification. The super-ego is moral function of the psyche, formed by ideals, spiritual goals, and controls guilt. The super-ego interjects parental images and expectations, standing as a voice of authority for the ego. The ego is the mediator between the id and super-ego, and attempts to satisfy both masters, as well as the external world. The ego represents the outside world to the id and exercises the judgment and logical behavior required by the super-ego (*The Ego and the Id* 54-9). Like another modern author, D. H. Lawrence, both Freud and McEwan have uneasy relationships with society: society is inherently imperfect because imperfect humans construct society, and yet humans need the company of one another and the expectations of society to live together.

McEwan's writing is initially quite postmodern, depicting "id-ridden" characters that allow their basic drives, immediate enjoyment, selfishness, and instant self-gratification to rule their actions. He has openly admitted that by his final year at the University of Sussex he had "developed two new passions: reading Freud and writing fiction," both of which have had obvious effects on

his life and work. Books like *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), *In Between the Sheets* (1978), *The Cement Garden* (1978) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) depict deviant characters who, many times, have no place in society. They have allowed their ids to become the ruling force of their psyches and actions. Therefore, in accordance with Ihab Hassan's descriptions of postmodern works, McEwan's early characters exhibit a "diffusion of the ego" (99). The characters possess limited understanding of or adherence to social or familial responsibility. Their desires are not kept in check, they rarely experience guilt, and they have distorted concepts of right and wrong. Ultimately they answer to no social conscience or traditionally inherited morals.

As McEwan's works progress, the reader begins to see the ego play a larger role in his characters' psyches. During this period of writing, McEwan's writing straddles the line between postmodernism and modernism, and the reader begins to see McEwan's new style of writing, in which he incorporates elements of both modernist and postmodernist literature, using his characters for social commentary and for the exploration of reason, emotion, intuition and spirituality. McEwan's works are more socially conscious, and while still challenging the social norms and expectations, the characters become more real, struggling between the id and the ego, socially prescribed duties and morals with their own desires. In his books *The Child in Time* (1987), *The Innocent* (1990), *Black Dogs* (1992), *Enduring Love* (1997), and *Amsterdam* (1998) McEwan hones his ability to shock and thrill through human struggle and environment, developing

characters who are less caricatures of social deviance and more round and dynamic characters. They are searching for a universal truth, and while McEwan carefully refrains from decisively declaring a universal truth or the proper path to finding one, he does not deny the human's attempt to find meaning.

Finally, in his last few books McEwan perfects the blended style he began to experiment with in his earlier books. Not only does he retain all the shared modern and postmodern characteristics, as well as acknowledge the human need to assign a purpose to themselves and to their lives, but in works like *Atonement* (2001), *Saturday* (2005), and *On Chesil Beach* (2007), he seeks to find reparation and redemption for the fragmented world through mediums such as art, science, production, and relationships, while continuing to emphasize the characters' destructured and decentered condition. Thus he moves beyond simple constructs of modernism and postmodernism into a more timeless and universal style. His characters continue to grow in depth and dynamism, utilizing these mediums as the lens through which they view the world and their place in it. These characters believe that these elements provide the necessary materials to find meaning in the world.

David Zalewski, in his *New Yorker* article "The Background Hum," contends that

> the change in his work is not as extreme as it may seem. McEwan's presiding interest has always been psychology, and, like many scientists of his generation, he has shifted his intellectual allegiances. At first, he studied perversity; now he studies normality. His first god was Freud. Now it is Darwin. (56)

Yet such a claim is far too general, and not entirely accurate. In fact, Freud himself acknowledges Darwin's influence over his own work: "The theories of Darwin, which were then of topical interest, strongly attracted me for they held out hopes of an extraordinary advance in our understanding of the world" (*An Autobiographical Study* 7). Though new Darwinists (as critics like James M. Mellard have sometimes labeled him) are usually set up in opposition to psychoanalysis, especially Freud and Lacan ("No ideas but in things" 6), McEwan's works still can be read with Freud to inform them. Initially, Freud's acclaim arose from his sensational studies of the perverse, but his writings also examine the roles of the conscience and society on the individual, influences that are central to a study of McEwan's novels. Freud asserts that although society is imperfect, humans need one another, and that "social feelings rest on identifications with other people, on the basis of having the same ego ideal" (*The Ego and the Id* 37). In *Saturday*, one Darwinian texts, his main character Henry Perowne echoes Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "Beware the utopianists, zealous men certain of the path to the ideal social order" (286). And, arguably, even some of McEwans' better adjusted characters are not "normal." Briony's overactive imagination ruins lives and relationships in *Atonement*, Perowne has a normal family, but has trouble understanding, engaging in, and relating to the diverse world around him in *Saturday*, and Florence and Edward repress their emotions, destroying their relationship in *On Chesil Beach*.

So, although McEwan “has what he calls an ‘Augustan spirit’” and Zalewski claims that his plots defy what McEwan calls the “dead hand of modernism,” (qtd. in Zalewski 46, 48) he cannot seem to escape some of the modernist ideals. As Zalewski has also pointed out, “critics have noted that many McEwan novels hinge on a single, transformative event: the balloon, the abduction, Briony’s accusation” (54). And, these transformative events inspire in the characters and, in turn, in the reader, an attempt to find truth.

CHAPTER TWO

Id Trumps Ego: The Domination of Desire in McEwan's Early Works

Ian McEwan's first four published works, *First Love, Last Rites, In Between the Sheets*, *The Cement Garden,* and *The Comfort of Strangers* received a flurry of attention, both positive and negative, and earned him the nickname "Ian Macabre." McEwan's cool, detached narration is often commented on and contrasted with his unflinching descriptions of rape, incest, pedophilia, sexually transmitted diseases, mutilation, sadomasochism, murder, and other savagery, and led some reviewers of his early works to accuse him of employing such imagery and plots in an overt attempt to shock the reader. Undoubtedly, the content of the short stories and the first two novellas is quite shocking and, in many cases, disturbing. Some readers and critics were offended by the grisly pictures of sexuality, abuse, and degenerate behavior depicted in many of the stories. Critics have labeled the works "unsavory" (Malcolm 45), "hateful"(Freemont-Smith 32), and "definitely diseased"(Leonard 14C). Such stories as "Homemade," "Butterflies," and "Pornography," as well as the novellas leave the reader uncomfortably enthralled with the frank and explicit depictions of sexual deviance and social transgressions. Others of the short stories may not be as horrifying as these three, but nearly all make even an open-minded reader uneasy, a malaise that remains with the reader throughout his

next two novels. In a 1983 interview with John Haffenden, McEwan insisted that although, "it turns out that what I've written is unsettling . . . I don't sit down to think about what will unsettle people next" (169). Sixteen years later, in his 2009 interview with Zalewski, he admitted that "he was 'trying to shock' with his early experiments; there was a tone of disavowal" (56). Whether or not McEwan plans his stories based upon their ability to unsettle, he is clearly postmodern in his attempts to push the envelope and explore the individual's role in society, and this challenging of norms and expectations is exactly what critics and readers also admire about his works.

Reviewers took the short story collections and novellas seriously, and critics found much to praise. Both short story collections' "seeming preoccupation with sordid sexuality, abused children and violent relationships" depicted scenarios that were "at once . . . bleak and compelling, squalid and unconventional, yet recognizably and disturbingly human" (Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 2). Hermione Lee wrote that *In Between the Sheets* contained "seven elegantly gruesome accounts of derelict and perverted lives [that] cannot be dismissed after the first *frisson*: their peculiar images of pain and loss seem, retrospectively, to grow in depth" ("Shock Horror" 86). Whether their receptions were positive or negative, critics like Jack Slay, Jason Cowley, Kiernan Ryan as well as Lynda Broughton, Angela Roger and Christina Byrnes have carefully examined the works, identifying an uneasy humanity in disconcerting stories.

McEwan once again exhibits his postmodern style, and although there are certainly upsetting and even, in some cases, perverted depictions of humanity, he has a purpose for the grotesque and shocking stories he tells. In creating macabre plots that are "paradoxically absurd yet logical," he writes in line with postmodern ideas and methods; he tries to challenge or blur the line between what society considers natural and proper and right (Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 8). While flouting social expectations, he rarely offers answers or judgment explicitly, but rather presents the plots in such a way that one must closely examine the tension between personal expectations and responsibility. In doing so, they play an integral role in understanding of the evolution of postmodern and modern mentality (and the developing struggle of desire versus conscience) throughout McEwan's works.

Jack Slay, who argues that by forcing us to acknowledge the "atrocities of everyday life, [we are] only a step away from reforming them," finds a kind of subtle morality in even the most depraved of McEwan's tales (9). However, this idea is hotly contested by David Malcolm, who asserts, "perhaps the most shocking aspect of McEwan's short stories is . . . their lack of moral judgment" (42). While McEwan certainly forces the reader to acknowledge atrocities in the world, and while there are many characters lacking morals, what is so shocking and upsetting is not just the absence of some obscure moral code but *specifically* an almost complete disregard for any sense of conscience or social expectations, any indication that the character has, in Freudian terms, an ego or super-ego to

control his or her id. Rather than merely observing whether or not these characters act morally, one should discern that the characters have not internalized society's mores and therefore do not prescribe to the duties that are defined by a set of responsibilities to and the expectations of the human community. In a *Salon* interview with Dwight Garner, McEwan states, "We're descended from generations of people who *survived,* who acted successfully. But who also cooperated successfully; so we clearly need to save our own skins and look out for own interests, but we're social animals and we need other people dearly" ("The Salon Interview: Ian McEwan").

Thus, in some of the most upsetting stories, the characters do not answer to such duties because they are entirely unaware they should have a sense of obligation. In instances where McEwan does allow responsibility to enter the minds of his characters in his early works, their ideas of responsibility are usually skewed or almost entirely based upon an id driven duty to self as opposed to super-ego informed responsibility to others. More often than not the characters allow their desires to trump any obligations society would expect them to fulfill. Often, such characters are adolescents or young adults trying to find their place in the society to which they must enter, and they are torn between the expectations laid out for them and their personal desires. Other times the characters are fully grown adults who act outside of the confines of social expectations, thereby shirking the duties that have been established for them by their peers. In either case, McEwan creates a vivid environment where

desire usurps the ego and super-ego and extremely deviant behavior is treated as normal, inconsequential, or even amusing.

The first and certainly most disturbing story of McEwan's first collection, *First Love, Last Rites* is "Homemade." The unnamed narrator and main character in "Homemade" tells the story from an adult perspective reflecting on his fourteen-year-old self. The boy is on a quest to become a man under the tutelage of his unpromising mentor, Raymond. Raymond introduces him to smoking cigarettes and marijuana, drinking alcohol, stealing, masturbation, and finally sex. As Lynda Broughton points out, the main character shows scorn for the middle class upbringing he has been privileged to (41), for he "walked into Foyle's bookshop, crammed [his] pockets with books and took them to a dealer on the Mile End Road who was pleased to give [him] half their cost price"(*First Love, Last Rites* 11), and simply laughs at his father and uncle who work twelve hour shifts of honest work "because [he] knew that a good afternoon's work in the bookshop earned more than they scraped together in a week" (17). His outright disdain for the working and middle class men and women around him exhibits a disregard for such a society's expectations: to put in the time at an honest job, to earn one's living, and to provide for one's family. Such matters do not weigh on the narrator's mind. He does not even use the money he gets to help his family. This young man instead seeks to fulfill the immediate enjoyment from making money for cigarettes, taking drugs, and drinking alcohol. And, upon discovering another aspect of adulthood of which he has been deprived,

sex, he is consumed by the desire to acquaint himself with yet another area of manhood. If he can be said to have a duty, the duty is to himself: to experience any and every activity will make him a "man."

The boys hear of a young girl, Lulu Smith, "of whom it was said she would do anything, and that she had done everything" (14). Raymond is able to make a deal that Lulu will expose herself to the main character for a shilling, but aware of his inexperience, the main character devises a new plan. And, perhaps in the most appalling instance yet, his ego and super-ego do not intercede. Instead, he is consumed with the selfish desire to garner more knowledge before his Lulu encounter. He decides to convince his ten-year-old little sister, Connie, to play "Mommies and Daddies," so that he might be able to face Lulu with ease and confidence, perhaps even enabling himself to "lay her out there and then, halfway through the peepshow" (21). In her eagerness to play her favorite game, the narrator has little trouble convincing Connie to incorporate sex into the game because he explains it is how Mommies and Daddies show affection toward one another. The encounter undeniably distresses the reader. Furthermore, the juxtaposition between a familiar childhood game of "house," the little girl's confusion combined with her innocence, and the boy's unquestioning acceptance of his inappropriate lust exhibit his complete disregard for the accepted social obligations and responsibilities as a brother and temporary caretaker. Ironically, in his attempts to rape his sister, he is so inexperienced in sexual matters that little Connie must show him where his penis goes. Despite his inadequacy or the

fact that his first sexual partner is his little sister, the character feels pride rather than shame.

> I wished Raymond could have seen me . . . I wished Dinky Lulu could have seen me, in fact, if my wishes had been granted I would have had all my friends, all the people I knew, file through the bedroom to catch me in my splendorous pose. For more than sensation, more than any explosion behind my eyes, spears through my stomach, searings in my groin or rackings of my soul – more than any of these things, none of which I felt anyway, more then than even the thought of these things, I felt proud, proud to be fucking. (29)

When Connie begins to cry because he has "wet" inside her, he barely notices, but gets dressed, takes her to clean up before his parents get home and he must explain what has happened. He expresses little guilt or disgust with himself. Freud would argue that this incestual drive is a quite normal impulse, because even "savage" races have shown awareness of and aversion towards incest (*Totem and Taboo* 1-16). Yet, even if one could argue over whether or not the boy truly understands the concept of rape or incest, his adult self, the narrator, does not even appear to have guilt as he recounts the events. Instead, as Broughton points out, "the events of the story are described with shocking detachment and chillingly good-humored affection from an adult perspective which appears to invite the reader to share both its misogyny and its celebratory tone, both of which are presented unproblematically" (139). After years of perspective and additional sexual experiences, the narrator still exhibits no remorse, no awareness of a breach in conduct. Reflecting on the "wonder" and "ecstasy" Connie experiences in playing house, he callously and sardonically comments,

"It was almost a shame I had it in mind to rape her" (*First Love, Last Rites* 25). His assertion that the story is not in fact about "virginity, coitus, incest and self-abuse" but about Raymond belies his complete lack of acceptance of guilt. According to this claim, the story is not about the narrator's abuse of power and age, but poor Raymond, who failed to accomplish any of the wonderful things to which he exposed the narrator.

Whether or not "the story emerges as both a feminist and an anti-feminist story, one in which the pastiche of writers like Mailer, perhaps inevitably, becomes an example of the genre it is parodying," as Broughton argues, the reader cannot deny the complete lack of expected conscience and responsibility expressed by the narrator (142). He realizes that he is committing an act for which he could be punished.

> After all it would not do to go scaring my little sister who would not think twice about telling my father everything, and that would mean a scene of some sort, laborious lies to invent, shouting and crying and that sort of thing. (*First Love, Last Rites* 22)

But, looking closely at the dialogue, one can find no contrition. Although he seems abstractly aware that most would find rape and incest unacceptable, an infringement of his brotherly duties as child-minder, social morals, norms or taboos are not even considered. Should Connie tell on him, he would not be embarrassed or ashamed, merely put out at having to cover his tracks. Dominic Head points out that the only possible hint of remorse the narrator exhibits is when he has finished with Connie, and claims to have lost the desire to see a

naked female for a while (36). Overall, the event simply enhances his sense of manhood, his sense of superiority and extinguishes his desire to simply see Lulu's vagina after he has already experienced coitus. Although he concedes, "this may have been one of the most desolate couplings known to copulating mankind, involving lies, deceit, humiliation, incest, my partner falling asleep, my gnat's orgasm and the sobbing which now filled the bedroom," he is "pleased with it" (*First Love, Last Rites* 29). Desire is the supreme ruler of the narrator's conscience and fulfilling desire is his primary goal.

As exhibited in "Homemade," McEwan often expresses a breach of responsibility within the family setting. Adults are bound to take care of children, whether that relationship is between parents and children, guardians and their wards, or simply a stranger to a young child. Yet often the responsibility is shirked or distorted into an abuse of power. "Butterflies," narrated in the first person, is a horribly upsetting story about an unnamed pedophile whose age is also not specified. When asked about the story, McEwan admits that it is "appalling . . . written by someone who had nothing to do with children . . . As children come more into your life, the possibility of their death is not something you play with lightly" (qtd. in Haffenden 172). The undeniable violation of expectations regarding an adult's role toward a child leaves the reader wholly revolted.

The adult narrator (and main character) is socially awkward and at the outset the reader feels simultaneously sympathetic towards and uneasy with this

man. An odd loner, he only talks to two people, neighbors, and only when they happen to cross paths. So lonely that when he stops the local boys' runaway soccer ball and the boys cheer, "that for one elated moment [he] thought [he] could go back and join their game" (*First Love, Last Rites* 87). So lonely that he is happy when a nine-year-old neighbor girl, Jane, begins to follow him and talk to him because he "wanted her to be [his] friend" (87). However, the reader quickly realizes this man is not accustomed to or governed by the conventional social expectations.

The story opens with two men discussing Jane's recent death. The reader discovers that the narrator has been asked to meet the little girl's parents because he was the last to see her alive. He reflects on his interview at the police station, on the sergeant's repeated observation that she lived on the same street, and knows that he "breeds distrust" (82). The memories cause the narrator to think back further, to the previous Thursday, the day he "saw Jane's corpse" (82). Walking in front of her garden, she tries to talk to him and he initially ignores her. When he doesn't respond, she leaves her garden and begins to follow him. The narrator does not know how to interact with her, and while she follows and interrogates him on where he is going, asking to tag along. Ironically, when he first looks closely at her, it is she who seems suspect, with "a long delicate face and large mournful eyes. Her fine brown hair was tied in bunches in red ribbon to match her red cotton dress. She was beautiful in a strange, almost sinister way, like a girl in a Modigliani painting" (85). She continues to follow and

interrogate him until they arrive at the main shopping street and stop in front of a toy store. He buys Jane a "small, pink, naked doll" (88) and an ice cream, wiping her face for her. He reflects that he "had never touched another person's lips before, nor had [he] experienced this kind of pleasure. It rose painfully from [his] groin to [his] chest and lodged itself there, like a fist pushing against [his] ribs" (91). Only twice does he exhibit such strong emotion: in the excitement of the soccer boys' encouragement and this initial contact of his fingers on her lips. Primarily, the narration, like that of "Homemade," is descriptive yet detached, recounting events and dialogue.

After their little shopping excursion, he lures Jane to the canal where she is forbidden to go, under the pretense of seeing butterflies there. He has no plan, "no idea what was going to happen when [they] came to the end of the path," but he does know that "she would want to run home and I just knew I could not let her go" (94). Without a sense of boundaries, he is completely insensitive to her tears, her increasing fear and her anxiety. Once they arrive, she realizes his deception begins to scream, but he drags her into a tunnel where her cries are drowned out by a train overhead. He pulls out his penis, first attempting to cajole her into touching it and finally shaking her and yelling at her. Her brief, hesitant touch is enough, and he ejaculates. While he cleans up she tries to escape, but as she is running she falls, hits her head and is knocked out. He gathers her body, "gently" places it in the canal and she drowns.

Again, all this is relayed unemotionally; the narrator simply restates the facts. Because the story is written in first person, the reader is trapped inside his mind as he jumps back and forth between the day of the murder and the day he is to meet with the parents. In the end, the reader is left trying to discern whether or not the narrator believed he committed a crime; like the narrator in "Homemade," he is aware that others would condemn him for his actions. He blatantly lies to a neighbor, claiming that he did not see the little girl fall in the water, and lies to the sergeant, saying he was on the bridge when he saw her running along the canal. However, his description of the events is so unemotional that one begins to believe that the narrator sees no wrongdoing in his actions. When he is finished remembering Jane's death, his mind nostalgically returns to the soccer game with the neighborhood boys, imagining how he might impress them. He expresses no sense of remorse or even unease because he is not subject to the societal norms.

Also similar to "Homemade," both narrators do not appear to have an ego to keep their id in check. However, the pedophile's desire is more vague than the narrator's in "Homemade." While the desire in "Homemade" is purely sexual, a conquest to assert his manhood, this man's desire is a desire for companionship, for human intimacy. Yet this perfectly human and logical desire is perverted by its fulfillment through a sexual encounter between an adult and a child. Also, neither character fears self-inflicted punishment or internal turmoil

for their abhorrent actions. Rather, the consequences will come from an outside source: the parents, law enforcement, or neighbors.

One of the first times McEwan exhibits accountability for an overdeveloped id is in the story "Pornography" from *In Between the Sheets*. In fact, rather extreme consequences for allowing desire to subordinate a responsibility to others are finally enforced, yet these consequences do not come from any internal damnation, but from the women who are wronged. The main character, O'Byrne (whose age is unclear), works in his brother's pornographic shop, and he treats women like a buffet: a different woman for every mood. Although he doesn't specify how O'Byrne meets these women, clearly he has no responsibility to the women with whom he is involved; they are simply tools to fulfill his sexual desires. His older brother further reinforces the misogynistic lifestyle and encourages such behavior in an attempt to live vicariously.

At the time of the story O'Byrne keeps two steady girlfriends, Pauline and Lucy, ten years apart in age, though their exact ages are never mentioned. Both women are nurses at the same hospital but polar opposites in personality. The women do not know about each other, or about the women on the side and O'Byrne feels no obligation to tell them. Pauline is "a silent girl who once wept at a film about the effects of pesticides on butterflies, who wanted to redeem O'Byrne with her love," which makes it easy for O'Byrne to manipulate and take advantage of her (*In Between the Sheets* 13). Pauline provides him the opportunity to play a more traditional role of manliness both in and out of the bedroom.

Lucy is the older one, a little plump, and extremely assertive. Sexual encounters with Lucy are anything but traditional: she pins him down, slaps him, calls him degrading names, urinates on him, and has him wear women's underwear. That misogynistic O'Byrne accepts such treatment from a woman is initially shocking, but this sexual deviance properly foreshadows the consequences for his irresponsibility.

Within the first two pages of the story the reader discovers O'Byrne has contracted "the clap," though the origin is unclear. At the clinic he claims he contracted it from a prostitute. However, rather than being alarmed, he seems fairly unconcerned and his older brother even celebrates his infection with a drink from the pub. He goes to a clinic and receives treatment for the infection, but the medicine leaves him "sapped of desire" and stops seeing either woman for ten days (23). Yet, even with a diminished libido, O'Byrne does not tell either woman he has contracted gonorrhea. The women have found out about each other, though, and the infection he has so generously shared with them. Because of his philandering and deceitful ways, the women have decided to punish him. He meets Lucy at her flat to pick up where they left off, but after allowing himself to be tied to the bed, he discovers that Pauline will be coming soon, and they will "get" him. Lucy asserts, "this is what they should have done for you at the clinic" (29), and, in a very feminist move, they prepare to castrate him. Unlike the stories from *First Love, Last Rights*, McEwan's characters are beginning to have tangible, if violent, consequences for completely succumbing to desire.

Dominic Head, who reads a moral implication in the story, says, "the story is about the destructive consequences of the objectification of human sexuality," which "reduces men and women to . . . urinating on each other, literally as well as metaphorically" (41-2). And Christina Byrnes claims the story is "arguably the 'dirtiest' of McEwan's stories in that it deals with the dissemination of venereal disease, frankly sadistic sex and punitive castration as well as pornography" and goes on to express relief that unlike some of his previous stories of sexual deviancy and perversion, "the characters are all adults and equally culpable" (*The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 28). However, this argument seems to ignore the fact that though the women choose to be sexually involved with a man like O'Byrne, and their revenge is violent, the reader can find no indication that they choose lack consciences. These stories are examples of why feminists have a hard time establishing whether McEwan is a feminist or not. He frequently creates misogynistic characters that exert their will and power over women, but the women are also often the ones who triumph or educate the men. Pauline may allow O'Byrne to treat her badly and Lucy may participate in consensual sadomasochistic sexual experiences, and though one may argue that the women clearly suffer from Freudian "penis envy," McEwan does not mete out consequences for them. O'Byrne's complete lack of concern for the effects of his actions on others is the true offense.

McEwan's first novel, *The Cement Garden*, has been compared with Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, with its "familiar plot of children suddenly abandoned

and isolated" and McEwan "readily admits the influence" (Slay 36-7). But McEwan's children, so lost and lonely, do not make war on one another, but grow closer. Like his previous stories, these children are also at odds with the expectations of society, responsibility, and their own desires.

> The novel seems to explore an ambiguous area somewhere between the poles of social control and unfettered impulse, and the effect of this can be to interrogate the nature of these social controls. The ambiguity that results from the interrogation of social norms and codes also complicates and obscures the moral stance, of course. (Head 47)

The Cement Garden is certainly more complicated than some of his earlier works with similar plot devices and imagery (cross-dressing little boys, incest, masturbation) because the tension between Freud's three functions of the mind is more prevalent than in his short stories. More so than the characters in his short stories, the children in *The Cement Garden* occasionally show an awareness of social norms and socially appropriate actions, but it is often overridden by the lure of desire.

While attempting to cover the entire garden with cement the Father dies from a heart attack and the children Julie (aged sixteen/seventeen), Jack (fourteen/fifteen), Sue (twelve/thirteen) and Tom (five/six) are left with their mother, who becomes very ill and also dies shortly after her husband. Left alone and aware they will be put in an orphanage and possibly separated from one another, they place their mother's body in a trunk in the basement and fill the trunk with cement. Julie, the eldest, assumes the role of mother, and the children

work together to keep the fact that they are orphans a secret. However, from the moment the story begins to unfold, the reader perceives that, for the most part, these parents have neglected to model for their children proper social behaviors, even while alive and the children have therefore failed to fully understand and internalize these behaviors.

The family lives in almost complete isolation, an urban wasteland in the midst of an average (though unnamed) city. Their ancient, decaying house is the only one left standing after the others were knocked down for a motorway that was never built. The family lives by the unspoken rule that no one "ever [brings] friends home" (*The Cement Garden* 26). The parents have no siblings, the grandparents are dead, and the parents do not have "any real friends outside the family" so "no one ever [comes] to visit" them (28). Such a reclusive lifestyle clearly impacts the children, and after both parents die, the kids continue to live a life with little-to-no contact with the outside world, with the exception of Julie. Within the family, the mother and four children are quite different but tightly knit, while the father is domineering, belittling every family member but, "jokes [are] not made against Father because they [are] not funny. He sulk[s]" (20-1). The family in *The Cement Garden* fits right into Freud's argument that "The more closely the members of a family are attached to one another, the more often do they tend to cut themselves off from others, and the more difficult is it for them to enter into the wider circle of life" (*Civilization and its Discontents* 58). Limited socialization leads to a distorted awareness of the role of an individual in society.

Because of the family's isolation, the children's most important responsibilities are to each other. However, they struggle with their own selfishness and limited understanding of their roles, both in their family and in society as a whole. The entire novel is based upon the ultimate breakdown of social conscience and interaction with the outside world in order to fulfill immediate enjoyment. As Malcolm points out, the children are not necessarily behaving immorally, but lawlessly (63-5). Once left to their own devices, they begin to retreat further into their own worlds of fantasy and desire. Julie vacillates between playing mommy and still being the popular girl at school, and at sixteen Julie attempts to date a twenty-three-year-old man. The youngest, Tom, first dresses as a girl and then reverts back to infancy. Jack, the narrator of the story, lives an entirely selfish existence; he refuses to shower or clean his clothes and his days are primarily spent sleeping and masturbating. Sue is perhaps the most average of all the children, an emotional introvert who passes the time reading and writing in her journal. The ultimate suppression of the ego manifests itself in Jack and Julie's relationship when the id oriented Oedipal complex is fulfilled.

> The ego ideal is therefore the heir of the Oedipus complex, and thus it is also the expression of the most powerful impulses and the most important libidinal vicissitudes of the id. By setting up this ego ideal, the ego has mastered the Oedipus complex and at the same time placed itself in subjection to the id. Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. (*The Ego and the Id* 36)

Whereas the children should have inherited a "higher nature" from their parents, the abnormal home environment and the parents' disconnection with the outside world restrict the children's development of the ego's assimilation of the external world's taboo against incest, and act according to their id's impulses.

Jack's sexual interest in the females in his family is interwoven throughout the novel, and within the opening pages the reader is aware of the incestuous overtones that pervade the novel. Jack and Julie strip down their younger sister Sue and pretend to be doctors examining an alien, stroking her all along her body and sliding their fingers over her vagina. When they are finished, Jack locks himself in the bathroom and attempts to masturbate but only succeeds in dry spasms. Jack uses the same image of "Julie's hand between Sue's legs" during his first successful masturbation while avoiding working with his father on the cement garden, and this is when his father dies (*The Cement Garden* 23).

Jack expresses no remorse at his father's death, and many critics have pointed out the Oedipal overtones that only become more prevalent as Julie takes over as surrogate mother. Like "Homemade," Jack and Julie are, in essence, playing "Mommies and Daddies." Studying a young boy, Freud observed, "

> The hate which resulted from the rivalry for the mother could not permeate the boy's psychic life without being inhibited; he had to contend with the tenderness he had felt for his father from the beginning, so that the child assumed a double or ambivalent emotional attitude towards the father. (*Totem and Taboo* 124)

After rebelling against Julie's authority as his mother, Jack takes his place as her partner; he takes up the role of father. As Zalewski points out Jack, upon observing his dying mother, "notes that, 'her eyes, set in dark skin wrinkled like a peach stone, were sunk so far into her skull she seemed to stare out from a deep well'" and the "Oedipal foundation" of sex between Julie and Jack "is signaled when he touches her nipple, which is 'hard and wrinkle like a peach stone'" (55). Though Angela Roger purports that "the relationship between Jack and Julie . . . moves inexorably from normal sibling affection to incest," Jack's feelings toward Julie never seem to be simply brotherly. He never views Julie as just a sister, but an Other, something more: sister, mother, woman, and sexual being. He often notices her physicality and is continually drawn to her. There is a distinctly sexual air to the scene where he puts sunscreen on her back (52-3), he is jealous as she dries off a naked Tom (53) and as Tom lays his head on her breasts (119), and often attempts small physical contact (124). Even when he is trying to play a brotherly role in his interactions with Julie's boyfriend, Derek, he is more clearly driven by jealousy. And, as the story progresses, Julie becomes more and more receptive to his advances. All their interactions are building up to the final scene in the novel, when any concept of social mores has been entirely suppressed, and desire consumes them in an incredibly intimate incestuous encounter.

However, unlike the incestuous encounter in "Homemade," the sex is consensual and long awaited. And Head posits that either "the parents have

established a dysfunctional home in which emotional need and emotional damage have become inseparable," in which case Jack and Julie are merely products of an oppressive home life, or "Jack and Julie are driven to construct a parody of the family structure they needed to react against in order to achieve maturity"; thus, while most children would leave home to mature, their home has already broken down and they must rebuild it in order to have something to reject (48). Yet these readings do not take into account the lack of ego in the children's encounter. The two are either unaware or disaffected by the consequences their relationship will bring from the external world. As "mother," Julie's strives to keep the family together, but an incestuous relationship with Jack could and does jeopardize the family's unity. And the breach of socially acceptable behavior is not without consequence. Derek walks in on Jack and Julie and confronts them. He has long suspected what the children have done with their mother's body, but he does not report the children as orphans because he wishes to become part of family. At the sight of Jack and Julie, Derek rushes to the basement, smashes their mother's concrete tomb and leaves to inform the authorities. Within a few minutes cars pull up outside and the story ends. If the super-ego does exist in such a situation, it is not an internal psychological function to which Jack or Julie respond, but is instead manifested in Derek, who punishes them for their incestual encounter. McEwan's fascination with complete the domineering id does not, and his next book violently depicts the consequences of completely succumbing to instant and selfish gratification.

Much of these first four works depict patriarchal dominance in which women are victimized and abused, thus feminists often struggle with his earliest works. As Malcolm says, several of McEwan's short stories and early novels "present traditional male attitudes of control, domination, and exploitation to women in extreme and revealing forms" (12). Yet as his writing matures, so does they ways in which he deals with social conscience. He is not just pushing the envelope, but is beginning to propose possible (albeit rather extreme) consequences for living outside of any sort of socially established expectations toward humanity or the human community. There are increased hints of feminism in *The Cement Garden*. As Julie and Sue dress Tom in a girl's outfit, complete with a wig, Jack claims he'll look "bloody idiotic," and Julie quickly retorts, "You think girls look idiotic, daft stupid . . .? [. . .] You think it's humiliating to look like a girl, because it's humiliating to *be* a girl" (*The Cement Garden* 55). Yet McEwan presents a much stronger sense of feminism in *The Comfort of Strangers*. In it he challenges the patriarchal and dangerous worldview in which women are socially bound to be subservient to men, even at the risk of their own safety. Once again McEwan attempts to explore the tension between acknowledging sexual desire, understanding its roots, and succumbing so completely that one's sense of self is lost in fulfilling the desire (either that of oneself or one's lover). When talking about *The Comfort of Strangers*, McEwan has argued that "many women probably have masochistic fantasies and that many men probably have sadistic fantasies" and argues that it would be better to

acknowledge such desires and attempt to understand them (qtd. in Haffenden 178). He further went on to say that unconscious desire might usurp intellectual beliefs if such an attempt to understand them is not made.

> You might well have grown up deciding that you accept certain intellectual points of view, and you might also change the way you behave as a man or a woman, but there are also other things – vulnerabilities, desires – within you that might well have been irreversibly shaped in childhood. People in our generation, who grew up in the 1950s, grew up in the time of the fathers, and I made the point that there are many women for whom the figure of the father lies very deeply and powerfully within their sexuality (179).

Despite the hostility such comments drew from the *Marxism Today* conference attendees, McEwan's novel is clearly not trying to relegate women back to a role of subjugation, but rather to examine their own psyche and how a patriarchal society can shape sadomasochistic desires. As seen in the relationships between Caroline and Robert and Mary and Colin, a lack of understanding of oneself can lead to disastrous consequences.

The Comfort of Strangers is the story of an unmarried middle-aged couple, Mary and Colin, who are vacationing in an unnamed city that bears a marked resemblance to Venice. Their days are spent meandering about the city, often getting lost and simply existing rather than properly experiencing the culture. And this inability to plan their days is merely one symptom of their reversion to a childlike dependence on each other and others. They become so spoiled by maid service that, "rapidly they became to depend on her and grew lazy with their possessions. They became incapable of looking after one another, incapable

in this heat, of plumping their own pillows or of bending down to retrieve a dropped towel" (*The Comfort of Strangers* 12). And although "the demand to be looked after was routine between them, and they took it in turns to respond dutifully," they perform inadequately. Additionally, Mary has two children whom she has left with her estranged ex-husband, and although she has bought them postcards, they have failed to mail them or make any sort of contact. This neglect weighs on Mary's mind, but she does nothing to assuage her guilt.

Part of this dependence is derived from an incomplete understanding of themselves. Although they both believe themselves to be strong, independent thinkers and feminists (she more so than he), "their carefully constructed rationalist view . . . becomes undone, because they haven't ever addressed the matter at a deeper level of themselves: they've always seen it as a social matter" (McEwan, qtd. in Haffenden 179). The two are often described talking to each other, but not truly listening, and rarely reflecting on the words they or their partner have spoken. The reader can see McEwan's fiction maturing, requiring the characters to be more aware of themselves, the ways in which society has shaped them, and their roles within such a society. But, Colin and Mary lack this essential introspection and insight. And, in neglecting their responsibility to understand themselves and each other, they become vulnerable to Robert and Caroline's (who are slightly older than Colin and Mary) influence and manipulation.

Leaving quite late for dinner one night, they are aimlessly wandering about the city, unable to find a place to eat. Robert, who (the reader later learns) has been observing the couple since they arrived, "rescues" them, taking them to a nearby bar where they proceed to get very drunk. Meanwhile, Robert regales them with stories of his childhood, disconcerting tales of his domineering father, of whom everyone was afraid. As the only son, Robert was his "passion," and the father used him to regurgitate his own controlling edicts. Such an upbringing has a tremendous impact on Robert; his father's irresponsible parenting creates an abusive misogynist. Caroline later reveals that Robert has been identified as sterile, which he believes thwarts both his purpose as a man to reproduce and his duty to carry on the family line. Unable to fulfill these perceived duties, Robert reverts to extreme desires, the desire to control those around him to be a man like his father. He begins to invest himself in the ideology, which he shares with Colin, that

> women long to be ruled by men . . . it is the world that shapes people's minds. It is men who have shaped the world. So women's minds are shaped by men. From the earliest childhood, the world they see is made by men. Now the women lie to themselves and there is confusion and unhappiness everywhere. (*The Comfort of Strangers* 72)

Though this ideology seems to reflect McEwan's comment that some women long to be masochists and some men long to be sadists, the horror such an ideology can inflict when unexamined becomes clear. Robert's idea of the male role, both in relationships and in society as a whole, is really a guise for an all-

consuming desire for power -- a desire that is not even mostly sexual, but is instead about control.

In turn, Caroline is complicit in her own abuse. She explains to Mary that true love means “that you’d do anything for the other person and . . . you’d let them to anything to you” (62). The two most important words in this proclamation are *anything* and *to*. Although Mary points out that anything is a rather broad term, Caroline quickly asserts that she truly means anything, even going so far as allowing one’s own murder. Furthermore, the freedom to do anything is one-sided, restricted to *men* doing anything they want *to* a *woman*, never the reverse. Caroline clearly subscribes to Robert’s way of thinking. She becomes so inculcated to this ideology that she finds pleasure in the pain, in the shame, in being punished (110). Her distorted sense of responsibility to her husband and to love, coupled with her own desire, ultimately trumps her responsibility to others. What makes this work so interesting in terms of id and ego then, is that a skewed ego, shaped by society’s expectations of women, allows the id to take over because it seems to be aligned with socially appropriate behavior.

Colin and Mary believe they are fundamentally opposed to this masochistic behavior, but after visiting Robert and Caroline’s home, they begin whispering sadistic fantasies to each other, and experience a renewed passion for one another. Again, their inability to genuinely scrutinize their own desires and beliefs leads to an inadequate understanding of themselves and their ultimate

demise. Completely of their own accord, they return to Robert and Caroline's house. Mary is drugged and forced to watch while Caroline and Robert murder Colin, having sex by the corpse, rolling around in his blood. Mary survives the ordeal, is questioned by ambivalent police who describe the crime "as wearingly common," and is left to make sense of what has happened. Desire, unchecked and unstudied, creates truly grotesque and monstrous characters.

McEwan's next books, *The Child In Time, The Innocent, Black Dogs, Enduring Love* and *Amsterdam* once again deal with the complication of adult relationships, but marks another distinct maturation of his fiction. Moving beyond the macabre, horrifying, and shocking, he begins to create characters that more actively attempt to integrate all three of Freud's functions of the psyche. The idea of a social conscience becomes more developed, and McEwan begins to transition toward the exploration of universal truth.

CHAPTER THREE

The Middle Years: A Growing Social Conscience

McEwan's next several novels exhibit the maturation of both the man and his writing. The time period between 1981 and 1998 was quite transitional for him; he married Penny Allen, became a father to sons William and Greg, divorced Allen, lost his father, and married Annalena McAffee. Over this period McEwan also wrote plays for television, screenplays, an oratorio, children's books and five novels. In these novels, which will be the focus of this chapter, the reader can begin to detect the emergence of a slight modernist approach to writing and a growing temperance of the id-ridden individual. Desire still plays a role in McEwan's characters, but it is not solely sexual desire and the ego exercises some restraint on the id. McEwan's novels begin to display not only a social critique and consciousness, but a social conscience as well. McEwan begins to use such consciences to search for a truth or meaning, a way to unite people and history.

The Child in Time, written in 1987, is set in futuristic Thatcherite London, "is longer and has a much more complex story material than McEwan's earlier novels" (Malcolm 88). The novel tells of Stephen Lewis, a children's writer, whose daughter, Kate, was snatched from him at the supermarket. At the time of the story, two years have passed and Stephen still searches for a little girl who

might be Kate when he sees small children playing. The loss is so great that his wife, Julie, has moved to the country to get away from him and herself and the memories. Stephen has been appointed, thanks to his politician friend, Charles Darke, to a political committee hired to put together a child-rearing manual as part of the official policy for the current, "fairly authoritarian right-wing" government (Malcolm 88). However, unknown to the committee, Darke has already written the manual; and they have been established solely to reassure the public. Though he has caught the eye of the Prime Minister and is quite adept at politics, over the course of the novel Darke retreats further within himself, ultimately regressing to a man-child of about ten-years-old and forcing his wife to become his mother and caretaker. He is written in contrast to Stephen, who learns from his loss and deep self-examination to mature and reconcile himself both with the past and with his wife. While Stephen moves forward and ultimately creates a new life, figuratively and metaphorically, with Julie, Charles ends his.

The book struck many critics as quite different from his previous novels – less intentionally shocking, more sympathetic and empathetic, and, as Brian Martin of the *Spectator* put it, "[McEwan's] Gothic adolescence has given way to adult life and grown up insights" ("Looking Back to the Future" 40). And many critics focus on McEwan's novel as a political commentary. Furthermore, the feminist criticism is conflicted; some critics see it as a text rife with "womb-envy" in which McEwan attempts to "usurp women's experience" (Childs, "Ian

McEwan: The Child in us All" 174), while others view the text as a "journey toward true maturity, the process by which he wakes up and discovers how to participate more fully in it" (*Demon or Doll* 202). The female characters Julie and Thelma are rather idealized, and together represent the balance between reason and emotion; they are examples of mature adults.

More important, however, is the theme of childhood. Childs also points out that although "the presence of children is removed at the start of the novel and only reintroduced on its closing page [. . .] the book's concern with the meaning of childhood that has attracted the most attention" (*The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 65). In fact, McEwan's depiction of childhood and the study of the meaning of childhood have garnered much attention in many of his works. What makes *The Child in Time* interesting to McEwan scholars and critics is the ways in which he deals, not with children, but with the adults' inner child. In childhood, especially infancy, the id is strongest because small children are not yet fully shaped by external expectations and taboos.

In the opening pages McEwan adeptly describes Stephen's observations of Kate's behavior. She sings "a vague, abstracted chant which meandered between improvisation, nursery rhymes and snatches of Christmas carols," (*The Child in Time* 9) and tries to play with a discarded drink straw in the street (10). She chatters all through their shopping excursions and fights against being removed from the shopping cart because she enjoys the ride (11). When Stephen winks at her, she attempts to copy, closing both eyes (13). Though these actions are the

memories leading up to Kate's abduction, all these little actions, these mannerisms, exhibit the uncomplicated innocence and joy a child embodies. The details and McEwan's descriptions seem to laud the simplicity of childhood. A few pages after this memory the reader learns of "Stephen's conviction that maturity was treachery, timidity, fatigue, and that youth was a blessed state to be embraced for as long as was socially and biologically feasible" (31). With such a mentality, Stephen shuns his responsibility, retreats into himself, and lives in an imaginary world where his compulsions (continual searching for Kate, buying her birthday presents, etc.) may somehow bring Kate back. Stephen himself is tempted to act like a child and, unable to provide the support and solace his wife needs, almost loses her. The novel continues in this fashion for some time, with Stephen nostalgically remembering Kate and his own childhood, associating adulthood with the screaming and fighting and violence between his parents (79) or Darke's ostentatious and occasionally obnoxious behavior. And Stephen remembers "Nietzsche's idea of true maturity, to attain the seriousness of a child at play" (121).

However, through Stephen's experiences and reflections, McEwan shows the reader that one cannot regress. Darke's second childhood becomes a perversion, a self-indulgent action centered, once again, on immediate enjoyment. The id is not sexually driven, as in previous stories, but in Darke's case it is just as dominant and just as dangerous. He allows his desire to be a child overrule his responsibilities to his wife, his friends, and the British people

as a Government representative. “He wanted the security of childhood, the powerlessness, the obedience, and also the freedom that goes with it, freedom from money, decisions, plans, demands” (238). Ultimately, reverting to the beginning results in his end, because Darke commits suicide. Furthermore, the act is purely selfish and childish, even in its execution. His suicide is not a result of action, but inaction. At the threat of having to return to his former life and responsibilities, Darke lashes out, simply sitting down in the cold under his tree house until he freezes to death. “As suicides go, it was petulant and childish” (242).

Meanwhile Stephen matures, overcomes the selfishness and lonely mourning which tears him and Julie apart, and becomes a man and proper partner for his wife. “To return to childhood, like Charles Darke, would be a kind of death; thus the novel suggests that the mature individual has to balance the child and the adult, like the ego balancing the demands of the super-ego and the id” (*The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 65). Interestingly, characters who participate in the arts and sciences, characters like Stephen (a writer), Julie (a musician) and Thelma Darke (a theoretical physicist) are the characters who are able to mature, who are able to emotionally and intellectually analyze and evaluate situations and use their observations to modify their behavior to find a middle ground between their desires and their responsibilities to themselves, their partners and friends, and, more generally, their fellow human. Darke, on the other hand, attempts to create with the child-rearing manual, but the words are not his own,

rather a regurgitation of the Prime Minister's ideas and political agenda. McEwan's mature characters are able to balance their ids, egos, and super-egos through the idea that works of art and science are windows into a kind of truth.

One should note that the ways in which McEwan plays with time also reinforces the ways in which he mixes modernist and postmodernist elements in the novel. At one point Stephen is trekking to Julie's and stops at the window of a pub and seems to travel in time as he observes his young parents having a discussion over whether or not to abort him. Later, with Stephen's prompting, his mother recalls the conversation and that there was a child's face in the window, like a ghost, that seemed to be begging for the right to live. Stephen, in essence, has a hand in saving himself. Thus, in an unusual move by McEwan, he incorporates a seemingly fantastical element in an otherwise realist text. Some critics have identified this moment as magic realism; however, Dominic Head argues "there is a factual basis – or, at least, a basis in scientific theory – in the apparently fantastic moments in the novel" (*Ian McEwan* 60). He points out this "time travel" and another moment, in which time slows right before Stephen is almost in an accident, can at least be defended by studies of David Bohm, whose work is cited in McEwan's acknowledgments. Whether the reader views these portions of the novel as scientifically viable or absurd, one should note that McEwan is utilizing the technique to play with the concept of time and use the bizarre scenes as to show the ways in which art and science can explain such seemingly impossible events (68). Thelma, Darke's wife, attempts to help explain

the "time travel" event to Stephen, positing several theories, all of which essentially arguer that time is variable, fragmented, and ultimately left up to the observer to interpret (*The Child in Time* 117-18). And if time is variable and open to interpretation, so might be history? McEwan's next book, *The Innocent*, also allows McEwan to explore time and history and, of course, the complicated human psyche.

The Innocent, set in postwar Berlin, 1955, garnered much positive critical attention for McEwen's skillful mixing of genres, his detailed and insightful reflection once again into the human psyche, and the social and political commentary between the conquerors and the conquered. The title itself begs for critical analysis of innocence and corruption, morality and immorality within the novel and its characters. But to read the novel as simply a loss of innocence or a political allegory of the oppression stronger countries inflict on weaker ones deprives the reader of the deeper and more introspective theme of the internal struggle between the id, the ego, and the super-ego and the direct effects culture has on determining the super-ego and ego's guidelines.

The Innocent combines the elements of espionage and psychological thriller novels. Twenty-five-year-old Leonard Marnham, a post-office telephone technician, travels to postwar Berlin to help the American and British alliance tap the Russian phone lines under the supervision of the boisterous, overbearing American Bob Glass. While in Berlin, he falls in love with a thirty-year-old German woman, who initiates him into the ways of love and sex. A virgin,

Marnham starts the relationship eager to please and to learn from his older, more experienced lover. And she is eager to teach; she is attracted by his innocence and lack of experience. However, as one would expect from any McEwan novel, the honeymoon does not last. Leonard's initiation into sex has given him confidence, and soon his sexual desires overcome him and threaten Maria and the relationship.

Critics have adeptly pointed out the parallels between British Leonard Marnham's interactions with German Maria Eckdorf and American Bob Glass and the interactions of these countries. Leonard begins his experience in London naïve, reserved, and innocent. Glass is loud and domineering, incredibly serious about their mission in Berlin, and a bit conniving and manipulative. Maria is jaded, weary from years of war, an abusive marriage and horrific experiences. Critics like Richard Brown and Mark Ledbetter wonderfully outline the correlations between the characters and the stereotypes of their fellow countrymen which they embody, while other critics such as Judith Seaboyer, Lynn Wells, Dominic Head and Jack Slay explore the elements of initiation and ethical responsibility, both in the private and public spheres. Head keenly observes that

> Leonard's initial attributes – bestowed, for example, by his sheltered background and his virginity – mark him out as an empty vessel. This can make him seem to be someone with humble expectations, and whose impact on his environment is minimal, benign . . . However, the extent to which Leonard's status as a novice generates innocence is soon called into question. When he parrots the opinion of two Englishmen about the behavior of the

> Russians in 1945, the ease with which his "emptiness" can be filled is disturbing. (97)

Head's observation is quite helpful in exploring the ways in which Leonard's ego is formed by the culture(s) to which he is exposed. Leonard "spent the war with his granny in a Welsh village over which no enemy aircraft had ever flown" (*The Innocent* 5). His impressions and ideas of the war are therefore influenced by speeches by Mr. Churchill (6), the men, such as Glass and those in the tunnel, with whom he builds a kind of camaraderie, and Maria. Thus, these are also the people who fill his vessel, who help form his understanding and ideas of what is socially and culturally acceptable, who help establish his ethics. Of course, one cannot discount the effects of his parents and his upbringing in postwar Britain, but neither can one deny that his first experiences away from home, abroad during the still formative years of his mid-twenties, have great influence on his self-perception, national identity, and worldview.

Initially men seem to be once again overwhelmed by the desire for power. Surrounded by the men he works with (who are, to some degree, misogynists), submerged in a society where his countrymen are the conquerors and Maria is one of the conquered, increasingly confident in his sexual prowess, and feeling no longer like a boy, but a man, the "darker side of [Leonard's] id" is unleashed (Slay 136). He begins to have fantasies of dominance and submission, rape fantasies.

> Men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the

> contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. (*Civilization and its Discontents* 69).

At first his ego, constructed by ideas of how a British man and a gentleman should behave, holds these inclinations in check and he internalizes the fantasies. However, soon his fantasies become "inseparable from his desire," and although "they were alien to his obliging and kindly nature, they offended his sense of what was reasonable," they become more and more persistent (*The Innocent* 92-3). He feels the need to act them out, "he could not believe that she would not be aroused by it" and forces himself on her (94). His ego is torn between the desires of the id and the moral beliefs of the super-ego. Not only in a critic or reader's mind, but also in Leonard's own mind, he views himself as Britain, and Maria is Germany, waiting to be conquered and subjugated. And though he attempts to write the episode off as a game, a role-play they can both enjoy, the darker implications soon become clear. His desire, in such a society appears, to Leonard, natural and right; it seems to align with the morals and norms and acceptable conduct.

Yet, probably to the relief of McEwan's feminist detractors, Leonard's conscience begins to exert its influence over his psyche. He quickly realizes that he has violated her trust and security, and as time passes he realizes the sheer stupidity of his actions.

> There had been some logic, some crazed, step-by-step reasoning that he could no longer recall. It had all made good sense, but all he could remember now was his certainty at the time, his conviction that ultimately she would approve. He could not recall the steps along the way. It was as if he were remembering the actions of another man, or of himself transformed in a dream. (105)

Realizing how unforgivable his actions were and desperate to get Maria back, Leonard bunglingly attempts an apology, and Maria forgives him because she realizes that his violation was a product of his inexperience, that he is "not malicious or brutal, and that it was an innocent stupidity that had made him behave the way he had. He lived so intensely within himself that he was barely aware of how his actions appeared to others" (124). This insular life, the repression, the lack of perception and misinterpretation, cause Leonard to violate social expectations as well as the unspoken rules and norms the couple has established for themselves. Maria's trust is broken, her role as guide and mentor is dashed, and the mutuality in both their sexual and emotional relationship is fractured. Even after the two have reconciled, they have

> already suffered a loss . . . They could never regain the spirit of February and early March, when it had seemed possible to make their own rules and thrive independently of those quiet, forceful conventions that keep men and women in their tracks . . . it was blissful ordinariness they settled for now. (133-4)

Despite his gross error, the ultimate forgiveness Leonard is awarded is important to note. Although the text and the descriptions are much more empathetic than earlier McEwan works, and although Leonard's transgression has immediate and tangible consequences, Leonard, like Stephen Lewis in *The Child in Time,* differs from many of the characters in McEwan's fiction in that he is aware of his own

failures and offenses, he feels remorse and guilt in a way characters like the narrators of "Homemade" and "Butterflies" do not. Unfortunately, though Maria and Leonard reconcile and even get engaged, their second chance at happiness is thwarted by their own self-serving, unchecked, and irrational behavior.

The relationship appears to be improving after he expresses contrition and regains control of his sexual imagination, yet, the night of the couple's engagement party, Maria's abusive ex-husband, Otto, finds out about the relationship and hides in her wardrobe to wait for her return. Otto occasionally returns to beat Maria and ask for money, and Leonard has been anticipating this encounter for some time. They are frightened and are trying to devise a plan when Otto awakens. Drunk and drowsy, he stumbles into the room and begins arguing with Maria. She insults him and Leonard has to step in to prevent Otto from hitting her. The argument quickly escalates from a verbal fight into a brawl. In desperation and self-defense, Maria and Leonard hit Otto over the head with an "iron foot," killing him. Desperate and believing that the authorities will not understand them, the couple decides they must dismember the body, pack it away in luggage, and drop it off in a locker at the train station to await discovery. However, Leonard cannot seem to execute the plan, and ends up leaving the body in the very tunnel in which he works.

The reader can easily be coerced into believing Leonard's claims that he is still innocent, his declarations to his imagined prosecutors that he is "no

different" from them, that he is "not evil, that all along [he] acted only for what he took to be the best" (*The Innocent* 242). Or, as Head points out, the reader is invited to

> permit the skewed self-justification that Maria and Leonard indulge in . . . the projection of them as an engaged couple, with their future under threat. They act in self-defense, and circumstances drive them to butcher the corpse of the violent ex-husband, wrongly identified as a war hero by the local police. (96)

Otto is, by no means, an admirable character. He terrorizes Maria, hitting her face, bleeding money out of her, and threatening to sue for the apartment they used to share. He's a drunk, but, according to Maria, because he fought in the war the local police revere him. However, Otto seems to be going through the proper authorities to petition for the apartment, and the night of his death Maria escalates the situation, goading Otto and insulting him. Of course, his attack on Maria propels him and Leonard toward the violent, gruesome fight and his death.

While Leonard initially tries to act according to the law and social expectations, suggesting they notify the proper authorities and explain, Maria quickly convinces him that they must deal with the corpse on their own. Not only do the authorities excuse or ignore Otto's transgressions against Maria, but also his body is mutilated – in the process of the fight, Leonard bit a hole in Otto's cheek, and the iron foot is embedded in his skull. She is certain the police will not believe they acted in self-defense. As she has taken charge of the relationship, she takes charge of the murder and plans for the disposal of the

body. "The sequence of choices and responses is a process of asserting self-interest. Leonard's suggestible innocence here makes him a convenient tool for Maria" (*The Innocent* 101). The super-ego ultimately has no place in their internal struggle, for the ego sides with the id. Their fear and desire for self-preservation override their social conscience and responsibilities. Once again McEwan successfully revolts and shocks the reader, but manages to make the character's plight and actions more understandable, if wholly distasteful. And their plan is thwarted when the luggage does not fit into the lockers at the station. In a panic, Leonard leaves with the luggage, returns to his flat, and is haunted by a dream in which he reassembles the body, then offers himself to the restored Otto.

The final vestiges of Leonard's innocence are eradicated in Leonard's betrayal of the CIA/MI6 tunnel mission of which he has been a part. Tired, disillusioned with himself, Maria, love and life he is drawn to rid himself entirely of his innocence. In a daze he wanders into the Russian sector, to the Café Prag where spies are just waiting for people buying and selling information. "As far as [Leonard] is concerned, the imperative of self-protection outweighs any sense of international political allegiance" (Head 102). Later, Leonard reflects that though "he had been fond of the place, he had loved it, he had been proud of it . . . now it was hard to feel anything at all. After Otto, the Café Prag was nothing" (*The Innocent* 246). The fact that George Blake, both a character in the story and a real double agent, betrayed the Berlin Tunnel before it was even built does not diminish the fact that Leonard betrays his countrymen and the people he has

worked with over the year. His betrayal and the awful events with Otto have damaging and life-altering effects. Interestingly, Leonard argues throughout the remainder of the book that he is still innocent, despite evidence that he is plagued with guilt. He argues that it is hard to feel anything, yet he has the dream, which can only be ascribed to a sense of guilt. He is uncomfortable and unsure of Maria, the jealousy and suspicion he has felt toward Bob is exacerbated, and "the dismemberment proves to be unbearable . . . their alliance has been irrevocably damaged, sending them in separate directions" (Slay 140).

The final chapter outlines Leonard's return to Berlin, thirty-two years later in June 1987, with a letter from Maria. She informs him that the day after the Russians "found out" about the tunnel, Glass approached her and she admitted everything. He spoke to his superiors and his people force the Germans to drop the inquiry, but Glass swears Maria to secrecy, even from Leonard. She assures Leonard that at the time of his departure, there was no relationship between her and Glass – they did not begin an affair until nine months after Leonard left and stopped answering her letters. Maria married Glass, who died in 1985, and she lives in America with her three girls. Despite the depravity the couple has shared and subsequent distance between them, the book concludes on a hopeful note. Looking at the old tunnel site, Leonard begins his journey back, not just to his hotel but also to Maria. He will fly to the United States, answer the questions in the letter and later, they will return to Berlin to exorcise their demons, and

take a good look at the Berlin Wall before it is torn down. Because they have accepted their transgressions and suffered for them, they can begin again.

Once again, McEwan also uses literature to explore the fragmented history and human. He still straddles the lines between postmodern and modern elements in his literature, because undoubtedly the characters are destructured and decentered, and certainly there are shocking and repulsive moments in the novel. However, like *The Child in Time*, McEwan's writing provides spaces in which the fragmentation of the current age can be explored, applied to individual lives and relationships, and possibly help the journey toward unity, coherence and meaning. Furthermore, art explores the individual's role in society; the consequences of an unbalanced or unchecked psyche affect not only the individual, but also those with whom he or she interacts as well. McEwan still does not provide a universal truth or answer to life's most pressing questions, but he does continue the idea started in *The Child in Time* that contrary to the postmodern concept that life and fragmentation are meaningless, and that life is only lived on the surface, relationships give life meaning, and art reflects and explores this meaning. This idea is expanded upon in *Black Dogs*, where McEwan explores the tension between religion/belief/spirituality and science, as well as the merits of each. As previously mentioned, although McEwan embraces scientific thought and discovery, he has not abandoned Freudian theory. Freud explains the need for religion, the desire for a divine father

watching over mankind. Darwin does not replace, but rather supplements Freud in McEwan's works.

On the surface *Black Dogs* is novel of a couple, June and Bernard, who are deeply in love but divided by the ways they interpret and approach the world. Their story is in turn interpreted and told by their agnostic son-in-law. The realization of their irreconcilable worldviews hinges upon a moment during their honeymoon when two large black dogs attack June. They are traversing the French countryside, in St. Maurice. A train of caterpillars has waylaid Bernard while June is left to fend for herself. As the dogs advance

> She tried to find the space within her for the presence of God and though she discerned the faintest of outlines, a significant emptiness she had never noticed before, at the back of her skull. It seemed to lift and flow upward and outward, streaming suddenly into an oval penumbra many feet high, an envelope of rippling energy, or, as she tried to explain it later, of "colored invisible light" that surrounded her and contained her. If this was God, it was also, incontestably, herself. (*Black Dogs* 125)

As the male dog sets on her, attacking the rucksack she is using as a shield, she defends herself by stabbing its belly and sides with a penknife. Bernard arrives a few moments later and they make their way back to the village, where they report the incident to the Maire and Mme. Auriac, the owner of the Hôtel des Tilleuls in St. Maurice. There, the couple finds out that the dogs are Nazi dogs, brought to terrorize the villagers. The Maire claims that the dogs were trained and used to rape women by their Nazi owners, although Mme. Auriac angrily writes off the rumor to vicious gossip intended to humiliate a local woman who

was, in fact, raped by the Gestapo. After the occupation the dogs were left to roam the hills, surviving off sheep. However, this incident is significant because it signals a great change in the way June approaches the world, which in turn changes the dynamic of her relationship with Bernard. Like Stephen and Julie in the Child in Time, June becomes introspective and spiritual, while Bernard remains analytical and rational.

In typical McEwan fashion, the book actually defines linear time. We do not get the full story above until the fourth and final section of the book. The earlier sections are written as a kind of memoir by the couple's son-in-law, Jeremy. Such narration is important to note, because the entire story is filtered through Jeremy's point of view. The reader must depend on Jeremy's rendition of his separate interviews with Bernard and June, and must evaluate the reliability of his story. As Slay and Malcolm have pointed out, Jeremy's narration may not be entirely reliable. He grew up an orphan in his sister's violent house, helping raise his young niece and seeking out the company of his friend's parents. After he finally gains his own parents via marriage, he sets out to understand them and dig into their psyches, much to the chagrin of his wife and her siblings. He is a self-proclaimed agnostic and is fascinated by Bernard and June, who have such contradicting views on life, and who remain married but live in different countries. Early in the novel, while Jeremy is interviewing June, she explains that, "the truth is we love each other, we've never stopped, we're obsessed. And we failed to do a thing with it. We couldn't make a life.

We couldn't give up the love, but we wouldn't bend to its power" (29). For Jeremy, whose "existence began" when he married his wife, Jenny, the refusal to acquiesce to the power of love and desire is tragic and incomprehensible.

Black Dogs, whether intentionally or not, wonderfully lends itself to Freudian interpretation, presenting the conflict and interaction of the Freudian deepest desires (sex, wealth, immortality, the untamed passions) with the ego and super-ego, as well as the role these functions of the mind play on spirituality versus rationality. At the outset of their relationship, June and Bernard (according to June's testimony, which Bernard contests, at least in part) are extremely sexually attracted to each other. She reflects that, "within days of meeting Bernard . . . I thought I was going to explode. I wanted him . . . It was like a pain. I didn't want a wedding or a kitchen, I wanted this man. I had lurid fantasies about him" (32). And though June's super-ego, influenced by cultural ideas of premarital sex, attempts to restrain her, the desires are soon fulfilled. Thus begins the lifetime of obsession, for she admits to Jeremy that the obsession is physical at least as much as it is emotional. However, unlike the characters in McEwan's earlier works or Leonard's transgression, this sexual relationship is not depicted as deviant, depraved, shameful or driven by a desire for power. It may not align with society's sexual expectations of the time, but it is selfish in the healthiest sense – the characters' desire is satisfied, but not at the expense of others.

Freud, the id, the ego, and the super-ego also have a place in the dichotomy between June's spirituality and Bernard's rationality. The oft-quoted passage, "Rationalist and mystic, commissar and yogi, joiner and abstainer, scientist and intuitionist, Bernard and June are extremities" (xxiii) clearly identifies how different these two characters are. Of course, Freud would undoubtedly favor Bernard's way of looking at things. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud argues, "in keeping with the course of human development that external coercion gradually becomes internalized" and that most people only obey moral demands and cultural prohibitions because of fear – fear of punishment. Civilization is helpful in creating an environment where humans are not lonely and can have their needs met by fellow humans, but they must also adhere to certain governing principles that often go against the passions or wishes of their id.

> For the individual too, life is hard to bear, just as it is for mankind in general. The civilization in which he participates imposes some amount of privation on him, and other men bring him a measure of suffering, either in spite of the precepts of his civilization or because of its imperfections. To this are added the injuries which untamed nature – he calls it Fate – inflicts on him. (*The Future of an Illusion* 16)

Humans must find a way to psychologically deal with unpredictable and powerful forces of nature, and Freud ultimately comes to the conclusion that religion fulfills the human need to be protected. Humans remember "a similar state of helplessness" to the one they feel when they realize the power of nature, and that is as a child, when one both fears one's parents, especially the father, but

also feels protected (17). Therefore, God takes the place of the father in the human psyche, and humans are further affirmed by the idea that "all good is rewarded and all evil punished, if not actually in this form of life then in the later existences that begin after death" (19). Religion provides a model, or an answer, to cultural expectations and human vulnerability.

June and Bernard begin their relationship sharing the same ideals. The couple joined the Labor party in "hopes for a sane, just world free of war and class oppression" (*Black Dogs* 5), and, as Freud asserts,

> It is understandable that the suppressed people should develop an intense hostility towards a culture whose existence they make possible by their work, but in whose wealth they have too small a share . . . a civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence. (*The Future of an Illusion* 12)

But June quickly begins her own path, not an external revolution, but internal reflection and growth through spirituality, whereas Bernard believes that the change is executed through action, educated debate. Ironically, he asserts that June was a better communist than him because she was able to get along with anyone, whereas he bonded with ideas. Yet she became a recluse and he came to the forefront as a respected political commentator and devoted advocate for political and social reform.

Though Jeremy tells Bernard June "had no interest in dogma or organized religion. It was a spiritual journey" (*Black Dogs* 68) and she believes that "we have within us an infinite resource, a potential for a higher state of being, a

goodness" outside of "rules and practices and addictions to power," the journey begins because June "met evil and discovered God" (37-8). She is in tune with the need and desire Freud identifies, to not only "admit to a sense of man's insignificance or impotence in the face of nature," (*The Future of an Illusion* 33) but the quest for a remedy to this insignificance. The evil humans can inflict on one another, which the black dogs symbolize, deeply disturbs her, and she consequently searches for the counter element of human nature – the divine in humanity. June believes that everyone is responsible for one's own life, and only working on one's inner life and improving oneself, might there even be a chance that society will change in small and subtle ways. She doubts "the abstract principles according to which 'committed intellectuals think to engineer social change'" (*Black Dogs* 146). From some of her statements, one might agree with Bernard that she is selfish, that her "self-enclosed life devoid of social responsibility" (146) is a complete departure from her previous commitment to the Communist party under the ideals that humans should be treated equally and provided equal opportunities. However, like Stephen Lewis or Leonard Marnham, she is not a flat, id-ridden character driven only by selfish preservation. Freud would classify her need for religion as the id's need for security and immortality, but she also believes that careful introspection and "a revolution of the inner life" is the only way to find peace within humanity, and "the good that flows from it will shape our societies in an unprogrammed,

unforeseen way, under the control of no single groups of people or ideas" (147). June believes that change in the world begins with change within oneself.

Similar to June, Bernard is disillusioned by the atrocities of which humans are capable, and the violence and cruelty the Nazis perpetrated has embittered him. Yet despite both characters' anger at the darkness within humanity, June's "magical way of thinking . . . this belief that life really does have rewards and punishments, that underneath there's a deeper pattern of meaning beyond what we give ourselves – that's all so much consoling magic" bewilders Bernard (57). He has had no spiritually charged moment in which he also experienced the great hope and joy in human love. He is "certain that there was no direction, no patterning in human affairs or fates other than that which was imposed by human minds" (xxiv). Bernard has a scientific mind; and though he might encourage one to keep an open mind, to "beware of phenomena that don't accord with current theories" if there is not empirical evidence to support a theory or idea, he is unlikely to give it credit. Instead, he believes life should be approached with an analytical, socially conscious mind.

Unlike his earlier works in which characters primarily exhibit an overly dominant id, or *The Child in Time* and *The Innocent*, in which a single character's point of view and assimilation of cultural and social mores is presented and tested, the characters' egos in *Black Dogs* actively attempt to balance the id and the super-ego. The difference is that the super-ego's expectations are based upon different interpretations and understandings, different senses of right and

wrong, socially appropriate and responsible behavior. Interestingly, Jeremy, an agnostic, admires both characters. Their conflicting worldviews hammer at his disbelief, and he respects their commitments to their beliefs despite his inability to mirror such conviction. He believes that to believe a little of everything is the same as believing in nothing, yet he cannot seem to conclusively side with either June or Bernard. Jeremy's declaration that he believes "in nothing . . . there was simply no good cause, no enduring principle, no fundamental idea with which [he can] identify," (*Black Dogs* xxii) makes him morally and emotionally "vacuous" (Head 110). And, in fitting with McEwan's style and point of view, neither side is irrefutably correct. One may be tempted to assume that June's spirituality is superstitious and lacking in the social conscience that McEwan begins building with his later works. When interviewed, McEwan himself tells Zalewski "the idea of an afterlife, that we'll meet again in some . . . theme park? There seems no good reason to think so . . . Faith is at best morally neutral, and at worst a vile mental distortion" (56-7), a view that echoes Freud's own arguments in his book *Civilization and its Discontents*. In an extension of his argument from *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud reasserts that mankind has devised religion as a way to cope with the unpredictability and uncertainty of life and of the world. Humanity creates a god to justify and provide compensation for suffering.

> The common man cannot imagine this Providence otherwise than in the figure of an enormously exalted father . . .The whole thing is so patently infatile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life.

> It is still more humiliating to discover how large a number of people living to-day, who cannot but see that this religion is not tenable, nevertheless try to defend it piece by piece in a series of pitiful rearguard actions. (22).

Both McEwan and Freud do not believe that religious belief provides valid insight or relevance to the contemporary human, no matter how one might cling to the comfort such faith can provide. Furthermore, feminists may justly point out that June fits the stereotypical female, governed by emotions and abstract faith, and Bernard fits the typical reasonable and rational male stereotype (a claim which may be repeated when reading *Enduring Love*).

However, whether McEwan intended to or not, her “reappearances,” even after her death, seem to hint that there is something more than rationality and skepticism in the world. As Jack Slay proposes, “there is, simultaneously, the suggestion that something grand and wondrous consolidates the world and the intimation that the world is entirely in our hands, at our disposal, controlled by the dictates of logic and rationality” (145). Through art, through writing, both McEwan and Jeremy are attempting to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of both spirituality and rationalism. The tension between intuition and instinct, reason and rationality will continue to develop in his novel, *Enduring Love*.

Critics and fellow writers, including James Fenton, frequently agree that one of McEwan’s most masterful pieces of writing is the beginning of *Enduring Love* (Zalewski 59). The novel opens with the horrific scene of a young boy trapped inside a hot air balloon as the wind tosses and lifts it. Five men rush

toward the pilot (and boy's grandfather), who is struggling to regain control of the balloon. The men have no plan, no clear leader, and while struggling to ground the balloon, someone lets go. Later, no one would admit to being the first to release his grip, but when one let go, each of the other men followed suit except for John Logan a doctor and family man. He remains hanging on as the balloon rises, and after a few horrible seconds, falls to his death as the young boy, Harry, floats away but later lands safely. The main character, Joe Rose, later reflects the mental process each man must have gone through: the responsibility to help others (especially a helpless child) and the instinct for self-preservation.

> This is our mammalian conflict: what to give to the others and what to keep for yourself. Treading that line, keeping the others in check and being kept in check by them, is what we call morality. Hanging a few feet above the Chilterns escarpment, our crew enacted morality's ancient, irresolvable dilemma: us, or me. (*Enduring Love* 15)

Immediately the reader is introduced to the conflict that pervades the novel: instinct and desire versus rationality, somewhat of an extension of the dichotomy explored in *Black Dogs*. The men must decide whether the risk is worth the potential sacrifice. And, in the heightened emotionality of the event, the reader and Joe first encounter Jed Parry. Jed quickly becomes fixated on Joe, convinced the romantic feelings are mutual although Joe certainly indicates he does not feel the same. In fact, they have very limited contact, and really only argue over the existence of God (Joe, a scientist, refutes His existence whereas Jed is a devoutly religious man). Jed calls Joe later that night, telling him "I just

wanted you to know, I understand what you're feeling. I feel it too. I love you" (40). Joe is confused and disconcerted, but either from exhaustion, protectiveness or some other intangible emotion, he lies to his girlfriend, Clarissa, and tells her it was the wrong number. Thus begins Jed's disturbing and frightening pursuit of Joe.

In the following months, Jed persists in stalking Joe, believing that Joe has initiated the relationship, proclaiming that the love is reciprocated and his certainty that the purpose of their love is to bring Joe to God. He begins by covertly following Joe, and then resorts to camping out in front of Joe and Clarissa's home. He calls constantly, leaving up to thirty-three messages in one day, and writes love notes. Initially, Joe tries to reason with him, and then tries to ask him to stop, to go away. He even threatens to go to the authorities, but Jed does not believe Joe means it. Jed bizarrely interprets signals or hidden messages that have never been sent.

Remembering old research he has done, Joe is finally able to correctly diagnose Jed with de Clerambault's syndrome, a psychological delusion in which the patient believes that the object of his or her affection (usually of a higher class) has fallen in love with him or her. The patient also believes that the other person has initiated contact through secret messages, gestures, signals, telepathy, etc. (Anderson 2). "Protestations of indifference or even hatred are seen as paradoxical or contradictory" and do not deter the patient from pursuing his or her love interest. "Other derived themes include beliefs that the object will never

find true happiness without her, and also the relationship is universally acknowledged and approved" (*Enduring Love* 250). Jed is so overcome with his desire for Joe, he cannot rationally assess their interactions or "relationship."

Unfortunately, Joe cannot convince others of the danger Jed presents. The police cannot help Joe because he has no evidence of harassment, and Jed makes no specific threats. More importantly, Clarissa believes Joe himself is obsessed with Jed. In fact, though nearly everyone claims she is the irrational one, she is presented very little evidence by which to make an empirical decision. Instead, she is forced to rely on Joe's version of events and the scant facts he shares. He deletes the messages Jed leaves and doesn't tell her about the first phone call until two days later. Malcolm points out that, she "is a complicated figure in her own right" and (after chapter twenty-three) from her perspective, one can imagine how, without much solid evidence, she might have trouble believing Joe. In the end, though, she is at fault.

Once again, the female improperly interprets the facts, or simply ignores them while the male carefully evaluates the evidence and comes to a logical conclusion. When he shows her the letters, she believes the handwriting resembles Joe's. Clarissa, whose work is in the humanities, not science, relies on her emotions "and at times she finds Joe's rationality absurd and unnerving" (Malcolm 162). She relies on her intuition, rather than the facts, and is quite wrong. McEwan himself claims, "Clarissa's got everything wrong" (qtd. in Zalewski 58). So wrong, in fact, that in some of the final chapters Jed first hires

hit men to kill Joe at a restaurant, then arrives at the house she and Joe share and attempts to slit his own throat. James Wood wonders at how "two people who supposedly love and know each other – Joe and Clarissa – can interpret the same experience quite differently and quite selfishly," and Childs points out that Joe asserts "Selfishness is also written in our hearts" (both qtd. in *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 108). In her desire to be right, to justify herself, Clarissa has trouble admitting her inaccurate assessment of the situation. In a letter to Joe, she says that Joe became emotionally distant, once again claiming that if they had "asked him in and talked to him" that "together we might have deflected him from the course he took." She claims that Joe, on some level, allowed Jed's obsession to continue (*Black Dogs* 235). She ignores the fact that Joe repeatedly and assertively asked Jed to cease contact, or the evidence she witnesses herself when trying to reason with him at their home. Jed is clearly irrational, and no amount of reason will deter his interest in Joe. Joe need not do anything to encourage or discourage Jed's affection; the relationship exists entirely in Jed's mind, independent of Joe's actions. Ultimately, Clarissa cannot differentiate the facts she's observed with her feelings. Relying entirely on one's desires, instincts, and intuition will result, in a McEwan novel, in tragic consequences. In his novel *Amsterdam*, McEwan leaves the debate between emotion, spirituality, rationalism, and science and regresses a bit to self-centered, narcissistic individuals.

At a London crematorium, old friends gather to pay their last respects to Molly Lane, a fun-loving photographer and restaurant critic. Among the crowd are Molly's awkward and jealous husband, George, and her former lovers: composer Clive Linley, tabloid editor Vernon Halliday, and Foreign Secretary Julian Garmony. Clive and Vernon are close friends, and have remained so despite (or, perhaps, because) of their shared past with Molly. Her degenerative disease and consequent death cause them to reflect on their own mortality, and the two make a euthanasia pact, promising to help each other die with dignity before they become incapable and caring for themselves.

Clive has been commissioned to compose The Millennial Symphony, a work he believes could be his masterpiece. Consistent with the stereotypes of an artist, Clive locks himself away, fuelled with coffee and alcohol, and works for hours on end oblivious to anyone else. He is overwhelmed by the desire to be remembered, to be revered, and to be recognized as the genius he believes he is. Vernon is the editor of a failing tabloid, desperate to prove himself worthy of his position. Suddenly he is given the perfect chance to save his paper: George has discovered, in Molly's possessions, photos of Garmony dressed as a woman. Pressed to publish the photos, Vernon goes to Clive under the pretense of asking his friend's opinion, but he is really seeking Clive's approval. He argues that Garmony is gaining popularity and political momentum, and something must be done to prevent him from rising all the way to Prime Minister. Certainly Garmony is no angel. According to Clive, Garmony declared that Nelson

Mandela should be hanged and Vernon believes that if Garmony becomes Prime Minister "there'll be even more people living below the poverty line, more people in prison, more homeless, more crime, more riots like last year . . . the environment will suffer . . . economic catastrophe" (79-80). Despite their mutual dislike for Garmony, both politically and personally, Clive disagrees with Vernon's wish to print the photos. He berates Vernon, arguing that it would betray Molly's memory and ruin a man's life.

Soon, the true nature of each man is revealed. After the fight Clive travels to the Lake District for inspiration, and at the moment he hears "music he had been looking for" (*Amsterdam* 90), he witnesses an altercation between a man and woman, but does nothing to intercede for fear that he will lose his train of thought. Instead he hides, retreating to write down his ideas. Meanwhile, Vernon decides to go forward and print the incriminating photos of Garmony, but calls Clive to mend things and Clive begins to share what he saw and his own inaction in the face of violence. Vernon doesn't really listen and cuts Clive off in his rush to get to work. Later, though, after his victorious and successful reception at work for "saving" the paper, he remembers a story they discussed at the meeting and realized Clive saw the Lakeland rapist. He calls Clive and insists that he report what he saw to the authorities because it is his "moral duty," even threatening to call the police if Clive does not do so on his own, similar to the rape in McEwan's 2001 book, Atonement (130). Clive does not

want to leave his symphony, and points out that Vernon, in trying to destroy Garmony and violating Molly's memory, is far from a moral paragon.

From here the relationship between Clive and Vernon is damaged beyond repair. Neither man is concerned with his own transgressions against his fellow man; but they are instead indignant that they have been judged so harshly by such an old friend at critical times in their lives, so selfishly occupied by their own desires, goals and losses. Clive sends a letter to Vernon reading "Your threat appalls me. So does your journalism. You deserve to be sacked," which arrives after Vernon is actually fired from his job (149). Clive is dragged downtown for two days, asked to try and identify the rapist, which he cannot even do. Both men have become failures in their fields – Vernon, the man who failed to properly read the public sentiment and insensitively printed pictures in order to ruin a man; Clive, a composer with great potential, whose final movement in his masterpiece is painfully derivative of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." Unable to admit their own roles in their misfortune, in the end they exploit their euthanasia agreement and kill one another. In true McEwan fashion, Garmony and George Lane, the least appealing of the four former lovers, are left relatively unscathed and responsible for returning the bodies to England.

Both men, succumbing to their own drives for power and recognition, are reminiscent of McEwan's earlier characters, whose egos have ignored their super-egos and allowed their ids to take control of their actions. Vernon and Clive differ from characters like the narrators of "Homemade" and "Butterflies"

however, because they clearly have consciences and struggle with the morals their super-egos have internalized from society, but they allow their ids to win the battle. Clive considers helping the young woman whom the rapist is attacking, but ultimately decides that his music and the potential for infamy are more compelling. And publishing Molly's private pictures of Garmony clearly troubles Vernon on some level, or he would not need to visit Clive for reassurance. Yet, in the end, he is more driven by the desire for success, power, and money that he may acquire through saving the tabloid for which he works. Each man's internal struggle between desire and conscience does not last long, and ultimately selfish impulse clearly trumps any sense of responsibility toward others.

McEwan's most recent books, *Atonement*, *Saturday*, and *On Chesil Beach* continue his excavations of the human psyche and continue his movement toward a style infused with modern and postmodern elements, masterfully playing with metafiction, the role of art in human interaction, and an optimistic desire to repair the fragmented world through literature. In the first two of these novels his characters are perhaps some of the most psychologically balanced characters McEwan has created. In the final book McEwan explores the opposite end of the spectrum from where he began, exploring what happens when one is too repressed.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Beware the Utopianists": Satisfaction of Self and Conscience

The three most recent of McEwan's novels, *Atonement* (2001), *Saturday* (2005), *On Chesil Beach* (2007), are some of the most complex and socially aware works he has produced. These three novels adeptly evaluate the role of desire and conscience, moral judgment, and human relationships within the human life and within society. These characters, more than ever, work toward a balance between their desires and their duties, and evaluate the impact of their actions on those around them.

Atonement is undoubtedly one of McEwan's most critically acclaimed books to date. Frank Kermode identifies the work as "easily [McEwan's] finest" (*Pieces of My Mind* 413). The novel is divided into three parts and a coda. It opens in 1935 in the British countryside as the Tallis family prepares to welcome the only son and eldest child, Leon (twenty-five-years-old), home from school. From the outset, the novel is fairly obviously engaged in metafiction. Briony, thirteen-years-old and a budding writer, is attempting to direct her cousins in a play she has recently written in honor of Leon's homecoming. Their cousins, the Quinceys, Lola (fifteen) and the twins Jackson and Pierrot (nine) are staying with the family while their parents resolve a nasty divorce, and are playing the characters in Briony's "The Trials of Arabella." Dominic Head claims either a

very careful first reading or an informed second reading reveals passages in which the true narrator becomes clear. "A fully attentive reading of the novel – which may be a rereading – must continually register a high degree of narratorial guilt and complicity

> and the repetition of "literary ruminations, the self-mocking tone, the contemplation of a finger – all are reflections that have been encountered earlier in the narrative. At this point, the narrator of the first section is implicated in the fictional authorial self-reflexiveness and in such a way as to invite an equation between Briony and the narrator, revealed as her older self. (*Ian McEwan* 164-5)

Thus, the role of id and ego within this novel must be studied simply on the plot level of the story, as well as the more complicated authorial level.

Within the first section of the tale, Briony's sister Cecilia (twenty-three) is helping organize the house and pondering her future after returning from school herself. In one of the pivotal scenes, she walks out to the fountain to fill a vase, and encounters the charlady's son and her childhood friend, Robbie Turner. He has also just returned from Cambridge, his education financed by Cecilia's father, Jack Tallis. Cecilia and Robbie are tense and awkward with one another, but neither understands why. When Robbie tries to help Cecilia, she becomes defiant and as they struggle over the vase in her hand, it breaks and part of it falls into the fountain. Robbie begins to undress to retrieve the piece, but "Cee" will not be outdone and strips down to her underwear, climbs into the water, salvages the pottery and stalks back to the house (Atonement 27-9).

All the while, Briony watches from an upstairs window, enthralled and horrified, trying to fit the scene into her young writer's understanding of the world. Initially, she conceives of the story as a typical fairy tale in which the poor charlady's daughter falls in love with the girl from the big house. However, she believes Robbie, in the exertion of some "strange power" over Cee, forces her to undress. Robbie suddenly becomes the villain. She begins to conceive a story in which she can tell of the scene she just observed from the perspective of Robbie, Cecilia, and herself. She realizes "the simple truth that other people are as real as you. And only in a story could you enter these different minds and show how they had an equal value. That was the only moral a story need have" (*Atonement* 38). Such a view reflects McEwan's own opinion that "imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality" ("Only Love and Then Oblivion. Love Was All They Had To Set Against Their Murders"). In this moment, Briony believes she has transitioned from childhood fantasy to adult reality. She realizes life is not a fairy tale, that romance, arguments, and the events that comprise a life happen whether or not she is around to observe them or to participate in them, and is overwhelmed with the desire to successfully communicate this revelation, this amorality in her writing.

> Six decades later . . . Her fiction was known for its amorality, and like all authors pressed by a repeated question, she felt obliged to produce a story line, a plot of her development that contained the moment when she became recognizably herself. (39).

Clearly the reader is invited to make a correlation between Briony and McEwan; both are haunted by questions, and use a plot to explain their discoveries, whether through their characters or through stories of their own lives.

But, young and immature, Briony is unable to truly practice such subjectivity. She believes she should be "above such nursery-tale ideas as good and evil," and contemplates that "There must be some lofty, godlike place from which all people could be judged alike, not pitted against each other, as in some lifelong hockey match, but seen noisily jostling together in all their glorious imperfection," but "If such a place existed, she was not worthy of it. She could never forgive Robbie his disgusting mind" (*Atonement* 108). Her desire to become a "real writer" and her inability to remain objective and place herself in someone else's situation results in devastation.

Leon arrives home with his friend Paul Marshall, a twenty-four -year-old who has devised the "Amo Bar," a successful chocolate candy which will become even more successful it becomes "part of the standard issue ration pack" (46). Leon invites Robbie to dinner, which aggravates Cee, but she still does not understand the source of her irritation. Meanwhile, Robbie returns home to write a note to apologize for the incident at the fountain. He agonizes over his awkwardness and embarrassment around Cecilia, and against his better judgment smells a book she handed him earlier. He wonders, "How had it crept up on him, this advanced stage of fetishizing the love object? Surely Freud had something to say about that in *Three Essays on Sexuality*" (79). Painstakingly

analyzing several drafts, he attempts to appear intelligent, warm, and impressive as he works up to expressing his muddled feelings. After constructing an acceptable copy in which he confesses, "The truth is, I feel rather lightheaded and foolish in your presence, Cee, and I don't think I can blame the heat," he impetuously adds "In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long" (*Atonement* 80). He rips the "obscene draft" out of his typewriter, rewrites the letter by hand and without the last addition, and dresses for the meal. On his way to the house, he runs into Briony, who he asks to deliver the note to Cecilia, almost immediately realizing he has grabbed the note with his intimate confession. But it is too late. Briony runs ahead, too far to hear his call, and reads the note. Though she has never heard or seen the word before, she knows what it means and believes Cecilia is in great danger. The note only succeeds in reaffirming her childish ideas that Robbie is an evil man. She delivers the note to Cee and runs to her room, avoiding her sister's questions regarding the fact that the note is delivered open.

For Cecilia, the note finally brings into focus the feelings she did not understand earlier. When Robbie arrives at the house, he immediately seeks out Cee to offer his apology and "face her anger and disgust" (123). Instead, she admits that the letter made her realize she "it's been there for weeks" and their awkward attempts to express their feelings culminate in them making love in the library, which Briony walks in to see. Told from two different perspectives, this coupling is crucial to the future of all three characters. Overwhelmed by desire,

the sexual consummation of the love that has been growing is not simply the id's usurpation of the super-ego, but a union of the three psychological functions. Robbie and Cecilia view the experience as transformative, enlightening and uplifting, but Briony interprets the scene quite differently.

> Though they were immobile, her immediate understanding was that she had interrupted an attack, a hand-to-hand fight. The scene was so entirely a realization of her worst fears that she sensed that her overanxious imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books. (116)

Already certain Robbie is a "maniac," she is convinced he has attacked Cecilia, and is driven by both the instinct to protect her sister and create a compelling narrative out of the events.

When the twins disappear at dinner, Briony's sexual fear of Robbie escalates and a search party is sent out to find them. Robbie goes off on his own, as do Paul Marshall, Lola, and Briony. In her search for the boys, Briony stumbles upon Lola and a large dark figure. With her overactive imagination and her determination to cast Robbie as the villain, Briony accuses Robbie of raping Lola. Lola, frightened, embarrassed, and unsure, allows Briony's imagination to run wild and stays silent when Briony testifies. Despite the telling scratches on Paul Marshall's face and his enthusiastic affirmation of Lola's claim that her brothers were responsible for her previous injuries, Briony's determined and assured claims that she *saw* Robbie convince nearly everyone that he is the rapist. Only Cecilia remains faithful and unconvinced, eventually

believing Danny Hardman is the true rapist (317, 327). When Robbie returns to the house with the boys safely in tow, he is accosted, accused and convicted.

The second part of the novel details the horrific retreat to Dunkirk, of which Robbie was a part. He chose to serve in the hopes that he might be able to bargain "for an early release in return for joining the infantry" (191). The men are exhausted, ill and injured. Robbie himself has a piece of shrapnel lodged in his right side, just below his rib cage. As he makes his way to Dunkirk, he reflects on Cecilia, who has cut all ties with her family. In her letters, she promises to wait for him (197, 201). She also tells him that Briony has written her, wanting to go to the police and confess her crime. This news causes him to reflect on Briony's motives for accusing him. He remembers teaching her to swim the summer she was ten, when she threw herself in the river, wanting him to save her because she "loves" him (a crush Briony fleetingly remembers in the next section, claiming that she had moved on the next day). Robbie cannot help but believe that her accusation was a response to the betrayal she felt because he loves Cecilia and not her. Although he understands the impulsive need to lash out, although he and Cecilia have repeatedly reminded themselves that she was just a child, "He would never forgive her. That was the lasting damage" (*Atonement* 220). The pain for his wound is getting worse, and as he falls asleep he remembers her promise to wait, to guard their secret and their love until he returns.

The third part of the novel finds Briony working as a nurse in the hospital. As Cecilia suspected, Briony has chosen nursing over Cambridge as a sort of penance. Yet initially she has trouble finding any dignity in her job. "Mostly, she was a maid, a skivvy and, in her hours off, a crammer of simple facts . . . She did not want her mother to know about the lowly work she did" (*Atonement* 260-1). However, her compassion and competence as a nurse grows. She empathetically sits and talks with Luc Cornet, a dying soldier whose skull is half gone, revealing a portion of his brain. He believes she is a sweetheart from his childhood, and she sympathetically acts the part (290-1). In this time she is also writing, and has submitted her novella, "Two Figures by a Fountain" to *Horizon*, which has been rejected by Cyril Connolly. Thus the reader (if he or she has not already realized it) begins to learn of Briony's plans for atonement.

Receiving no reply from Cecilia, she goes to visit her sister, and on the way she stops by Lola Quincey and Paul Marshall's wedding. As she stands at the back of the church, she mentally reviews all the details that indicate that "poor vain and vulnerable Lola . . . who saved herself from humiliation by falling in love, or persuading herself that she had" married her rapist (306). From here, McEwan's intricately woven metafiction reaches its climax. Both character and author, Briony is rewriting history, propelling McEwan's question of whether or not the conscience can be relieved through fiction, or whether the act of writing is ultimately self-serving. Briony continues on and arrives at Cecilia's flat, where the couple stays while Robbie has been given leave. In an attempt to make

amends, or at least demonstrate her contrition, she promises Robbie and Cecilia that she will confess her crime to the authorities and her parents, to clear Robbie's name. She leaves them at the tube station, aware that though neither one will likely forgive her, she has the opportunity and the responsibility to retract her unfounded, impetuous, and damning testimony.

The book closes with an entry from Briony herself, written in the first person. She is seventy-seven, a successful writer, and suffering from vascular dementia. The year is now 1999 and the reader is left without any doubt that the preceding portions of the novel are written by Briony. Although the novel cannot be published until the Marshalls are dead, it will be her act of atonement. She admits that she never met with Robbie and Cecilia to apologize and promise to clear his name. In a cruel twist, the reader learns that, in fact, Robbie "died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940" and "Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station" (*Atonement* 350). The reader must now also examine the facts they have been presented, for they are contingent upon Briony's observations, experiences, and interpretations. And she acknowledges herself to be an unreliable narrator for, she confesses, "I worked in three hospitals in the duration . . . and I merged them in my description to concentrate all my experiences into one place" (*Atonement* 336). She later adds, "If I really cared so much about the facts, I should have written a different kind of book" (340). Until the end, Briony is unable to let go of the reins and forego her penchant for fantasy.

However, she muses over whether or not an author, creating his or her own world and, in a sense, becoming God, can find atonement without anyone to appeal to for forgiveness. She brings to light the question of the morality or responsibility of the author to the reader. For instance, in the end she is unable to continue with the pessimistic and realistic ending of her previous drafts, and she gives the lovers a happy ending. She wonders what purpose is served in dashing the reader's hopes. McEwan himself, however, has no qualms in denying consolation to the reader. In an interview with Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, McEwan says he "wanted to play with the notion of storytelling as a form of self-justification, of how much courage is involved in telling the truth to oneself" (qtd. in *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 131). Because of the complicated element of McEwan's masterful metafiction, one must also look at the role of authorial desire and conscience. As Head argues, "It is clear that *Atonement* presents narrative fiction as having *to do* with moral questions, without necessarily being able to *resolve* them. Indeed, *Atonement* provokes reflection on moral responsibility that is *tortuous*, rather than efficacious" and further points out that *Atonement* demonstrates why the search for truth in art "is doomed to fail, while remaining both laudable and necessary" (160). Briony is torn between her own desire to create a compelling story within the confines of her control and sense of order and the truth. Lynn Wells argues that "Briony's entire narrative, up to her joyous reintegration into the family around the performance of her play, is constructed as a fantasy text that elevates her self-

interest over genuine concern for the other" (*The Ethical Otherworld* 125). Both Briony and McEwan question whether an author's conscience should be burdened by the attempt to find truth through art, or to tell a story that is compelling and entertaining. His next book, *Saturday*, is both compelling and entertaining, while returning to his repeated quandaries: how to rationally deal with the irrational? And how to find the proper balance between satisfying instinct/desire and one's conscience?

Though Childs claims that reviews of Saturday were almost all positive, critics, such as Keith Gessen of *The New York Times*, found the story unbelievable. "That a successful surgeon will not only have never read "Dover Beach" but will also not have any idea who Arnold is, is an implausibility, almost a kind of joke" (Heart of Glass). And indeed, on the surface the novel seems like a story of a wealthy man whose life is inconveniently disrupted but set back on track with minimal damage. Forty-seven-year-old neurosurgeon Henry Perowne is wealthy, has two children and a wife whom he still loves and desires. But his happiness is a bit ironic. Henry is privileged, and is a spectator of the world and social dilemmas, rather than an active participant. Set over the course of a single day, only when he and his family are terrorized, is Henry able to reassess his views on fiction, humanity, and social responsibility. And, though the influence of Darwin can certainly be detected (Perowne himself is reading The Origin of the Species in the opening pages), Freud's id, ego, and super-ego have not lost their applicability in McEwan's work.

The plot is fairly simple. Henry wakes one morning, a few hours before dawn, to see a plane going down in flames. In the aftermath of 9/11, he jumps to the conclusion that a similar terrorist attack is being waged on London. He discusses it with his eighteen-year-old son, Theo, over breakfast, and, over a series of television broadcasts throughout the day, he discovers it was simply an accident and an emergency landing. In these first few pages, Henry thinks about the dangers of radical Islamists, and he reflects, "the pursuit of utopia ends up licensing every form of excess, all ruthless means of its realization" (*Saturday* 34). At once, Freud's struggle with civilization is echoed in McEwan's depiction of society. In a world where too many ideologies and religions exist, humanity cannot realize its full potential. Perowne appears to be fairly normal; he is not sexually deviant or overcome by innate desires. However, as Gessen observes, Perowne seems too cold. Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace argues that Perowne is "simultaneously Everyman, 'l'homme moyen sensual' . . . and an ardent anti-intellectual ("Postcolonial Melancholia" 466). New Darwinists would argue he is more evolved, genetically and therefore intellectually superior, and by the end of the book Perowne himself brushes on this:

> So much divides them from the broken figures that haunt the benches . . . It can't just be class or opportunities . . . Perowne, the professional reductionist, can't help thinking it's down to invisible folds and kinks of character, written in code, at the level of molecules. (281)

However, throughout the book we are reminded that Perowne is detached from reality and from society. He has no idea who Matthew Arnold is, cannot glean a

message from *Anna Karenina* or *Madam Bovary* other than "adultery is understandable but wrong, the nineteenth century women had a hard time of it" and about the Russian and French countrysides (65). Though Perowne is undoubtedly intelligent, more educated than the man who will threaten his family's safety, he lacks the ability to be moved by literature, by stories.

> Between these events, Perowne's lengthy narrated monologues centre upon his ways of knowing the world: through the knowledge of science, which understands the mechanics of the brain but not the complexities of the individual mind; through the media, which he is sure distort and give him only a biased picture; and through art. Trusting science but neither media nor art, Perowne finds himself helpless either to shake the feeling of doom at the impending war in Iraq or to understand Baxter well enough to defuse his plan to harm Perowne's family. (Wall 5)

Yet, even if only for a moment, Perowne is shaken out of his sanguine and meandering thoughts and is exposed to his own feelings of passion, awe, beauty and aggression, working to find a balance between his id's instinctual desires and his socially defined super-ego's expectations.

After breakfast Henry returns to his bedroom, has sex with his wife, Rosalind, which is a natural and familiar expression of love and satisfaction of needs. Both are able to fulfill their sexual desire in a healthy, fulfilling relationship. Afterwards, Rosalind, due at the High Court to defend the paper for which she works, leaves the house and Henry leaves for his squash game and errands. On his way to play, he watches anti-war marchers protesting the Iraq War. In his observations of the protestors, the reader is shown a glimmer of Perowne's aggression and a contemporary expression of Freud's ideas of self-

preservation. He supports the Iraq War, despite the fact that the matter is being "clumsily handled, especially by the Americans" because of the knowledge, made rational by recent terrorist attacks (such as 9/11) that "There are people around the planet, well-connected and organized, who would like to kill him and his family and friends to make a point" (*Saturday* 80).

This aggression is heightened as Perowne continues driving and gets into a minor car accident. This accident leads to an altercation between him and Baxter, the other driver. In addition to the natural irritation he feels, "there swells in him . . . a passion for justice to the thrill of hatred" (82). The normally controlled Perowne's is suddenly shaken and his instinctual, id-driven desire is to lash out and the source of danger (interpreted as a mere inconvenience). However, the situation quickly escalates, and Perowne quickly realizes that Baxter is irrational and more powerful than he. Perowne is able to escape by recognizing that Baxter has Huntington's disease and distracting him (95-100). That Perowne has used his medical knowledge and training against someone bothers him, but he rationalizes that it was necessary for his own safety. Freud would argue this sense of guilt is enforced by the super-ego's inculcation of cultural mores, specifically the contemporary ideal that one should not exploit those who are less fortunate, less intelligent, or less capable than oneself. Perowne's own sense of guilt over this exploitation persists throughout the novel, competing with instinctual aggression towards the threat Baxter poses to Perowne and, later, his family.

The rest of his day is fairly routine until dinner. He proceeds to his game with his friend, American anesthetist, Jay Strauss, where the full import of his brush with Baxter begins to shake and unnerve him. He struggles with his guilt combined with the sense of fear that has grown inside him and the pain in his chest where Baxter hit him. Afterwards, Perowne goes shopping for dinner and he visits his mother, who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, which is routine but depressing. Later, he sees his son's blues band perform, and as the music reminds him of his visit with his mother, when walking through the garden she says in the countryside "you feel lifted up," a sensation he feels when he hears the band play. Although in the opening pages Perowne claims to love forms of art such as music and architecture; anything really, as long as its not literature (67), this reflection is the only evidence at this point that he finds beauty in art, and the first hint that he might be able to connect with another human being however irrational, through art (174-77). He goes home to cook dinner for the family, including his twenty-something daughter, Daisy, and his father-in-law, John Grammaticus, who are both poets and have had a falling out.

At dinner, Rosalind appears with Baxter and his cronies behind him, armed with a knife. He is angry that Henry tricked and embarrassed him and is looking "to settle a score" (*Saturday* 276). Like Joe Rose, Perowne must figure out, as a rational, intelligent man, how to deal with the extremely irrational and violent. Vulgar and imposing, he forces Daisy to strip naked, which reveals to the family and the reader that she is pregnant (225-6). In sexualizing Daisy,

Baxter is using sex to obtain power, satisfying multiple levels of his id's drives. Discovering she is a published poet, he has her read one of her poems. Instead, she recites Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," which unexpectedly touches Baxter (228-32). Baxter declares, in awe, "You wrote that . . . It's beautiful. You know that don't you. It's beautiful. And you wrote it" (231). In this instant, though he can only understand the context through the lens of his own experiences, Henry begins to realize the power literature can have, even if it does not exist in the real world. For a moment he and Baxter can, at least on some level, find common ground. The poem calms Baxter, and Henry is able to convince him to come upstairs to the office, where he keeps information on revolutionary procedures for Huntington's. Once again, he is using his superior knowledge and training to manipulate Baxter, but this time is not only for his safety, but for his family as well. Theo runs upstairs, and together they fling Baxter downstairs, where he severely hurts his head. The police come and Baxter is taken to the hospital with Henry's expert analysis of his condition to help the hospital staff.

In a critical twist, Henry gets a call from Jay, asking him to come help with a head injury that's just arrived at the ER (Baxter, obviously). Listening to his recovering family in the kitchen Henry contemplates the request:

> There are other surgeons Jay can call on, and as a general rule, Perowne avoids operating on people he knows. But this is different. And despite various shifts in his attitude to Baxter, some clarity, even some resolve is beginning to form. He thinks he knows what it is he wants to do. (*Saturday* 242)

Rosalind worries that Henry will try and exact revenge, and such an innate desire for self-defense would be natural. Instinct would encourage him to lash out a Baxter, to use his vulnerability as an opportunity to punish him for what he has done to the Perowne family, because, according to McEwan, "When people take revenge, the same reward centers of the brain are activated that are associated with satisfying hunger, thirst, sexual appetite" (Zalewski 46). And indeed, Henry does not hesitate to allow this side of him to take control when Baxter poses immediate danger. However, when his ego is once again in control, Henry is drawn to perform his art. His conscience is stronger than his instinct.

> For once, following his leap of empathy with Baxter, Perowne has been able to immerse himself in an imaginative sympathy with someone in his position a century earlier, and this is partly because he recognized that Baxter has been moved by "the magic" of a poem in a way that he "never has, and probably never will." (*The Fiction of Ian McEwan* 149)

Back home and in bed, Henry again frets over whether he abused his authority when he manipulates Baxter through his position and knowledge as a doctor. Rosalind reassures him, pointing out that he was in serious danger, but "this is not the conclusion he wanted her to reach" (*Saturday* 277). In shock, they try and comfort themselves, discussing Theo's heroism, Daisy's poem and pregnancy, and planning ahead. In an affirmation of life and love, they once again make love before Rosalind falls asleep. In the small hours before dawn, Henry muses over what the future holds for his family and for his country. He is uncertain and frail after the day's horrors, "But one small fixed point of conviction holds

Henry steady" (287). He is determined that they will not press charges, that they will not punish Baxter further. Henry is not sure if he is granting or seeking forgiveness, or simply pity. Furthermore, if there was any revenge necessary, it has been achieved by saving Baxter's life, forcing him to live with the disease. Though reflective and unsure, Henry has somehow managed to achieve satisfaction and balance between his desires and his conscience, an unusual state for a McEwan character, and one that does not last in his next book.

Surprisingly, McEwan's most recently published novella, *On Chesil Beach* does not deal with over-sexed, id-ridden individuals, or horrific or violent events, or incredibly disturbing subject matter. But, as Jonathan Lethem posits,

> "The situation is miniature and enormous, dire and pathetic, tender and irrevocable. McEwan treats it with a boundless sympathy, one that enlists the reader even as it disguises the fact that this seeming novel of manners is as fundamentally a horror as any McEwan's written . . . That horror is located in the distance between two selves, two subjectivities: humans who will themselves to be "as one," and fail miserably. ("Edward's End")

The two young lovers in their early twenties, Edward and Florence, are repressed products of the time period. Set in 1962, the book once again takes place over the course of the day, with flashbacks to their courtship (45-94). Thus, Lethem also points out that McEwan engages in the modernist tradition of the slowness of fiction, like James or Woolfe, but argues that he does not feel like a late modernist because the challenge psychoanalysis posed to the novel's authority is unremarkable. Instead, he incorporates the novel's challengers, including the newest, neurology, into his fiction, introducing an element of

postmodernism ("Edward's End"). However, his deft incorporation of psychoanalytical theories and writings, his depth and journey toward an optimistic reparation of society through critical literature, and the tension he establishes between the individual's desires and social expectations, rather than completely distance him from modernism, aligns him with some modernist authors like Lawrence. Utilizing elements from both literary movements, McEwan engages the challenges to fiction's authority, himself challenging the role of art and fiction in society, and uses elements of Freud, Darwin, and the contemporary sciences to give literature more power. One need only to think of the role of Freud's Oedipal complex in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* to understand how these theories can be incorporated into a thought-provoking, relevant novel.

Florence is a talented violinist and the daughter of an Oxford academic and businessman, whose family is rather uptight and stereotypical of upper middle class. Music allows her to express her deep-seeded emotions and the sensual side she stifles. Edward is an intelligent young history student who grew up in a quite different household. His father teaches at the local school in the country and struggles to care for the house and children because Edward's mother is brain-damaged from a head injury. He is passionate and expressive, but inexperienced. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the two genuinely love each other and look forward to their life together.

Opening with the night of their wedding, neither can think of anything except sex, but whereas Edward looks forward to the consummation with

enthusiasm, Florence is frightened and experiences “a visceral dread” (*On Chesil Beach* 8). She has no desire, not even curiosity. Though she loves him, loves cuddling him, kissing him (as long as there was no tongue involved), and respects him, she cannot escape her disgust at the thought of him penetrating her, “a word that suggested to her nothing but pain, flesh parted before a knife” (9). Conversely, Edward not only loves and respects her; he can barely contain the desire he has restrained throughout their courtship.

Tim Adams, in *The Observer*, insightfully references the Larkin poem, “Annus Mirabilis”:

> Sexual intercourse began
> In nineteen sixty-three
> (which was rather late for me)
> Between the end of the Chatterly ban
> And the Beatles’ first LP
> Up to then there’d only been
> A sort of bargaining,
> A wrangle for the ring,
> A shame that started at sixteen
> And spread to everything (qtd. in “Innocents Abroad”)

However, neither one is able to express their fears and desires. Furthermore, he continually misinterprets her reluctance as coyness, teasing, or modesty. The couple has not talked about sex or their individual feelings about it, and this lack of communication and understanding of one another proves disastrous (132).

As they make their way to the bedroom, Edward believing he has set her free and they will face “this momentous occasion, this dividing line of experience, together,” but Florence is cold and void of passion (34). She is

disgusted and irritated by his aggressive kisses with his tongue, and can only focus on "not struggling, not gagging, not panicking" (36). Through small nuances in language, McEwan hints that her father might have molested or raped her as a child (61, 123). If true, such a revelation would certainly help explain her anxiety and distaste for sex. Her ego has likely suppressed any sexual desires the id might have at an attempt for survival. The pleasure principle, no longer associates intercourse with a satisfaction of desire, but instead of pain and discomfort. She attempts to rally herself, but she believes she is entirely in the wrong. Although she realizes that, by marrying Edward, she has agreed to have sex with him, she is horrified by the idea. Painfully for the reader, Edward misinterprets her moans of regret and displeasure, believing she is just as happy as he. Then, unexpectedly, she feels a sensation of pleasure and desire, but she wants to take things slow. Edward, however, has been waiting for this moment, and rolls on top of her. She is disappointed but is unable to express her desires. She wishes to fulfill her wifely duties, and so, following to the manual she has read, guides him toward her vagina. This single touch is more than Edward can bear and he immediately ejaculates. Florence, "incapable of expressing her primal disgust," frantically wipes herself with a pillow and runs to the beach (131). She is ashamed of her actions and angry with herself for failing. Contrary to a failure of Freud, such a reaction can be understood when one remembers the powerful role guilt plays in the super-ego's control over the ego. Despite the fact that "one of the forms in which love manifests itself –

sexual love – has given us our most intense experience of an overwhelming sensation of pleasure and has thus furnished us with a pattern for our search for happiness" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 33), in Florence's case the super-ego has assimilated the expectations of the culture, that a wife provides her body for the man's satisfaction, and Florence's failure to fulfill this duty has engaged the guilt controlled by the super-ego. The ego has little mediating to do between the id and the super-ego here, again, because intercourse is no longer associated with pleasure.

Confused and humiliated, Edward is left in the room, but his embarrassment quickly turns to anger and he stalks out to the beach to confront her. She thinks she has behaved "abominably," but her shame becomes irritation and anger (170). They privately acknowledge their own blame in the course of events, but they accuse one another and begin a fight based on old insecurities and problems never vocalized. Florence, in an attempt to reconcile and still believing she is wrong, offers to let Edward have anyone else, while she remains his wife and companion in ever other sense. The offer only insults him further, for he wants no one but her. He attacks her, calling her frigid, and she leaves for home without him, feeling miserable and worthless (195).

The reader cannot help but feel sympathy for each one, as McEwan undoubtedly desires. On a night when they are so happy to be in love and committed to each other, they cannot get past their own psychological setbacks. Florence truly wishes to be a good wife, but she has been damaged by the past.

Edward is a perfectly normal man, wishing to fulfill his sexual drive in a healthy, socially acceptable environment, and cannot understand the impediments that hold Florence back. They love each other deeply but unable to properly understand, express or fulfill their desires salvage the relationship. The novel perfectly depicts why Freud argued that society was such a problem for the human psyche: "Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 51), yet one is compelled to participate in a community in order to fulfill instincts and desires, such as love (sexual and emotional) and aggression (achieved through competition). One therefore attempts to make compromises with one's id achieve fulfillment within society.

The final chapter flashes to a future in which Florence becomes an accomplished violinist. The performance she promised to dedicate to Edward is wildly praised, with one critic claiming "Miss Pointing, in the lilting tenderness of her tone and the lyrical delicacy of her phrasing, played . . . like a woman in love, not only with Mozart, or with music, but with life itself" (198). Unfortunately, Edward does not know of this. Once again, McEwan shows that art holds the truth, a key to humanity, but left unobserved or unappreciated art is left impotent against the lover's divide. Edward drifts through life, not unhappy and with some material achievements, but without the kind of love he had with Florence. After years of thinking about her, he is eventually able to "admit to himself that he had never met anyone he loved as much," never

knowing that had he called out to her on the beach as she retreated that night, he could have saved the marriage (201-3).

These characters are different from many of McEwan's previous characters (except, perhaps, the inexperienced Leonard Marnham in *The Innocent*). Unlike the characters of McEwan's early fiction, the main characters are not flawed by overindulging their desires, but by restraining themselves to a fault. They are products of the age, an era when "respectable" people, especially women, did not have sex outside of marriage. Edward is a passionate and expressive person but curtails his desire and impulses for Florence during their courtship. Then, on their wedding night, overcome with feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment, he is unable to express his emotions to her. Afterward, his pride does not let him contact her for fear of further rejection, and years later, with the sexual liberation of the sixties, he realizes her offer may not have been so strange, but "an act of self-sacrifice he had quite failed to understand" (196). And she, ashamed and irrevocably affected by her past, cannot share her own fears and follow Edward into the future. Her father succumbed to his own desire without reference to any of society's morals or expectations, forever damaging Florence's sensual side and therefore her most important relationship.

In these latest novels, the reader discovers a different side of McEwan. A transformation from literature intended to shock and appall, to revel in man and the world's fragmentation and rebel against any attempt at optimism, to works of deep emotion and struggle, enhanced with strains of hope and melancholy

threaded throughout. Through art, both his own and the art forms he injects into his novels, there is a journey toward truth; a truth that is never defined but constantly sought. In finding a way to create characters that are not just interesting, but are also heartbreakingly human in their attempts to reconcile their wishes with their consciences, McEwan succeeds in artfully depicting the human condition.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, McEwan's fiction has evolved over the years, quite as humans and their relationships do. This thesis has shown that the author who once strove to scandalize his readers through violence and sexuality now strives to surprise through observation of human interaction. Both McEwan and his characters have tempered their basic drives and have tried to find a psychological equilibrium. He has honed the idea he communicates to Rosa González that, "the important thing is not what is described but why it is described" (qtd. in "The Pleasure of Prose Writing vs. Pornographic Violence" 57). In creating works that retain some of his frank and gruesome depictions of humanity, he masterfully leads the reader toward the questions he wishes the reader to ask about his or her own mind, his or her own thoughts and feelings, and about the society in which he or she lives and with which he or she interacts.

One of the ways McEwan has succeeded in achieving this interaction between the author, the text, and the reader is his use of metafiction, sometimes implemented facetiously. In works such as *Black Dogs*, *Enduring Love*, *Saturday*, and most notably, *Atonement*, McEwan engages the reader in a conversation with himself through his works. Questions regarding morality, human vulnerability and culpability, and the role an individual can or should play in society are all

achieved by continually reminding the reader that the novels are works of fiction, presenting the writing not as an absolute or universal truth, but instead one person's way of approaching the world and encouraging the reader to use his or her own evaluative powers and judgments. In fact, McEwan himself, in an incident comparable to an incident in his novels, demonstrated his ability to amuse and engage his audience, even in person. In an incredibly long line of people waiting for him to sign their books (or their whole McEwan library), I finally arrived at the table where my name had already been attached to a post-it to help the line move quickly. However, I stared, awe-struck, and mumbled, "I'm writing my Masters thesis on you." He looked up, flashed me a simultaneously compassionate and bemused smile and said, "I'm glad it's you and not me." McEwan and his fiction not only examine the human psyche, they remind the reader that he or she is human, and invite him or her to view the world through a different lens.

McEwan's transition from an entirely postmodern writing style to a style which incorporates both postmodern and modern elements is a symptom of his broadening his focus not just from the disturbed or conflicted individual, but the individual in society, and how the individual's own desires and conscience are shaped by society. He encourages the reader to question the morals, norms, and taboos established by the majority while simultaneously emphasizing that one cannot live outside of this society, either. While I was attending a book reading in Dallas, Texas, in 2009, McEwan told the audience that although he does not

believe in a divine being or associate with any religion, he does believe humans are "moral beings." This morality, the idea of right and wrong, is measured by our interactions with others, how we affect and are affected by those around us. Through his art he acknowledges that though there may not be a universal truth or answer, we must try to find common ground, to respect another human by trying to see their perspective, and perhaps this unity is achieved by looking for truth whether or not one finds answers. Perhaps then, McEwan's appeal to readers is his ability to use elements from both modern and postmodern ideologies, transcending the literary ideals or movements of a specific time period and creating literature that is relevant to anyone struggling to understand the world and his or her place in it.

McEwan's next novel, slated to be about a self-absorbed scientist who has been riding on the success of his earlier research, appears to continue in this manner. This not-so-likable character is faced with a dilemma which faces the world today – global warming (Zalewski 50). Such a premise promises to continue with McEwan's skillful investigation of the human struggle between id, ego, and super-ego, as well as personal responsibility and global issues. One can only expect and hope that his fiction will continue to evolve, excite and surprise the reader in new and equally masterful ways.

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