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**Bakalářská práce**

**Ian McEwan's Fictional Portrayals of Female Heroines**

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## **Abstract**

The subject of the bachelor thesis is the work of contemporary British writer Ian McEwan, who entered the literary consciousness of readers as an author evaluating social conventions and breaking down social taboos of the second half of the 20th century. The work begins with a characterization of the times and social climate of the so-called Cold War and the following decades in Great Britain. The aim of the thesis will be to compare Ian McEwan's early and contemporary work with regard to issues of partnership and marital relations in the social context of that period. The literary analysis of selected novels by Ian McEwan will focus on the characterization of female protagonists, their emotional life and inner perspective against the background of the main themes and motifs of McEwan's seminal works.

**Key words:** Ian McEwan, Great Britain, the Cold War, female heroines

## **Anotace**

Předmětem zkoumání bakalářské práce je dílo současného britského spisovatele Iana McEwana, který vstoupil do literárního povědomí čtenářů jako autor hodnotící společenské konvence a bořící společenská tabu druhé poloviny 20. století. Práce se v úvodu soustředí na charakteristiku doby a společenského klimatu období tzv. Studené války a následujících dekád ve Velké Británii. Cílem práce bude porovnání rané a současné tvorby Iana McEwana s ohledem na problematiku partnerských a manželských vztahů ve společenském kontextu uvedeného období. Literární analýza vybraných románů Iana McEwana se zaměří na charakteristiku ženských hrdinek, jejich citový život a vnitřní perspektivu na pozadí hlavních témat a motivů McEwanových stěžejních děl.

**Klíčová slova:** Ian McEwan, Velká Británie, Studená válka, ženské hrdinky

## **Poděkování**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Ian McEwan is one of Britain's current prominent writers, with works influenced by social changes and political events. Considered the enfant terrible of British literature, McEwan has not been hesitant to address the controversial themes that have brought him renown and continue to strongly influence the contemporary British literary scene.

This thesis focuses first on the Cold War and later on the portrayal of female characters in McEwan's works. The aim of the thesis is to analyze and compare how the author portrays female characters and how he deals with themes such as partnership, relationships, and social stereotypes. The thesis heavily focuses on the social context in which the pieces are set.

The first chapter will introduce the author, Ian McEwan, and analyze his relationship to the Cold War. The characteristics of the Cold War will follow. The next chapter will present a description of British society and the social climate during the Cold War. The main events concerning Great Britain with regard to the Cold War are the content of the following chapter, including the post-war period. The last part of the thesis will focus on the analysis of female characters in the three works created in different times and writing styles: *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), *On Chesil Beach* (2007), and *Sweet Tooth* (2012). Each of these works shows a different perspective of Ian McEwan describing and perceiving female heroines either in the context of the time in which he created the heroines or the times in which he set them. The thesis will comment on how McEwan tries to portray the complex and conflicted inner world of female heroines.

## 2 IAN MCEWAN

Ian McEwan is a British novelist and short-story writer who is noted for his literary works that investigate the complexity of modern society and the human mind, with a writing style enhancing the horror of dark humor combined with perverse themes.<sup>1</sup> McEwan, born in Aldershot, England, in 1948, started his writing career as a short story writer in the 1960s. In the 1970s, he shifted his focus to writing novels. At the age of 28, the author released his first collection of short stories, which was named "First Love, Last Rites (1975)."<sup>2</sup> From this start, *he was seen as a promising new talent* and received the Somerset Maugham Award in 1975.<sup>3</sup> But only his next early works, such as "The Cement Garden" (1978) and "The Comfort of Strangers" (1981), which were shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1981<sup>4</sup>, established him as a significant voice in the British literary scene. These works are noted for their bizarre and frequently unpleasant topics, and they established him not only as a prominent author but also, according to Lynn Wells, as the best writer of contemporary fiction in English in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the course of his career, McEwan has been honored with several awards for the work that he has produced, including being awarded the Man Booker Prize in 1998 for his novel "Amsterdam", published in the same year. In 1984, McEwan was even made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.<sup>6</sup> To this day, he is still one of around 600 Fellows, which include *the very best novelists, short-story writers, poets, playwrights...at work today.*<sup>7</sup>

The attention to psychological detail that McEwan puts into his writing is one of the qualities of his work that stands out the most. In his works of fiction, his characters frequently have serious flaws and are going through their own personal battles with their own inner demons. His acts and the reasons behind them are extensively examined. In

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<sup>1</sup>Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Ian McEwan*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023 [online].

Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ian-McEwan>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>ELLAM, Julie. *Ian McEwan's Atonement*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009. (p. 1).

<sup>4</sup>MALCOLM, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002. (p. 3).

<sup>5</sup>WELLS, Lynn. *Ian McEwan*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009. (p. 11).

<sup>6</sup>MALCOLM, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002. (p. 3).

<sup>7</sup>Available from: Fellows - Royal Society of Literature ([rsliterature.org](http://rsliterature.org))

works such as "Atonement" (2001) and "Enduring Love" (1997), he explores the psychological impact of traumatic experiences and the ways in which individuals deal with challenging situations. His works are noted for their psychological depth and finely developed characters, as well as for the complicated topics that he delves into, including love, relationships, and the heaviness of human existence. In the novel "Atonement," his most successful novel<sup>8</sup>, a little girl named Briony makes a malicious accusation against the person who is romantically involved with her older sister.<sup>9</sup> The psychological suspense thriller "Enduring Love" investigates the potentially ruinous effects of an unhealthy obsession.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to his investigation of the human mind, Ian McEwan is wellknown for his depiction of contemporary society and its ethical and moral dilemmas. For instance, in his work "Saturday" (2005), the author explores the effects of the War on Terror on a single day in the life of a neurosurgeon, Henry Perowne, from the moment he awakes euphorically to the next dawn, when he is chastened by all the things that happened the previous day – a burning plane streak across the skyline and a car accident. Set in February 2003, the story looks to the shadow of the attacks of 11.9.2001 and takes place during a huge anti-war demonstration massing in the streets of London.<sup>11</sup>

Besides his work as a novelist, McEwan has also contributed to the film and television industries by writing scripts. His movie script "The Ploughman's Lunch" (1983), awarded the Evening Standard Award for the best screenplay of 1983,<sup>12</sup> "The Good Son" (1993), and "The Imitation Game" (1982), a biographical drama about the life of computer genius Alan Turing, are some of the works that he has written for the screen.

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<sup>8</sup>SHAH, Bruno M. The sin of Ian McEwan's fictive Atonement: Reading his later novels. *New blackfriars*, 2009, 90.1025: 38-49.

<sup>9</sup>The novel, which was first released in 2001, was met with enormous acclaim, and it was then adapted into a film that was internationally successful.

<sup>10</sup>The novel was first released in 1997 and was met with favorable reviews when it was subsequently converted into a movie in the year 2004.

<sup>11</sup>ROOT, C. A Melodiousness at Odds with Pessimism: Ian McEwan's Saturday. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 2011. (p. 1).

<sup>12</sup>MALCOLM, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002. (p. 3).



Ian McEwan is the recipient of numerous accolades and holds a high level of respect in the literary world. His works have made a significant contribution to the world of literature. He has produced an amount of work that, as a result of his investigation of the human mind and the complexity of contemporary life, is not only thought-provoking but also profoundly relevant. His distinctive combination of in-depth psychological analysis and fascinating narrative has won him a devoted following among readers as well as among literary critics.

### 3 IAN MCEWAN AND COLD WAR AS A RECURRENT THEME

The Cold War is a recurring motif in Ian McEwan's works, and it can be seen in a number of his books as well as in short pieces. The author's work follows the story of various characters who are caught up in the political and emotional turbulence of the time, not scared to look into topics such as love, loss, and the emotional toll that is taken by political struggle. The reason is that McEwan himself was born into a British military family, and the early years of his childhood were spent on British military bases in England, Singapore, or Lybia, where McEwan claims to have had his first sense of the force of history and politics.<sup>13</sup> *The military family background and the army life exerted influence on Ian McEwan, especially on his writing style. His works are mostly related to history and war and have overtones of politics and history.*<sup>14</sup> The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War inspired Ian McEwan to write novels to reveal the violence and evil in society. *Creating characters to disclose the real society becomes McEwan's choice.*<sup>15</sup>

McEwan's novel, a Cold War spy thriller<sup>16</sup>, "The Innocent" (1990), which takes place in Berlin during the latter half of the 1950s and the early 1960s and tells the story of an Englishman, a young employee of the Royal Mail, who is supposed to participate in an ambitious plan by the CIA and the British secret service (SIS), better known as MI6. But young Leonard doesn't just live for his job, Berlin also marks his entry into adulthood and his first experience of love.<sup>17</sup> Besides the Cold War, the story touches on topics such as political treason, espionage, and the personal repercussions of living during a period of political unrest. But McEwan avoids, according to David Malcolm, moralizing the political difficulties – *'the cold war is rarely seen in the novel as a clear-cut crusade*

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<sup>13</sup>FU, Meiling. Textuality of History and Historicity of Text. *New Historical Analysis of Ian McEwan's Black Dogs*. (p. 100).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>WELLS, Lynn. *Ian McEwan*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009. (p. 56).

<sup>17</sup>MCEWAN, Ian. *The innocent: or the special relationship*. London: Picador, 1990. ISBN 0330296345.

*against evil, but rather as an enormously complicated boys' game.*'<sup>18</sup> McEwan takes care not to tell the reader what is right or wrong.

The Cold War is also included as a background in other novels such as in "Black Dogs"(1992), a story about *a thrilling experience, encountering two giant black dogs, of a new-married couple, Bernard and June, on their honeymoon after the end of the Second World War.*<sup>19</sup> "Black Dogs" is, according to Edward P. McBride, a novel addressing the depths of hatred and spite to which the world often descends.<sup>20</sup>

The spy novel "Sweet Tooth (2012)", written in the form of a memoir<sup>21</sup>, has a remarkable psychological portrayal of the female protagonist and her complicated story set against the background of the Cold War, the presence of which is an underlying theme throughout the story. "Sweet Tooth" is a historically accurate novel *recounting the journey of a young woman from a university student at Cambridge to an operative agent working for the British Security Service, MI5.*<sup>22</sup>

*Literary creation becomes Ian McEwan's weapon to reconsider history and criticize reality.*<sup>23</sup> With his political references, McEwan is not trying to judge ideals but to warn against blindness of any kind, and to *provide an alarm bell for people nowadays and warn against being wildly optimistic.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>MALCOLM, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002. (p. 17).

<sup>19</sup>FU, Meiling. *Textuality of History and Historicity of Text: New Historical Analysis of Ian McEwan's Black Dogs*. (p. 98).

<sup>20</sup>The Crimson. *Savage, Insightful 'Black Dogs' Piin These Characters*. 1993 [online]. Available from: <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1993/3/18/savage-insightful-black-dogs-piin-these/>

<sup>21</sup>HOTTI, Katja. *"Life was a fiction anyway": Metafiction and Ian McEwan's Sweet Tooth*, 2015. Master's Thesis. (p. 28).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. (p. 1).

<sup>23</sup>FU, Meiling. *Textuality of History and Historicity of Text: New Historical Analysis of Ian McEwan's Black Dogs*. (p. 100).

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. (p. 100).

## 4 COLD WAR

The Cold War was a confrontation between capitalism, represented by the United States of America and its allies, and socialism, represented by the Soviet Union and its satellites, that peaked in the years between 1945 and 1989.<sup>25</sup> It is possible to trace the beginnings of the Cold War back to the end of World War II, when the victorious allies (the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain) were tasked with the responsibility of rebuilding Europe and establishing a new world order. The United States and the Soviet Union had been allies against Nazi Germany during World War II., but the alliance ended with the war and tensions became apparent. (In July 1945, during the Potsdam Conference, where the joint occupation of Germany was negotiated.)<sup>26</sup> Other sources state that the Cold War began on March 5, 1946, when the term “Iron Curtain” was first used by Winston Churchill in Fulton, USA. Even before Churchill's speech at Fulton, on February 22, 1946, addressed United States Ambassador to Moscow, George F. Kennan, with a critical analysis of Soviet policy. *In a lengthy dispatch of 8,000 words, he stressed that the permanent goal of the world communist movement remained the final defeat of the capitalist system.*<sup>27</sup> But the truth remains that the mutual perception of the superpowers as a threat had already developed during the Second World War.<sup>28</sup> And the consequences of the Cold War can still be felt today, for example, in the doctrinaire belief in the free market or in a top-down approach to social ills.<sup>29</sup>

The prevailing ideology in the United States emphasized markets, mobility, changeability, and thought that all societies felt the same, but communism was created from the beginning as the opposite of the capitalist ideology that the United States represented - an alternative future that everyone could build for themselves.<sup>30</sup> The Soviet ideology made the state a machine working for the benefit of the people, while the

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<sup>25</sup>WESTAD, Odd Arne. *The Cold War: a world history*. Hachette UK, 2017. (p. 1).

<sup>26</sup>JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM. *The Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>

<sup>27</sup>NÁLEVKA, Vladimír. *Horké krize studené války*. Vyšehrad, 2010. (p. 13).

<sup>28</sup>Josef FUČÍK, *Stín jaderné války nad Evropou* (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 2010) (p. 21).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. (p. 2).

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. (p. 2).

Americans had an aversion to centralized state power. And so there was a very intense rivalry between the superpowers.<sup>31</sup>

During the Cold War, soldiers of the Soviet Union and the United States did not do battle directly. The War was defined by the two superpowers continually antagonizing each other *through political maneuvering, military coalitions, espionage, propaganda, arms buildups, economic aid, and proxy wars.*<sup>32</sup> Not only that, besides intercontinental ballistic missiles and spy satellites, nuclear weapons were an omnipresent danger hanging in the air as two Superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, *possessed enough nuclear weapons to threaten the globe with total annihilation.*<sup>33</sup> Technology was a main reason for the durability of the Cold War.<sup>34</sup>

During the early stages of the Cold War, two irreconcilable military-political groupings emerged: NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, is a military alliance that was established in 1949 by the United States of America together with its twelve founding members. Over time, 18 more countries have joined the membership to the present day.<sup>35</sup> *The North Atlantic Treaty was the clear expression of the West's search for military security following the start of the Cold War.*<sup>36</sup> *NATO's purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means.*<sup>37</sup> The treaty's goal was to promote democratic values, build trust, and prevent conflict in the long run. In 1955, the Soviet Union established the Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, better known as the Warsaw Pact. Similarly to NATO, the Warsaw Pact was a military-political alliance, but united Eastern Europe and 8 nations.<sup>38</sup> *The treaty provided for a unified*

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid. (p. 2).

<sup>32</sup>JOHN, F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM. *The Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>

<sup>33</sup>WESTAD, Odd Arne. *The Cold War: a world history*. Hachette UK, 2017. (p. 6).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid. (p. 5).

<sup>35</sup>NATO. *NATO - Homepage* [online]. Available from: <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>

<sup>36</sup>MILLOY, John C. *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1948-1957: Community or Alliance?*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2006.

<sup>37</sup>NATO. *NATO - Homepage* [online]. Available from: <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>

<sup>38</sup>Encyclopædia Britannica. *Warsaw Pact* [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Pact>.

*military command and for the maintenance of Soviet military units on the territories of the other participating states.*<sup>39</sup> The Warsaw Pact started a more systematic plan to strengthen the Soviet hold over its satellites and also served as a way to the bargaining position of the Soviet Union in international diplomacy.<sup>40</sup>

During the entirety of the Cold War, these two sides participated in a number of proxy wars in which they supported opposing sides in various conflicts that were taking place across the world. In Europe, the line between East and West remained frozen during the next decades, but conflict spread to Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>41</sup>

The Chinese Civil War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Cuban Revolution are examples of some of the most important conflicts that took place during the Cold War.

In the Chinese Civil War, *one of the bloodiest conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*<sup>42</sup>, which was battled in 1946-49, the communists triumphed, and China joined the Soviet Union as a Cold War adversary.<sup>43</sup> The battles were the largest military engagements after World War II. Communist victory not only determined Chinese history for next generations, it also defined international affairs in East Asia during the Cold War.<sup>44</sup>

The Korean War, 1950-53, *was the first military action of the Cold War.*<sup>45</sup> The Korean War was a conflict between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The war began in 1950 when North Korea, which was supplied and supported by the Soviet Union, invaded the South. The United Nations, with the United States as the main participant, joined the war on the South Korean side, and the People's Republic of China came to help North Korea. In 1953, the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM. *The Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>

<sup>42</sup>LYNCH, Michael. *The Chinese Civil War: 1945–49*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

<sup>43</sup>JOHN, F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM. *The Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>HISTORY. Korean War Causes: U.S. *Involvement* [online]. Available from: <https://www.history.com/news/korean-war-causes-us-involvement>.

war ended with Korea still divided into two hostile states. A demilitarized zone was established between the two, but peace between the states remains fragile to this day.<sup>46</sup>

The Vietnam War, the second of the Indochina Wars, fought from 1955 to 1975, *was a long, costly and divisive conflict that pitted the communist government of North Vietnam against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The conflict was intensified by the ongoing Cold War.*<sup>47</sup> Americans had an aversion to war, even though President Richard Nixon signed the Paris Peace Accords and ordered the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1973. The Communists ended the war by taking control of South Vietnam in 1975, and the following year the country was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.<sup>48</sup>

And lastly, the Cuban Revolution, the uprising and overthrow of the Batista regime and the establishment of a new Cuban government led by Fidel Castro.<sup>49</sup> Cuba was led by the corrupt dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who, although oppressive, was supported by America because he supported US interests. America has had a major influence in Cuba since the early 20th century.<sup>50</sup> A major part of Cuba's industry was owned by American companies, and the main commodity exported, sugar, was under US control. Batista's regime was therefore very unpopular among the Cuban people. In 1956, left-wing Fidel Castro started a revolutionary war. Two years later, the revolution had spread throughout Cuba, culminating in the fall of Havana in early 1959. Batista fled the country in 1959, and Castro formed a liberal nationalist government.<sup>51</sup> Castro's goal was to remove the influence of American businesses on the economy, so American businesses were nationalized. This meant that the Cuban economy could start working for poorer

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<sup>46</sup>Encyclopædia Britannica. *Korean War* [online]. Available from:

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War>.

<sup>47</sup>HISTORY. *Vietnam War History* [online] Available from: <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Encyclopædia Britannica. *Cuban Revolution* [online]. Available from:

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Cuban-Revolution>.

<sup>50</sup>BBC BITESIZE. *The origins of the Cold War* [online]. Available from:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zygjq6f/revision/2>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Cubans instead of Americans and the corrupt upper class.<sup>52</sup> The communist regime had the help and alliance of the Soviet Union, but the country quickly became economically and militarily dependent. *The United States' main rival in the Cold War had established a foothold just ninety miles off the coast of Florida.*<sup>53</sup>

Conflicts and events naturally involved Great Britain throughout the war as an ally of the United States, even though the British role is often overlooked in so described bipolar war. After World War II, Britain alone was a declining power, so there was a need to forge and sustain an Anglo-American partnership based on a common strategy and a common ideology.<sup>54</sup> The United States needed an alliance with Britain as well in order to beat the Soviets. The USA is far away from the Soviet Union, and so Americans needed help and a bridge to overcome the gap. Moreover, America relied on Britain to provide air bases that it had accumulated across the empire.<sup>55</sup> Britain's involvement was significant especially in regards to the infamous arms race and cases of espionage.<sup>56</sup> That was because when the U.S. and the Soviet Union started to raise tensions, Great Britain had to ensure safety. In 1957, Great Britain detonated the first British Hydrogen bomb in the Pacific Ocean, and one year later, nuclear relations with the U.S. were restored and Great Britain stopped conducting nuclear tests without the United States.<sup>57</sup>

Besides military and political conflicts, the Cold War brought espionage problems, in which not only Great Britain alone played a significant role. Subversion and Soviet espionage were big concerns during the war, together with terrorism emerging from the 1970s as a serious threat to national security.<sup>58</sup> For this reason, many intelligence services

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<sup>52</sup>JOHN, F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM. *The Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>.

<sup>53</sup>JOHN, F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM. *The Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>.

<sup>54</sup>DEIGHTON, Anne. *Britain and the Cold War*. Springer, 2016. (p. 4).

<sup>55</sup>TUTORHUNT. *The differences between communism and capitalism* [online]. Available from: <https://www.tutorhunt.com/resource/7615/>.

<sup>56</sup>TORRES, Olivia. *British Involvement in the Cold War* [online]. Pennsylvania State University, Mar 23, 2017 Available from: <https://sites.psu.edu/otorresrcl/2017/03/23/british-involvement-in-the-cold-war/>.

<sup>57</sup>TORRES, Olivia. *British Involvement in the Cold War* [online]. Pennsylvania State University, Mar 23, 2017 Available from: <https://sites.psu.edu/otorresrcl/2017/03/23/british-involvement-in-the-cold-war/>.

<sup>58</sup>MI5. *The Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/the-cold-war>.



specialising in internal security were needed and the goal was to uncover the secrets of the other. In the United States, it was CIA, or Central Intelligence Agency, *the most recognized intelligence agency, known for spying on foreign governments and conducting covert operations.*<sup>59</sup> Also DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, top spy agency responsible for collecting and analyzing intelligence on foreign militaries<sup>60</sup> or FBI, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which aims *to protect the U.S. against terrorism, cyberattacks and foreign intelligence operations and espionage.*<sup>61</sup> On the Soviet side, there was the KGB, Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (State Security Committee), agency, which served as an intelligence agency and a secret police.<sup>62</sup> An important intelligence service and term used with the Cold War, even though it was neither Soviet nor American, is MI5, formally the Security Service, an intelligence service tasked with internal security and domestic counter-intelligence in the United Kingdom. The service has the power to investigate anyone who might threaten the country's security and has been used extensively during the Cold War or previous wars.<sup>63</sup>

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the reunification of Germany in 1990 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 are three events known for heralding the end of the Cold War.<sup>64</sup> The Soviet Union was unsustainable, deteriorated economically and politically, and eventually collapsed. *According to historian John Lewis Gaddis, the Soviet Union was a "troubled triceratops": it remained powerful and intimidating but on the inside its "digestive, circulatory and respiratory systems were slowly clogging up then shutting down."*<sup>65</sup> Also on July 31, 1991, the START treaty, or the Strategic Arms

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<sup>59</sup>MAZZETTI, Mark. *What are the 17 intelligence agencies?.* In: Los Angeles Times [online]. January 12, 2017 Available from: <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-17-intelligence-agencies-20170112-story.html>.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>HISTORY.COM EDITORS. KGB. *HISTORY* [online]. Available from: <https://www.history.com/topics/european-history/kgb>.

<sup>63</sup>BRITANNICA. MI5. *Britannica* [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/MI5>.

<sup>64</sup>ALPHA HISTORY. *End of the Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://alphahistory.com/coldwar/end-of-the-cold-war/>.

<sup>65</sup>ALPHA HISTORY. *End of the Cold War* [online]. Available from: <https://alphahistory.com/coldwar/end-of-the-cold-war/>.

Reduction Treaty, was signed by the United States and the Soviet Union, limiting the number of nuclear weapons and reducing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup>

*The death of the Soviet Union marked the curtain call of the Cold War. While communist regimes remained in China, North Korea and Cuba, the perceived threat of Soviet imperialism had been lifted from the world.*<sup>67</sup> These events brought in 1991 an end in favour of the Western powers to the decades-long conflict known as the Cold War.

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<sup>66</sup>ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION. *START I Fact Sheet* [online]. Available from:  
<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/start1>.

<sup>67</sup>ALPHA HISTORY. *End of the Cold War* [online]. Available from:  
<https://alphahistory.com/coldwar/end-of-the-cold-war/>.

## 5 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE TIMES AND SOCIAL CLIMATE DURING COLD WAR IN GREAT BRITAIN

During the time of the Cold War, Britain and the British changed. A mix of political, economic, and cultural elements combined had an important impact on the social atmosphere in Great Britain. The population grew significantly, mainly due to immigration from the West Indies, South Asia and Eastern Europe.<sup>68</sup> This made British society much more diverse and cultural changes have happened. The increase in population was also due to improvements in the availability of medical supplies, medical aid and advances in medicine. Life expectancy increased a lot and the average age of the population also grew. However, along with the age of the population and life expectancy, expectations of the standard of living the population should achieve and the lifestyle they should have and be able to maintain have also increased. There was an increasing demand for mobility and space, especially for cars and houses. This led to a change in society as farm and ornamental land slowly began to take the place of houses and roads.<sup>69</sup> The welfare state was established and its growth had a big impact. *The post-war Labour government introduced the Welfare State to address the 'Five Giants' of disease, squalor, want, ignorance and idleness.*<sup>70</sup> *Based on proposals by Lord Beveridge, the UK's Welfare State was founded after World War Two with the aim to provide a comprehensive system of social insurance from 'cradle to grave'.*<sup>71</sup> The government of the United Kingdom established a variety of social welfare initiatives with the intention of raising the general level of residents' standards of living. These included the establishment of a comprehensive education system that runs from nursery through primary and secondary school and onto further and higher education. Then social security, for example, maternity

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<sup>68</sup>BBC. *Britain: 1945 to Present* [online]. Available from:

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/overview\\_1945\\_present\\_01.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/overview_1945_present_01.shtml).

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>BBC Bitesize. *Causes of the Cold War* [online]. Available from:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwhsf8/revision/2>.

<sup>71</sup>BBC Bitesize. *The Cold War Available* [online]. Available from:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zjphb8m/revision/1>

grants, then social housing, personal social services, and services for children, as well as the National Health Service, which offered free medical care to all citizens of the United Kingdom.<sup>72</sup>

According to Professor Jeremy Black<sup>73</sup>, British society has become more individualistic and less deferential. After 1945, the moral code of citizens, formerly prevalent, has now disappeared. It was a drawn-out process that was only officially confirmed by changes in the law in the iconic 1960s. Abortion and homosexuality were legalized. The position of women was rapidly improving. There was a decline in active members of the Christian faith. Youth and the new uncharted began to be celebrated rather than age and experience.<sup>74</sup> Even political-economic changes reflect this. The voting age has been lowered to 18 years old. The number of young consumers in the economy has increased.

There has been a reduction in demand and employment in manufacturing and the service sector has become more attractive. Consumerism has grown. Suddenly, spending money and shopping were no longer just a necessity for survival, they became an expression of identity and a popular leisure hobby. For this reason, even the restriction on Sunday shopping was cancelled in what was once a very religious country.<sup>75</sup> As far as shopping is concerned, changes can be observed not only in purchases of means for pleasure but also in the basic contents of shopping baskets in supermarkets and grocery stores as people's diets have changed. Demand for red meat has decreased and interest in lighter meats and fish has increased, but vegetarianism has also become very popular. Dishes and products from around the world were popular as evidence that the citizens of Great Britain had become open to non-British influences.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>BBC Bitesize. *The impact of the Cold War* [online]. Available from:  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zjphbdm/revision/3>

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

From the negative side, fear of communism and the possibility of nuclear war were key factors contributing to the general atmosphere of the society. Great Britain was the third country in the world to gain the atom bomb (1952). The Cold War was a time of great competition and tensions and fear of communist infiltration and the possibility of nuclear conflict were frequently exploited by politicians and the media to promote anti-communist sentiments and policies. *The early Cold War is an instructive period, showing how media consensus and government manipulation operate in a democracy during an open-ended undeclared struggle, in this case against the Soviet Union and its Communist allies. There was government manipulation and occasional strong-arming, but much of the consensus came about through a gradual, negotiated revision of the media's common sense view of the world situation.*<sup>77</sup>

The advent of rock and roll music, the popularity of pop music, television, and film as major cultural forces were all influenced by the Cold War. The spy agencies blossomed in the real world and in the world of art they became inspirational. The most famous case of culture in connection with the Cold War are early James Bond stories. These were deliberately used, for example, by U.S. President J.F. Kennedy, who intentionally used Bond to create the image of a heroic leader who could face any challenge in the most dangerous years of the Cold War. Kennedy hated the conformity of men in corporate jobs maintaining material comfort, so he used Bond to project masculinity and fearlessness.<sup>78</sup> The author, Ian Fleming, a British SIS employee with close connections to American intelligence people and U.S. President J.F. Kennedy, created James Bond based on his own experiences with the intelligence agency, even though Bond is not exactly a spy but more of a secret agent. James Bond bears many similarities to his creator, sharing a passion for women, skiing, cars, luxury food and drink. One of the most appealing things to the British in the Bond stories was that James Bond flew, something ordinary people didn't do at the time. And he traveled all over the world and went to amazing restaurants

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<sup>77</sup>JENKS, J. Conclusion. *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p. 149-150. ISBN 0-7486-2356-4.

<sup>78</sup>GROPPE, A. (2021). JFK, James Bond and the Cold War. *The Washington Post* [online]. Available from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/10/09/jfk-james-bond-cold-war/>

where he indulged in fantastic meals that you wouldn't dream of in England.<sup>79</sup> Charlie Higson, an English author, said, - *“I think that James Bond did play a big part in the Cold War end. Not as a real spy or a real secret agent, but as a cultural weapon. That Bond was exporting around the world the power of the West. We were making these huge, big, glossy films that no one else was making. Bond was driving fantastic cars ... James Bond is the living embodiment of the western ideal of glamour and gadgets and nice clothes and nice cars. And he’s travelling the world and he has freedom and he has beautiful girls. ... Where is the Russian equivalent? James Bond did help to win the Cold War for us by embodying that Western ideal of individualism and probably, capitalism and conspicuous consumption. It made the West sexy in a way that the Russians never found out a way to make communism sexy.”*<sup>80</sup>

New kinds of entertainment like stories, music or shopping offered an opportunity to escape reality and give a diversion from the stress of the day, they also contributed to the formation of the social atmosphere and cultural norms of the time.

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<sup>79</sup>National Archives. *James Bond won the Cold War for Britain*, 2013 [online]. Available from <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/james-bond-won-cold-war-britain/>

<sup>80</sup>National Archives. *James Bond won the Cold War for Britain*, 2013 [Online]. Available from: <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/james-bond-won-cold-war-britain/>

## 6 COLD WAR DECADES IN GREAT BRITAIN

The Cold War hit in the last bit of the 1940s and then continued for several long decades. After the Second World War, although Britain was exhausted, having used up almost all its financial reserves and was in debt to the amount of several billion pounds, and later even bankrupt, it still had the largest empire in the world. Nationalisation of railways, coal mines, ports and power stations began. In 1947, the recession hit, and even bread had to be rationed. Relief came in the form of a large-scale financial aid plan from the United States, called the Marshall Plan, which aimed to financially help the European continent. Nevertheless, Great Britain was no longer in control of its colonial territories, both politically and economically, and in 1947 British administration in India ended, and Ceylon and Burma gained their independence in 1948. Transjordan, Egypt and Palestine were on the same path at the same time.<sup>81</sup> *It has been argued that the orderly and dignified ending of the British Empire, beginning in the 1940s and stretching into the 1960s, was Britain's greatest international achievement. This interpretation can also be seen largely as a myth produced by politicians and the press at the time and perpetuated since. The ending of empire was calculated upon the basis of Britain's interests rather than those of its colonies. National interest was framed in terms of the postwar situation—that is, of an economically exhausted, dependent Britain, now increasingly caught up in the international politics of the Cold War.*<sup>82</sup> What we now calmly call decolonization was often very bloody and only came about because of Britain's inability to manage the empire rather than its modernity and benevolence.

The post-war time in Great Britain was a time of change and difficulty as the country worked to rebuild and recover from the end of the Second World War and the difficulties posed by the war itself.

Britain entered the fifth decade with high inflation and a pound that had been sharply devalued in 1949. Between 1950 and 1953, Great Britain sent troops to the Korean War to help fight communist North Korea. The 1952 elections were won by a Conservative-

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<sup>81</sup>Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "United Kingdom - Britain since 1945." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 24 Sep. 2021 [online]. Available from <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Britain-since-1945>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

led government with Winston Churchill in charge. Churchill presided over the February 6, 1952, accession of the new monarch, Elizabeth II. This great and controversial statesman had to resign from office in mid-decade, 1955, due to health complications. Churchill's role was taken over by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Eden had a difficult task and role after such a strong predecessor and ended up resigning in 1957 over a failed attempt to reverse the empire's decline by seizing the Suez Canal after it had been nationalised by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser the year before.<sup>83</sup>

Despite that, according to a British historian, Dominic Sandbrook, the 1950s were a golden age for many people. The Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan's, words in 1957 – 'Let's be frank about it, most of our people have never had it so good.' – became a symbol of the age. A misunderstood political quotation, meant as a warning, serves as evidence that even at times when the country was still bombed-out and financially exhausted, people preferred to enjoy consumerism. In the early fifties it was almost impossible to borrow money, rationing systems were very harsh and there was a severe housing shortage. But in less than ten years, everything changed. *Indeed, perhaps more than any other post-war decade, it was the 1950s that transformed Britain's social and cultural landscape.*<sup>84</sup> Wages rose and unemployment fell, life became more comfortable and the lucky ones had their first televisions at home. In 1958, Britain's first motorway, the Preston Bypass, was opened. The young were growing up with greater financial independence, were more educated and artistic, knew how to be carefree and danced to rock music. Underneath the gloss of freedom, however, there were anxieties. The British Empire was slowly becoming a thing of the past, and a massive wave of immigration from Commonwealth countries was hitting the British, changing the face of cities and showing the face of racism, and violent juvenile crime and race riots were on the rise (Notting Hill, 1958). But all these troubles were overshadowed by the threat of nuclear war, as mentioned before, 1952 was the year that Britain gained the atom bomb and 1957 the hydrogen bomb. Activists created a campaign for nuclear disarmament, their CND

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<sup>83</sup>Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "United Kingdom - Britain since 1945." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica* [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Britain-since-1945>.

<sup>84</sup>National Archives. Fifties Britain. *The National Archives* [online]. Available from: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/fifties-britain/>



marches are still well known today. *Still, the truth is that they only attracted a minority. Most people preferred to spend their weekends shopping for a new sofa instead.*<sup>85</sup>

Great Britain's sixties were the defining decade. *If the Fifties were in black and white, then the Sixties were in Technicolor.*<sup>86</sup> In the 1960s, a youth-driven cultural movement known as the "swinging sixties" emerged, London was transformed from a conservative city saddened by the impact of the Second World War into a capital full of hope, excitement, freedom, a city where everything was possible.<sup>87</sup> The first generation of teenagers who was not burdened by conscription was on the scene and even supported by parents who did not enjoy their freedom. One of the most defining aspects of that time was the music. The advent of rock and roll music had already taken place in the previous decade, but the revolution didn't come until the 1960s with the arrival of The Beatles. With the looseness and entertainment came drugs, especially marijuana and LSD, and a multiplied sense of happiness and optimism led to the birth of the hippie movement. As for the war, the Vietnam War was going on throughout the decade and musicians such as John Lennon drew attention to it through music and protest, trying to show the horrors of war and point out its senselessness. This was a powerful aspect not only artistically but also politically, people began to call for peace and question authority. Respect for authority was replaced by distrust and suspicion, which would have been unheard of in the previous decade.<sup>88</sup> Feminism was also gaining strength, for instance, there was a popularization of miniskirts, women dressed in a youthful and feminine way that would have been vulgar ten years ago. Contraception was legalized in 1967, a major step in expanding women's boundaries beyond motherhood and marriage. And in 1968, a woman became Secretary of State, giving women the green light to lead the country.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Historic UK. *The 1960s - The Decade that Shook Britain* [online]. Available from: <https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/The-1960s-The-Decade-that-Shook-Britain/>.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

According to Professor Jeremy Black, *the 1960s destroyed a cultural continuity that had lasted since the Victorian period.*<sup>90</sup>

The decade of the 1970s was, according to British journalist Christopher Booker, a blurred and depressing years, *hardly a time which in years to come is likely to inspire us with an overpowering sense of nostalgia.*<sup>91</sup> *Of all the decades of the twentieth century, it would be hard to pick out one with a less distinctive, recognisable character.*<sup>92</sup>

Despite that, British culture at that time was full of nostalgia, with a lot of past styles that could be brought back to life under a new explanation - postmodernism. The trade in antiques and World War II comics was flourishing. The decade was full of contradictions, there was excess and scarcity, hippies and violence, tastelessness and style.<sup>93</sup>

In terms of the economic sphere, a stronger entrepreneurial spirit began to be present, giving a foretaste of Margaret Thatcher's radical economics. Prices began to rise rapidly, causing labour unrest and a period of industrial conflict. These culminated in late 1978 in the so-called "Winter of Discontent," several bitter disputes that angered the people.<sup>94</sup> And so came the election of a government whose main appeal and ideology were to end the 1970s. The political atmosphere of the 1970s was defined by the ascension of Margaret Thatcher, who, in 1979, made history by becoming the first ever female Prime Minister of Britain. Thatcher was never a hugely popular prime minister, but even those who disagreed with her agreed with her aversion to a Britain of brown flares and power cuts.<sup>95</sup> Thatcher's conservative ideas and leadership style were contentious and divisive, and her time as Prime Minister was defined by on-going debates and protests over issues

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<sup>90</sup>BBC. *Overview: 1945-present day* [online]. Available from [https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/overview\\_1945\\_present\\_01.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/overview_1945_present_01.shtml)

<sup>91</sup>BOOKER, C. *The Seventies. Stein and Day*. 1980. ISBN 0812827570. (p. 4).

<sup>92</sup>BOOKER, C. *The Seventies. Stein and Day*. 1980. ISBN 0812827570. (p. 3).

<sup>93</sup>BECKETT, A. 1968 and all that. *The Guardian*, 2007 [online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/may/26/weekend.andybeckett>

<sup>94</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica. Britain since 1945. *Encyclopedia Britannica* [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Britain-since-1945>

<sup>95</sup>BECKETT, A. The Way We Live Now: 1972. *The Guardian*, 2007 [online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/may/26/weekend.andybeckett>

such as the future of the welfare state, privatization, and trade unions. This time is known as "Thatcherism", belief in the free market and non-interference of the state in people's businesses and lives. The government was to be limited to the defense of the realm and the currency. Everything else was to be left to each person's responsibility for his own life. To this, Thatcher added her strong personality and belief in Victorian family values, and Thatcherism was born.<sup>96</sup>

The decade of the 1980s in Great Britain started to form the country as known today. By the late 1970s, large suburban shopping malls had opened and general ownership of cars and houses was the natural state of things. In 1981, the world saw the Royal Wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer, with more than 30 million viewers the television audience became the second highest in the history of Britain.<sup>97</sup> Thatcher gradually gained popularity and by 1983 she had already won the election triumphantly. She enjoyed success despite the fact that her measures resulted in mass unemployment. There was, for example, the privatisation of the railway system, the transformation of transport infrastructure gave rise to urban public transport, but this was perceived as inefficient, and so there was an increase in motorization and road building. In 1981, a series of riots broke out in British cities, mainly Liverpool and London, as an expression of anxiety and feelings of alienation on racial grounds. Indeed, very little had been done in the 1980s to alleviate urban poverty.<sup>98</sup> The so called Beleaguered 1984 miners strike occurred as a consequence of privatization. Despite that, Thatcher still won the third election in 1987. In 1988, another controversial thing happened – Thatcher stated that a local authority shall not "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the

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<sup>96</sup>BBC News. "Margaret Thatcher: Death of the Iron Lady." *BBC News*, 2013 [online]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22079683>.

<sup>97</sup>UK 1980s 1981 in the UK. *UK 1980s*. [online]. Available from: <https://uk1980s.co.uk/history/1981-in-the-uk/>

<sup>98</sup>Britannica. United Kingdom - The Margaret Thatcher government (1979–90). *Encyclopædia Britannica* [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Margaret-Thatcher-government-1979-90>

acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".<sup>99</sup> Not for this, she did not remain in office until the end of the term anyway. Her refusal to fully integrate the pound into the European common currency alienated people and colleagues. Thatcher resigned and was replaced by John Major in 1990.<sup>100</sup>

In culture, the old ways were present, and the punk wave of the past decade was still going on, joined by the so-called new wave music that combined pop-oriented musical genres of the past years. However, it was also a time of innovation in music, artists mixed with punks and David Bowie admirers began experimenting with synthesizers and computers to create music. This was a breakthrough in art. Then, at the end of the decade, the rave movement emerged, especially coming from Manchester and energising a new generation. The readily available drug ecstasy also contributed to the spread of the rave wave.<sup>101</sup>

At the end of the decade, the Cold War came to an end. On board the cruise ship Maxim Gorky off the coast of Malta, Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush met with a vision to leave the Cold War era behind and move forward. No document was signed, but the moment is known as the end of the Cold War.<sup>102</sup> *The summer of 1989, the last summer of the decade, was unusually warm and settled in England. Meanwhile, something was happening in eastern Europe, and it soon became clear that entire political eras were coming to an end, with the sudden and dramatic fall of communist totalitarianism. For one sweet extended period that year it seemed as if everything was changing for the better, that the Cold War was at an end, and that we were living, if not quite at the end of history, then at the beginning of something new and promising.*<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>BBC News. *Margaret Thatcher: The woman who changed Britain* [online]. 2013-04-08 Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22079683>

<sup>100</sup>Britannica. The Margaret Thatcher government (1979–90). *Britannica* [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Margaret-Thatcher-government-1979-90>

<sup>101</sup>Guardian. "1980s cultural history". *The Guardian*, 2009 [online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/19/1980s-cultural-history>.

<sup>102</sup>Před 30 lety Bush s Gorbačovem oznámili konec studené války. *Lidovky.cz*, 2019 [online]. Available from: [https://www.lidovky.cz/relax/lide/pred-30-lety-bush-s-gorbacovem-oznamili-konec-studene-valky.A191130\\_154919\\_lide\\_ele](https://www.lidovky.cz/relax/lide/pred-30-lety-bush-s-gorbacovem-oznamili-konec-studene-valky.A191130_154919_lide_ele)

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

Compared to the crises of the 1970s and 1980s, the politics of this decade appear boring. The neoliberal hegemony launched by Thatcher was being consolidated, and the rise of Tony Blair's New Labour loomed in the distance.<sup>104</sup> It was a time of sex and financial scandals. John Major faced a storm of doubt and criticism after "Black Wednesday" in 1992, when he had to devalue the pound. At the same time, despite promising not to raise taxes in his campaign, he subsequently agreed to several increases. When he tried to secure the acceptance of the Treaty on European Union in 1993, he lost more and more popularity. Major was criticized for mismanagement but also for corruption and hypocrisy, so he resigned as a party leader in 1995. In 1997, Tony Blair's government took the lead. In 1998, Blair managed to negotiate the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement), which was ratified in both Ireland and Northern Ireland, officially ending the long struggle in Northern Ireland.<sup>105</sup> The agreement was preceded by a ceasefire declared by the IRA (Irish Republican Army), in 1994, which led to talks about the future of Ireland.<sup>106</sup> Tony Blair was then reelected and held the position of Prime Minister until 2007.

The 1990s were challenging and controversial for the royal family. Queen Elizabeth II herself famously called 1992 "annus horribilis", a terrible year, a year of misfortune. The royal residence of Windsor Castle was devastated by fire, and family relations were not going well either. Several relationships broke down - Diana, Princess of Wales, separated from Charles, Prince of Wales. Elizabeth's son Andrew, Duke of York separated from his wife Sarah, Duchess of York. This cast a public shadow over the royal family and Charles was even suspected of being unworthy and unable to take the throne. In 1997, the People's Princess, Diana, tragically died, causing a worldwide wave of

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<sup>104</sup>BOYLE, M. (2019). The Political Narratives of Britain in the Nineties. *Past & Present*, 243(1), 235-262. doi: 10.1093/pastj/gty038

<sup>105</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica. *United Kingdom - The Margaret Thatcher Government (1979–90)*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022 [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Margaret-Thatcher-government-1979-90>.

<sup>106</sup>THEIRISHSTORY.COM. *The Northern Ireland Conflict 1968-1998 - An Overview*, 2015 [online]. Available from: <https://www.theirishstory.com/2015/02/09/the-northern-ireland-conflict-1968-1998-an-overview/#.ZC6k3d3P25c>.

hysteria, and the Royal Family was once again disliked. However, popularity has returned, probably only because of the Queen's person.<sup>107</sup>

As to the cultural life of the nineties, new kinds of music were again created, especially Britpop, alternative rock inspired by the classic pop of the sixties. A subculture called Lad culture, a term still used today to signify the misogynistic behaviour of young men, was very strong. It implied anti-intellectual attitudes in favor of sports, drinking, and sexism. The popularity of the so-called acid house parties, which had already appeared in the last decade, continued to grow. The trend was black and white makeup, rap, emo people, or the cult of skateboarders.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica. *United Kingdom - The Margaret Thatcher Government (1979–90)*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022 [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Margaret-Thatcher-government-1979-90>.

<sup>108</sup>Retro Galaxy. *Which Subculture Emerged in the '90s?* [online]. Available from: <https://retrogalaxy.com/which-subculture-emerged-in-90s/>.

## 7 THE FOLLOWING DECADES IN GREAT BRITAIN

To celebrate the new millennium, two new buildings, the Millennium Dome and the Millennium Bridge, were built in London. Prime Minister Tony Blair, who celebrated with the Queen and thousands of people at the Millennium Dome, said "confidence and optimism for the new millennium should be bottled and kept forever."<sup>109</sup> In 2001, Blair won re-election and was at the center of several important events and difficult situations, the first of which was the rejection of the common European currency, the euro, because of the fear of the public, which was already burdened by increased immigration after 2000. Most of the public reacted to immigrants arrival as part of European integration with fear and mistrust. They perceived both incoming and long-term foreigners as a threat to Britishness. Frustrated and frightened people, whose fears were amplified by the xenophobic statements of the media, were deeply affected by the following event. The world was shaken by the attacks of September 11, 2001, after which Britain joined with the United States to contribute troops to the military effort to overthrow the Afghan Taliban regime that was sheltering Osama Bin Laden, the founder of the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation that has been linked to the 9/11 attacks.<sup>110</sup> The ensuing "War on Terror", the military campaign announced by George W. Bush, in which he called on all world leaders to join the resistance to terrorism - "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated." (G.W.Bush, 20.9.2001)<sup>111</sup> - intensified racist feelings in the people, and Muslims born in Britain also experienced a difficult time.

Since 2002, Blair has decided to go to war in Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein, who allegedly possessed weapons of mass destruction. There were huge public protests against the war, yet Blair stuck to his decision and insisted on removing the threat that

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<sup>109</sup>BBC. Jubilee celebrations usher in the new year. *BBC News*, 2002 [online]. Available from: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/1/newsid\\_2478000/2478173.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/1/newsid_2478000/2478173.stm)

<sup>110</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica. *United Kingdom - The Margaret Thatcher Government (1979–90)*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022 [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Margaret-Thatcher-government-1979-90>.

<sup>111</sup>History.com Editors. "War on Terror Timeline." *History.com, A&E Television Networks*, 2021 [online]. Available from: <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/war-on-terror-timeline>.

Hussein represented. After Saddam was removed, it became clear that he did not possess or produce any weapons of mass destruction. This was a major setback for Blair's government, but he still won re-election in 2005. He lasted only two more years and was replaced by Gordon Brown.<sup>112</sup> Brown led Britain when it was hit by the global financial crisis in 2008, caused by the collapse of the US investment bank Lehman Brothers and caused the biggest budget cuts since the Second World War, as well as cuts in social support and staff redundancies. Brown himself was linked to a scandal over the misuse of government accounts and so did not enjoy much popularity. He was replaced by David Cameron in 2010.<sup>113</sup>

In terms of culture and social life, the noughties were a time of technological development, with the rise of the internet, Youtube, Google, MySpace and other modern technological advances that brought a change in the way that people talked with one another and engaged.<sup>114</sup>

In 2011, an uprising known as the Arab Spring broke out in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>115</sup> Britain was particularly interested in the revolt in Libya and its suppression by Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi. Cameron was criticised for not being very effective in removing British citizens from Libya, but Cameron continued to do his job and steadfastly pushed for criticism of Gaddafi and a so-called no-fly zone over Libya. European and US forces jointly attacked the Libyan air force with fighter aircraft. NATO later took command of this military operation.

On the positive side, 2011 brought the marriage of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, a wedding that the world's attention was focused on. In 2012, the Summer

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<sup>112</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica. *United Kingdom - The Margaret Thatcher Government (1979–90)*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022 [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Margaret-Thatcher-government-1979-90>.

<sup>113</sup>"United Kingdom - Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition rule. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2010 [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Conservative-Liberal-Democrat-coalition-rule-2010-15>.

<sup>114</sup>The Guardian. "Culture: Review of the Noughties", 2009 [online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/27/culture-review-of-the-noughties>.

<sup>115</sup>Britannica Online Encyclopedia. "The Brexit Referendum [online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Brexit-referendum>.



Olympics were held in London and at the same time the Queen celebrated 60 years on the throne, therefore England became the center of action and pomp. In 2013, the UK's GDP rose and there was an economic recovery. That same year, the world watched the arrival of royal baby George, by then the third heir to the throne.

A referendum on leaving the European Union was held in 2016. David Cameron led the campaign to remain in the European Union, while the opposing campaign to leave was led by former London mayor Boris Johnson. The two sides were very evenly balanced, but with 52 percent, the campaign called "Leave" eventually won. The UK became the first country ever to make this decision. In 2016, David Cameron resigned with the intention of allowing his successor to negotiate a suitable exit from the European Union. David Cameron is replaced by Theresa May, the second female Prime Minister in British history. Although May was against Brexit, she promised to see it through as prime minister. This was a difficult task given the ongoing disagreements and countless details surrounding the exit. The process of the UK leaving the European Union was not completed until January 31, 2020, under Boris Johnson's leadership.<sup>116</sup>

One big cultural shift occurred during the 2010s, and that was The Marriage Act, which legalized marriage between people of the same gender in 2013.<sup>117</sup> The 2010s were a time of contrasts. Social media brought people together and yet divided them. Pop dominated over rock and computer generated music was equal to the voice. Television has never been more sophisticated and yet the most successful works have been simplistic and vulgar works. Technology has moved on, faster than ever, and continues to do so.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>"Same-sex marriage becomes law". *GOV.UK*, 2013 [online]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/same-sex-marriage-becomes-law>.

<sup>118</sup>FENEWS. *The changing face of youth culture in the UK* [online]. Available from: <https://www.fenews.co.uk/exclusive/the-changing-face-of-youth-culture-in-the-uk/>

## 8 REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE HEROINES, ISSUES OF PARTNERSHIP AND MARITAL RELATIONS IN MCEWAN'S WORK

According to David Malcolm, the presentation of women and the role of feminist concerns are issues that any critic of McEwan's work must focus on. McEwan's writing shows complex developments in terms of its interest in women's characters and of their roles. Interest in the women's movement in the early 1980s was reflected in the themes and aspects of McEwan's stories. However, McEwan's interest in female characters was evident much earlier, with male dominance controlling and exploiting women in extreme forms appearing in several stories as early as the 1970s. In *"The Comfort of Strangers"*, the relationship between man and woman is richly portrayed, underlined by male bestiality, the main antagonist is the exemplary embodiment of male arrogance and mistreatment of women stemming from a childhood in which a subconscious hatred of the female gender was created. The protagonists, on the other hand, are liberal, incorrigible, and stuck in a vicious world of miscommunication that contributes to their unhappy fate. A similar patriarchal obsession recurs in the stories. But Malcolm argues that McEwan's feminism has considerable flaws, despite being an expert in detailing patriarchal mentalities and the monstrosity of men doing evil to women not only in thought but not afraid to act. Some of the female characters portrayed by him take on traditional female roles and are very stereotypical - they are hypersensitive victims, mothers, and beautiful but unable to cope with difficulties. He portrays women who are less or not at all admirable.<sup>119</sup>

McEwan's favorite theme is power and strength relations between men and women and the differences in their psychological equipment. The story *"The Imitation Game"* deals with the exclusion of women from important areas of life, leaving the heroine to mop floors and serve tea. In *"Or Shall We Die?"* men destroy the world and women save

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<sup>119</sup>MALCOLM, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002. (p. 12-14).

it. Men are straightforward exploiters, women are the source of life and healing and have no mindset with a need to control.<sup>120</sup>

McEwan's characters often live without social relationships, enclosed in their own rich world, cut off from everyone else and often from reality, with few social contacts and these tend to be school or work. One of the few points of interaction with the world is the world of gender and gender relations. The complexity of gender relations, the complex picture between men and women is a theme running through the author's work. The stories show male characters learning to act like traditional men in order to try to control and abuse female characters. The most appropriate kind of woman is the mannequin, though even she strangely resists. But McEwan is also able to portray unbroken or less disturbed relationships between men and women, but even in these works, they adhere to traditional female roles - inscrutable fertility, innocent seductress, and mother earth in bed.<sup>121</sup>

Marriage is another one of Ian McEwan's concerns, he has devoted a lot of his writing to exploring various kinds of relationships. In his writing, McEwan examines romantic relationships as well as the influence of outside elements such as trust, betrayal, or lack of communication on those relationships. An example of this is in the novel "*The Comfort of Strangers*", where the relationship stands at the novel's center. Mary's previous relationship, a failed marriage from which she already has children, is meant to represent family drama. The relationship is depicted here on the basis of reflecting on each other, as fathers and sons reflect on each other, just as protagonists Mary and Colin, childlike adults, reflect on each other with the older antagonist couple, Robert and Caroline, who become parent figures for them. The motif of the father-son relationship can also be seen in Robert himself, who lives in the shadow of his father and grandfather, in the shadow of strong and tyrannical men.<sup>122</sup>

Intimacy and connection are also themes in McEwan's writings. On the night of their wedding, the characters of "*On Chesil Beach*", Edward and Florence, have difficulty speaking with one another, again the lack of communication is portrayed. This stressful

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid. (p. 186-7).

<sup>121</sup>Ibid. (p. 35-6).

<sup>122</sup>Ibid. (p. 82-3).

scene foreshadows the eventual disintegration of their relationship and marriage. McEwan strongly demonstrates how a lack of communication and an inability to comprehend one another may lead to difficulties or worse, as in the case of the murder of Colin in *"The Comfort of Strangers"*, which could be done because they hid a troubling feeling about the situation from one another and they couldn't rely on themselves to leave the situation.

McEwan's works demonstrate the need for maintaining good communication and having a mutual understanding of one another, even though sometimes a forced or natural power advantage is present, as well as how elements that a couple has no control over can influence their relationship and life.

## 9 THE COMFORT OF STRANGERS, 1981 – MCEWAN'S EARLY WRITING STYLE

*The Comfort of Strangers*, published in 1981, is McEwan's second novel. The title already reveals the plot of the story. On holiday, lost Colin and Mary wander the streets for hours and hours, eventually relying on the comfort of a stranger who invites them to visit his house. But fatal danger awaits them, and they are unable to escape it. Ever since the publication of his first works, McEwan has been known as a writer who is fascinated by violence, sex, perversion, and awfulness. It wasn't always seen as a positive way of gaining attention, and he was accused by critics of writing deliberately to disgust and be shocking, the depth of his work was disappearing somewhere under the layer of filth. For this reason, he was given the nickname "Ian Macabre", meaning terrible, horrible. The publication of *The Comfort of Strangers* deepened the controversy surrounding his work and persona. The novel was met with very harsh criticism and was morally judged as a typical McEwan work, sexually deviant, sick and ending in murder. McEwan's ability to write and construct a story has never been denied, but he has been criticized for wasting it on describing absurdities and sexual abnormalities, for which his writing is inappropriate, not socially useful, and not about people who commonly exist. McEwan was criticized for his sexual imagination, and critics wondered when he would write anything other than filth.<sup>123</sup>

But beyond that, the criticism seemed to be for something else, something much deeper. McEwan has been criticized for daring to deal with the forbidden territories of adulthood and sexuality while the sexual abnormality of sadomasochism, which the novel deals with, is so widespread as to be considered common. McEwan's goal is not to shock and disgust with violence, it is to explore the violent nature in all beings. *The Comfort of*

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<sup>123</sup>PAYANDEH, Hossein. Normal Abnormalities: Depiction of Sado-Masochistic Violence in Ian Mcewan's *The Comfort of Strangers*. *Cankaya University Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 2006, 1.6 (p. 145-7).

*Strangers* is a fascinating study of sadomasochism combined with patriarchal paradigms.<sup>124</sup>

And what do the women, Mary and Caroline, have to say?

Mary, without a surname, is a painfully ordinary woman. According to Malcolm, the choice of the main characters' names, which are very ordinary, and the absence of their surnames are meant to suggest that, despite how the story ends, its middle struggles with ordinary people and common relational and human issues.<sup>125</sup> Mary is a middle-aged, around 30-year-old, English divorced woman with two children from a previous marriage, whom she shows love to and does not forget to keep in touch with even when on holiday with Colin.

*... Her ten-year-old daughter had finally been selected for the school football team, and had been so savagely tackled by the boys in her first two matches that she had had to spend a week in bed. Then she cut her hair for the next match to avoid persecution and had even scored a goal. Her son, two and a half years younger, could run round the local athletics track in less than ninety seconds. ... (p. 91-2)*

She is an actress who once worked with an all-female acting group that eventually broke up because of arguments over whether or not to bring in men.

*... 'And what do you do, for a living I mean.' 'I used to work in the theatre.' 'An actress!' This idea stirred Caroline. She bent awkwardly in her chair, as though it pained her to keep her back straight, or to relax it. Mary was shaking her head. 'I was working for a women's theatre group. We did quite well for three years, and now we've broken up. Too many arguments.' Caroline was frowning, 'Women's theatre? ... Only actresses?' 'Some of us wanted to bring in men, at least from time to time. The others wanted to keep it the way it was, pure. That's what broke us up in the end.' ... (p.82)*

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>MALCOLM, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002. (p. 82).

She sees her boyfriend Colin, with whom she has been for 7 long years, as a handsome man and feels a deep connection and intimacy with him, which is more of a relaxation. They no longer show initial love and crazy passion, rather, they are peacefully blended, as if they were one body.

*... 'Well, yes, I do love him, but perhaps you mean something different by "in love".' She looked up. Caroline was waiting for her to go on. 'I'm not obsessed by him, if that's what you mean, by his body, the way I was when I first met him. But I trust him. He's my closest friend.'* ... (p. 76)

*... They often said they found it difficult to remember that the other was a separate person. When they looked at each other they looked into a misted mirror. When they talked of the politics of sex, which they did sometimes, they did not talk of themselves. It was precisely this collusion that made them vulnerable and sensitive to each other, easily hurt by the rediscovery that their needs and interests were distinct. ... (p. 12)*

Despite their long-standing relationship and harmony, they do not sleep together in one bed, do not live together, and that harmony can be questioned.

*... They woke, so it seemed to them, simultaneously, and lay still on their separate beds. For reasons they could no longer define clearly, Colin and Mary were not on speaking terms. ... (p. 1)*

They talk to each other as if they weren't talking to each other. They fail to connect their conversations and give them depth, each just listens patiently, waiting for their turn to speak. Colin doesn't understand Mary's motherhood or her political views. Mary doesn't understand his nightmares about public embarrassment.

*... Each evening, in the ritual hour they spent on their balcony before setting out to find a restaurant, they had been listening patiently to the other's dreams in exchange for the luxury of recounting their own. Colin's dreams were those that psycho-analysts recommend, of flying, he said, of crumbling teeth, of appearing naked before a seated stranger. ... She dreamed most frequently of her children, that they were in danger, and that she was too incompetent or muddled to help them. Her own childhood became confused with theirs. Her son and daughter were her contemporaries, frightening her with their insistent questions. Why did you go away without us?*

*When are you coming back? Will you meet us off the train? No, no, she tried to tell them, you are meant to be meeting me. She told Colin that she dreamed her children had climbed into bed with her, one on either side, and there they lay, bickering all night over her sleeping body. Yes I did. No you didn't. I told you. No you didn't ... until she woke exhausted, her hands pressed tight against her ears. ... (p. 2-3)*

If Mary were on vacation alone, she would be determined, resolute and purposeful, and she would know exactly where she was going and why. She would be able to enjoy possibly getting lost, she would be able to enjoy wandering aimlessly. She would not be oversensitive and notice every change in mood, she would not be able to get offended so easily, and she would not have to make compromises she was not sure of. But her connection with Colin changes her, they get lost together, unable to find the hotel, or the bar, the restaurant, and despite going round and round, they are unable to find the square they were standing in moments before.

*... Alone, perhaps, they each could have explored the city with pleasure, followed whims, dispensed with destinations and so enjoyed or ignored being lost. There was much to wonder at here, one needed only to be alert and to attend. But they knew one another much as they knew themselves, and their intimacy, rather like too many suitcases, was a matter of perpetual concern; together they moved slowly, clumsily, effecting lugubrious compromises, attending to delicate shifts of mood, repairing breaches. As individuals they did not easily take offence; but together they managed to offend each other in surprising, unexpected ways; then the offender – it had happened twice since their arrival – became irritated by the cloying susceptibilities of the other, and they would continue to explore the twisting alleyways and sudden squares in silence, and with each step the city would recede as they locked tighter into each other's presence. ... (p. 6-7)*

This perpetual wandering is a masterful illustration and depiction of the characters' inner world. Just as they feel lost in the city, they seem to feel lost in spite of love in their relationships and lives, and this gives an advantage to the seeking antagonist who offer them direction. Through their awkward wandering, the author informs us of their mutual incompatibility, even though there is no directly visible conflict between them.

Mary has no problem smoking marijuana with Colin, ... *Colin would roll a marihuana joint which they would smoke on their balcony and which would enhance that delightful moment when*



*they stepped out of the hotel lobby into the creamy evening air. ... (p. 4) engages in slow, sleepy intercourse, that has no clear start or end, ... Their lovemaking had no clear beginning or end and frequently concluded in, or was interrupted by, sleep. They would have denied indignantly that they were bored. ... (p. 12) does not clean the hotel room, and looks forward to hotel service doing it. As Colin does too, like they are happy to have someone clean up their mess and take responsibility. ... While they were out, and not only in the mornings, a maid came and tidied the beds, or removed the sheets, if she thought that was necessary. Unused to hotel life, they were inhibited by this intimacy with a stranger they rarely saw. The maid took away used paper tissues, she lined up their shoes in the cupboard in a tidy row, she folded their dirty clothes into a neat pile on a chair and arranged loose change into little stacks along the bedside table. Rapidly, however, they came 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. At the same time they had become less tolerant of disorder. One late morning, they returned to their room to find it as they had left it, simply uninhabitable, and they had no choice but to go out again and wait until it had been dealt with. ... (p. 5)*

After lunch, she is in the bathroom getting ready for dinner again. She and Colin go swimming and for walks, but they stop at shop windows rather than historic buildings or local attractions. Mary is politically aware and sees patriarchy as the most powerful single principle of organization shaping institutions and individual lives. Colin answers that more fundamental is class dominance, which represents his Marxist attitude.

*... They moved on, inevitably, to the politics of sex and talked, as they had many times before, of patriarchy which, Mary said, was the most powerful single principle of organization shaping institutions and individual lives. Colin argued, as he always did, that class dominance was more fundamental. Mary shook her head, but they battled to find common ground. ... (p. 99-100)*

Mary stops by feminist posters shouting about the castration of men who commit sexual violence, she is thrilled to see what vigorous feminists there are in the country, but Colin does not care and points out that no one will take feminists seriously like that and continues to wonder what street they have already walked down.

*... Frowning, Mary ran her forefinger along the lines of bold print, and when she finished she exclaimed in triumph. She turned and smiled at Colin. 'They want convicted rapists castrated!' He had moved to get a better view of the street to the right. 'And hands chopped off for theft? Look, I'm sure we passed that drinking fountain before, on the way to this bar.' Mary turned back to the poster. 'No. It's a tactic. It's a way of making people take rape more seriously as a crime.' Colin moved again and stood, with his feet firmly apart, facing the street on their left. It too had a drinking fountain. 'It's a way', he said irritably, 'of making people take feminists less seriously.'*  
... (p. 21)

This shows how Mary is alone on deep and sensitive issues in the relationship and is met with misunderstanding and even slight mockery or belittlement from her partner. Colin prefers to deal with practical things like the direction of the streets, certainly not motherhood or feminism. Mary is left alone in the depths of things, just as it becomes clearer and clearer to the reader that she will remain alone at the very end.

Caroline is the great opposite of the feminist Mary. She is an older woman, short, thin and bland. She has no distinctive features to attract one's attention, no expression.

*... Caroline had withdrawn her hand and stared at where it lay in her lap as though it were no longer her own. Her small face, made so geometrically oval by the surrounding darkness and the arrangement of her drawn-back hair, was featureless in its regularity, innocent of expression, without age. Her eyes, nose, mouth, skin, all might have been designed in committee to meet the barest requirements of feasibility. Her mouth, for example, was no more than the word suggested, a moving, lipped slit beneath her nose. ...* (p. 81-82)

Caroline's childhood was a happy one, as the only daughter of a Canadian ambassador, she was always well off, and her father was kind to her. Together with her mother, they supported her father.

*... My childhood was happy and dull. I was an only child, and my father, who was very kind, doted on me, and I did everything he said. I was very close to my mother, we were almost like sisters, and between us we worked hard looking after Dad, "backing up the ambassador" my mother used to say. ...* (p. 141)

At the age of twenty, she decided to marry and married her now husband Robert.

*... One afternoon the wife of the Canadian ambassador was invited to tea. ... The ambassador's wife had blue hair, something I had never seen before, and she brought with her a daughter, Caroline, who was twelve years old. Later I discovered that my father had said our families must become friendly for reasons of diplomacy and business. ... Caroline sat on one wooden chair, and I sat on another. For several minutes no one spoke. 'Caroline had blue eyes and a small face, small like a monkey's. She had freckles across her nose, and on this afternoon she wore her hair in one long pigtail down her back. ... Suddenly Eva said, "Miss Caroline, do you sleep with your mother?" And Caroline said, "No, do you?" Then Eva: "No, but Robert does." 'I went deep, deep red, and was ready to run from the room, but Caroline turned to smile at me and said, "I think that is really awfully sweet", and from that time on I was in love with her, and I no longer slept in my mother's bed. Six years later I met Caroline again, and two years after that we were married.'* (p. 44-45)

Caroline had no previous sexual experience and so was at first surprised when Robert became violent towards her during sexual encounters. At first, she tried to stop him.

*... I was twenty when I married Robert and I knew nothing about sex. Until that time, as far as I can remember, I hadn't had any sexual feelings at all. Robert had been about a bit, so after a bad start it began to come alive for me. Everything was fine. ...* (p. 142)

*... Robert started to hurt me when we made love. Not a lot, but enough to make me cry out. I think I tried hard to stop him. ...* (p. 142)

But then she discovered that she liked it very much. It was not the pain itself that excited her, but rather the pain of humiliation, the pain of guilt. She was ashamed of herself, of what was happening, of what she liked, and that shame was her greatest source of pleasure.

*... One night I got really angry at him, but he went on doing it, and I had to admit, though it took a long time, that I liked it. Perhaps you find that hard to understand. It's not the pain itself, it's the fact of the pain, of being helpless before it, and being reduced to nothing by it. It's pain in a particular context, being punished and therefore being guilty. We both liked what was happening.*

*I was ashamed of myself, and before I knew it, my shame too was a source of pleasure. It was as if I was discovering something that had been with me all my life. I wanted it more and more. I needed it. Robert began to really hurt me. He used a whip. He beat me with his fists as he made love to me. I was terrified, but the terror and the pleasure were all one. Instead of saying loving things into my ear, he whispered pure hatred, and though I was sick with humiliation, I thrilled to the point of passing out. ... (p. 142-143)*

She herself wanted more and more. Often, the incidents were initiated by her.

*... Quite often I was the one to initiate it, and that was never difficult. Robert was longing to pound my body to a pulp. ... (p.143)*

Robert began to use his fists on her or the whip. There were bruises, cuts, and injuries on her body all the time. She had a broken finger, broken ribs, a knocked-out tooth. She was scared, but it aroused her like nothing else. In her own words, she loved to be punished.

*... 'We went on like this for some time. My body was covered in bruises, cuts, weals. Three of my ribs were cracked. Robert knocked out one of my teeth. I had a broken finger.' ... (p. 143)*

She even realized that Robert was not acting, it was not only a love game for him, he really hated her with his whole heart.

*... . I didn't doubt Robert's hatred for me. It wasn't theatre. He made love to me out of deep loathing, and I couldn't resist. I loved being punished. ... (p. 143)*

He had once confided in her that his deepest wish, something that they have never tried yet, is to kill her during intercourse, and since then they have made love harder than ever.

*... We had arrived at the point we had been heading towards all the time. Robert confessed one night that there was only one thing he really wanted. He wanted to kill me, as we made love. He was absolutely serious. I remember the next day we went to a restaurant and tried to laugh it off. But the idea kept coming back. Because of that possibility hanging over us, we made love like never before. ... (p. 144)*

Even so, she could not help herself. When she was in public with other people, she realized that what she was doing with Robert behind the closed door was insane, and she was determined to end it. But as soon as she got back home, temptation pulled her back down again.

*... When I was alone for long enough, or when I was out with ordinary people doing ordinary things, the madness of what we were doing, and my own acquiescence in it, terrified me. I kept telling myself I had to get away. And then, as soon as we were back together again, what had seemed mad became inevitable, even logical, once more. Neither of us could resist it. ... (p. 143)*

To other people, she was just a beaten wife, which she really was, she realized that.

*... To Robert's friends I was just another beaten wife, which was exactly what I was. Nobody noticed. It gave Robert some status round the places where he drank. ... (p. 143)*

She ended up nearly disabled after Robert broke her back one night.

*... 'One night Robert came in from an evening of drinking, just as I was falling asleep. He got into bed and took me from behind. He whispered he was going to kill me, but he'd said that many times before. He had his forearm round my neck, and then he began to push into the small of my back. At the same time he pulled my head backwards. I blacked out with the pain, but even before I went I remember thinking: it's going to happen. I can't go back on it now. Of course, I wanted to be destroyed. ... (p. 144)*

She had to stay in the hospital for several months. Her injuries made it painful for her to laugh. It hurts her to be happy. She can no longer walk away from her life and Robert, which is represented by the fact that because of her injuries, she cannot walk up the stairs, and so she spends her days in the upstairs of her house.

*... 'My back was broken and I was in hospital for months. I'll never walk properly now, partly because of an incompetent surgeon, although the other specialists say he did a wonderful job. They cover for each other. I can't bend down, I get pains in my legs and in my hip joint. It's very difficult for me to walk down stairs, and completely impossible to walk up them. Ironically, the only position I'm comfortable in is on my back. ... (p. 144-145)*

One day she went outside and found that she could not go back up the stairs. Robert did not help her, forbade others to help her, and for going out without his permission, he left her under the stairs all night.

*... When the physiotherapist said I was strong enough, I went out by myself, just to walk in the streets and be an ordinary person again. When I came home I discovered that I couldn't get up the stairs. If I put all my weight on one leg and pushed, I felt a terrible pain, like an electric shock. I waited out in the courtyard for Robert to come home. When he did, he said it was my own fault for leaving the apartment without his permission. He spoke to me like a small child. He wouldn't help me up the stairs, and he wouldn't let any of the neighbours come near me either. You'll find this hard to believe, but I had to stay out all night. I sat in a doorway and tried to sleep, and all night I thought I heard people snoring in their bedrooms. ... (p. 145-146)*

From then on, Caroline was only in the house taking care of her husband's small museum consisting of mementos of his father and grandfather that he was obsessed with.

*... 'I became a virtual prisoner. I could leave the apartment any time, but I could never be sure of getting back, and in the end I gave up. Robert has been paying a neighbour to do all our shopping, and I've hardly been outside in four years. I looked after the heirlooms, Robert's little museum. He's obsessed with his father and grandfather. ... (p. 146)*

It might seem that Caroline is a poor wife oppressed by her husband, to whom she is nothing more than an object of his sadistic desires. McEwan offers this view simply by portraying her as bland, vapid, featureless, uninteresting in anything other than what she does with her husband. For Robert, a bar owner and frequent participant in drinking nights, such a wife provides a certain status in the circles in which he moves.

But for Caroline, submission to patriarchy is natural from her childhood, when she saw her mother support her father. Moreover, there is something in Caroline that she only discovered with Robert, but it seems to have been with her all her life. Robert's ultimate desire, to murder, is also her desire, which she was prepared to fulfill with her own body. This never happened, Robert and Caroline preferred to find an object outside their relationship, but the desire never left. Desire can't stop just because it has to.

*... When I came out, the idea was that we were going to be sensible. We were shaken up by what had happened. Robert was putting all his energy into the bar, I was seeing a physiotherapist here in the apartment several hours a day. But of course, we couldn't forget what we'd been through, nor could we stop wanting it. We were the same people after all, and this idea, I mean the idea of death, wouldn't go away just because we said it had to. ... (p. 145)*

But Mary and Caroline have one thing in common. The reader must not miss the fact that, although at first it seems that Caroline and her husband are completely deviant and possess rare sexual abnormalities, McEwan suggests otherwise. Which serves as evidence that he is trying to portray the violence in the nature of every creature, not to disgust and shock. This is represented in the story by the fact that after Mary and Colin meet Robert, they suddenly start holding hands, wake up in the same bed, and are surprised by the quality of their intercourse.

*... Walking back from the apartment to the hotel, they had held hands all the way; that night they had slept in the same bed. They woke surprised to find themselves in each other's arms. Their lovemaking surprised them too, for the great, enveloping pleasure, the sharp, almost painful, thrills were sensations, they said that evening on the balcony, they remembered from seven years before, when they had first met. How could they have forgotten so easily? It was over in less than ten minutes. They lay face to face a long while, impressed and a little moved. They went into the bathroom together. They stood under the shower giggling and soaped each other's body. Thoroughly cleansed and perfumed, they returned to bed and made love till noon. ... (p. 96-97)*

They begin to share their sexual fantasies involving bondage and violation, ... *Mary muttered her intention of hiring a surgeon to amputate Colin's arms and legs. She would keep him in a room in her house, and use him exclusively for sex, sometimes lending him out to friends. Colin invented for Mary a large, intricate machine, made of steel, painted bright red and powered by electricity; it had pistons and controls, straps and dials, and made a low hum when it was switched on. Colin hummed in Mary's ear. Once Mary was strapped in, fitted to tubes that fed and evacuated her body, the machine would fuck her, not just for hours or weeks, but for years, on and on, for the rest of her life, till she was dead and on even after that, till Colin, or his solicitor, switched it off. ... (p. 102-103)* and are suddenly overwhelmed with love and understanding. Caroline and Robert, as if they knew that Mary and Colin shared their sadomasochistic desires, welcomed them into their final scene with the words ... *'Why?'*

*Robert laughed and mimicked accurately Colin's studious hesitancy. 'Why? Why?' Then he leaned forwards and touched Colin's forearm. 'We knew you would come back. We were waiting, preparing. We thought you'd come sooner. ... (p. 134)*

Before Robert slits Colin's wrists, Caroline says, *'Mary understands. ... Secretly, I think you understand too.'* (p. 156) Just as Colin and Robert take pleasure in their partners' pain, Caroline and Mary take pleasure in receiving it.



## 10 ON CHESIL BEACH, 2007 – MCEWAN'S LATER WRITING STYLE

McEwan's writing underwent a major evolution as he began to expand his range beyond shocking psychopathological phenomena. In the early 1970s, his work was at its most violent and sadistic. By the end of that decade, under the influence of the feminist and peace movements, it had softened. Later, it moved into political, social, and historical themes. This is not to say that the darkness in his work stopped, McEwan just felt, in his own words, trapped in his themes and needed to realise himself in other areas.<sup>126</sup>

One of the works that does not deal in any way with hideous or shocking motifs, nor with heavy political or historical references, is *On Chesil Beach*. For these reasons, Head organizes it into McEwan's minor works.<sup>127</sup> This short story is very gentle and human, set against the troubles of class hierarchy and social conventions in England in the early 1960s, therefore capturing the change from classic small-town sexually repressive England to the forerunner of the sexual revolution and its arrival. The story describes one event, a wedding, including the events leading up to the wedding and the events following the wedding. *On Chesil Beach* follows a young English couple, Edward Mayhew, a graduate student of history, and Florence Ponting, a violinist in a string quartet. They are very much in love, although Edward is from a poor background and Florence, on the other hand, comes from a well-off family. Their life's journeys and love have led them to their wedding night, honeymoon in a hotel on the Dorset coast, at Chesil Beach. According to Head, this placement of the story has its own historical and social symbolism. The couple's ruined wedding night, one single event after which nothing is the same, is a representation of the dividing line between the sexual revolution and the repression that preceded it. And specifically Chesil Beach, the long pebble beach dividing the English channel and Fleet Lagoon, which is not easy to walk on, is meant to symbolise this epochal change.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>MALCOLM, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002. (p. 5).

<sup>127</sup>HEAD, Dominic. On Chesil Beach: Another 'Overrated' Novella?. *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 2013, 115-22. (p. 116).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* (p.118)

The work resonates with the coming free-spirited decade and the reader is not at all left disgusted, yet the heroine Florence has a little surprise waiting.

Florence is 22 years old, a very intelligent English girl with an IQ of 152.

*... He had peeped once into her school report folder and seen her intelligence-tests results: one hundred and fifty-two, seventeen points above his own score. ... (p.16)*

Unlike Edward, she is extremely ambitious and driven, with love for music, often sharing a lifelong dream and goal of standing on the Wigmore Hall stage as a leader of the Ennismore string group.

*... Florence was so touched, she made another promise—again, that thrilling solemnity that seemed to double the size of her eyes. When the great day came for the Ennismore to make its Wigmore Hall debut, they would play the quintet, and it would be especially for him. ... (p. 126-127)*

Music seems to be Florence's only real passion in life and she spends plenty of time talking about the Ennismore Quartet she is part of.

*... Naturally, Florence talked about her plans for the Ennismore Quartet. The week before they had gone to their old college and played Beethoven's second Razumovsky right through for her tutor, and he was obviously excited. He told them straightaway that they had a future and must at all costs hang together and work extremely hard. He said they should focus their repertoire, concentrate on Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert and leave Schumann, Brahms and all the twentieth-century composers until later. Florence told Edward that there was no other life she wanted, that she could not bear to waste away the years at a rear desk in some orchestra, assuming she could even get a place. With the quartet, the work was so intense, the demands on concentration so huge when each player was like a soloist, the music so beautiful and rich, that every time they played a piece through, they found something new. ... (p. 123-124)*

Above all, Florence loves classical music, which means nothing to Edward. Music is a strong motif in the work, demonstrating another of the many differences between the couple.

*... She said all this knowing that classical music meant nothing to him. As far as he was concerned, it was best heard in the background at low volume, a stream of undifferentiated mewling, scraping and tooting generally taken to signify seriousness and maturity and respect for the past, and entirely devoid of interest or excitement. ... (p. 124)*

Florence has mysteriously flecked, hazel eyes, clear whites with a hint of the finest milky blue, eyelashes as thick and dark as a child's, a serious expression, a graceful face as if sculpted by a sculptor. "Flo" reminds an American Indian noble woman, with a strong jaw, a broad and artless smile, big-boned, broad hips. Small breasts that have hardly been touched, pale and strong violinist's hands, long arms.

*... He was gazing at his wife now, into her intricately flecked hazel eyes, into those pure whites touched by a bloom of the faintest milky blue. The lashes were thick and dark, like a child's, and there was something childlike too in the solemnity of her face at rest. It was a lovely face, with a sculpted look that in a certain light brought to mind an American Indian woman, a high-born squaw. She had a strong jaw, and her smile was broad and artless, right into the creases at the corners of her eyes. She was big-boned—certain matrons at the wedding knowingly remarked on her generous hips. Her breasts, which Edward had touched and even kissed, though nowhere near enough, were small. Her violinist's hands were pale and powerful, her long arms likewise; at her school sports days she had been adept at throwing the javelin. ... (p. 14)*

Florence's posture is impressive, and she holds herself upright, with back straight and head proudly held high, reading notes with a commanding and confident expression.

*... When she was before the music stand in the rehearsal room in London, or in her room at her parents' house in Oxford, with Edward sprawled on the bed, watching and desiring her, she held herself gracefully, with back straight and head lifted proudly, and read the music with a commanding, almost haughty expression that stirred him. That look had such certitude, such knowledge of the path to pleasure. ... (p. 15)*

In everyday life, however, she is awkward and clumsy, uncertain and shy.

*... When the business was music, she was always confident and fluid in her movements—rosining a bow, restringing her instrument, rearranging the room to accommodate her three friends from college for the string quartet that was her passion. She was the undisputed leader, and always had the final word in their many musical disagreements. But in the rest of her life she was surprisingly clumsy and unsure, forever stubbing a toe or knocking things over or bumping her head. The fingers that could manage the double stopping in a Bach partita were just as clever at spilling a full teacup over a linen tablecloth or dropping a glass onto a stone floor. She would trip over her feet if she thought she was being watched—she confided to Edward that she found it an ordeal to be in the street, walking toward a friend from a distance. And whenever she was anxious or too self-conscious, her hand would rise repeatedly to her forehead to brush away an imaginary strand of hair, a gentle, fluttering motion that would continue long after the source of stress had vanished. ... (p. 15-16)*

Florence comes from a classic wealthy English family, father is a factory owner and mother is a teacher at Oxford University. Thanks to her father Geoffrey, Florence travelled many places as a child, went on ships and slept in good hotels - things Edward never even dreamed of.

*... Last summer her father had taken her out regularly after work in his Humber, so that she could have a go at her driving license just after her twenty-first birthday. She failed. Violin lessons from the age of five, with summer courses at a special school, skiing and tennis lessons and flying lessons, which she defiantly refused. And then the journeys: just the two of them, hiking in the Alps, Sierra Nevada and Pyrenees, and the special treats, the one-night business trips to European cities where she and Geoffrey always stayed in the grandest hotels. ... (p. 54)*

Two factors had a negative impact on the development of Florence. There are several hints in the story, Head suggests, that the father of Florence may have been abusive,<sup>129</sup> or at least while travelling one night, Florence heard him unbuckling his trouser belt and perhaps accidentally saw his penis.

*... He used to take her out with him, and several times, when she was twelve and thirteen, they crossed all the way to Carteret, near Cherbourg. They never talked about those trips. He had*

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<sup>129</sup>HEAD, Dominic. On Chesil Beach: Another 'Overrated' Novella?. *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 2013, 115-22. (p. 120).

*never asked her again, and she was glad. But sometimes, in a surge of protective feeling and guilty love, she would come up behind him where he sat and entwine her arms around his neck and kiss the top of his head and nuzzle him, liking his clean scent. She would do all this, then loathe herself for it later. ... (p. 50)*

*... Here came the past anyway, the indistinct past. It was the smell of the sea that summoned it. She was twelve years old, lying still like this, waiting, shivering in the narrow bunk with polished mahogany sides. Her mind was a blank, she felt she was in disgrace. After a two-day crossing, they were once more in the calm of Carteret harbor, south of Cherbourg. It was late in the evening, and her father was moving about the dim cramped cabin, undressing, like Edward now. She remembered the rustle of clothes, the clink of a belt unfastened or of keys or loose change. Her only task was to keep her eyes closed and think of a tune she liked. Or any tune. She remembered the sweet scent of almost rotten food in the closed air of a boat after a rough trip. She was usually sick many times on the crossing, and of no use to her father as a sailor, and that surely was the source of her shame. ... (p. 99-100)*

The second factor is an emotionally cold and uptight mother, to whom Florence cannot go for advice, even when experiencing hopeless anxiety, as a boring university lecture would follow.

*... There was no one she could have talked to. Ruth, her sister, was too young, and her mother, perfectly wonderful in her way, was too intellectual, too brittle, an old-fashioned bluestocking. Whenever she confronted an intimate problem, she tended to adopt the public manner of the lecture hall, and use longer and longer words, and make references to books she thought everyone should have read. Only when the matter was safely bundled up in this way might she sometimes relax into kindness, though that was rare, and even then you had no idea what advice you were receiving. ... (p. 10)*

Edward also struggled with dysfunction in the family. Mother, Marjorie Mayhew, ended up mentally disabled after suffering an injury caused by the door of a passing train and was unable to run the household, so they lived in chaos and poverty, moreover, the family kept mother under the delusion that everything was managed perfectly and that she was still the head of the household.

*... There is a certain kind of confident traveler who likes to open the carriage door just before the train has stopped in order to step out onto the platform with a little running skip. Perhaps by leaving the train before its journey has ended, he asserts his independence—he is no passive lump of freight. Perhaps he invigorates a memory of youthfulness, or is simply in such a hurry that every second matters. The train braked, possibly a little harder than usual, and the door swung out from this traveler's grasp. The heavy metal edge struck Marjorie Mayhew's forehead with sufficient force to fracture her skull and dislocate in an instant her personality, intelligence and memory. Her coma lasted just under a week. ... (p. 70)*

*... But for most of the time Marjorie kept herself content with the notion, an elaborate fairy tale in fact, that she was a devoted wife and mother, that the house ran smoothly thanks to all her work and that she deserved a little time to herself when her duties were done. And in order to keep the bad moments to a minimum and not alarm that scrap of her former consciousness, Lionel and the children colluded in the make-believe. At the beginning of meals, she might lift her face from contemplating her husband's efforts and say sweetly as she brushed the straggly hair from her face, "I do hope you enjoy this. It's something new I wanted to try." ... (p. 67-68)*

*... It was a form of make-believe that was comforting for them all. When Marjorie announced that she was making a shopping list for Watlington market, or that she had more sheets to iron than she could begin to count, a parallel world of bright normality appeared within reach of the whole family. But the fantasy could be sustained only if it was not discussed. They grew up inside it, neutrally inhabiting its absurdities because they were never defined. ... (p. 68)*

Perhaps because of family backgrounds, Florence and Edward are unable to make a connection.

Another explanation may be social conventions. In 1962, it was too early for Edward and Florence to what people their age would be doing on a regular basis in a few years' time. At this time, even when alone, there were still thousands of unwritten rules, pervasive conformity and uptightness taking away from authenticity.

*... They were adults at last, on holiday, free to do as they chose. In just a few years' time, that would be the kind of thing quite ordinary young people would do. But for now, the times held*

*them. Even when Edward and Florence were alone, a thousand unacknowledged rules still applied. ... (p. 18)*

For Florence, marriage was the beginning of a cure from the awkward condition called youth, which it really was at that time. Marriage meant a new status, an end to endless youth and a desired freedom.

*... This was still the era—it would end later in that famous decade—when to be young was a social encumbrance, a mark of irrelevance, a faintly embarrassing condition for which marriage was the beginning of a cure. Almost strangers, they stood, strangely together, on a new pinnacle of existence, gleeful that their new status promised to promote them out of their endless youth—Edward and Florence, free at last! ... (p. 6)*

For over a year, Florence managed to put off intercourse, suffered long kisses and invisibly avoided any longer touching. Edward had been both patient and impatient, not understanding the exaggerated detachment but hoping for a breakthrough on their wedding night. One day, when Edward could not endure his desire any longer, he impulsively proposed to Florence.

*... He could not have known what it cost her to put a hand—it was the back of her hand—in such a place. She loved him, she wanted to please him, but she had to overcome considerable distaste. It was an honest attempt—she may have been clever, but she was without guile. She kept that hand in place for as long as she could, until she felt a stirring and hardening beneath the gray flannel of his trousers. She experienced a living thing, quite separate from her Edward—and she recoiled. Then he blurted out his proposal, and in the rush of emotion, the delight and hilarity and relief, the sudden embraces, she momentarily forgot her little shock. And he was so astonished by his own decisiveness, as well as mentally cramped by unresolved desire, that he could have had little idea of the contradiction she began to live with from that day on, the secret affair between disgust and joy. ... (p. 23)*

The proposal was accepted enthusiastically, and Florence enjoyed the wedding preparations, with a nightmare in the background that still haunted her mind, a dark cloud, a never-fading stain on her happiness. The nearer the wedding day approached and the more Florence looked forward to it, the more the terror of what would have to surely be

undergone grew. Florence was rolling a stone in front of her that she would not be able to bear and was not brave or honest enough to admit it, to endanger desired approaching status. At first, Florence could not even name the problem to herself, but it was inevitable. The girl was not just commonly nervous about her inexperience or scared of the unknown, she was disgusted, grossed out, the simple thought of what was swinging between Edward's legs and how he was going to insert "it" in made her want to vomit.

*... Florence's anxieties were more serious, and there were moments during the journey from Oxford when she thought she was about to draw on all her courage to speak her mind. But what troubled her was unutterable, and she could barely frame it for herself. Where he merely suffered conventional first-night nerves, she experienced a visceral dread, a helpless disgust as palpable as seasickness. For much of the time, through all the months of merry wedding preparation, she managed to ignore this stain on her happiness, but whenever her thoughts turned toward a close embrace—she preferred no other term—her stomach tightened dryly, she was nauseous at the back of her throat. ... (p. 7)*

Florence could not stand Edward's constant begging and pleading, wheedling. She tried and wanted so badly to make it, every time Edward was given an extra bit, he wanted more and more. Still in front of Florence stood the overwhelming weight of Edward's increasing desire, and then the heaviness of not satisfying it. Florence lived a secret affair between disgust and joy. Sex was the price she would have to pay for her happiness.

*... "You're always pushing me, pushing me, wanting something out of me. We can never just be. We can never just be happy. There's this constant pressure. There's always something more that you want out of me. This endless wheedling." ... (p. 145)*

*... Florence suspected that there was something profoundly wrong with her, that she had always been different, and that at last she was about to be exposed. Her problem, she thought, was greater, deeper, than straightforward physical disgust; her whole being was in revolt against a prospect of entanglement and flesh; her composure and essential happiness were about to be violated. She simply did not want to be "entered" or "penetrated." Sex with Edward could not be the summation of her joy, but was the price she must pay for it. ... (p. 9)*



Soon there was no going back. When the tension between the couple finally came to a peak, that was, the highlight of the wedding night came, after agonizingly long moments of awkward attempts, Edward squirted sperm on Florence's thigh.

*... In horror she let go, as Edward, rising up with a bewildered look, his muscular back arching in spasms, emptied himself over her in gouts, in vigorous but diminishing quantities, filling her navel, coating her belly, thighs, and even a portion of her chin and kneecap in tepid, viscous fluid. ... (p. 105)*

Florence could no longer contain her disgust, her desire to vomit, and run screaming from the room.

*... She had taken pride, only half a minute before, in mastering her feelings and appearing calm. But now she was incapable of repressing her primal disgust, her visceral horror at being doused in fluid, in slime from another body. In seconds it had turned icy on her skin in the sea breeze, and yet, just as she knew it would, it seemed to scald her. Nothing in her nature could have held back her instant cry of revulsion. ... (p. 105-106)*

Angry at Edward, at his nastiness, and at herself for letting things get this far. Florence run off to Chesil Beach, *... She snatched her shoes from the floor and ran through the sitting room, past the ruin of their meal, and out into the corridor, down the stairs, out through the main entrance, around the side of the hotel and across the mossy lawn. And even when she reached the beach at last, she did not stop running. ... (p. 106-107)* where she later confided her feelings to Edward. In addition to her feelings, she also offered a solution.

Florence loves Edward, and music, there is nothing else in the world she would rather spend her life with. But Edward did not believe her love as they did not share the same desires. Edward was still too young, ignorant, and rash to understand the love with which Florence offered a platonic, open relationship. (In spite of the fact that Florence had no relation to sexuality, or so she thought at the time, she had a very progressive and modern mindset when it came to marital needs, so modern that it would not be entirely common even at the peak of the free-thinking sixties.) For all self-centeredness, Edward could not understand that love could blossom from anything other than sexual desire. (But it was

too early for her proposal to be acceptable. Western ideas of what was and was not normal in love had not yet arrived and so Florence's request was considered deviant and offensive to Edward.)

*... It's because I know you love me that I can actually say this. What I mean, it's this—Edward, I love you, and we don't have to be like everyone, I mean, no one, no one at all...no one would know what we did or didn't do. We could be together, live together, and if you wanted, really wanted, that's to say, whenever it happened, and of course it would happen, I would understand, more than that, I'd want it, I would because I want you to be happy and free. I'd never be jealous, as long as I knew that you loved me. I would love you and play music, that's all I want to do in life. Honestly. I just want to be with you, look after you, be happy with you, and work with the quartet, and one day play something, something beautiful for you, like the Mozart, at the Wigmore Hall." She stopped abruptly. She had not meant to talk about her musical ambitions, and she believed it was a mistake. ... (p. 155)*

Florence was left by Edward with curses of frigidity and outrageousness.

*... "You tricked me. Actually, you're a fraud. And I know exactly what else you are. Do you know what you are? You're frigid, that's what. Completely frigid. But you thought you needed a husband, and I was the first bloody idiot who came along." She knew she had not set out to deceive him, but everything else, as soon as he said it, seemed entirely true. Frigid, that terrible word—she understood how it applied to her. She was exactly what the word meant. Her proposal was disgusting—how could she not have seen that before? and clearly an insult. ... (p. 156)*

The marriage was annulled as unfulfilled and the couple never met again.

*... A week later he learned from his father that Mrs. Ponting had efficiently arranged the return of all the wedding presents. Between them, Lionel and Violet quietly set in motion a divorce on the grounds of nonconsummation. ... (p. 160)*

Florence was successful in life, determined, and fulfilled her dream of performing. Edward was the exact opposite, he wandered through life aimlessly, never achieving dreams, having several partners and fully enjoying the free years that England offered at the time.

... In later years, whenever Edward thought of her and addressed her in his mind, or imagined writing to her or bumping into her in the street, it seemed to him that an explanation of his existence would take up less than a minute, less than half a page. What had he done with himself? He had drifted through, half asleep, inattentive, unambitious, unserious, childless, comfortable. ... (p. 163)

... Toward the end of that celebrated decade, when his life came under pressure from all the new excitements and freedoms and fashions, as well as from the chaos of numerous love affairs—he became at last reasonably competent—he often thought of her strange proposal, and it no longer seemed quite so ridiculous, and certainly not disgusting or insulting. In the new circumstances of the day, it appeared liberated, and far ahead of its time, innocently generous, an act of self-sacrifice that he had quite failed to understand. Man, what an offer! his friends might have said, though he never spoke of that night to anyone. By then, in the late sixties, he was living in London. Who would have predicted such transformations—the sudden guiltless elevation of sensual pleasure, the uncomplicated willingness of so many beautiful women? Edward wandered through those brief years like a confused and happy child reprieved from a prolonged punishment, not quite able to believe his luck. The series of short history books and all thoughts of serious scholarship were behind him, though there was never any particular point when he made a firm decision about his future. Like poor Sir Robert Carey, he simply fell away from history to live snugly in the present. ... (p. 160-161)

He became involved in the administration of various rock festivals, helped start a health-food canteen in Hampstead ... lived through a chaotic, overlapping sequence of lovers, traveled through France with a woman who became his wife for three and a half years and lived with her in Paris. ... His life was too busy for newspapers, and besides, for a while his attitude was that no one could honestly trust the “straight” press because everyone knew it was controlled by state, military or financial interests—a view that Edward later disowned. Even if he had read the papers in those times, he would have been unlikely to turn to the arts pages, to the long, thoughtful reviews of concerts. His precarious interest in classical music had faded entirely in favor of rock and roll. So he never heard about the Ennismore Quartet’s triumphant debut at the Wigmore Hall in July 1968. The Times critic welcomed the arrival of “fresh blood, youthful passion to the current scene.” ... At the end of his review he singled out the leader, the first violinist. “Then came a searingly expressive Adagio of consummate beauty and spiritual power. Miss Ponting, in the lilting tenderness of her tone and the lyrical delicacy of her phrasing, played, if I may put it

*this way, like a woman in love, not only with Mozart, or with music, but with life itself.” (p.161-162)*

As becoming more sexually experienced and free from dominance and anger, Edward realised that Florence was not frigid. All she needed was time and the certainty of love.

*... When he thought of her, it rather amazed him, that he had let that girl with her violin go. Now, of course, he saw that her self-effacing proposal was quite irrelevant. All she had needed was the certainty of his love, and his reassurance that there was no hurry when a lifetime lay ahead of them. Love and patience—if only he had had them both at once—would surely have seen them both through. ... (p. 165-166)*

Florence never stopped thinking about Edward, even in her most glorious moments. After her triumphant performance, Florence glances back in remembrance at the seat where Edward sat in the empty auditorium decades ago, vowing to be there on this very day of triumph.

*... And even if Edward had read that review, he could not have known—no one knew but Florence—that as the house lights came up, and as the dazed young players stood to acknowledge the rapturous applause, the first violinist could not help her gaze traveling to the middle of the third row, to seat 9C. ... (p. 162-163)*

Edward never knew how much she loved him the moment she left him.

*... He did not know, or would not have cared to know, that as she ran away from him, certain in her distress that she was about to lose him, she had never loved him more, or more hopelessly, and that the sound of his voice would have been a deliverance, and she would have turned back. ... (p. 166)*

Edward and Florence's relationship was a victim of timing, a product of a conventional time when debate about intimate matters was a non-existent topic, and so the two inexperienced young people, unaware of what was ahead of them, easily lost their way.

## 11 SWEET TOOTH, 2012 - A CONFIRMATION OF MCEWAN'S NEW STYLE

*Over the decades, his writing has moved from placing a covert rather than overt psychological pressure on his characters and readers.*<sup>130</sup>

In each of McEwan's later works, a more developed characterization and a more complex structure are seen. In his own words, the writer feels that he is clearer as a writer than he was in the 1970s and is more and more able to expand on his ideas, stating that he wants to start creating a more realistic world. Already in *On Chesil Beach*, his literary style is elevated from his earlier works.<sup>131</sup> Even though *On Chesil Beach* and *Sweet Tooth* were created with only a five year difference, *Sweet Tooth* takes this effort even further.

*Sweet Tooth* is an enjoyable and fast-paced work, a spy novel set in England in the early 1970s. Here McEwan delivers a masterfully crafted twist that leaves the reader clueless until the last moment and then leaves them alone to re-evaluate everything they have thought about the story so far.

The story is told by a young, beautiful, and mathematically clever woman, the daughter of an Anglican bishop.

*... But at the time I was considered something of a freak of nature – a girl who happened to have a talent for mathematics. I wasn't interested in the subject, I took little pleasure in it, but I enjoyed being top, and getting there without much work. I knew the answers to questions before I even knew how I had got to them. While my friends struggled and calculated, I reached a solution by a set of floating steps that were partly visual, partly just a feeling for what was right. It was hard to explain how I knew what I knew. Obviously, an exam in maths was far less effort than one in English literature. And in my final year I was captain of the school chess team. You must exercise some historical imagination to understand what it meant for a girl in those times to travel to a neighbouring school and knock from his perch some condescending smirking squirt of a boy. However, maths and chess, along with hockey, pleated skirts and hymn-singing, I considered*

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<sup>130</sup>ELLAM, Julie. *Ian McEwan's Atonement*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009. (p.8)

<sup>131</sup>Ibid. (p.9)

*mere school stuff. I reckoned it was time to put away these childish things when I began to think about applying to university. ... (p. 2-3)*

Although only as clever as the rest of the population, that is, not at the highest level of mathematics.

*... It was obvious to my tutors and fellow students that I could not succeed precisely because I was a good-looking girl in a mini-skirt, with blonde hair curling past her shoulder blades. The truth was that I couldn't succeed because I was like nearly all the rest of humanity – not much good at maths, not at this level. ... (p. 5)*

A Cambridge University student, Serena Frome (rhymes with plume), ... *... My name is Serena Frome (rhymes with plume) ... (p. 1)* wished to study literature at a provincial university, reading seems to be her biggest hobby.

*... Left to myself I would have chosen to do a lazy English degree at a provincial university far to the north or west of my home. I enjoyed reading novels. I went fast – I could get through two or three a week – and doing that for three years would have suited me just fine. ... (p. 2)*

But because of her mother, she pursued a degree in mathematics. Her mother wanted Serena to break out of the established model of the female-male relationship, where a woman suppresses her desires, is unable to be independent, and her life is filled only with supporting man. Mother herself has wasted life that way and wants a feminist future at least for daughter.

*... But what I hadn't understood about my mother was that buried deep beneath this conventional exterior was the hardy little seed of a feminist. I'm sure that word never passed her lips, but it made no difference. Her certainty frightened me. She said it was my duty as a woman to go to Cambridge to study maths. As a woman? In those days, in our milieu, no one ever spoke like that. No woman did anything 'as a woman'. She told me she would not permit me to waste my talent. I was to excel and become extraordinary. I must have a proper career in science or engineering or economics. She allowed herself the world-oyster cliché. It was unfair on my sister that I was both clever and beautiful when she was neither. It would compound the injustice if I failed to aim high. I didn't follow the logic of this, but I said nothing. My mother told me she would never*

*forgive me and she would never forgive herself if I went off to read English and became no more than a slightly better educated housewife than she was. I was in danger of wasting my life. Those were her words, and they represented an admission. This was the only time she expressed or implied dissatisfaction with her lot. ... (p. 3-4)*

Serena's childhood was trouble-free, idyllic, set in the classic patriarchal English countryside. Father's religious commitment did not have a negative impact on her and settled their family in a nice and secure environment.

*... I won't waste much time on my childhood and teenage years. I'm the daughter of an Anglican bishop and grew up with a sister in the cathedral precinct of a charming small city in the east of England. My home was genial, polished, orderly, book-filled. ... (p. 1)*

*... Our father's belief in God was muted and reasonable, did not intrude much on our lives and was just sufficient to raise him smoothly through the Church hierarchy and install us in a comfortable Queen Anne house. It overlooked an enclosed garden with ancient herbaceous borders that were well known, and still are, to those who know about plants. So, all stable, enviable, idyllic even. We grew up inside a walled garden, with all the pleasures and limitations that implies. ... (p. 1)*

But even behind the wall, the typical atmosphere of the 1960s came through into the idyllic surroundings and slightly affected serena.

*... The late sixties lightened but did not disrupt our existence. I never missed a day at my local grammar school unless I was ill. In my late teens there slipped over the garden wall some heavy petting, as they used to call it, experiments with tobacco, alcohol and a little hashish, rock and roll records, brighter colours and warmer relations all round. At seventeen my friends and I were timidly and delightedly rebellious, but we did our school work, we memorised and disgorged the irregular verbs, the equations, the motives of fictional characters. We liked to think of ourselves as bad girls, but actually we were rather good. It pleased us, the general excitement in the air in 1969. ... (p. 2)*

Serena shows no interest in political events and certainly has no ambition to take part in political troubles, living the ordinary life of a young girl, occupied with her studies, boys, and enjoying reading.

*... I knew nothing of the Soviet labour camps and had never heard the word 'gulag'. Growing up in a cathedral precinct, what did I know of the cruel absurdities of communism, of how brave men and women in bleak and remote penal colonies were reduced to thinking day by day of nothing else beyond their own survival? Hundreds of thousands transported to the Siberian wastes for fighting for their country in a foreign land, for having been a prisoner of war, for upsetting a party official, for being a party official, for wearing glasses, for being a Jew, a homosexual, a peasant who owned a cow, a poet. Who was speaking out for all this lost humanity? I had never troubled myself with politics before. I knew nothing of the arguments and disillusionment of an older generation. Nor had I heard of the 'left opposition'. Beyond school, my education had been confined to some extra maths and piles of paperback novels. I was an innocent and my outrage was moral. I didn't use, and hadn't even heard, the word 'totalitarianism'. I probably would have thought it had something to do with refusing a drink. ... (p. 8)*

*... But I lost my virginity in my first term, several times over it seemed, the general style being so wordless and clumsy, and had a pleasant succession of boyfriends, six or seven or eight over the nine terms, depending on your definitions of carnality. I made a handful of good friends from among the Newnham women. I played tennis and I read books. ... (p. 5)*

Serena's romance with Tony Canning, a man thirty years older, is something unexpected and new for her although she has felt a certain attraction to older men in the past.

*... Suddenly, from out of an alley, there appeared before us under the inadequate street lighting Jeremy's history tutor, Tony Canning. When we were introduced he shook my hand, and held on to it far too lingeringly, I thought. He was in his early fifties – about my father's age ... (p. 11)*

*... He was of the great and good, a type vaguely familiar to me. Men like him came to our house to visit the Bishop from time to time. They were annoying of course to anyone under twenty-five in that post-sixties period, but I rather liked them too. They could be charming, even witty, and the whiff they trailed of cigars and brandy made the world seem orderly and rich. They thought much of themselves, but they didn't seem dishonest, and they had, or gave the impression they*



*had, a strong sense of public service. They took their pleasures seriously (wine, food, fishing, bridge, etc.) and apparently some had fought an interesting war. I had memories of childhood Christmases when one or two of them would tip my sister and me a ten bob note. Let these men rule the world. There were others far worse. ... (p. 11-12)*

Tony, with whom Serena spends almost the last days of his life, ... *His case was more complex and sadder than anyone knew. He would change my life and behave with selfless cruelty as he prepared to set out on a journey with no hope of return. If I know so little about him even now, it's because I accompanied him only a very small part of the way. ... (p. 14-15)* prepares her for the Secret Service and gradually train her, through newspaper reading and long discussions, for the crucial task of securing her path in life.

*... When exams were over Tony said he was taking charge of my reading. Enough novels! He was appalled by my ignorance of what he called 'our island story'. ... (p. 22)*

*... I was required to read up on the Congress of Vienna of 1815. ... (p. 22)*

*... Initially, I impressed him with my speed-reading. Two hundred pages in a couple of hours! Then I disappointed him. I couldn't answer his questions clearly, I wasn't retaining information. He made me go back through Churchill's version of the Glorious Revolution, tested me, groaned theatrically – You bloody sieve! – made me read again, asked more questions. These oral exams happened during walks in the woods, and over glasses of wine after the suppers he cooked. I resented his persistence. I wanted us to be lovers, not teacher and pupil. ... (p. 22)*

*... I was easily led. I was being groomed for my first interview, which was to take place in September. He had an idea of the kind of Englishwoman they would want to take on, or that he would want, and he worried that my narrow education would let me down. ... He insisted I read a newspaper every day, by which of course he meant The Times, which in those days was still the august paper of record. I hadn't bothered much with the press before, and I had never even heard of a leader. ... (p. 23)*

Serena was successfully recruited by the British secret service, MI5.

*... Perhaps it should have been obvious to me where this was leading. In a tiny, hothouse world of undergraduate journalism, I'd announced myself as a trainee Cold Warrior. ... (p. 13)*

*... Recruitment methods in those days were changing, but only a little. The Western world may have been undergoing a steady transformation, the young may have thought they had discovered a new way of talking to each other, the old barriers were said to be crumbling from the base. But the famous 'hand on the shoulder' was still applied, perhaps less frequently, perhaps with less pressure. In the university context certain dons continued to look out for promising material and pass names on for interview. Certain successful candidates in the Civil Service exams were still taken aside and asked if they had ever thought of 'another' department. Mostly, people were quietly approached once they'd been out in the world a few years. No one ever needed to spell it out, but background remained important, and having the Bishop in mine was no disadvantage. ... (p. 13-14)*

*... Generally, both hand and shoulder belonged to men. It was unusual for a woman to be approached in that much-described, time-honoured way. And though it was strictly true that Tony Canning ended up recruiting me for MI5, his motives were complicated and he had no official sanction. If the fact that I was young and attractive was important to him, it took a while to discover the full pathos of that. (Now that the mirror tells a different story, I can say it and get it out of the way. I really was pretty. More than that. ... I was 'actually rather gorgeous' ... (p. 14)*

What Serena does not know, is that she is under suspicion, having been recruited by a former spy. MI5 believes she knows dangerous information and so she is being watched by her colleagues.

*... I said, 'Do you really think you're being followed?' 'No, not me. You.' My laughter was genuine. 'That's ridiculous.' 'Seriously. The Watchers. Ever since you joined. They've probably been into your room. Put in a mike. Serena, don't stop smiling.' ... 'But Shirley. Why?' 'I thought you could tell me.' 'There's nothing. You've made this up.' 'Look, I've got something to tell you. I did something stupid and I'm really ashamed. I don't know how to say it. I was going to do it yesterday, then my nerve failed. But I need to be honest about this. I've fucked up.' ... Shirley said at last, 'Before we went to clean that house, they called me in. Peter Nutting, Tapp, that creepy kid, Benjamin someone.' 'Jesus. Why?' 'They laid it on. Said I was doing well, possibility of promotion, softening me up like. Then they said they knew we were close friends. Nutting asked if you ever said anything unusual or suspicious. I said no. They asked what we talked about.'*

*'Christ. What did you say?' 'I should have told them to get stuffed. I didn't have the courage. There was nothing to hide so I told them the truth. I said we talked about music, friends, family, the past, chit-chat, nothing much at all.' She looked at me a touch accusingly. 'You would've done the same.' 'I'm not sure.' 'If I'd said nothing they'd have been even more suspicious.' 'All right. Then what?' Tapp asked me if we ever spoke about politics and I said no. He said he found that hard to believe, I said it was a fact. We went round and round for a bit. Then they said OK, they were going to ask me something delicate. But it was very important and they'd be deeply appreciative, etc., if I could see my way to oblige, on and on, you know the greasy way they talk.' 'I think so.' 'They wanted me to get into a political conversation with you, and to come on like a real closet leftie, draw you out and see where you stood and ...' 'Let them know.' ... (p. 113-114)*

At first, Serena was not a spy, her MI5 job was of little importance in the mass of activity organised by the Secret Service. Serena was an ordinary office girl, miles away from making important decisions.

*... I was to fill the post of junior assistant officer. I already knew that in Civil Service rankings this was the lowest of the low. My principal duties would be in filing, indexing and related library work. With hard work and in time, I might rise to assistant officer. ... (p. 36)*

When later on, the year is 1972 and Serena is to participate in an anti-communist campaign codenamed "Sweet Tooth" entrusted to her by MI5 as more interesting work opportunity, she became involved with Tom Hayle, the object of her mission, therefore Serena failed as a spy. The task is to seek out or select and offer financial help to authors who are writing or willing to write ideologically appropriate literature.

*... Don't be impatient about the work. I happen to know there's a really interesting project coming through. Sweet Tooth. Right up your street. I've put in a good word for you.' ... (p. 62)*

*... 'So we want to start afresh. Our idea is to concentrate on suitable young writers, academics and journalists mostly, people at the start of their careers, when they need financial support. Typically, they'll have a book they want to write and need to take time off from a demanding job. And we thought it might be interesting to have a novelist on the list ...' ... 'Makes it a little less heavy, more, you know, a bit of light-hearted fun. Frothy. Someone the newspapers will take an interest in.' Nutting continued. 'Since you like that sort of thing, we thought you might want to be*

*involved. We're not interested in the decline of the West, or down with progress or any other modish pessimism. Do you see what I mean?' ... We're looking out for the sort who might spare a moment for his hard-pressed fellows in the Eastern bloc, travels out there perhaps to lend support or sends books, signs petitions for persecuted writers, engages his mendacious Marxist colleagues here, isn't afraid to talk publicly about writers in prison in Castro's Cuba. Generally swims against the orthodox flow. ... (p. 92)*

Serena accepts the assignment, and one of the writers she selects, Tom Haley, is in for an unexpected turn.

Throughout the story, Serena is never exposed to anything seriously important or dangerous, she does not come across as fearless, resourceful, quick, or brave, as if she is not a spy at all. She is more concerned with ordinary matters like anyone else - relationships, friendships, fears, and joys. She is caught up in the turmoil of Cold War events, but they seem to pass her by, unrelated to her, and she stays as if unaware of them.

Serena soon learns that her already dead lover, Canning, was a Soviet spy, and she only got the job in order for the agency to monitor Canning.

*... It reminded me of much else that was messily unfinished, a scattering of mental litter – Tony's disgrace, Shirley's disappearance, the possibility that I was only taken on because Tony was exposed, the Watchers going through my room ... (p. 234)*

*... I would sit on the grass by the mound of his grave and think about Tony, remember how we were fond lovers one whole summer, and I'd forgive him for betraying his country. ... (p. 283-284)*

Serena's decline in professional success (which she was never even close to) continues when Thomas Haley finally publishes the work that Serena's organization, the Freedom International Foundation, sponsored. The work is successful but unfortunately anti-capitalist, as Thomas has long secretly known about Serena's assignment.

*... Tom talked more about his novel, and about his new editor, publisher of Heller, Roth, Marquez. I was wondering how I'd break the news to Max. An anti-capitalist dystopia. While other Sweet*

*Tooth writers handed in their non-fiction versions of Animal Farm. But at least my man was a creative force who went his own way. And so would I, once I'd been sacked. ... (p. 203)*

When Serena's relationship with Thomas is leaked to the public, not only is the "Sweet Tooth" plan threatened, Serena and Thomas's relationship is threatened as well. Instead of breaking up, however, Haley decided to process and write their story into a novel.

*... The truth was too weighty, it would destroy us. He would hate me forever. I was over the cliff edge and could never get back. I could remind myself of the benefits I had brought into his life, the artistic freedom that came with me, but the fact was that if I was to go on seeing him, I would have to keep telling him these off-white lies. ... (p. 202)*

*... I'd already decided to look through the press in Camden because I didn't want to be seen with a pile by somebody from work. So I stood in the icy gale that swept through the twin-entrance booking hall, trying to manage the flapping sheets of several newspapers. Tom's story was not on any front page, but it was inside all the broadsheets, the Daily Mail and the Express, with different photographs. ... 'Well then, Miss Frome. Why are we in all the newspapers?' 'It didn't come from me.' ... 'Really.' And then, 'You're ... seeing this man?' He made the verb sound obscene. ... 'Since when?' 'October.' 'You see him in London?' 'Mostly Brighton. At weekends. Look, he doesn't know anything. He doesn't suspect me.' 'Really.' It was said in the same flat tone. ... (p. 285-286)*

McEwan created Serena's easily manipulated personality as observable at several points during the story. Serena goes through life as the wind blows, susceptible to the trappings of temptation and naively unaware of the dangers of the real world in light of the Cold War. Serena is easily adaptable to the preferences of those around. She went to the university that was chosen for her, *... So I abandoned my ambition to read English at Durham or Aberystwyth, where I am sure I would have been happy, and went instead to Newnham College, Cambridge, to learn at my first tutorial, which took place at Trinity, what a mediocrity I was in mathematics. ... (p. 4)* then took a job that seemed to fall into her lap. Serena also lets herself be influenced in reading, her favorite hobby, at first by Canning, who insists on her reading history books and newspapers, and then by Haley, who likes realistic works. Even though all she needs is to read a fictional book with a happy ending and love.

*... My needs were simple. I didn't bother much with themes or felicitous phrases and skipped fine descriptions of weather, landscapes and interiors. I wanted characters I could believe in, and I wanted to be made curious about what was to happen to them. Generally, I preferred people to be falling in and out of love, but I didn't mind so much if they tried their hand at something else. It was vulgar to want it, but I liked someone to say 'Marry me' by the end. ... (p. 6)*

And just as Serena loved books with happy endings full of love and weddings, she reached her end as well. At the end of the story, the reader discovers that Haley wrote the very story the reader has just finished reading. Serena, in order to hide her affair from MI5 and to hide her job from Haley, created so many lies and deceptions that there would be more than enough for one breakup. But Haley certainly was not honest with Serena either, which is why their lies rather balanced each other out, twisting them into a common web too much for them to leave. In the final scene, Haley blames Serena for her insecurities, unsisterliness, desire for praise from her superiors, minor snobbery, ignorance, vanity, self-pity, and minimal social conscience. He loves her all the more for her beauty, tenderness, love of sex, and protective instincts. Therefore, he decides to propose to her at the end, Serena's decision remains unspoken and the story ends with the words, "Dearest Serena, it's up to you."

*... We both reported back. You lied to me, I spied on you. It was delicious, and I thought you had it coming. I had to ... experience your urge for independence as well as the bonds that held you to your parents and made you cry against your father's chest. I had to taste your loneliness, inhabit your insecurity, your longing for praise from superiors, your unsisterliness, your minor impulses of snobbery, ignorance and vanity, your minimal social conscience, moments of self-pity, and orthodoxy in most matters. And do all this without ignoring your cleverness, beauty and tenderness, your love of sex and fun, your wry humour and sweet protective instincts. To recreate you on the page I had to become you and understand you (this is what novels demand), and in doing that, well, the inevitable happened. When I poured myself into your skin I should have guessed at the consequences. I still love you. No, that's not it. I love you more. ... (p. 318-319)*

*... You may think we're too mired in deceit, that we've told each other enough lies to outlast a lifetime, that our deception and humiliation have doubled the reasons for going our separate ways. I prefer to think they've cancelled out and that we're too entwined in mutual surveillance to let each other go. I'm in the business now of watching over you. Wouldn't you like to do the*

*same for me? What I'm working my way towards is a declaration of love and a marriage proposal. Didn't you once confide to me your old-fashioned view that this was how a novel should end, with a 'Marry me'? ... (p. 319)*

*... If your answer is a fatal no, well, I've made no carbon, this is the only copy and you can throw it to the flames. If you still love me and your answer is yes, then our collaboration begins and this letter, with your consent, will be Sweet Tooth's final chapter. Dearest Serena, it's up to you. ... (p. 320)*

## 12 CONCLUSION

McEwan's works demonstrate the changes that British society underwent, as presented mainly in *On Chesil Beach* (here a reference to the 1960s) and in *Sweet Tooth* (a reference to the 1970s). The thesis attempted to link the influence of the time in which the works were written to the era in which they were set, adding the social and political aspects of the Cold War. Later McEwan works show a lot of interest in historical and political events, an interest created in his own childhood and family background. The Cold War is seen most strongly in *Sweet Tooth*, where the story is built directly on the espionage activities of Great Britain, mentioning the United States and the Soviet Union while describing the efforts of the capitalist world to reject communism. The thesis presents Cold War espionage in Chapter 4.

The sixties, one of the decades in which the Cold War was going on, in which *On Chesil Beach* is based, are explored among the decades in Chapter 6. *On Chesil Beach* captures the changes in social mood - at the beginning, in 1962, Florence is desperate, knows nothing about sexual intercourse, Edward is unskilled and rushed. They had nowhere to learn what steps they should take to successfully consummate their marriage, they could not communicate their concerns to each other, they could not discuss intimate matters, a thousand unwritten rules applied, and discussion of such a topic was not acceptable. As was Florence's suggestion of an open marriage. Many years later, Edward nostalgically describes the sexual revolution that came, he lived a life of travel, casual intercourse, had several girlfriends, and lived for rock music. If the revolution had come a moment earlier, or if Edward and Florence had met a moment later, things would have turned out differently.

The late sixties are touched on lightly in *Sweet Tooth* as Serena describes her teenage years in a classic English setting. She lives in the Bishop's house, where, despite the high wall, in 1969, brighter colours, records of rock and roll music, experiments with tobacco, alcohol and hashish, as well as more warmer social relations, have slipped in. Serena describes a time when teenagers thought of themselves as bad, but because they went to school regularly, memorized irregular verbs, and fulfilled responsibilities, they were rather good anyway.



*The Comfort of Strangers* presents McEwan's early fascination with psychopathological phenomena, without which he would not be the same today, rather than political and social connotations, and serves as a starting point for exploration of McEwan's work evolution.

McEwan has been summed up as an excellent and inventive author whose representation of female heroines is described both colourfully and in detail, but also surprisingly and unexpectedly each time. The thesis attempted to provide a comprehensive view of McEwan's works in the context of social and political difficulties throughout history with the prominence of female heroines. The female characters of Ian McEwan and their emotional lives against the background of the environment they live in and the situations in which they have to act were portrayed. The analysis showed that McEwan's female characters are full of contradictions. Mary in *The Comfort of Strangers* is liberal and free-thinking, feminist oriented, yet in the course of the story shows excitement about being submissive to a man. Throughout her life, Caroline dealt with the inner conflict of the huge need to leave her husband and, at the same time, could not get rid of the desire for the pain he caused. Florence Ponting in *On Chesil Beach* loves her fiancé very much but experiences a boundless aversion to physical love. Serena Frome in *Sweet Tooth* desires to study literature, but circumstances force her to study the exact opposite, mathematics.

All of them are strong and weak, Mary shows incredible weakness when she and her partner rely on guidance from strangers and when she is unable to communicate her bad feeling about the upcoming situation. Caroline, on the other hand, is weak for falling for her desires and her husband, but she is also strong in taking the steps that lead to her and Robert's desired goal. Serena Frome shows weakness several times, outside of her choice of university, in becoming romantically involved with her subject as a spy. Her strength, however, lies in her dedication to fulfilling whatever fate the circumstances have in store for her, even if she doesn't always succeed.

The female heroines show a certain degree of naivety. Mary, if she thought her relationship with handsome Colin had other than a tragic ending. Florence, when she thought her vision of marriage was acceptable in the early sixties. And Serena, when she hoped her love affair would not be discovered.

The female characters also show a very practical way of looking at things. Mary and her boyfriend are lost on holiday, so she is oblivious to emotion or suspicions of danger and practically goes for comfort. Florence wants Edward, wants a platonic marriage, and wants to pursue music, so without jealousy, she suggests that she pursue music and Edward fulfills his needs elsewhere. Serena takes a purely practical approach to her study of mathematics in order to avoid her mother's fate, even though she does not enjoy the studies and does not particularly excel at math.

*The Comfort of Strangers*, *On Chesil Beach*, and *Sweet Tooth* presented McEwan's attempts to deal with the emotional difficulties that partnership, work, or childhood bring for women. Apparently the slightly traumatic events with her father in childhood left an impact on Florence in the form of her aversion to being touched and her slightly snobbish attitude due to her cold mother, but even the idyllic upbringing of both Serena and Caroline did not ensure a completely smooth course through life, they ended affected by their parents' relationship, their mother's submissive behaviour towards their father.

The thesis dealt with the major political, economic, and socio-cultural events in the context of the Cold War. Ian McEwan's evolution from a criticized to a respected artist was described. The evolution from a shocking author with horrific themes to an author capable of expressing unusual themes in a sophisticated manner, along with the main motives driving his work was followed. In the last part of the thesis, the heroines were characterized. The multifaced characters and well-portrayed psychological motives of Mary, Caroline, Florence Ponting, and Serena Frome are a proof of Ian McEwan's geniality. It is not the norm for a male author to portray women's emotional issues as fully.

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