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Pedagogická  
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# **Processing trauma in Ian McEwan's The Cement Garden**

Bakalářská práce

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Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání – completus

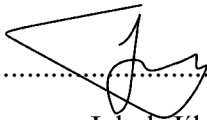
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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených zdrojů.

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## Abstract

All four children in the book were exposed to effects of traumatic event of death of both of their parents. This study focused on inspecting their pathological behavior and put any such behavior into the context of their storyline. The research tried to answer the question in what way these events influenced the children and how is their behavior influenced by such pathological occurrences. All four kids were investigated in detail to reveal any dysfunctions in their individual storyline. This study also offers insight into pathological or problematic behavior appearing in the book from theoretical point of view and contrasts it with practical appearance of these in the book.

## Abstrakt

Všechny čtyři děti z knihy byly vystaveny efektům traumatizující události, kterou je smrt obou jejich rodičů. Tato studie se zaměřuje na výzkum jejich patologického chování a staví jakékoliv takové chování do kontextu jejich dějové linie. Výzkum se pokouší odpovědět na otázku jakým způsobem tyto události ovlivnily zmíněné děti a jak je jejich chování ovlivněno těmito patologickými jevy. Všechny čtyři děti byly detailně zkoumány za účelem odhalení jakýchkoliv dysfunkcí v jejich jednotlivých dějových liniích. Tato studie také nabízí vhled do patologického nebo problémového chování po teoretické stránce a staví jej do kontrastu s praktickou demonstrací těchto jevů v knize.

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## Introduction

For someone who did not read *The Cement Garden* but knows the basis of the plot, this book means incest, filth and perversion. The book is indeed filled with topics and motives which should be easily condemnable, this research however shows that the incest between Jack and Julie can be viewed as acceptable.

In the book, there are many layers that can be researched in the sense of the characters, their personalities and mostly their motivations. The household which appears to be dysfunctional and ready to be condemned gradually starts to show its inner workings and ties between the characters. How are the children influenced by the death of their parents? And: How are they able to function without them? The findings might also show some hints as to what dysfunctions may appear in children of real life, the children with whom teachers may come into contact during their career.

The main aim of this project is to examine all four children of the household in *The Cement Garden*, reveal any potential pathological behavior and mainly confirm the hypothesis that all of the behavior in the book which can be considered harmful or pathological is a result of trauma created by sudden absence of parents. In order to do so, this paper is divided into two main sections:

First will disassemble each child into several behavioral aspects. These aspects are then contrasted with the events in the story to explore whether there is a connection between the traumatic events of the book.

Second section will discuss the pathological or problematical behavior in theory and then contrasts it with the demonstration of such behavior in the children. This is to prove whether the behavior can really be considered problematic and whether there is basis in reality for the behavior as described.

The influence of Ian McEwan as author on this book is omitted in this research. While there definitely can be made a connection between author's beliefs and his work, this research does not aim to explore such relations.

## About the book

The Cement Garden by Ian McEwan is a book published in 1978 in the United Kingdom. With 138 pages, it can be considered as one of his shorter novels. However, even in such small number of pages, Ian McEwan is able to take on the story of not one or two but four kids and describe in detail their reaction and transformation in regard to their parents passing away. On the contrary, by fitting all the changes, twists and drama into such page span, McEwan creates gripping and fast paced story where the readers can hardly find themselves bored or uninterested. The other aspect worth of mentioning and in the end also connected to the length of this novel is the setting in which the story takes place. The whole story is observed from the inside of a family house, where all the main characters live and where even the additional characters interact with the main heroes. For this reason, there is no need for description of other locations and author can freely focus on description of relations between the individual characters, notably the family members.

Relations between the siblings, but also parents and other characters, emotional dynamics, action and reaction in behavior or solely the dysfunctional household situation are the main motives around which the book revolves. There are not many new or shocking elements introduced and instead, the book story just gradually heads towards the events which may be expected by the reader. Both parents pass away early in the book, leaving space for development of the children. It is also worthy of mentioning, that the book is quite graphic and yet it leaves space for interpretation of the events depicted in the book. Even though the book covers span of many months, the story stops and highlights situations of some days, sometimes describing a whole week or even multiple weeks.

Even in such wide time range, it may be surprising how much the events and mindsets evolve and escalate over the course of the story. Question may arise, whether such course of events is even possible in the real-life scenario. However, the fact that some events in the book are still considered a taboo even in current society (Kaestle, 2011 p. 991) may hint that there are directions in which behavior of children may go, with which we may not be even familiar with. This book really plays with taboos and unacceptability of certain situations. This may be one of the most important reasons as to why The Cement Garden still remains popular among readers.



## Observing behavior of the children – methodology

This thesis is aimed on observation of influence of traumatic events which happen during the course of the story and influence mainly the four children appearing in the story. It is therefore important to state what behavior is to be considered as problematic and resulting from the trauma of having both of the parents out of their lives. For the purposes of this study, numerous harmful behavioral occurrences will be monitored, described, and analyzed along with some behavior which can be by the standards of the day or even current standards considered harmful or abnormal. Of course, here the question of normality arises, and it is necessary to state what this paper will deem to be normal and what abnormal or unacceptable.

In a small and confined social group as is the household of only four children, who are distressed by the death of their parents, many behavioral occurrences might appear to be acceptable and normal to them, in their social group. (Magolda, et al., 2007 p. 145)

Yet in the society as a whole, for example incest between Julie and Jack or retrograde development in case of Tom would be judged as out of the norm. For this reason, this study will turn to Emile Durkheim in search for the definition of normality. As Durkheim claims, anything that is widely occurring in the society and is considered by the majority of the society to be acceptable can be considered as a norm. (Durkheim, 1982 p. 56) With the borderlines set, it becomes easier and more comprehensible to identify the irregular behavior in the story. It is also useful to note that the depictions of the activities and also thought processes of the characters are so polarized and in contrast with the social norms that even a reader with no proficiency or previous knowledge in sociology, coming from almost any social background, should be able to reliably identify the abnormal behavior of the children.

As for the methodology of the study, the progress of the development of the children in the story will be noted and interpreted. Special attention will be directed towards their pathological behavior and the results for this behavior will be theorized and put into scientific or social context or experience. Many aspects of the behavior of the children in the book will therefore be also examined via deduction and a bigger out-of-the-story picture may be created on numerous occasions unless this deduction does not collide with implicit storyline of the book. It should be accepted as a valid way of researching the character development arch and of the results of traumatic events in the lives of the children.

Each child will be studied separately in order to thoroughly analyze their personality and subsequent psychological defects. Synthesis will also be used later on, to put some of the behavioral events into the context of the whole household to better understand the dynamics between each member of said household. It is also important to mention that any trauma processing which might have been ongoing in the storyline of the parents or other characters apart from the four children will not be taken into account since it is not significant for the interpretation of processing trauma in the four children. This allows the study to focus solely on the children and bring more focus and detail into each case. It is also the most important group from the pedagogical aspect of the thesis, as children are the main point of interest for teachers or future teachers.

## The children in detail

### The case of Tom

Tom is one of the four main characters. He is six years old and even though the story does not revolve around him to the same extent as it is with Julie and Jack, he does have an important role to play later towards the end of the story. He is also important for better understanding Jack's and Julie's emotional and psychological evolution.

At the beginning of the book, Tom seems to behave typically for the child of his age. He demonstrates a shy personality; this can be observed numerous times during the course of the story. Specifically, Tom often hides behind a piece of furniture or some member of the family, usually a sibling of his: "Tom was scared of Father and kept well behind me." (McEwan, 1978 p. 13), says Jack in the role of the narrator early in the book. Here, the shyness or maybe fear possibly, might very well come from the attitude of the father towards Tom and other kids as well. The figure of the dad, although not introduced properly in this thesis, can be described as strict, perfectionist in some respects and also quite cold. As an article by Tomlinson suggests, these types of characteristics may well be the reason for some kids of primary school age to develop certain respect or distance towards the hostile figure. (Tomlinson, 2011) There may be a discussion whether such behavior observed in the father can even be considered to be hostile from the general point of view, there however is little discussion as to whether pre-school and/or primary school children consider such behaviors and personalities hostile or unlikable. The father may be trying to gain respect from Tom by being cold and strict towards him, but these practices often only cause the children to lose overall interest and willingness to interact with such person. This can be in a way seen as a great lesson for teachers, who might think, as reported by Tomlinson, that being limited on emotions and trying to always maintain a sense of fear and respect above their pupils will lead to a better classroom climate (Tomlinson, 2011).

Even though the book does not use classroom as a setting, the household of virtually any family shows certain similarities with classroom, for example in the importance of gaining respect and working with it not only to the hierarchically superior, but also on the member-to-member level. Additionally, parents are able to teach children and form their personality similarly to teachers, for parents, this happens generally in their home. (Ceka, et al., 2016 p. 63) For these reasons, Tom can be considered as quite an important character for readers with pedagogical focus or background, even though he is one of the less exposed characters in the story.

There is other notable occurrence of problematic behavior. Sometime after death of his mother, Tom is suddenly without any direct authority or leadership in the family. Even though Julie and occasionally also Jack try to maintain some degree of order in the household, Tom is allowed to act more freely in some aspects. The most notable one being his choice of clothing. Tom starts wearing skirts and generally is wearing clothes meant for girls. This would probably not be allowed by his late parents, but Julie appears to show a high degree of benevolence regarding Tom's clothing choices. This maybe more than anything else shows how big influence Julie really has on the running of the household and on each of the members. It is also important to mention that it seems like she is the main source of norms for the household. He gives out tasks and chores to her siblings and she also in general says what is right and what is not. Not only with Tom's clothing, but also with incestual and provocative activities with her brother Jack, it is very visible that Julie's sense of social normality is very much different from the conventional line of thought. What she perceives as normal or irrelevant is by society considered as a key point of interest. For example, Jack during his narration often mentions the household being dirty, kitchen untidy or smell carrying through the house with source often being food leftovers. In this sense, Tom is a valid symbol of neglect and benevolence. It is hard to state whether first or latter is the more prevalent reason for Tom dressing up as he is. Julie is definitely not neglective as per rule. She does not care about things which are not vitally important for the household as a living space, but she cares about selected needs of every member of the household. While she does not necessarily clean the dishes, floors or does not care much about washing clothes, she for example buys food. This can serve as an example of her not being totally separated from the reality and being unable to take care of the household, but rather her significantly selective way of choosing what chores are needed to do and which necessities are simply expendable. These characteristics of Julie shed more light on why exactly Tom cannot be view as neglected in every aspect, since he is being cared for in a way Julie feels valid through the scope of her moral and social values. And while this may be said about virtually any neglected child, in this case, it is arguable that Tom is definitely not being left to survive on his own. The support both material and social is there for him in a form Julie sees the most helpful and beneficial for him.

Probably the most concrete and specific example of discussion about Tom's gender identity issue can be observed in the first part of the book, where the mother is still alive. Tom supposedly tells Sue that: "“What's it like being a girl?” and I said it's nice, why? And he said he was tired of being a boy and he wanted to be a girl now. And I said but you can't be a girl if

you're a boy, and he said, 'Yes, I can. If I want to, I can.' So then I said why do you want to be a girl? And he said, 'Because you don't get hit when you're a girl.' And I told him you do sometimes, but he said, 'No you don't, no you don't.' So then I said how can you be a girl when everyone knows you're a boy, and he said, "I'll wear a dress and make my hair like yours and go in the girls' entrance.' So I said he couldn't do that, and he said yes, he could, and then he said he wanted to anyway, he wants..." ". (McEwan, 1978 p. 46) This hints to the fact that the motivation for Tom to start dressing in female clothing might have initially come from the fear of being bullied. This also occurs in the book, when Tom returns from school numerous times with scathes, bruises or other minor injuries caused by his schoolmates. By being a victim of bullying, Tom might have concluded that by being a girl, he might avoid these attacks. While children can sometimes think irrationally and ignore certain social principles, the will to start pretending to be a girl requires a certain willingness and openness to pretending to be of a different gender. Therefore, it is possible to argue that regardless of the motivation, Tom or any other child for that matter, needs to incline to the idea of belonging to an opposite gender prior their decision to really pursue and develop this idea. It is arguable that even though Tom does not inherently seek to become a female, he later does not mind looking or behaving like one. The motivation behind these acts is however still in discussion.

Circling back to Tom's clothing choices, there is another theory looming in the story which might seem more logical as to why is Tom dressing up the way he is sometimes. During the first occurrence of dressing in women clothes, Tom is in the room with Julie and Sue. Jack comes to the room only later on, to find Tom dressed in one dress already, while other one is being customized by Sue and Julie to fit him better. This event might support the theory that Tom wearing female clothing is more of a choice of his sisters than of his own. This can be best observed when Jack is speaking about the moment he walked into the room where Tom is being dressed up and observes his face. According to Jack, Tom stands "with his hands behind his back and his eyes lowered" (McEwan, 1978 p. 78), which according to Jack may mean Tom is necessarily not enjoying the whole process of dressing up in women clothes. One of the other aspects however also is that Tom is significantly shy, and this behavior could correlate with this characteristic of his.

But then on the other hand, Jack is Tom's brother, and he should be able to tell from his facial expressions whether he is enjoying dressing in the skirts or not. Either Jack fails to do that, or Tom is just confused doing something similar for the very first time. Whatever the right answer to this is, it can be said with confidence that both Julie and Sue see that more or less as a game.

According to study by Marion Braizaz, for girls, it is very typical to enjoy different clothing, experimenting and exploring new styles, through which they identify with their social status, class and express femininity in general. (Braizaz, 2019 p. 17) Use of dolls is very common in younger ages, where the girls are engaging in different games and role-plays such as playing in a toy kitchen, having a doll as their child etc. While regularly, children in standard functioning families are offered this possibility of play and are refrained from dressing their potential male siblings, in the book, no such guidelines are imposed by parents. Therefore, it may be said that Julie and predominantly Sue used Tom as a sort of living doll. Tom is not in the age where he would make a solid stance on something he might not like. Social cognitive functions are also not very developed in him and therefore the ground is set for his sisters to play with him in such manner. Without no restrictions or guiding from a parent or other adult authority, the reality of what is morally and socially expected and accepted may be, and in this case is, obscured by what the children find exciting and entertaining at the moment.

The book does not cover span of time that would be long enough for the reader to analyze whether this habit or game persists over time or fades away and socially acceptable style of clothing is restored in Tom. But it may well be predicted that if not for the events outlined at the very end of the book, Tom might stick to wearing women clothing without much hesitation of questioning. He is in the age where setting standards and behavioral patterns should be of utmost interest of the parental figures around such child. At this age, children learn habits, get used to certain social processes and learn what is normal and what is considered to be abnormal in the society they live in. In the case of the Cement Garden household, this micro-society accepts wearing women clothes on men as a normality. That is at least in case of Tom, with Jack, Julie mentions that he would not look good in the dress since his visual outlook is unpleasant. Whether that is merely a stating of a fact or Julie's tactics to make Jack care more about his outlook is a topic which will be explored later on in this paper.

There however is one more conversation in the book, where Jack asks Tom about his attire and the conversation turns intimate. More specifically, Jack asks Tom whether he feels sexually aroused by seeing himself in a mirror, looking like a girl. To this, Tom replies only by stiffening his face and quickly leaving the room. Deducing from publication on discussing sex related matters with children, it appears that while reactions to sudden introduction of a sexually orientated topic may cause a child to avoid the topic or not want to participate in the discussion (Christensen, et al., 2016 p. 7), this specific reaction may suggest that the eventuality of arousal by wearing the women clothes may be the case with Tom. If this would to be confirmed, the

implications of such behavior might be reaching much further than a simple game that might fade away in the span of a few months. It is possible that his whole sexuality and sexual orientation might be in question and changes in these aspects might start to happen. A sense of willingness to accept the role of a female is also present in the story. Not long after his first try at wearing female clothes, Tom is seen again in them, this time even outside of his house. Jack observes him playing with another friend. This friend claims they are role-playing. Tom is supposed to be Julie and his friend is Jack. This acceptance of Tom's role as a female, even though it is just in game, again hints towards the theory that Tom is slowly transitioning towards feminine individuality.

Wearing wigs is another clue of not only he fancies his look in the clothes, but he also seeks the general appearance of a girl. Sue sometimes makes different hairstyles for him, and Tom often carries his wig around the house, even when he does not have it on at the given moment. What is important about this, is that Tom does not see this as an issue or abnormality, what started with curiosity evolved into normality. By absence of any contrary opinions or comments, Tom feels acceptance of his behavior and there is no reason for him to change his clothing preferences. It however must be further discussed whether children in general shall be offered the choice to choose any type of clothes. As Christensen et. al. explain in their study, even though kids might find discussions about sexuality embarrassing or invasive, such discussions are vital for child's correct development from the gender perspective. Topic of gender identity is widely discussed in current society. Be it scientists, members of the gender activist community and also general public. Later in the theoretical overview part of this thesis, the topic of gender assignment in childhood is discussed slightly more.

In conclusion concerning Tom's feminine behavior, by analyzing all the collected data and behavioral occurrences related to the matter throughout the book, it must be stated that Tom decides to become a female character in order to avoid some issues that deeply concern him, namely the ongoing bullying issue. Since his social perception does not allow him to analyze and calculate possible outcomes of his decision, he feels it is a valid solution to start dressing as a female, use wig to alter his appearance and he also takes up roleplay to further fit into the role of a female. He does so even inside the house or with friends who never bullied him, nor they intended to do so. It can therefore be concluded that even though the initial motivation might have not been inherently comfortable to Tom, and he might have viewed it as a necessity, later on in the story, he accepts his new identity as the chosen one. He wears the wig and skirt mainly outdoors, or at least that is the picture given to the reader by Jack's perspective. While

the attendance of school is scarce during the story, it is never mentioned how often Tom wears skirts and wig to school.

A question also arises, whether this solution would be of any help. By implementing logical thinking as well as findings from research focused on US students of age 12 – 18, (U.S. Department of Education, 2019 pp. T-36) this decision might even worsen the current bullying situation as the bullies would only have another, even stronger reason for bullying Tom. By separating himself from the group visually and not conforming to the normative clothing, he might easily find himself in even more problematic situation. This decision and intended solution of the bullying issue is simply a creation of child's mind and if there would be a parental figure present, it would be expected of them to guide the child in the sensible direction and to explain that such decision cannot lead to a resolving end. However, since the parents are dead, there is a justifiable deduction to be made that Tom would not be discouraged from wearing female clothes probably up until the point when the bullying would escalate even more based on his choices. In any case, the story of the book does not relate to this topic any further and therefore and further theorizing on this topic does not find even slightest basis in the book or parts of the storyline. Development of this topic therefore does not need to be discussed further.

The last significant deviation from the norm which has been observed in Tom during the course of the story is his later tendency to act as a baby. This phenomenon is starting to appear towards the end of the story. Suddenly, Tom is becoming increasingly dependent on Julie. He can often be seen crying, moaning and generally shy. He is also losing the ability to rely on himself and forces Julie to take increased care for him. This is however done selectively, and it is crucial for understanding of this behavior that Tom is perfectly capable of managing himself as any other child of his age. Simply because he is allowed to, many interactions he has are done in a baby-like manner. One of the examples can be the moment when Tom is tired and wants to go to bed. He lets Julie carry him in her arms and cover him with his sheets. During these periods of pretending, he does not communicate by any other means than by sounds, such as crying, cooing, and murmuring, and also by usage of very basic words and sentences. Sucking on his thumb is another behavior which developed in the second half of the storyline and is connected to his pretending. Whether this behavior is or is not to be considered as pathological will be discussed later in this paper. The fact that this behavior is not regulated in any manner by any of his older siblings is however notable. It points towards conclusion that even if this behavior



would be problematic and potentially harmful, neither Jack or Julie seems to be willing to stop or regulate it. Jack questions this behavior numerous times but does not conduct any exact steps to tackle it nor does he discuss any further steps with Julie. From her side, this behavior is completely acceptable, and she mostly overlooks it and accepts his behavior as it is. Her being the oldest member of the family in combination with her dominant personality causes that Jack accepts her approach towards any “parental” decision.

### The case of Sue

Sue is one of the two girls living in the household. She is supposed to be 13 years old. In the scope of the story, she seems to be probably the child of the least importance for the overall development of the story, she also does not appear to have as many faulty characteristics as the rest of the children in the family. It is however still vital to observe her behavior and summarize all her possible deviations. This is important not only because, possibly, some abnormal behavior may be found, but also to better understand the context, setting and climate in which the other children were living and demonstrating their behavioral dysfunctions. The reason why this is important can be illustrated just at the beginning of the book, where Jack and Julie play the game of doctor, where they pretend to be scientists who perform inspection on Sue, who is supposed to be an alien. Jack and Julie touch Sue all over her body, focusing on genitals.

“Vell?” We rolled Sue onto her side and then onto her belly. We stroked her back and thighs with our fingernails. We looked into her mouth and between her legs with a torch and found the little flower made of flesh.

“Vot do you think of zis, Herr Doctor?” Julie stroked it with a moistened finger and a small tremor ran along Sue’s bony spine. I watched closely. I moistened my finger and slid it over Julie’s. (McEwan, 1978 pp. 11 - 12)

This game was a source for excitement not only for Sue, but also for Julie and crucially for Jack, who, as he admits as a narrator, longed to examine Julie (McEwan, 1978 p. 11) which clearly shows that the urge to sexually engage with his sister was present even before the passing of any of their parents. This clearly proves that it is possible to argue that not every of the defective behavioral occurrences is initiated by the passing of either of the parents. It however may be the catalyst for such occurrences to further develop and amplify. Whether this

is the case cannot be deducted or proven in every type of abnormal behavior described in this paper. However, when it comes to the general notion that Jack is sexually attracted to Julie in such strong manner, that he is willing to turn his incestual wish into reality, it can be said with confidence that this longing is lodged in him much earlier before the death of his father or mother later in the story. The role of Sue in this matter is significantly important because it can be claimed that Jack realizes his sexual urges through her. He also later admits masturbating while picturing how he watches Julie touch Sue's vagina. And again, even while playing the scientist roleplay game, he pictures Julie instead of Sue. In a sense, Sue in this case stands between him and Julie and if not for her, there would be no other option than for him to be the scientist and for Julie to be the examined alien. At least that is the view of Jack in the story.

Apart from this occurrence however, Sue does not appear to engage in any other activities of sexual nature with her siblings and according to Jack's narration, she does not show any signs of dysfunctional behavior. It needs to be noted that the roleplay game mentioned above ends after the death of the father (McEwan, 1978 p. 29) and Sue no longer wants to engage or even talk on this topic anymore. This leads to Jack losing interest in her since he used her to channel his sexual desires towards Julie through her. He does not stay if he still fantasizes about Sue and Julie during masturbation, but it is plausible that he ceases to do so once Sue becomes inert towards any such activities. Sue from the moment when her dad passes away becomes much more mature. She starts to take care of her bedridden mother and it seems like she finds the responsibility suitable for her. Even after the death of the mother, Sue still does not appear to recede into some lower mental state, and she maintains a high level of responsibility. She is often seen taking care of Tom, cleaning the dishes or in discussion with Julie. It is however not possible to say whether there is not an abnormal behavior that simply was not observed or deemed important to mention by Tom and it would be only a matter of theorizing whether Sue really is "faultless" in this aspect.

It would be logical to assess that some sort of pathological behavior must have occurred in the case of Sue since, according to findings by Bowlby, children who lost their parents in childhood tend to demonstrate signs of misbehavior far more often than those who did not. (Bowlby, 1944 p. 1) What these occurrences might be however remains unknown since it is not mentioned in the book in any way.

The role of Sue in the last two thirds of the book (after the death of both parents) is mainly sustaining and assisting. She helps Julie run the household and keeps an eye on Tom when Jack and Julie are both busy or away. Sue is also often available to discuss any matter with Julie or

Jack and even Tom in some instances. What she offers is often not a resolve but rather an opinion. For the sake of this study however, it is very challenging to define what traumatic effects did the deaths of the parents have on her. From what is known to the reader, it could be concluded that Sue did manage to avoid any traumatic effects and is able to cope with the absence of her parents rather well.

It could be argued that in a certain age, children are able to cope with a higher amount of stress for a shorter period of time and still function normally without any deviations. (Llabre, 2015) But for the abundance of more detailed information, the only statement about Sue that can be made is that she is able to provide mental support as well as to be of help with the everyday running of the household and that is what she is utilized for. She also accepts Derek, Julie's boyfriend, with no hesitation, which hints to her loyalty to Julie in almost every aspect. By focusing on the areas mentioned above, Sue might have avoided the trauma of losing parents to alter her personality and behavior. By being occupied with the activities and interests which are ever-present throughout the story, she simply did not allow any dysfunctionality to develop and therefore it is safe to say that out of the four children, Sue is by far the least affected child, and she processed the trauma with a high degree of success.

### The case of Jack

When observing Jack, it is very important to note that he is the narrator of the story and his view on himself can be largely distorted, he might be suppressing certain aspects of his personality and behavior and some form of deduction must be used in order to perceive his character and coping with the trauma with the best possible accuracy.

While Sue might have been the well-functioning and balanced part of the household, Jack could be introduced as a direct opposite. From the very beginning of the story, Jack is a part of some sort of a conflict. Firstly, it is the conflict between him and his father. There is a sense of competition between them. Even though Jack knows that his father is ill, he puts himself first and always tries to assess the dominant position. A good example of that can be found in the beginning of the book: "Because of his heart attack my father was forbidden this sort of work, but I made sure he took as much weight as I did."

When we bent down and each took hold of a corner of a sack, I felt him delay, waiting for me to take up the strain. But I said, “One two three...” and pulled only when I saw his arm stiffen. If I were to do more then I wanted him to acknowledge it out loud.”. (McEwan, 1978 pp. 13 - 14) Then when the father passes away, Jack experiences only a short period of time when he can feel as a dominant male in the household, even though the dominant figure would be Julie. Later however, Derek appears as a boyfriend of Julie and Jack feels his position being endangered once more. Here though, it would be sensible to analyze Jack’s overall behavior towards Derek as jealousy rather than fight for dominance.

Interestingly, jealousy in siblings is not an unobserved phenomenon and there are scientific articles, such as Milevsky’s take on this issue, which confirm occurrences of such behavior. (Milevsky, 2012) He argues that siblings may feel this jealousy as a result of preceding traumatic or simply negative common experience. He claims: “...hypersensitivity is often a result of negative core beliefs about self...” and further explains that such core beliefs might be created by the sibling constantly expressing negative opinions about the other one. Then, the jealous sibling can be irritated by the presence of someone, whom his brother/sister considers to be better or suitable.

Even though regularly, this feeling does not contain the romantic part, in the case of Julie and Jack it very much does. The reason for the hypersensitivity as described above is also present in form of Julie’s persistent criticism of Jack’s appearance, e.g.: “Julie’s eyes roved over my face. “You won’t make a pretty girl like Tom with horrible spots like those.” (McEwan, 1978 p. 79). Even though her criticism might have been constructive and meant to make Jack more acceptable for her, he interprets it as an attack against him with the intention to make him subordinate in comparison to Derek, who is (in Jack’s point of view) the better choice as a boyfriend for Julie. This jealousy and hypersensitivity are direct reason for Jack to be reserved and behave in a hostile manner every time Derek is in the vicinity or even mentioned. As Milevsky explains, the jealousy between siblings is natural, however in this case, the cause for it may definitely be considered abnormal. It is the sexual desire that makes Jack jealous.

Jack also describes numerous occasions of masturbation throughout the story. Many times, he uses any spare minute to masturbate if the desire comes. The first occasion of masturbation which he describes is also the time he ejaculates for the first time. This time, he is in the cellar but on other occasion, he describes masturbating in bathroom or in his room. This suggests that he does not have specific setting or place where he would feel this urge and this act is motivated purely by his desire to do so. What however is recurring is the image he pictures while

masturbating. He pictures Julie reaching with her hand between the legs of Sue. Jack admits this is a repetitive imagination and it can be considered the culmination of his sexual desires for most of the story, apart from the ending.

While masturbation is still very stigmatized and undiscussed topic, it is by scientific consensus that this activity is not harmful or to be considered a behavioral defect. On the contrary, studies suggest that masturbation does not worsen relationship towards sexual intercourse (Smith, 1996 p. 508), improves quality of semen and sperm (in primates) (Marson, 1989 p. 48) and can be considered as common in majority of males and females (Robbins, 2011 p. 1090). Unlike other studies on similar topics (Sistani, et al., 2014) or (Khadoume, 2017), this study will not include masturbation as a problematic behavior simply because there is no merit on which this activity could be classified as such. The imagination motivating Jack during the act however can be seen as problematic but will be discussed in unrelated terms.

An issue that, on the other hand is not something discussed all that much in other studies is Jack's negative stance towards hygiene. Namely bathing or showering. Jack even describes himself losing interest in hygiene: "At some point during the same period my spots were so thoroughly established across my face that I abandoned all the rituals of personal hygiene. I no longer washed my face or hair or cut my nails or took baths. I gave up brushing my teeth,..." (McEwan, 1978 p. 21), this changes only after it is pointed out to him by Sue that he does not shower, clean his teeth etc. Only then he takes bath and tries to get rid of the supposed smell, but later on again gives up on doing so. Meanwhile connections between other behavioral problems and its origins may be hard to establish, here, it is quite accurate to state that abundance of parental guidance lead to loss of some hygiene habits in Jack. It is not mentioned in the book how other members of the household follow their hygiene habits, but from the descriptions and observations made by Jack, there is no implication that any of his siblings would be countering similar problem to his. It can therefore be stated that this problem is solely his and is also connected to his age. In comparison with over 180 000 students between 12 – 15 years old from different countries of all regions of the world (12 countries from Africa, 1 from Europe, 22 from America, 18 from the eastern Mediterranean, 5 from Southeast Asia), Jack belongs to small group of teenagers whose hygiene is, according to this Chinese study, on critical level. Only 9% of respondents do not wash their hands with soap and 8.6% are claiming not to brush their teeth regularly and less than once per day. (Han, 2020 p. 6) It is safe to say that Jack belongs to these critical groups for at least some part of the storyline.

As mentioned above, while with other abnormalities in behavior it may be difficult to put blame on a single person or entity, here it is possible to claim that absence of parents or parental figure led to loss of certain hygiene habits. This can quite possibly be a traumatic effect of losing parents, who are supposed to be source of guidance in this matter and since there was not any guidance even prior the death of his mother, Jack's habits in hygiene deteriorated quickly with sudden absence of father and also by absence of mother in her parental role, even though she was still alive. He suddenly does not feel the need to follow these habits. The fact that it is a parent's duty to teach and police their children regarding their hygiene is supported by Finnish study in which parents agree by majority that it is prevalent responsibility of parents/family to teach children such habits as proper dressing, oral health and self-care. (Sormunen, et al., 2012 p. 248) This pathological behavior can therefore be easily traced to the loss of parents and is one of the most direct results of trauma in the book.

The last and most notable dysfunctional behavior is incestual tendency and relationship with his sister Julie. This is the topic around which the theme of the book revolves for majority of the storyline. Jack is attracted to Julie in sexual way but during the story, the reader might get the notion that Jack is also attracted to her romantically, or even in love with her. However, there are almost no occurrences in which Jack admits this through his narrations. The only description of an exact and intense feeling does not come until first sexual interaction with his sister: "... I felt weightless, tumbling through space with no sense of up or down. As I closed my lips around Julie's nipple...". (McEwan, 1978 p. 135) It is probably also the first sexual experience for Jack, and it therefore is hard to establish whether this feeling is truly connected to the achievement of enjoying Julie's body or simply the excitement of having this kind of experience. This encounter ends up in sexual intercourse and Jack fulfills his long-dreamt fantasy. In the very beginning of the book, he wishes to "examine" Julie as a part of roleplaying game, in the end, he gets to experience her body even more than he thought he will.

One notable observation is that Jack does not express any direct romantic or sexual feelings towards Julie, not via narration nor through any dialogue with her or his siblings. There is however ever-present longing for attention and also dominance. There are moments where he fights with Julie and enjoys the moments when he grabs her and has the power over her. As discussed above, there is also the jealousy when Julie introduces Derek. In the end, Jack does not need to put any effort into seducing Julie or getting her to have sex with him. She simply drags him to her bed at one moment, without any previous foreplay or suggestions from Jack. From this and other moments further described in the next chapter on Julie, it is clear that it was

her who was in the control of the important events in the household and regarding the relationship between her and her brother.

### The case of Julie

If there would be a need to answer the question who the main character of *The Cement Garden* is, it would be Julie. It might seem conflicting with the fact that Jack is the narrator and the whole story revolves around his point of view, but even when that is true, Julie is the main point of interest for the majority of his narration. Or it at least feels that way. Jack goes through evolutionary process of his own, but almost every of his actions is somehow influenced by Julie and it is her who organizes the running of the household. Her personality overshadows the one of Jack.

There are also some problematic behavioral occurrences connected to the traumatic events of the story that need to be discussed. The most critical is the already mentioned incest, there are however other issues. Namely the loss of interest in cleaning the household, partial acceptance of maternal role and misguided upbringing of the two youngest siblings.

The occurrence of incest has already been described in this paper in the chapter *The case of Jack*, it is however still vital to briefly revisit this event from the Julie's perspective. While Jack is for a long time longing to experience any form of sexual activity with Julie, she does not seem as eager as he is. This might be again the issue of the distorted view of the narrator who is not able to correctly interpret her behavior accurately. In this case however, it seems that Julie is simply not interested in her brother to the point where she would actively pursue any sort of direct interaction. Instead, there are numerous acts of provocation, intended or otherwise. The reader can observe Julie's ability to manipulate with other people around her by being authoritative and adamant. There are numerous occurrences proving this throughout the story when Julie orders Tom or Sue to go sleep, clean the kitchen etc. She also is in position where Sue nor Jack are able stop her from doing it. Prior the sexual intercourse in the end of the story, there is no occurrence of such behavior or even an attempt to be intimate with her brother. If the actual incest was a matter of impulsive behavior will be discussed later in the theoretical chapter on incest.

Even though Julie seems to be the most mentally strong and reliable person, it is possible she is the most traumatized person. While the death of both parents influenced every member of the family in some way, it was Julie who suddenly realized that she must take on the role of mother and while it might seem logical that Jack would then act as a father, he did not successfully accept that role. It is entirely possible that Julie felt alone and isolated therefore she started looking for a validation but also confirmation of her maternal role.

The first stage of such behavior is giving tasks and assignments around the house regarding taking out trash and cleaning dishes. Furthermore, she takes on raising Tom with small to no success at first. Tom recedes into the aforementioned (see The case of Tom) roleplay of a baby but when Julie accepts this roleplay, they are able to cooperate with each other and Julie in the end becomes something of a mother-like figure. Sue is naturally obeying Julie since for her, it seems to be the right thing to do. As discussed above, Sue does not show any signs of deviation and does not see any issue with obeying Julie and accepting her as her mother. Note that this statement should not be understood explicitly. In no way does Sue think that Julie is an equal replacement for a mother, nor she finds her comparable to their late mother. However, in a time of need for such figure, Sue recedes to accepting her as the only viable option. She sees some of the attributes of their mother and finds a partial relief in having at least some support in Julie. With Jack however, she tries to establish a similar superior connection on a mother-son level but fails as Jack aims for an equal role. He expresses this when their mother dies, and Julie takes over the “ruling of the household” without allowing Jack to take part: “Where have you been?” she said, but I did not understand her.

“I want to see,” I said. Julie shook her head. “We’re both in charge,” I said as I circled the kitchen table, “she told me.

“She’s dead,” Julie said, “Sit down. Don’t you understand yet? She’s dead.” I sat down. (McEwan, 1978 p. 53)

While here, Jack fails to assert the dominant or equal position, later on, Julie is unable to fully command him and her attempts end in fights both verbal but also physical – but these are more of a playful nature than driven by anger, still though, dominance is contested through such occurrences. In the end, Julie understands that she is unable to control Jack and rather takes him as an equal partner, the thought of sexual advance must appear in her thoughts at some point at that time. The closeness with which Julie and Jack enter the story is only strengthened during the course of the storyline and it is safe to say that Julie in the end needs the unity with Jack in



order to have a stable position in the household. The trauma of losing parents demonstrates itself through her search for affirmation and place in the family. Suddenly, after the death of her mother, there is a place to be filled and Julie takes up the challenge.

It might be tempting to suggest here that Julie is following footsteps of her mother and asserts her role. Is her mother a role model to her based on which she starts fulfilling her duties as a “mother”? It would seem logical, yet after inspecting some studies and articles (Perez-Brena, et al., 2014), (Biddle, et al., 1980), (Pickhardt, 2010) on parental influence on adolescents, it is probably not the case. From what it can be discovered on inspiration by parents and idolizing them, this happens mostly during the mid-childhood (age 8-9), during adolescence however (ages 9-13), parents become the example of what the adolescents do not want to be. (Pickhardt, 2010), peers suddenly become the more relevant source of preferences (Biddle, et al., 1980 p. 1071). Biddle et al. makes a distinction between preferences and norms. The latter of these seems to be internalized earlier on during childhood, and other norms can be still internalized during adolescence, however preferences (which are the choices of behavioral patterns changeable with time) are internalized during adolescence mostly from their peers. (Perez-Brena, et al., 2014 p. 6)

In the context of *The Cement Garden*, Julie (nor Jack for that matter) does not have any friends who would be mentioned and also there are no parents to contrast her choices of behavior, preferences or norms. All that is left is a memory. Even though there are definitely norms embedded in her, for example her care for younger siblings and sense of fairness in dividing the pocket money, she seems to miss any inspiration or reflection from her peers and in this isolated environment, she creates her own values, norms and preferences, mostly based on impulsive behavior. Similar can be said for Jack, who also does not seem to be influenced by anyone and does not even attempt to take up the role of father. He does not directly assert any authority as long as his own comfort is not in jeopardy. It can be concluded that even when the children are in adolescence, the presence of parents forms an important role of contrasting. While adolescents might see peers as more relevant source of behavioral inspiration, it is the parents who provide day-to-day contrast, and even unintentionally embed norms into their children. Absence of any of the parent in the household results in an autonomous development of Jack and Julie based solely on their own perceptions.

## Pathological behavior in theory

### Pretending

This behavior is listed as a problematic one because it is a kind of behavior that may not be expected and does not fall in line with cognitive development of children in age of around six years. While children of this age are expected to not act baby-like and rather show signs of upward development, it is a phenomenon commonly appearing in children between 4 – 7 years of age. (Weisberg, 2015 p. 250) A study by Deena S. Weisberg also suggests not only the pretending games are normal in children, but such activities can also be highly beneficial for their cognitive development, empathy, social and relationship skills and language skills are also developed during such activities.

Another article further elaborates on this topic: “In the same way, when a child faces a real-life situation, he or she can use the same process of simulation to predict how another person may react. The difference is that when children are pretending, they act out a role and in real life they're simply predicting how another person might react. This theory doesn't require children to understand others' mental states per se. Rather, it simply requires them to put themselves in someone else's shoes and imagine how they themselves will react.” (Azar, 2002)

From these findings, it can be claimed that Tom's child-like behavior was part of a role-play game, and it cannot be considered as harmful. Tom is additionally not totally immersed in the game and is able to recognize the difference between reality and pretending. This is also supported by Weisberg (Weisberg, 2015 p. 251) as part of the theory that children do not confuse reality and pretending or games. Some moderation is however clearly needed and since Tom's mother is not alive when this form of pretending starts, it is all up to Julie to moderate this behavior and ensure that Tom benefits from it.

### Transsexuality in children

Transsexuality is a mental occurrence appearing both in children and adults. It is mainly demonstrated by the will or desire to belong to the opposite sex to the one they were assigned

at birth and simultaneously refusing the attributes of their current sex. Games, clothing, and overall behavior in children tends to be typical of the chosen gender. (Korte, et al., 2008 p. 834) What is necessary for people to be diagnosed with such state is the will to be the opposite gender, if such will is not demonstrated, it is possible that transsexuality might not be the case of the child in question.

For purposes of this paper, it can be argued that Tom does not experience transsexuality since he does not express the desire to be a woman, nor he prefers female toys and activities. The only visible and present disorderly habit is cross-dressing (wearing clothes supposed for the opposite gender) and occasional roleplaying. A fair point can be made that Tom is rather showing signs of dual-role transvestism. As Coleman suggests in his paper, people with this diagnosis dress as the opposite gender, accept their role of a female but do so temporarily. (Coleman, 2012 p. 176) Motivation for this behavior might be psychological but often there are observed cases of sociological motivation. The latter is the case of Tom who chooses to dress as a girl to lose the attention of bullies.

A space for further discussion opens, whether the loss of parents might have triggered Tom's search for identity. When losing the role of son suddenly, Tom may feel in an empty space where he can be freer with choice of what and who he wants to be. Again, with little to no guidance, he deems it alright to cross-dress and accept the appearance of a female.

## Sibling incest

This topic is probably one of the most interesting pieces of this paper. This can be for numerous reasons. A) The topic is concerning a taboo which is still left hardly undiscussed in current society, B) How exactly does the sex between siblings influence them? C) Is it truly to be considered pathological behavior? And D) Is there a connection to the traumatic events of the story?

Because of a still very reserved view towards the topic of incest, it is hard to reach scientific conclusion. But based on the premise it is a taboo, a question must be asked why. Previously, taboos related to sexual intercourse were e.g. pre-marital sex or homosexual intercourse. Such topics are now discussed freely and considered as an acceptable activity in the general Western society.

Sexual intercourse between siblings is from technical point of view nothing more than sexual intercourse between two people who, if consenting to it, should not face any risks of harm. The only obvious risk is creation of a child with high possibility of a genetic disorder. However, as it turns out, sexual activities between siblings are hardly ever connected to the intent of reproduction. One of the few studies on incest among children also reports that while around a third of female respondents and 20% of male respondents found the sexual intercourse with their siblings unpleasant, the rest deems it to be insignificant or of positive effect. (Finkelhor, 1980 p. 184) Furthermore, females who had sexual experience with their sibling during childhood demonstrate higher sexual activity during adulthood than those who do not have any such experience. The study concludes there are no findings proving sibling incest is harmful. It must be noted on the other hand, that there are often violent motives included in such sexual activities. The ratio of forced and natural sibling incest is measurable only with limited reliability.

As to how the siblings really are influenced by having sexual intercourse, there is no other way than to turn to pure theorizing. That is because the scene of the only sibling sexual intercourse between Jack and Julie comes only at the very end of the book. No further look into the future is available. Finkelhor's study suggests there might be some relation to higher sexual self-esteem of women who participated in incestual sexual activities. (Finkelhor, 1980 p. 186) These findings are however suggestive rather than conclusive.

It is very hard to make any conclusions from Finkelhor's or any other study, since even through anonymous questionnaires, only very limited number of such incidents is reported. Sibling incest is the least reported form of incest. (Barry, 1984 p. 6)

If there would be prediction to be made based on some research data, it would be that Julie might have feel more confident about her body and sexual ability. It is predictable that since Julie nor Jack are of age, they would be separated after the police comes into the house at the very end of the book. Any further sexual activity between them therefore could not take place anymore.

In relation to The Cement Garden events, however being the most controversial and graphic, from the scientific point of view, the incest between the siblings in this case does not display any signs of forced sexual intercourse or outside pressure. It is therefore possible to view this behavior as acceptable in this case.

## Conclusion

From what could be learned in this study, it appears that children do not react to traumatic events in strict patterns, but their personality and age heavily influence how they react and adapt. Sue and Jack are perfect example for this. While Sue stays more or less intact from the behavioral and personality point of view, Jack demonstrates many different changes in his behavior and habits. It appears that while after a traumatic event children might need time to bounce back into regular life, once this happens, they are able to function independently based on their own principles and norms. Whether these norms are inherited from their late parents or their peers or whether they find new ways of conduct after the traumatic events again depends on their age and characteristics. Observation can be made though, that children of this book receded into behavior which was comfortable to them, regardless of previously obtained social and behavioral norms. The most important and crucial variable in this process is guidance, if the guidance is absent or misaimed, children can easily recede to pathological behavior.

One interesting finding is connected to one of the main themes of the book – incest. While strongly tabooed, incest appears to be acceptable if the social perception of the act is omitted. No harmful behavior was observed in the depicted incestual behavior and some studies hint that the idea of incest might not be harmful, however the way in which many instances of incest occur can be harmful and dangerous to the inferior participant.

Other important finding may be the importance of role-play for child's cognitive and perceptive development. During the research, I discovered that Tom's acting like a baby while he is 6 years old is in the end beneficial to his development. Through role-play he is able to learn how to react to certain emotional states, distinguish what behavior may be annoying, when it is suitable to use empathy and so on. While some parents might direct their children to not act silly and to act appropriately to their age, it is crucial to detect whether their behavior is not an instance of roleplay, which can be beneficial and also enjoyable for children.

## Resumé

Tato studie primárně odhaluje významnost individuality pro vnímání a zpracovávání traumatických událostí. Díky zkoumání každého ze čtyř dětí studie odhaluje, jak různě každé z dětí demonstruje problematické chování v určité míře. Toto chování také do jisté míry ovlivňuje jejich rozhodování a chod domácnosti v které žijí. Dále tato studie také odhaluje, že absence rodičů či osoby v roli rodiče je jedním z rozhodujících faktorů pro vývoj jedince v dětství. Realističnost chování jednotlivých postav příběhu nebyla ověřována. Postupným porovnáváním jejich chování a existujících poruch a patologických jevů však tato studie dokazuje, že podobné scénáře vlivu traumatických událostí na vývoj dítěte jsou do značné míry reálné.

U jednotlivých dětí byly odhaleny různé negativní jevy v chování a rozhodování a postupně byla prokazována jejich souvislost s traumatickou událostí úmrtí obou rodičů. V každém případě byla prokázána alespoň částečná souvislost s touto událostí a vznikem daného patologického chování. Objevily se však i případy, kdy chování, které bylo z úvodu považováno za patologické, se ukázalo být neškodné a přijatelné. Konkrétně lze mluvit například o incestním vztahu mezi nejstaršími sourozenci (Julie a Jack).

V tomto případě výzkum podpořený vědeckou studií prokázal, že byt' je incest stále považován za tabu a společensky nepřijatelný jev, neexistuje v případě těchto dvou postav po psychologické stránce žádný patologický moment, na základě, něhož by bylo možné rozhodnout o závadnosti takového chování. Tato studie zároveň upozorňuje na velmi rozdílnou realitu incestu, kdy je takovéto chování často doprovázeno psychickým či fyzickým nátlakem a z těchto důvodů může být incest považován za závadný. To samé však lze říci i o sexu obecně. U incestu je však incidence násilného chování vyšší.

Tato studie také dále odhaluje druhotné následky absence rodičů, kdy děti nezvládají vedení domácnosti a projevuje se u nich zaostalost v hygienických návycích jak po stránce osobní hygieny, tak i udržování hygienických podmínek v rámci domácnosti. Prokázalo se tedy, že nejen že traumatická událost může mít přímý vliv na utváření osobnosti dítěte a na jeho psychický stav, ale také taková událost má z dlouhodobějšího hlediska za následek změny v utváření okolí okolo osob přímo ovlivněných takovou událostí.

Výsledkem studie je tak zejména poznatek, že traumatické události v okolí dítěte jej mohou velmi významně poznamenat na vývoji psychického stavu, osobnosti, hodnot a návyků. Po

pedagogické stránce je jedním z důležitých poznatků nutnost individuálního přístupu. Dále také tato studie ukazuje důležitost věnovat se psychickému stavu dětí a nutnost usměrňovat jejich vývoj. To platí i po stránce rodičovské stránce, kdy rodič nepopíratelně nese zodpovědnost za vývoj dítěte po všech stránkách. Na základě poznatků této studie lze říci, že prostředí, v kterém dítě vyrůstá má klíčový vliv na jeho vývoj.

## Final note

It must be said that the conclusions of this work are based on my perception of the characters and their activities and behavior may be possibly viewed in very different way by another reader.



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