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**Space in Contemporary British Fiction**

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**Blanka Kučerová**

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## **Abstract:**

My diploma thesis *Space in Contemporary British Fiction* will focus on the concept of space in contemporary British novel; at first, three of leading English authors will be mentioned (Ian McEwan, Graham Swift, Martin Amis), and it will briefly characterize the literary period in which their novels were published. In the chosen novels, the thesis will notice the changes of McEwan's work towards the globalization of space. The core of interpretational analyses will be the novels *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday*, *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth*. The comparison with Golding's *Lord of the Flies* will be a part of the chapter concerning McEwan's first novel, *The Cement Garden*.

## **Anotace:**

Práce se zaměří na pojetí prostoru v současném britském románu; nejprve zmíní nejvýznamnější představitele současné románové tvorby v Anglii (McEwan, Graham Swift, Martin Amis) a stručně charakterizuje dobu, ve které romány vznikly. Poté se zaměří na průřez dílem Iana McEwana a na vybraných románech se bude snažit zachytit proměny McEwanovy tvorby směrem ke globalizaci prostoru jeho děl. Jádrem interpretační analýzy budou romány *Betonová zahrada* (*The Cement Garden*), *Cizinci ve městě* (*The Comfort of Strangers*), *Amsterdam*, *Sobota* (*Saturday*), *Solar* a *Mlsoun* (*Sweet Tooth*). Součástí kapitoly o prvním McEwanově románu bude srovnání s Goldingovým *Pánem much* (*Lord of the Flies*).

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## Introduction

This diploma thesis called *Space in Contemporary British Fiction* concentrates on the importance of space in the genre of British fiction. The aim of my thesis is to introduce the most significant English present-day novelists, most importantly Ian McEwan, together with their literary output and tendencies noticed in their novels. Also, I describe the artistic creation of Ian McEwan. Finally, the thesis analyses the concept of space that we can find throughout his novels.

Apart from introduction and conclusion, my diploma thesis is composed of two main parts: the theoretical part and the analysis of the novels. The first chapter of the theoretical part concentrates on contemporary British fiction in general. A general overview with the dominant tendencies in postmodernism are presented. With the aid of specialized publications, three significant British authors, Graham Swift, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, are introduced. When presenting these authors, I focus on their biography and general style of their novels. Most importantly, I concentrate on Ian McEwan. Apart from his biography, the author's style as well as the development of his writing career are described, followed by the detailed description of his artistic creation.

Main focus of the third chapter is on Ian McEwan's art itself. I point out the typical elements of his novels such as dark elements, autobiographical elements, turning points, critics of society and vast knowledge presented in the novels. These elements are introduced on the ground of six McEwan's novels: *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday*, *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth*. When presenting the part called "Savage", the comparison is made between *The Cement Garden* and *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. The analysis are based partly on the novels themselves, partly on secondary literature.

The third chapter deals with the space in novels in general. On the basis of the secondary literature, the issue of space as an element of the poetics of perception is discussed. The chapter is focused on the delimitation of space and other elements



that are connected, on the construction of space and on the way how the space is represented in literature and perceived by readers. In addition, the chapter also discusses the city as an urban space. Construction, representation and perception of city are in the spotlight.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the analysis of space in Ian McEwan's novels. His novels are analysed in chronological order according to the date of publishing. The core analysis concerns *The Cement Garden* (1978), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), *Amsterdam* (1988), *Saturday* (2005), *Solar* (2010) and *Sweet Tooth* (2012). In these novels, I compare particular concepts of space McEwan has been using in his writing. I try to detect the common tendencies in the novel along with the development of the register of the space.

The fifth and final chapter, conclusion, summarizes the results of the analyses. The conclusion concerning the concept of space in McEwan's novels is made. In addition, the propositions for further research in the studied novels are given.

# 1. Contemporary British Fiction

In this chapter, I will outline the general character of the present-day literature in Great Britain. I am also going to concentrate on the literature within social and historical context of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the turn of the century. The main character of British fiction of this era will be pointed out while emphasizing the main tendencies used by the various authors. We will highlight some of the leading authors: Graham Swift, Martin Amis and finally Ian McEwan. Last but not least, I will describe their contribution to British literature, while focusing mainly on Ian McEwan.

## 1.1 General Information

First of all, it is essential to define what we understand by the term contemporary British literature. In today's point of view, I would say that the term has been applied since the post-war period, so to say the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the modern literature is flourishing. Of course, the term goes beyond the 20<sup>th</sup> century to this day.

It is necessary to point out when talking about the literature and its development that the literature as a cultural element cannot be separated from other phenomena of the society. In other words, whatever literature is talking about, the social, political, social and philosophical aspects of the time are included as well as the social climate and its changing. (Hilsky, 2002: 17)

In the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were several events that undoubtedly influenced British literature. Above all, it was the decline of British Empire in the middle of 60s'. This event seems to be the most important turning point in the after-war Britain. It definitely led to the needs for searching of identity, the national and the individual one. (ibid : 13) Therefore, it is essential to admit that not only this event but also Suez war, the new Labour government, disorder in the Northern

Ireland etc. contributed to the atmosphere in British society. The 60s' meant to the society primarily the liberalization of life in every possible aspect. It is mainly the sexuality that became widely discussed, whereas before it was a taboo. That is probably the most noticeable change in public. Of course, all these elements were considerably displayed in the literature. The outright debate on sexuality certainly influenced the writing of Ian McEwan, Martin Amis and others and prepared their "terrain". (ibid.: 17)

## **1.2 Shape of Contemporary British Novel: Postmodernism**

In this part, I am going to present the main attributes of contemporary British novel in general. I will point out the main tendencies concerning the shape of the novel throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I will concentrate on the modernism, postmodernism and their enriching effects on the shape of the novels.

British novelists of 50s' continue writing the "traditional" realistic novels. However, this time, the writers focus on the real life issues in their works. They insert the present-day hero into their novels who is often an intellectual (like Kingsley Amis's Jim Dixon) or a character of a rebel workman (like Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton). (ibid. : 18) These novels emphasize the social context, integrity of an individual, and the analysis of the social relationships. The authors of this time tend to be very individualistic and it is rather difficult to find the mutual tendencies. Nevertheless, we can observe the common inclination to the traditional realistic writing (with a few exceptions).

British novel in 60s' and 70s' went through the significant changes. These changes can be referred to as postmodernism. Postmodern authors often react to the horror of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as to the up-to date problems and issues. (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/postmodernism-in-literature-definition-lesson-quiz.html>)

Postmodernism remains the most commonly used trend to this day. As we know, postmodernism is a complex term and it is rather difficult to characterize. That is because it seems too wide and vague. Generally speaking, we could define the whole postmodern art as the very opposite of the modernism. In many aspects, postmodern literary genre was to ridicule, reject and reverse the modernist tendencies. (ibid. : online) The problem is that the definition of modernism is as well unobtainable. We can observe that both terms are too vague. However, we can certainly divide British novelists into both movements without any problem. In spite of this fact, observing both categories, we can hardly find any mutual tendency of modernist or postmodernist authors. (ibid. : online)

However, we can at least define the postmodern literature as a “*form of literature which is marked, both stylistically and ideologically, by a reliance on such literary conventions as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, games, parody, paranoia, dark humour and authorial self-reliance.*” It is also important to mention that postmodern literature does not approve neither the division into “high” or “low” literature nor the distinction between the genres. (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/postmodernism-in-literature-definition-lesson-quiz.html>)

Let us say that the modernist experiment is a response to the World War I as well as the questioning of values of the society. For the modernists, the description of the outer reality is replaced by the inner one. On the other hand, the postmodernists refuse any kind of presentation of the reality. They reject straight meaning, however, they offer the possibility of several meanings within one reality, one literary work. It is important to mention that for postmodernists, the world is beyond our understanding as it already went through various disasters. (ibid.: online) We can observe that both artistic tendencies contribute to the progressive destruction of the realistic novel of 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Hilsky, 2002: 20)

Now, let us concentrate only on postmodernism. This literary movement has its foundation in the USA, where the industrialization was the most developed at

that time. All the postmodernist novels respond one way or another to the society which is industrial and technological. If it is needed to define the postmodernism, there are two factors that are important to notice: The first one is that at the inception of postmodernism, the reality itself presented the most fantastic element that one could imagine, that one could not invent more unrealistic settings than the reality. That is why the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction disappear. The second factor is media and its influence on our reality. The image of today's world is fragmental, chaotic, instead of having only one coherent image of the world. Knowing this information, we thus understand the position of a postmodern novelist: his function in the writing was reduced. A postmodern novelist does not display the reality but invents it. (ibid.: 21)

We can detect the postmodern nature of a novel via various elements. Even if we know that the definition of postmodernism is difficult to obtain, it is possible to look for typical postmodern elements that are frequently found in the novels. Usually, it is the stylistic techniques that are used. For example, the authors often use a term *pastiche*. By this term, let us imagine an amalgam of ideas taken out of different styles and various novels. Then, these ideas are used in a new concept. *Intertextuality* is connected to pastiche. The postmodern authors commonly allude to different literary work. It is also the technique called *faction*. The *faction* involves the mix of the real historical events and the pure fiction made by the author. The boundaries between the two are not clear. Another important element is *participation of reader*. The postmodern author addresses himself to the reader very often, even directly. The authors use both *minimalism* and *maximalism*. When using a minimalistic approach, the author gives very few details and very modest descriptions. He uses common characters, common settings and no exceptional elements. Via these techniques, a reader turns his attention to the very nature of the fiction. On the contrary, maximalism in literature means highly detailed, lengthy writing, providing very rich descriptions. Both elements, minimalism and maximalism are very important for space representation and its perception, which will be proved in the forthcoming analyses. *Temporal distortion* is also very typical of postmodern writing. There is often not only one linear timeline and narrative

technique. The author inserts non-linear timelines and varies the narration to confuse the reader. It is important to mention *magical realism* that can be commonly found in postmodern writings. The author introduces an impossible, unrealistic or magical event in the plot. The entire novel is otherwise realistic. The writer thus passes from realism to magical realism. (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/postmodernism-in-literature-definition-lesson-quiz.html>) These are just some of the examples of what the postmodern novel might be like. Of course, the list of the stylistic techniques is not exhausting. Only some typical elements were mentioned.

Let us introduce the theories that considerably influenced the postmodern novels. Above all, it was existential philosophy that meant a lot to British novelists, for example to William Golding. It was also the sociology and the Social-Role Theory that affected the novelists. This theory perceives a human as an actor and it contributes to the vision of the reality. The reality itself is considered a fiction. In addition, the postmodern literature was developing simultaneously with the development of the literary theory. Literary theory itself becomes an inspiration for the fiction (as for example for Malcom Bradbury or John Fowles). The Freud psychological theories and many more also contributed to the postmodern movement. (Hilský, 2002: 22)

Of course, postmodern literary movement has been inspired by postmodern philosophy. Postmodern philosophy denies the possibility of understanding our world as such. It also notes that it is impossible to strictly define the world, and not only the world itself but all the knowledge and facts acquired during the ages. This philosophy suggests that everything is relative to particular situation. There is also a belief that as the world has already fallen, all we can do is just to depict the absurdities and paradoxes of our lives. (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/postmodernism-in-literature-definition-lesson-quiz.html>) It is important to mention that this overview is only indicative. Let us say that we cannot really discuss all the influences on postmodernism because it

would require much more attention. Of course, there are even more influences that contributed to the shape of postmodern novel.

To summarize what a postmodern fiction is, we could say that above all, it is the disappearance of boundaries between reality and fiction. Then, it is a tendency to self-examination and rejection of totalising reality and its explanation. There is a connection to the old myths and fairy-tales as well. It is essential to mention that none of the experimental tendencies in the postmodern literature are unambiguous. The tendencies are very often mixed or blurred together with traditional realistic fiction.

### **1.3 Leading Authors**

Right now, I will concentrate on the leading authors of the present-day British fiction, the authors who were born after 1945. I will present the works of Graham Swift, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan. After a short look at their biography, I will point out the main features that characterize their fiction.

As already mentioned above, there is hardly any common tendency to be found between the postmodern authors and these three authors are no exception. There are various styles and various themes. Nevertheless, we could mention several features that are mutual for a lot of contemporary authors. For example the linguistic artistry (especially Graham Swift and Ian McEwan) and the attempt to picture the dark side of the life in the United Kingdom. In addition, we can observe that the heroes usually come from the middle-class society.

This group of authors has been critically praised and also commercially successful. Their prose has called attention to the problems of contemporary world. In their works, they have discussed the determinations of their societies, they have questioned the restrictions predetermined by social class and sex, by culture, gender, and politics of wealth. (Slay, 1996: 9)

In short, we must admit that these modern authors represent a new point of view on British society. They bring fresh air to British literature: new themes and new art techniques. (Hilský, 2002: 139)

### 1.3.1 Graham Swift

In this chapter I am going to talk about Graham Swift, an author known for his pieces such as *The Sweet Shop Owner* (1980), *Shuttlecock* (1981), *The Waterland* (1983) or *Out of This World* (1988). At first, his biography will be described, followed by some characteristics of his work will be outlined.

Graham Swift is born on 4<sup>th</sup> May in 1949 in South London. He grows up in a family where his father works as a naval fighter pilot. After studies in Croydon Grammar School and Dulwich College, he attends Queens' College in Cambridge and he finally decides to become a writer. He is also doing Ph.D. degree at the University of New York, eventually interrupting his studies for one year in order to teach English in Greece. In 1975, he begins to live with his partner, Candice Rodd, journalist and editor. He is teaching in Further Education Colleges in London, and also has a several part-time jobs. In late 1970's and early 1980's, he begins to publish collections of short stories, for example *New Stories*, *Winter's Tales* or *Firebird*. In 1980, he publishes his first novel, *The Sweet Shop Owner*, and one year later his second novel, *Shuttlecock*. His another novel, *Waterland*, achieves a great success: *Waterland* wins the *Guardian Fiction Awards*, the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and also the Italian Premio Grinzane Cavour. This novel is also filmed in 1991. In 1992, Swift publishes *Ever After* and soon wins the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger in France. Another important novel is *Last Orders*, published in 1996. This successful novel wins Booker Prize and is made into film in 2001. Nowadays, Graham Swift continues to live and write in South London, near Wandsworth Common. (Widdowson, 2006: 9, 10)



Now let us characterize his style in general. His novels often possess several levels, for example historical, mythological, factual, historical or fairy-tale level. There is also fusion of reality and fantasy, when a reader cannot distinguish one from another. Another important formal characteristics is the poetic self-conscious language he uses and a lyrical character of his novels. What is typical of Swift is also his interest in family relationships; he is interested in the rapport between lovers, husbands and wives and parents and their children. The relationships Swift pictures are often complicated. However, Swift himself completely denies the influence of his life on his work. He once said he has never believed in autobiographical writing. He claims he does not resemble his characters and that the heroes he introduces in his stories and novels are not people from his life. It is thus incorrect to link Swift's work to his life. (ibid.: 2, 4)

When observing the main themes and subjects of Swift's prose, we clearly incline to identify it as postmodern. He is often intercutting histories, blurring the past and the present of the story in order to make a disturbed chronology. This technique can be explained as a postmodern self-consciousness. According to this and many other elements we can observe, Swift fits well in the group of postmodernists. However, Swift is not a kind of "extreme" postmodernist; there is still some linearity conserved in his work. He also combines the strong realistic tradition with self-reflexive postmodernism. (ibid.: 6)

It is certainly historical dimension that occurs frequently in his work. Very often, the past and present shade into each other. Also, the time of the history and "human" time or the fact and the fiction are not easily distinguishable. (Hilský, 2002: 142) This "shading" into one another is used in relation to other elements as well: for example the indistinctiveness of a real thing and substitute, history and story or possibility or impossibility of escaping emotional wasteland. (Widdowson, 2006: 4) Another typical element of Swift's work is a narration from the male point of view; he usually introduces male character who is narrating in the first person.

We can also discuss the time and space in his novels, because these features seem to be significant for Swift's work. Swift brilliantly plays with both elements:

we can see that the description Swift gives us when introducing a landscape is almost impressionist. He usually describes a real, particular locations. These locations flow together with mythological landscapes. The same principle can be observed when discussing the time in his fiction. There is no clear boundary between the time of the fiction and the time of the myth. (Hilský, 2002: 143)

### 1.3.2 Martin Amis

Let us continue with Martin Amis who is famous for being both an entertainer and a writer. He is the son of no less well-known author Kingsley Amis. His most famous writings are for example *The Rachel Papers* (1973), *The Dead Babies* (1975), *Success* (1978) or *Other People* (1981). In this part of chapter, Martin Amis' life and writing career will be discussed.

Martin Amis is born in 1949 in Oxford in the family of Kingsley Amis and Hillary Bardwell, Ministry of Agriculture civil servant's daughter. He had two siblings, brother and sister, but only his brother is alive. In his childhood, he attends several schools, for example Bishop Gore School or Cambridgeshire High School for Boys. During his youth, he is travelling a lot: He is educated in the schools not only in the Great Britain, but also in the USA or in Spain. He graduates from Exeter College in Oxford in English. After his studies in Oxford, he is working as an editorial assistant in *Times Literary Supplement* and later also in *New Statesman* as literary editor. He also spends some time living in Uruguay. Currently, he is living in London with his second wife, Isabel Fonseca, and their two daughters. Since 2007, he works as a Professor of Creative Writing at Manchester University.

His early writing career began in 1973, with his first published novel, *The Rachel Papers*. Thanks to this novel, he was awarded Somerset Maugham Award. *The Rachel Papers* was also made into a film. Other debut novels followed: for example *Dead Babies* (1975), *Success* (1977) and *Other People: A Mystery Story* (1981). In *Success*, it is particularly interesting to observe the social dimension of

the story. Through the novel, we can notice the description of the London art business. In this writing, Amis also excellently describes the sexual life of the main characters. (ibid.: 144) All these first novels have already showed the base of Amis' novels: dark and sadistic humour, morbidity, and critical look on our society.

The period between 1980's and 1990's can be determined as Amis' principal writing career. In this period, the most successful Amis' novels were written: for example *Money* (1984), *London Fields* (1989), *Time's Arrow* (1991) and *The Information* (1995). These three novels are often referred to as "London trilogy", as the protagonists from the novels often come from London. We can say that all three novels have something in common: not the plot or the narrative techniques, but the image of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain and its apocalyptic vision. Amis often introduces anti-heroes as main protagonists. His novel *Money* was included in the List of 100 best English-language novels of 1923 to 2005. Moreover, *Time's Arrow* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

In 2000's and 2010's, Amis' other important novels were written. Nevertheless, these two periods are considered less fruitful in writing fiction than the end of the first millennium. *Yellow Dog* (2003) or *House of Meetings* (2006), can be mentioned. On the other hand, in this period Amis wrote more non-fiction books. Some of his latest novels are for example *The Pregnant Widow* (2010), *Lionel Asbo: State of England* (2012) and the latest one is *The Zone of Interest* (2014). His last novel concerns the issues of Holocaust. (<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/martin-amis>)

In spite of being an entertainer, let us say that his writings are not humorous at all. Amis' writings are often psychological dramas. Let us point out the similarities between Martin Amis and Ian McEwan. Above all, it is an open eroticism that is typical of both authors. For both of them, the sexuality does not represent anything sensational, it is described in a very simple, plain and natural way. It is also the language of the talking about sex that link both authors. Both Amis and McEwan show that they astonishingly master the language. (ibid. : 145)

### 1.3.3 Ian McEwan

Now, let us proceed to the last author, and for our purpose the most important one. In this chapter, I will introduce at first a brief biography of Ian McEwan. Then, I will comment on his writing

#### 1.3.3.1 *Brief biography*

Ian Russell McEwan, born on June 4 1948 in Hampshire, Aldershot, is one of the novelists of the new generation in Britain, sometimes considered a descendant of the Angry Young Men generation. (Slay, 1996: 3) He is the son of David McEwan and Rose Lilian Violet (Moore) McEwan. His mother already had two children from the previous marriage<sup>1</sup>. In spite of having two step-siblings, he considers himself as an only child (mentally) because of the age gap between them. (Quigley, 2006: 436) However, at the end of his mother's life, he finds out he has another (hidden) brother, who is given away for adoption due to fear of uncovering of extra-marital involvement. (Matoušek, 2001: 291) His father is a Scottish sergeant major who serves in British Army and that is why Ian McEwan is travelling a lot during his childhood. He spends much of his time for example in Libya or Singapore. David McEwan, his father, is a very strict man. His wife, the author's mother is almost never allowed to work.<sup>2</sup>

Ian McEwan is first educated at Woolverstone School in Suffolk. He evaluates this school as both academically and socially good and "*less arrogant than most English high schools*". (Slay, 1996: 1) Thereafter he attends the University of Sussex, where he earns a B.A. honour degree in English and French

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<sup>1</sup> As McEwan talked about it in 2007 in public, he discovered another brother given up for adoption during the WWII. They have both the same parents, but as his brother was born out of an extramarital affair, when his mother was married to a different man, they decided to hide the baby.

<sup>2</sup> McEwan himself mentions that all the family was afraid of his father. Later in his life, he discovered that his father was menacing his mother and that probably he was also violent. (McEwan, 2002: 42)

literature. During these times, he begins to write his fiction. After that he earns M.A. degree in creative writing at the University of East Anglia in Norwich in 1971. There he graduates under the auspices of two writers and professors – Malcom Bradbury and Angus Wilson.

Later after his studies, he marries Penny Allen, an alternative healer and astrologer and at the same time his former classmate from the university. Penny had already had two daughters from her previous marriage. With Ian they have two sons. (Ryan, 1999: 192) They divorced in 1995. Nowadays he is married to his second wife, Annalena McAfee. Ian McEwan is atheist. He once said: “*What I believe but cannot prove is that no part of my consciousness will survive my death.*” (Head, 2007: 191)

McEwan became a fellow of Royal Society of literature (Ryan, 1999: 192). In 1998, he won the prestigious Booker Prize for his work *Amsterdam*. Nevertheless, some critics believe that considering all his writings, the prize was probably given to the wrong book (Quigley, 2006: 438). Also, he was awarded the CBE in 2000. Ian McEwan currently lives in Oxford.

His writing career has been very rich. His university thesis resulted in his first collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites* (1975). This collection then received the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976 and brought him the reputation for shocking and macabre writing. (Slay, 1996: 2) The beginning of his career is thus marked by the short story genre: he continued with *In Between the Sheets and Other Stories* (1978) or with *The Daydreamer* (1994), which was dedicated to children. Later in his career, he rather focused on the novels. We can mention for example *The Cement Garden* (1978), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), *The Child in Time* (1987), for which he won Whitbread Novel Award in the same year, *The Innocent* (1990), *Black Dogs* (1992), *Enduring Love* (1998), *Atonement* (2001), which brought him W. H. Smith Literary Award, *Saturday* (2005), etc. Apart from the novels, McEwan wrote also several plays, such as *Conversations with a Cupboardman* (1975), *The Imitation Game* (1976), *Solid Geometry* (1976) or *The Good Son* (1993). (ibid.: 192) He is also an author of a libretto for an oratorio, *Or*

*Shall We Die: An Oratorio* (1983) which deals with the topic of nuclear annihilation. (Quigley, 2006: 436) This oratorio was performed at the Royal Festival Hall in London in February of 1983. (Slay, 1996: 2) McEwan's novels were made several times into film adaptations. We can name for instance *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers* etc. The film *Atonement* (2007), based on the novel with the same title, was nominated for Oscars. McEwan has also written several scripts for television, as for example *Solid Geometry* (1979). He is also an author of children fiction.

### ***1.3.3.2 Ian McEwan – The Figure of the Writer***

In this part of chapter, I will point out the character of Ian McEwan as a writer. I will concentrate on the development of his writing and on his style. The elements used in McEwan's novels will be discussed later in the following chapter.

It is important to mention that in spite of associating McEwan as a postmodern author or associating his writings as postmodern, the author himself has never wished to be associated with any kind of fixed literary movement. He once said: "*I know lot of writers and I like them as people, and there are certain of their works, their novels, stories, that I like, but I can't locate myself inside any shared, any sort of community taste, aesthetic ambition or critical position or anything else. I don't really feel part of anything at all.*" (Slay, 1996: 4) However, it has been observed that Ian McEwan shares a lot of ideas and themes with his colleague and close friend, Martin Amis. Both authors use dark humour in their works. They aim to shock and disgust readers, being both horrified by the state of the world. In spite of these common observable tendencies, McEwan tends to separate himself from all the authors and thus escapes the comparisons with others. (ibid. : 5)

In closing, it is a good idea to suggest to class Ian McEwan still as postmodern author, based on the similar techniques that can be found in his works

as well as in the others' works (such as the techniques mentioned – minimalism, fiction, etc.) Finding these techniques in his works, it enables us to simplify the comprehension of the messages mediated by author.

There is the myth of the “two McEwans”. This myth concerns the character of his writings. More precisely, this concept deals with the difference between his earlier prose and the later one. The “first McEwan” wrote mainly Gothic, dark short stories and novels. The dark elements and morbidity in general were typical of his works such as *First love*, *Last Rites*, *Cement Garden* or *Comfort of Strangers*. The reader could feel “*abstract terrors generated by some mysterious, supernatural force.*” (Ryan, 1999: 1921) These writings cause shock, as if the author felt desire to discomfort, disgust his readers. Nevertheless, McEwan insisted that the disturbances he describes are just the venues of our everyday lives. He discomforts readers by various techniques: perversion, incest, brutality, etc. (Malcolm, 2002: 9-10) What is also typical of McEwan is no distinction between the ordinary and horrible. The narrator usually describes horrors with no emotions. (ibid.: 2002: 9)

However, later there is a noticeable change in his writings. McEwan himself said he felt the need for a change in his writing, because he had the impression to be labelled as a writer of exaggerated prose. (Quigley, 2006: 437) The novel *The Child in time* could be considered a landmark in McEwan's work. McEwan became father and as he said, at that point he turned away from his earlier Gothicism. That is why sometimes we distinguish McEwan the Gothic and the later McEwan who has widened the scope of his writing and who is interested in up-to date world, political topics such as propaganda, terrorism etc., and who introduces wider range of characters in his works and thus creates more socially conscious literature. (Quigley, 2006: 436) He portraits contemporary Britain, British politics, society, etc. In his later works, McEwan thus continues the tradition of conscience in British literature. (Slay, 1996: 4)

As already mentioned, McEwan is a master of various literary genres. The same could be said about his subject matter. He alternates between historical fiction and contemporary psychological intrigue, as well as between sadomasochism and

feminism. All the significant elements in his writings will be discussed later. The earlier gothic literary form earned him the title *Ian McAbre*. His art was also named as *the art of unease* because of the dark discomfort we feel while reading his stories. (Quigley, 2006: 436) In all his writings, he faces directly the weaknesses and shames of our societies, of ourselves. He always concentrates on relationships. McEwan brings the relationship between a man and a woman as well as a child and his parent into focus; He says that the relationships between lovers, between husband and wife, brother and sister are based on the codes of sexual behaviour. He likes examining the attachments of any kind. He says that these attachments or connections between people reflect the social worlds of people. In McEwan's works, these relationships are seen as a necessary refuge in our society that is dehumanized. (Slay, 1996: 6) It is important for him to point out the violence and confusion within relationship as well as the chaos, desolation and destructive hierarchies. (Malcolm, 2002: 9)

McEwan also presents himself as an expert in human minds. He gives you a full idea of what is it like to be someone else. Readers can entirely understand what the characters are thinking and why they are doing so. (Head, 2007 : 7)

Also, we regard Ian McEwan as an outstanding stylist. In his first collection of short stories *First Loves, Last Rites* (1975), he has already proved his stylistic artistry. He retained this literary reputation in *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981). This time, he tries to create a gothic novel, bringing innocence face to face with violence and perverse eroticism. The McEwan's novels often possess naturalism, horror and morbidity. He often blends ordinary-within-extraordinary or normality-within-abnormality. We can also observe the dark portraits of our modern world in his works. Considering all the mentioned elements, it is certain that Ian McEwan is one of the authors who has undoubtedly influenced contemporary fiction, and not only British one.



## **2. Ian McEwan's Artistry**

In this chapter, as anticipated, the crucial elements of Mc Ewan's novels will be discussed. It is important to mention that there are of course many elements that deserve further examination. We though concentrate on the most determining ones for our purpose. Considering the selection of novels I take for analyses, finally it was dark elements, autobiographical elements, turning points, critics of society, and vast knowledge of the author that I chose. All these elements joined together outline the portrait of the modern society. I will present the ideas taken out of the secondary literature as well as the ideas found directly in the novels.

### **2.1 Dark Elements**

The first and maybe the most obvious elements in McEwan's fiction are the dark elements, present in (almost) every novel. Firstly, the portrait of our society given by Ian McEwan is already dark. This "darkness" of his fiction is evoked by introducing several subjects that are often repeated in his work. In this part of chapter, let us talk about incest, death and disease, desire to disgust, and savagery. By means of these elements, he shows brutalities of everyday life. He wants us to see it, to notice and to change it.

#### **2.1.1 Incest**

In almost every novel of McEwan, we can find the theme of sexuality and very often also the theme of sexual deviation, for example incest. Incest is one of the reasons why McEwan's literature is often characterized by critics as "*the literature of shock*" (Head, 2007: 32). He concentrates on taboos of our society, especially on the erotic ones, and he talks about them openly. When describing a taboo scene, he emphasizes the physiological details with all the naturalistic

ugliness of the scenes. In his novels (for example *The Cement Garden*), the sexual deviation is originally based on the children's "innocent" games. Incest is one of the forms of the demoralization that is generally based on the isolation. McEwan often describes that later on the children lack the erotic scruples that is leading to the complete demoralization of the personality. Blending of macabre grotesque with ordinariness is another typical feature of McEwan's fiction. (Hilský, 2002: 141).

As already said, McEwan describes incestuous scenes as it was natural behaviour of the children, appropriate for the given situation. The children are lonely, without parents, and this action seems natural to them, because they need somebody to lean on (Slay, 1996: 36). Therefore they look for contact and connection inside of their own family. Jack, the narrator of *The Cement Garden*, does not distinguish ordinary activities of the day and incest with his sister or the death of his mother. This causes even more intense experience of readers as they go through these, for our society unacceptable situations. However, it is important to mention that the disgust and criticism of this incestuous behaviour are reactions of the outside world and not of the children themselves. For them, the incest is "*nothing more than a need to share, a need to love.*" (ibid.: 46) Moreover, we have to realize that as Julie and Jack are the eldest siblings, on the edge of adulthood, they naturally become influenced by the codes of adult sexuality. As a result of their new role of so-called mother and father, the process finally culminates in their incestuous involvement. (Head, 2007: 47)

It is suggested to read *The Cement Garden* not as a book about sex and death, but a book about social and personal crisis, when the need for comfort and familiarity is manifested. (Childs, 2006: 36) In other words, incest does not represent only dark element in McEwan's fiction but also an element of the social crisis; the author thus offers a social-cultural critique. Children are acting this way in order to prevent stagnation and to maintain stability in the family. (Head, 2007: 25) Incest is an element of attachment. McEwan explains: "*I had an idea that in the nuclear family the kind of forces that are being suppressed – the oedipal, incestuous forces – are also paradoxically the very forces which keep the family together. So*

*if you remove the controls, you have a ripe anarchy in which the oedipal and the incestuous are the definitive emotions.”* (Slay, 1996: 44)

When talking about incest in *The Cement Garden*, it is also essential to point out the Oedipus complex. Even if it is not literally performed, the similarity is suggesting itself. The main hero Jack confesses in the beginning: *“I did not killed my father, but he sometimes I felt I helped him on his way.”* (McEwan, 1978: 1) At the end of the novel, he is having sex with the matriarchal figure of the family – his sister Julie. We could thus say that Jack killed his father and then had a sexual intercourse with his mother. However, he does not feel any guilt. This behaviour does not seem unnatural or immoral to none of the children. (Slay, 1996: 45)

### **2.1.2 Death and Disease**

Death, disease and morbidity in general are very strong elements in McEwan’s fiction. Except for the novel *Sweet Tooth*, we can observe these elements in every analysed novel. Although they represent horrors and fear, they are often covered by a banal, ordinary façade. (Slay, 1996: 40) Progressively, I will point out the references to death and disease in the chosen novels.

#### **2.1.2.1 Death and Disease in *The Cement Garden***

In *The Cement Garden*, we witness the death of the father of the family, followed by the death of the mother. As it was pointed out earlier, the death in this novel is not presented in a usual way. Firstly, it seems that the children or the whole family do not grieve for their father’s death. There are no signs of or emotions. Jack says: *“His death seemed insignificant compared to what followed.”* (McEwan, 1978: 13) We may get the impression that the story about the father’s death is mentioned just to begin the story, just to introduce the circumstances. The mother’s death is preceded by the escalating disease. This disease, followed by the death,

reinforces the disintegration of the family. The mother is bedridden because of an illness. Before her death, she no longer participates in the family's life. In the story, by fear of being discovered and by fear of loss of their freedom, the children decide to bury their mother into cement. This shocking decision seems to be again natural to children, seems to be the right thing to do. As readers can observe, except for Sue, the children do not grieve for their mother. Sue is the only one who, by sending imaginary letters to her mother, stills thinks of her and wishes her to be back. Even Tom, the youngest child, seems to completely forget his mother. After her death, it is Julie who performs the maternal figure of the family and now, Tom is dependent on her.

In this novel, the power of the dead over the living can be observed. The mother, buried under the cement, is still present in the world of the living. As the load of cement breaks open, the deathly odour starts to fill the atmosphere in the house, still reminding the children the act they did. The odour grows stronger and stronger, just like the consciousness of the children. This way, they cannot forget the reality and cannot ignore their present situation. Jack, who at first does not keep hygiene, first thinks that the origin of this odour is him, specifically his hands. Even though he washes himself afterwards, the odour does not leave the house, like the possible guilt (which, however, Jack does not feel at all). The rotten smell invades their existence and remind them of what they have done, it serves as a symbol of the monotony and lethargy that eats away their lives. There is no escape from casualness of their every day. (Slay, 1996: 39)

#### **2.1.2.2 Death and Disease in *The Comfort of Strangers***

Unlike *The Cement Garden* and *Amsterdam*, *The Comfort of Strangers* does not begin with death, but it ends with it. However, while reading, readers feel the sinister atmosphere, and feel that the death is something inevitable that will certainly come. In this novel, readers witness the death of Colin, main character. His death can be considered something incomprehensible and senseless. Colin is

used as a sacrifice of a perverted fantasy, symbolizing lost and corrupted society. (Slay, 1996: 86) As typically for Ian McEwan, the most horrifying element of the murder is the ordinariness of it, the roughness of the description. The murder of Colin is the result of Robert's need to dominate. (ibid.: 85) Colin becomes the victim because he is easily manipulated. Moreover, he is seen as weak and feminine by Robert and that is why he wants to punish him. For Robert, femininity implies weakness. Colin even admits that "*he has long envied women's orgasm, and that there were time when he felt an aching emptiness, close to desire, between his scrotum and his anus.*" (McEwan, 1981: 79) Robert gains progressively dominance over Colin. (Slay, 1996: 79) The murder is only an awaited climax of the manipulation. In contrast to other novels, we can also observe a large amount of violence, brutality and sadomasochism.

### **2.1.2.3 Death and Disease in *Amsterdam***

In *Amsterdam*, the story begins and ends with death. In the beginning, it is the death of Molly, a lover of both main heroes. We might think that her death is the consequence of the long-term promiscuity. Molly died of a disease of the central nervous system, which could have been syphilis. (ibid.: 127) There are also speculations about transmission of the virus onto Clive and Vernon. During the story, readers can notice the symptoms of tertiary syphilis that both heroes experience: for example lack of self-judgement etc. However, Molly's (or Vernon's and Clive's) diagnosis is open to speculation. (ibid.: 127). The novel ends with death as well. It is both Vernon and Clive's deaths who poison each other in revenge. Their death is the climax of the novel as well as of their mutual vindictiveness and immorality. Their otherwise grotesque act is to conclude their fates. In *Amsterdam*, the characters' deaths work as a tragi-comic element. (Childs, 2006: 120)

Again, the power of the dead over the living is manifested. (ibid.: 122) Readers might get the impression that the Molly's death finally caused the death of Vernon

and Clive. The ghost of Molly is present in heroes' lives. Although invisibly, Molly gradually poisons the friendship between Vernon and Clive and stimulates the rivalry between them and thus destroys them. (ibid.: 125) Garmony, George, Vernon and Clive all have something to deal with Molly. The most significant conflict including Molly is about publishing Garmony's photos, dressed as a woman. Clive blames Vernon for disgracing the memory of Molly. The discussion about euthanasia is also sketched. One would say that Ian McEwan is now less critical to it. As the two friends speak about Molly's death, they agree with helping each other with their own death, in case they would not be able to do it on their own: "*Just supposing I did get ill in a major way, like Molly, and I started to go downhill and make terrible mistakes, you know, errors of judgement, not knowing the names of things or who was I, that kind of thing. I'd like to know there was someone who'd help me to finish it... I mean, help me to die.*" (McEwan, 2005: 48-49) In this story, both make a disastrous moral judgement. (Childs, 2006: 128).

#### **2.1.2.4 Death and Disease in *Solar***

In *Solar*, both disease and death are present. The main character, Michael Beard, has been escaping diseases for a long time. He does not respect the doctor's orders, is on very unhealthy diet and later in the novel is diagnosed with the skin cancer. However, at first he seems to successfully ignore all of it. The reader also witnesses the death of Tom Aldous, which is a ridiculous coincidence. Even though Michael is partly responsible for it, he does not feel any guilt. Later, he frames his ex-wife's lover for the murder and this way, he gets rid of this story. As in *Amsterdam*, the death plays rather grotesque element in the novel. It does not represent any horror element, by contrast to *The Cement Garden* or *The Comfort of Strangers*.

### **2.1.2.5 Death and Disease in *Saturday***

In *Saturday*, the death itself is not presented. Nevertheless, it is present in terms of various allusions. It is the danger, the fear Henry feels after one single Saturday. Before this day, everything seemed harmless and safe to him. After that he feels vulnerable and weak. (ibid.: 145) The diseases are also found: firstly, Henry Perowne himself is a brain surgeon and he often meets severely ill people. On Saturday he visits his old mother, who suffers from Alzheimer disease. The same day he operates Baxter, suffering from degenerative brain disorder, who breaks into his house in the evening. He and all his family was in danger and this was earlier unimaginable for Henry. All these events together with anti-war protests in London show Henry that he is not untouchable.

For Henry (or McEwan), it is the genetics that determines our lives, and our fate entirely depends on this written code in our body. This randomness predicts our behaviours, opportunities, diseases and death. The role of genetics is predominant. (Head, 2007: 195)

### **2.1.3 Desire to Disgust**

Another typical element for McEwan's novels is a desire to repulse and disgust readers. McEwan reaches this effect by giving all possible details of the action, by being direct in all possible contexts. Moreover, as already mentioned, the most horror, disgusting scenes are often depicted with a mask of the ordinary.

#### **2.1.3.1 Desire to Disgust in *The Cement Garden***

In *The Cement Garden*, the narrator Jack gives us every single detail of the imagination, very direct and without emotions. When his mother dies, he talks about this subject as about an ordinary event, with crude details, however not deep. He as

well as other siblings deals with the situation with ordinariness. (Slay, 1996: 37) When talking about himself, he mentions his perverse pleasure in making his siblings disgusted by him. He neither washes, nor brushes his teeth and he takes pleasure in it. Jack's attention is drawn to banal things. However, he mentions very baser and grosser details around him. For example, when he finds out about his father's death, he notices that the radio was playing in the kitchen. When his mother is sleeping, he also notices "*mucus in her nose*". (McEwan, 1978: 57) When he finds his younger brother crying, he watches "*a large tube of green shot hanging out of one nostril*". (ibid.: 109) Jack's narration often puts emphasis upon crude details. Jack's loneliness is also manifested in his obsession with masturbation that is mentioned several times. Masturbation is extremely important to him. He even calls his first ejaculation a "*landmark in my own physical growth*". (ibid.: 13) His mother, when still alive, criticises him for self-abuse and comes to tell him this in his dreams even after her death. After the death of his parents, masturbation becomes another meaningless part of the day, the daily routine. (Slay, 1996: 43)

Another thing that may disgust readers is his honesty concerning his father's death. Although he does not feel any guilt, he openly admits that he might had an indirect hand in his death. One day he refuses to help his father with cement in order to go to the bathroom to masturbate. Meanwhile, his father suffers heart attack. He thus admits that his laziness and lust might be the factors of his father's death. Nevertheless, he argues that his purpose was extremely important, and his father's death is insignificant compared to his "*physical growth*." All these details are described with undeniable heartlessness and coldness.

### **2.1.3.2 Desire to Disgust in *The Comfort of Strangers***

In *The Comfort of Strangers*, the desire to disgust is not so obvious as in *The Cement Garden*. It is rather implied. The disgust is not inserted directly in the action, (except for the murder of Colin), but is often present in the memories. The



strongest and the most brutal part is the confession of Caroline; it is the story of the sadomasochistic alliance between her and her husband and the destructive nature of their relationship. The story and their relationship itself is full of violence and brutality: “*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.*” Or: “*My body was covered with bruises, cuts, weals. Three of my ribs were cracked. Robert knocked out one of my teeth. I had a broken finger... Neither of us could resist it.*” (McEwan, 1981: 110-111)

The only openly brutal action right in the novel is the murder of Colin. As already mentioned, the crudeness of the description is the typical McEwan’s element that intensifies the experience of disgust: “*...as he drew the razor lightly, almost playfully, across Colin’s wrist, opening wide the artery. His arm jerked forward, and the rope he cast, orange in this light, fell short of Mary’s lap by several inches*”. (ibid.: 122)

### **2.1.3.3 Desire to Disgust in *Amsterdam***

Even in *Amsterdam*, it is possible to find some repulsing details. Again, it concerns masturbation. Vernon, lying on the bed, is thinking whether he is still capable of masturbation for the pleasure, and discovers it is only a meaningless routine, as Jack does in *The Cement Garden*.

### **2.1.3.4 Desire to Disgust in *Solar***

The novel *Solar* also offers a wide range of repulsive patterns of behaviour provided by the main character, Michael Beard. Michael himself is a repugnant person and the more we know about his personality, the more we despise him. We

witness an insight into his obsession with sex and food, into his masturbation, into the gastric flu he gets after eating much smoked salmon before a conference. We are provided a detailed description of his body and his phallus. With McEwan's usual direct and cold style, we are able to see the darkest sides of Michael Beard with no indulgence.

#### **2.1.4 Savagery**

Another important element for McEwan is savagery. This element can be mostly analysed only in the novel *The Cement Garden*. This element is also present in the William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. McEwan himself admits that *Lord of the Flies* served as a structural basis for his own novel.

The deal with savagery thus concerns both Golding and McEwan. As McEwan says: "I had no doubt that my children too would suffer from, rather than exalt in, their freedom." (Slay, 1996: 37) McEwan's savagery resides in the anarchy that occurs after the parents' deaths in the house. Unlike Golding, McEwan sees the anarchy in nothingness. The children in *The Cement Garden* do not kill each other but they are rude at each other and try to deal with the situation by ordinariness and they complain about the monotony of their life. They are isolated in their anarchy. The children are overwhelmed by the sudden strangeness of the life that was before familiar to them.

At first, the children are amazed by their unexpected freedom and take their situation as adventure. However, later they discover that their "adventure" became a routine and meaningless and that the days are empty. Jack says: "*The days were too long; it was too hot; the house seemed to have fallen asleep.*" (McEwan, 1978: 79) Not only Jack, but everybody in the house is bored. They are isolated and their "society" or "family" is about to stagnate, the children find only endless monotony in their freedom. After this experience, it seems that they would be happy for the former order and authority of their parents, because freedom brought nothing to them. (Slay, 1996: 39)

As a result of their freedom, they explore the relationships among themselves. After the death of their parents, Jack and Julie are even forced to act as so-called father and mother of the family. That is also a reason why the relationship, however incestuous, is formed between them. (ibid.: 44) McEwan is trying to point out that if we let the children with no control, free, with no boundaries, this may be a possible result – basically unconscious savagery. He thus examines the role of the social control and of the unfettered impulse of the children. (Head, 2007: 47)

In *Lord of the Flies* we might find an analogy to *The Cement Garden* in terms of savagery. In the first mentioned novel, the children also lack boundaries and parental supervision. Such unexpected situation also forces them to act like adults; they distribute the roles into leaders, hunters, fire protectors, etc. In the beginning, the situation seems to be joyful and under control. The boys have a good time, they feel happy and self-confident. As the time goes by, the situation gets worse and their artificial society starts to disintegrate. The laws are no more respected; there is no more security or human rights. The hunters take charge of the others, gaining dominance over their whole society. Readers even forget that the story deals only with boys, with children. The children also seem to forget the fact that they are not grown up and suddenly skip the maturing, acting like the worst kind of adults. Only in the end, when adults arrive, they realize their fears, their crimes and their destroyed childhood.

Both Ian McEwan and William Golding outline what happens if we remove social boundaries that are imposed by our societies. They point out that human nature can be evil in certain circumstances even in the case of innocent people like children. By these examples we can see that lack of boundaries can reveal the darkest side of our being.

## **2.2 Autobiographical Elements – Life Related to Art**

Autobiographical elements occupy a very important part in McEwan's work. Although not entirely, it is impossible to deny the influence of the author's

life on his work. It is important to mention that McEwan's life and work were influenced by variety of changes in society; for example the second wave of feminism, the transformation of family life, the dissolving of British class structure, educational reform and also the fading colonial system. (Groes, 2009: 5) McEwan himself admits that he has always been silent and shy, keeping his dark thoughts for his novels. (McEwan, 2002: 41)

We may suggest the possible quest for identity and emphasis put on self-understanding in McEwan's novels. This point, however, does not seem to be anything particular in McEwan's case. What we see in his works can be rather considered a democratic postmodern tendency. This tendency is defined as a necessary invention of the self in the society freed from the narrative modernity. (Groes, 2009: 14)

In this part of chapter, we will deal with isolation and women and feminism. We will point out the similarities between author's life and his novels.

### **2.2.1 Isolation**

Let us talk about isolation, an important feature when talking about McEwan's characters. In every McEwan's novel, we may find various forms of isolation. Gradually, we will discuss the forms of isolations in the analysed novels. McEwan himself did not feel like the others during his childhood. He was rather tongue-tied and not talkative (McEwan, 2002: 39). That is why isolation from other people presents one of McEwan's concerns.

#### **2.2.1.1 Isolation in *The Cement Garden***

In *The Cement Garden*, there are many forms of isolation. For the narrator Jack, his inability to keep clean separates him from other siblings and it makes him

lonely. While other siblings cooperate, talk and laugh together, Jack remains out of the game. In defence, he bullies them. (Slay, 1996: 42) Another element that represents his isolation is masturbation.

Sue, his younger sister, is the most introverted of the children. She spends most of the time alone, she thus consciously isolates herself, mostly by reading and writing to her diary. She is frequently describe as an “alien” of the family, which symbolizes her isolation. (ibid.: 47)

The isolation of Tom, the Jack’s younger brother, has a different form: as the youngest one, he truly needs a mother in his life and thus demands protection and attention. In order to fight against loneliness and isolation, he at first starts to wear the girl’s clothes. The other step of his defence mechanism was his regression. He starts to suck his thumb, wear a rib, speak in a baby voice, etc. (ibid.: 48)

Julie is also isolated from other siblings. She is the most grown-up of all, so she is responsible for the whole family. Her escape from this is situation is bossiness of her siblings and also Derek, her boyfriend. Every member of the family deals with their isolation in a different way. Both Julie and Jack deal with isolation by means of incest. However, let us see beyond the act of incest: it can be considered a “*disquieting antidote to the acute levels of physical, emotional and psychological isolation which characterizes this desolate “familial tale”*” (Groes, 2009: 24). It is important to point out that also the family used to be isolated as a whole. In spite of the fact that the father gives instructions to children, pointing out what to do when someone comes to the door, Jack mentions that no one had ever come. (Childs, 2006: 37)

### **2.2.1.2 Isolation in *The Comfort of Strangers***

The element of isolation can be found also in *The Comfort of Strangers*. The isolation of Mary and Colin is caused by the fact that they are strangers in a foreign country, in a city they do not know. Both characters are also isolated towards one

another. Their relationship is no more passionate after the years. Although they know each other perfectly and they are let us say the best friends, they cannot reach each other, remaining both silent and ignorant to the other's feelings. This type of isolation concerns the first half of the book. In the second half of the plot, their relationship grows stronger and more intense, however, they are always alone in the city of strangers, isolated from the society as they spend their days and nights in a hotel room and finally isolated with their sadomasochistic friends. This isolation becomes fatal for them.

Caroline, masochistic wife, is also isolated. However, compared to Colin and Mary, she is literally isolated. She is not permitted to leave the house or to speak to anybody.

#### **2.2.1.3 Isolation in *Amsterdam***

In *Amsterdam*, both characters suffer from a certain isolation too. In spite of being friends and in spite of the fact that Vernon actually has a family, they are lonely and isolated with their horrible moral decisions. Vernon, alone and isolated after his unsuccessful attempt to humiliate Garmony and Clive with his likewise unsuccessful symphony that ruined his career.

#### **2.2.1.4 Isolation in *Saturday***

In *Saturday*, isolation is treated in a completely different way. Perowne's imaginary isolation from contemporary world and its problems is something comfortable for him. As already mentioned, Henry Perowne thinks that he and his family are untouchable. He is isolated in the way that the up-to-date problems do not reach him. Driving in the middle of the biggest anti-war protest in Britain after 11<sup>th</sup> September, he is calm and balanced and he does not seem to be worried about today's problems. On television, in the street, he can see poverty and hunger, but

feels isolated, safe from it. When talking about these problems with someone, he does so “*while listening Schubert in his Mercedes*”. (Childs, 2006: 146) Nevertheless, as it can be observed, this isolation is only apparent and Henry learns so at the end of the day.<sup>3</sup>

#### **2.2.1.5 Isolation in *Solar***

Isolation in *Solar* can be described as a selfish element. Michael Beard is not forced to be isolated; if he wanted to, he could have a family and stable life. However, this is not his objective in life: except for being famous and highly regarded, he wants to be free. At the same time, he wants to be cared of and not responsible for the feelings of others. He looks only for profit for himself but not for the others – that makes him indifferent to the family values. He does not want to invest himself; when married to Patricia, his third wife, he repeatedly cheats on her. When having another lover, he comes only for sex and food and he does not care for the other person. When having a daughter with his lover, he stills searches for another distraction. He is intentionally isolated in his selfishness.

#### **2.2.1.6 Isolation in *Sweet Tooth***

Let us talk about the possibility to find the motive of isolation in *Sweet Tooth*. It is a good idea to mention that the element of isolation is rather secondary in this novel and readers do not feel it immediately. The isolation of the main character Serena could be find in her struggle with life. We might feel that she did not fully

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<sup>3</sup> By the way, *Saturday* is considered McEwan’s most autobiographical novel. There are undeniable similarities between McEwan’s and Perowne’s house, there are parallels between the work of Perowne as a surgeon and of McEwan as a writer, and so one. (Childs, 2006: 151)

Another autobiographical point is the shared atheism of Perowne and McEwan. In an article on science and belief, McEwan said: “*What I believe but cannot prove is that no part of my consciousness will survive my death.*” (Head, 2007: 191) Similarly, Perowne states in *Saturday*: “*That this span is brief, that consciousness is an accidental gift of blind processes, makes our existence all the more precious and our responsibilities for it all the more profound.*” (ibid.: 191)

find herself in the things she does. She has her degree in mathematics even though she is rather interested in literature. Her intimate life is not successful. She tries to find her way, changing partners, not knowing exactly whether she is in love or not.

Another symbol of isolation could represent her secret mission – operation Sweet Tooth. She finally finds someone to be with, eventually she falls in love. However, her relationship is partly a cheat, because she hides her true identity from her lover. In this way, we might take Serena as isolated with her own confused mind. She is in love as well as her partner. In spite of this fact, she remains alone with her feelings and her fear of revelation. In this sense, she is isolated from her lover.

### **2.2.2 Women and Feminism**

Ian McEwan is well-known for his feminism. He found himself to be classified as “*a male feminist writer*”. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, McEwan denies any classification. In any case, we cannot argue that he demonstrates the problems of a male-dominated society in many novels. He proclaims the very necessity of a world in which the sexes are equal. (Slay, 1996: 8)

Why do we talk about this element as an autobiographical one? On the base of his contribution to the publication *On Modern British Fiction* called *Mother Tongue* (2002), where we can learn much about his childhood and about the relationship between his mother and his father. As much as we know, their relationship was not ideal. His mother was apparently oppressed by his father. She could not work and she was afraid of him, McEwan himself was too. Later, McEwan even learnt that his mother was exposed to violence and was horrified by it. (McEwan, 2002: 42) That is why we might consider that his own family and the man-woman model he saw at home had an immense influence on his writing. Considering himself to be shy and tongue-tied, he said: “*I drifted away, and saved my darker thoughts for my fiction, where fathers – especially the one in *The Cement Garden* – were not kindly*



*presented.*” (Childs, 2006: 45) Nevertheless, it is not only *The Cement Garden* where the fathers are depicted in a bad perspective, as it will be discussed later.

Throughout his novels, we can detect many elements concerning a woman’s role in the society, and the feminism itself. McEwan himself admits that the rise of the feminist movement in the 1970s’ had a certain influence on his writing. (Head, 2007: 52) He deals with the fact that women are seen as the submissive beings in both their societies and relationships. Is it important to note that his female characters often break through these societal barriers. (Slay, 1996: 6) He stated: “*I developed a romantic notion that if the spirit of women was liberated, the world would be healed. My female characters became the respiratory if all the goodness that men fell short of.*” (Childs, 2006: 45) In this part of the chapter, we will illustrate these elements on the analysed novels.

### **2.2.2.1 Women and Feminism in *The Cement Garden***

In *The Cement Garden*, it is possible to find many feminist elements and many parables to show the rapport between men and women. First of all, if we observe the family, we can state the stereotypical roles of a mother and a father. The father is feared and respected; he gives orders to everybody around. He rules by maintaining mental abuse of the entire family. He makes fun of everybody, but nobody can make fun of him. On the other hand, the mother is caring, loving and also fragile. Compared to her husband, she is very quiet and peaceful, trying to pacify the tyranny. (Slay, 1996: 38, 41) The hierarchy in the house is thus clear.

The decisive moment for feminism to appear is the Tom’s transvestism. Jack does not like his change at all and he thinks it is unnatural. Observing his negative reaction, Julie points out a paradox of patriarchal culture we live in: “*Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short and wear shirts and boots because it’s okay to be a boy; for girls it’s like promotion. But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading, according to you, because secretly believe that being a girl is degrading....If I wore your trousers to school tomorrow and you wore my skirt, we’d soon see who had*

*the worse time. Everyone would point at you and laugh.*” (McEwan, 1978: 55-56) This way, women are depicted as the objects of social injustice. At the same time, Tom thinks that being a girl is easier for him, because girls do not get hit by boys.

From Jack’s point of view, it is natural that Julie accepts the role of mother after the death of their parents. Nevertheless, he, accepting the role of the father of the family, thinks Julie’s role should be subservient to his. As Julie is dating her new boyfriend, Jack thinks he has a right to ask questions about it. (Childs, 2006: 39)

If we observe closely Julie’s character, we can see that she represents feminism. The protest at the social injustice is then dressing their younger brother as a girl. (ibid.: 41) Tom, by means of crying, complaining, wants to draw attention of Julie, newly the matriarchal figure of the family. This relationship is to “*satirize the male tendency to make women into mothers to get attention from them.*” (ibid.: 43) Julie, desired by her brother, as it is described several times in the novel, is thus object of sexual desire, which is another patriarchal element present in the story.

#### **2.2.2.2 Women and Feminism in *The Comfort of Strangers***

Let us continue with the issues of feminism in *The Comfort of Strangers*. Compared to other analysed novels, we might consider this one as the most concerned one, when it comes to patriarchal matter. We can observe even perverse obsession by a patriarchal world throughout the story. It can be read as a story about exploration of the role in patriarchal culture. The novel describes both women in this male-dominated society and attitude of men towards these women. (Slay, 1996: 72) Robert serves as an archetype of a strict patriarch and chauvinist, proud to be a man, an evil with the need to dominate. The domination over his wife is not enough for him; he wants to dominate over Colin too.

The origin of Robert’s nature was of course his dominating father, who controlled the whole family through fear and had descending attitudes towards women. (ibid.: 80) From the psychoanalyst point of view, we can consider Robert’s

mind as governed by gender confusion originating from his failure to live up to his masculine ideal – his father. (Head, 2007: 61)

His wife, Caroline, is considered nothing more than possession to him. For him, she is no person. Nevertheless, she willingly accepts her role. She also admits that “*If you are in love with someone, you would even be prepared to let them kill you, if necessary.*” (McEwan, 1981: 62) This statement also points out the fact that her husband tainted her own thinking with success. Their marriage developed into terrific sadomasochistic relationship. Caroline’s existence is reduced to pain and terror. She proclaims that she needs brutality, but undeniably, this lifestyle destroys her. (Slay, 1996: 81) Caroline is first the victim, then the participant of Robert’s sadism. She represents a weak character, a woman who is easily dominated by the power of the male. The whole patriarchal dogma dominates the novel. McEwan attempts to oppose these archaic mores with his fiction, fighting against the destructive and absurd patriarchy. (ibid.: 83)

Mary, another character of the novel, represents the feminist movement. For example, from very few details given about her life, we know that she was a part of all-female theatrical group. Also, she approves the idea of castration of a rapist she sees on the poster. She is thus the exact opposite of Robert. In the novel, she finds herself alone to fight against the world possessed by the patriarchy. (ibid.: 83) Her character can be compared to Julie in *The Cement Garden*: both women are independent, and both define their own engagement in the rapport with men. Both characters also play mother-like figures. Julie, to her brother, and Mary, to Colin, to her lover. On the other hand, we have no prove about Mary’s qualities of being a mother to her own children. Despite talking about herself and Colin as about good parents, a reader has no evidence of it. (Childs, 2006: 57) Also, we can observe that the first day of their holiday, Mary writes a few postcards for her children. However, she does not send them during the holiday. Probably, she did not even buy any presents for them. This way, Mary does not correspond to the image of a typical mother.

She, unlike Colin, established her own identity. Instead of winning Colin over with her ideas, it is Robert who manipulates him and talks to him persuasively about the role of men: “*My father and his father understood themselves clearly. They were men, and they were proud of their sex. Women understood them, too... There were no confusion.*” (McEwan, 1981: 71) Robert thus thinks that he can justify his brutal behaviour and cruelties to Caroline. As a result, Mary, alone in the story, cannot win the feminist fight. Caroline, the other woman in the novel, is her very opposite, too. She succumbs to the inconsiderate demands of Robert. She says she enjoys the fact of the pain, being reduced, and her shame is also a source of pleasure. She is described as though she does not have an independent existence, because she is entirely submissive.

In the end, Mary, actually waken up from her feminist sensibilities, is surrendering to the world of patriarchal ideology. (Slay, 1996: 86) Finally, we can observe that McEwan gives us warnings about the corruptions and perversions that are based on a destructive sexual hierarchy between a man and a woman. This world obsessed by patriarchal values demands the subservience of its female population. (Slay: 88) McEwan also suggests that “*human desire may be fundamentally underwritten by a master/slave dialectic, in which the roles are not fixed but contested, and individuals can move between position of sadist and masochist, subject and object, dominator and dominated*”. (Childs, 2006: 58)

It is interesting to point out McEwan’s connection with the whole issue of the feminine masochistic desire to be a victim. He even presented his ideas in a debate – proposing in his speech that “*it would be far better in a relationship to embrace it than to deny it, and that true freedom would be for such women to recognise their masochism and to understand how it has become related to sexual pleasure.*” (Head, 2007: 58) Not surprisingly, the audience’s reaction was stormy and very negative. However, McEwan still claims that he said very pertinent and right things.

### **2.2.2.3 Women and Feminism in *Amsterdam***

In *Amsterdam*, there is not much place for discussion about the position of women or feminism. Nevertheless, let us point out that all the main characters are men, except for Molly, who is not physically present.

What is even more important is the fact that actually every character in the novel is a well-known, leading person in British society, or a celebrity. Apparently, McEwan deals with the idea that our patriarchal society does not allow women to be in leading positions.

### **2.2.2.4 Women and Feminism in *Saturday***

The novel *Saturday* is not interested in feminism as such. However, as already mentioned above in 3.2.1, it is considered a very autobiographical novel. The issue of Perowne's mother in *Saturday* is very similar to the situation McEwan had to face with his own mother. During the day, Perowne visits his mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, in a sanatorium. He describes her states of mind, mentioning that sometimes, she recognizes him, sometimes not. In every case, these visits are really painful for him. McEwan's mother, as he describes in *Mother tongue*, (McEwan, 2002: 43), his own mother suffered from dementia. He familiarizes us with her illness, how she talks as if her mother was alive, as if she could return home to her parents, etc. (ibid.: 43) Of course, it must have been a difficult situation for him to see his mother like this, and it certainly inspired him in *Saturday*.

### **2.2.2.5 Women and Feminism in *Solar***

The novel *Solar* does not show any direct discussion about feminism. In any case, we can comment on female characters in connection with the main anti-hero,

Michael Beard. He, the man of the contemporary society, is a witness of generation of women who are progressively gaining ground. This can be one of the possible reasons why he is so afraid of women arguments and the manifestation of their femininity in general. (Matoušek, 2001: 296)

By all means, the women around Michael are not respected by him. He lets himself spoil, but has never shown any further interest in them. He has had naive wives, lovers, girlfriends who have a foolish idea that it is possible to change him. Readers witness his selfishness and infidelities in every kind of relationship he attempts to be in. When dating Mellissa, he admits that he comes only for a good dinner and sex, satisfied that his girlfriend never asks questions and never demands anything more. He also mentions that in his life, he got used to apologize himself by some kind of impersonal presents he brings from his travels, knowing that hopefully, all will be forgiven. For Michael Beard, a typical ignorant, a woman exists only to fill his needs.

#### **2.2.26 Women and Feminism in *Sweet Tooth***

Serena Frome, the main character of *Sweet Tooth*, can be considered a feminist figure for her time. We can conclude that in the novel, she does always what she wants, and does not know any limits. She is dating boys or a married man, without any shame. She is admitted into MI5 and is eventually sent to a secret operation, which is exceptional for such a recently accepted member like her.

Serena is not even afraid to go beyond the imperative rules of her job, making every time her own decision. Even though she is losing control over it in the end, we can consider her as a very strong woman and strong character.

## **2.3 Turning Points**

In this part of chapter, we will discuss possible “turning points” in McEwan’s novels. It concerns the events or the sudden decisions of the heroes that will finally catch them. These points function as a sort of karma, showing the principle of applied cause and a consequence. Whatever the character does, it will later certainly affect his life.

### **2.3.1 Turning Points in *The Cement Garden***

In *The Cement Garden*, there are two main landmarks: it is the death of the mother that will cause the overall disintegration of the family. The second, more important landmark is the burial of the mother under cement.

The corpse, even if buried and not actively participating, influences from beyond the whole plot. The burial is the fatal mistake of the children and it will be reminded little by little. First of all, it is the crack of the cement that breaks the smell of the corpse free. Then, it is the smell itself that poisons the whole house and that points out the horrible action of the children. As we can conclude, karma finally reaches fruition.

### **2.3.2 Turning Points in *The Comfort of Strangers***

The fatal meeting of Robert with Mary and Colin is the main turning point in *The Comfort of Strangers*. The conclusion of the book surely depends on this moment. Since this time, reader can feel the sinister atmosphere and as already mentioned, it is suggested that some tragic event must certainly occur. This meeting of a trusting couple with a sinister local only starts an intricate net of Robert’s manipulation, and without any coercion, the couple is lured into a dangerous trap.

Despite observing the bizarre nature of the alliance of Robert and Caroline, they somehow naturally succumb. Their first meeting with Robert does not only rule over their holiday, but finally on their lives, too.

### **2.3.3 Turning Points in *Amsterdam***

As in *Amsterdam*, the core of the story is a corrupted friendship of two men, there are also two main turning points.

Before their own shameful actions, there is also the death of their former lover, Molly. Her death can be finally interpreted as the possible cause of their own demoralization, followed by death. She is in fact the “*signifier of their own mortality.*” (Childs, 2006: 121)

Both heroes face important moral decisions and both finally choose the wrong side. Their decisions are disastrous and they soon feel the impact of their faulty steps as they are both punished; at first, by the society, and then they punish each other. However, the moral decisions they deal with are very different. For Clive, the situation is simple; the rape he witnesses is of course negligible, compared to his symphony, a supposed masterpiece that he is working on for a long time. He is taken by his own seeming importance and reader actually believes that he is talented. Nevertheless, his overrated symphony is a complete failure. Vernon’s situation is more complicated: He is aware that the publication of Garmonys’ photos will change the politics and thus the whole country. He tries to persuade himself that he is doing the right thing for the society, but finally, we get the feeling that his decision is rather selfish attempt to save his own career. (ibid.: 123) His idea is, according to Clive, reprehensible.

Unsuccessful publishing of the photos then causes his resignation. The editor of *The Judge* finally finds himself judged by the society. Vindictive “friends” cause death to each other, proving their amoral nature.



### **2.3.4 Turning Points in *Saturday***

In *Saturday*, the tangle of the events is not entirely caused by the main character Henry Perowne himself. The collision of his car with another one driven by Baxter and two his companions can be considered the main turning point of the novel. This event, seemingly pointless, has of course a repercussion later in the story. Readers might already know that McEwan would not insert any purposeless element to the plot.

The situation in *Saturday* could be even regarded as Perowne's personal catharsis. He is somehow waken up by immediate, dramatic and unexpected situation that presents a real threat to his family. His comfortable life and self-evident security is gone.

Because of this event, no matter how insignificant, compared to all the contemporary issues of the world (also mentioned in the novel, such as war in Iraq etc.), he is finally forced to see the crisis of the world. (Childs, 2006: 148) The attack of Baxter can be seen as a form of punishment for Henry's ignorance towards the global issues.

### **2.3.5 Turning Points in *Solar***

Michael Beard in *Solar* becomes a victim of his own crimes, too. Even though readers can think that he is going to escape and go unpunished, the climax of the novel shows the very opposite.

Michael makes several fatal mistakes. At first, he is framing his wife's former lover for the murder of her current lover, his colleague at the same time, with no prick of conscience. Furthermore, he steals scientific inventions of the dead scientist that he later exploits. In addition, he maintains love affairs with two women. Michael's downfall is sudden, rapid and fatal.

All his world collapses: his career is probably gone, he is accused of plagiarism and both women he is making love to meet in one place to seek justice. The conclusion McEwan suggests may be interpreted as a heart attack. Simultaneously, we can discuss an interesting analogy; the role of the Sun. The Sun is an imaginary accomplice of Michael. He uses it to split the molecules of water in order to produce effectively electric current and to make himself even more famous. Nevertheless, the Sun finally testifies against him, having the imaginary function of God. Sinister stain on his hand, caused by the Sun, stands for an incipient of skin cancer. (Matoušek, 2001: 300) The novel *Solar* could be literally translated as *Crime and Punishment*.

### **2.3.6 Turning Points in *Sweet Tooth***

In *Sweet Tooth*, Selena's crime is not crime as such. It is only Selena's decision to maintain a love affair with the subject of her operation, a young and perspective writer that represents a turning point in this novel. She has to do both; work for the mission and hide it from her partner she progressively falls in love with. At first, she thinks that the situation is under her control. Later, she finds out that she is mistaken but still attempts to live in a lie. Of course, their relationship is untenable and Selena's foolishness is punished, but only in the short term.

## **2.4 Critics of Society**

Another, very important element of McEwan's work is the critics of society. However, this element concerns rather his later novels, in which he slightly turns away from his initial horror tendencies. That is why we will only comment on *Amsterdam*, *Saturday* and *Solar*.

### 2.4.1 Critics of Society in *Amsterdam*

*Amsterdam* is McEwan's first social satire and represents a new departure for the author. The satirized political issues in *Amsterdam* are undeniable. This novel succeeded as a "burlesque" of the deposed Conservative government, which was led by Prime Minister John Major. (Childs, 2006: 118) The main idea is that professional standards (in either field) have occluded ethical standards. (Groes, 2009: 24) McEwan attempts to depict an amoral society with sex scandals and poor values. He personally mentioned that at that time, "the political culture and the press had each other by the throat where neither could move." (Childs, 2006: 119) By this social satire, he is saying goodbye to this hated political period.

He describes both moral and social corruption, the governing generation that has "betrayed the legacy it has inherited from the past." (ibid.: 122) In the novel, the corrupted British politics is represented by Garmony, a right-wing Foreign Secretary. Besides, we can also observe the critics of the press. McEwan points out that the role of the press is distorted.

### 2.4.2 Critics of Society in *Saturday*

The whole plot of *Saturday* is in fact turning around up-to date issues, showing a new perception of the society. McEwan treats not only the mood in our society, but also global political context. (Head, 2007: 180) It deals with various subjects: for example with gender relations, post-imperial nationalism, the politics of Britain, the history of post-war Europe or the genealogy of English novel (Childs, 2006: 144).

The main character, Henry Perowne, presents the main object of the critics in the novel. He represents the material West's indifference to global affairs. A person like this can discuss the global issues, hunger, poverty, war, but only in his distant position. None of these problems concern Perowne, so he sees these issues just from his detached western perspective. He is uninvolved and uninterested until he

collides with danger himself; according to McEwan, exactly this attitude of life is dangerous to our civilisation. It is thus engagement of an individual which stands in the centre of the novel through the question of personal responsibility in global issues. (ibid. : 151)

The most significant political event mentioned is the Iraq war and the great march against the war in the centre of London. Through this event, we can observe Perowne's variable judgement. He changes from a dove into a hawk, eventually gets into an argument with his daughter Daisy who is a strong pacifist. Finally, Henry becomes unsure of the right thing to believe, and even if he talks about his opinion about this war, he is not sure what it will bring to his life. (ibid.: 147) For example Lawson suggest that *Saturday* presents "*one of the most oblique but also most serious contributions to the post-9/11, post-Iraq war literature, and, consequently, it succeeds in ridiculing on every page the view of its hero that fiction is useless to the modern world.*" (Head, 2007: 187)

Henry considers himself to be completely apart from the violence on the street he can see. He can see violence out of the window, he can read about the brutalities in the newspaper, but he remains indifferent, because it does not touch him personally. In one of the perspective, *Saturday* is the novel about the "war of terror" in terms of international politics.

The ecological consciousness is also included. When Perowne goes to fishmonger's in the afternoon in order to buy fish for dinner, he reflects on emptying seas and also recollects that according to recent studies, even fish feel pain. In spite of this fact, Perowne contributes to this culture which creates an ethical paradox. (Head, 2007: 184) The consequence is "*the growing complication of the modern culture, the expanding circle of moral sympathy.*" (McEwan, 2005: 127)

McEwan is pursuing allegorical dimension, too: There are discussions about a parallel between Saddam Hussein and Baxter. By means of this parallel, readers are invited to speculate about a possibility of a common psychological disorder, which was degenerative brain disorder in *Saturday*. However, we have to admit that

Hussein's real psychological profile is incomplete and the diagnosis is thus problematic. (Head, 2007: 181)

### **2.4.3 Critics of Society in *Solar***

Even in *Solar* we can find the marks of criticism of society. This novel deals with the big issue of global warming and world climate as such. Global warming functions as the object of satire. In fact, the society is not entirely sure about the nature of so-called global warming; we are not absolutely convinced whether it is really a non-returnable process or whether it is only a comeback of a "little ice age". However, as our society could experience, there was much hypocrisy and many frauds in order to make business, connected to this issue. For example, McEwan describes in a ridiculous way the ecological summit for the scientists in 2005. He satirizes this sort of events, thinking that the importance of such actions is zero. He offers an insight to these scientific workshops, where scientists only talk about the problems and do not solve anything. On the contrary, they even contribute to the increase of emissions of carbon dioxide. (Matoušek, 2001: 295).

By means of anti-hero Michael Beard, the author also criticizes the materialism of our age. This tragicomic figure only sponges on the progress of science. He represents the sort of greedy scientist who is completely indifferent to the future of our planet; he wants only himself to be rich and famous. McEwan thus points out the materialistic character of our society, where no moral values occur.

## **2.5 Vast Knowledge**

Let us conclude this chapter with the part called "vast knowledge." In many novels, McEwan proves that he is a brilliant observer of people, of the world. However, that is not all. Many times we have noticed that his knowledge, when he presents an insight to the mind of characters, is immense. Very often he chooses as

characters the professionals from various fields: composer, newspaper editor, writer, neurosurgeon, physics or even writer. He thus shows that he has been doing a lot of studies and detailed observations before the writing itself. However, we might consider that the sciences he uses in his novels are “*servants rather than masters of plot and character.*” (Head, 2007: 9)

In many acknowledgments in his novels, he is thankful to various professionals from the target fields. That points out the fact that he is a professional writer with a sense for details. He is capable of displaying brilliantly people’s mind in spite of being non-specialist. However, some may think that his interest in the human mind makes him a scientist, too. (Head, 2007: 8) In this part, we will comment on the vast knowledge McEwan performs in *Amsterdam*, *Saturday* and *Solar*. In an interview, McEwan mentioned he has always admired for example John Updike or Rudyard Kipling for their detailed knowledge of a process of particular kinds of work. (Childs, 2006: 120) However, since we observe McEwan’s superb insight into various professions, we can conclude that he equals his models.

### **2.5.1 Vast Knowledge in *Amsterdam***

At first, the vast knowledge of professions in *Amsterdam* will be discussed. Two main characters are a composer and a newspaper editor. Ian McEwan proves an excellent knowledge of both jobs, giving really specific details and confirming thus the credibility of the plot.

When the author comments on Clive, the head of newspaper *The Judge*, he mentions various details concerning his responsibilities as the boss, many specific terms from journalistic area and also the hierarchy in an editorial office, for example: “...*Vernon Theobald Halliday... shall not publish, nor cause to have published, nor distribute or disseminate by electronic or any other means, nor describe in print, or cause such descriptions of the proscribed matter hereafter to be referred to as the material, to be printed, nor describe the nature and terms of*

*his order....*” (McEwan, 2005:41) Moreover, McEwan provides us an insight into the meetings of editorial team.

The other significant character, Clive, is a composer. McEwan brilliantly describes the way he is trying to reach the melodies, the way he attempts to concentrate, the various obstacles in his creation as well as the process of drawing inspiration for his symphony: “*The ancient stone steps had been climbed, the wisps of sounds had melted away like mist, his new melody, darkly scored, had gathered around itself rich orchestral textures of sinuous harmony, then dissonance and whirling variations that spun away into space...*” (ibid.:135)

### **2.5.2 Vast Knowledge in *Saturday***

The character of Henry Perowne in *Saturday* shows the mastery of the author. This very complex novel introduces, besides other things, the detailed comments by a human brain expert. Neurosurgeon Henry is giving many details about surgical interventions and operations he did in the past. He describes for example his wife’s former disease and gives many other comments on his job. What is also very important is that Henry shows interest in the relations between mind and brain, which is very important for neuroscience. In *Saturday*, all the knowledge is associated to literature and science too. (Groes, 2009: 97)

It is interesting that McEwan chose neurological science as a field of study for *Saturday*; We might conclude that neurological science “*points the way for a combination of scientific and cultural insights, positing an organism that comes to life designed with automatic survival mechanism, and to which education and acculturation add a set of socially permissible and desirable decision-strategies making that, in turn, enhance survival, for constructing a person.*” (Groes, 2009: 20)

To be that familiar with medical terms and methodology, McEwan even spent some time with a neurosurgeon. The comments he does in the third person of

singular give the impression of authenticity, professionalism and real experience with the job. Apart from observing the neurosurgeon's work, McEwan was also inspired by the book *When the Air Hits Your Brain: Tales of Neurosurgery* by Vertosick. For example, Perowne describes the story how he met in wife; he had to remove a tumour which was pressing on her optic nerve. This operation is called transsphenoidal hypophysectomy and it is partly drawn from the book mentioned above. However, there are some differences: in Vertosick's work, the glands that are operated are "*blue and taut*", but in the operation carried out by Perowne, the glands are "*swollen and purplish*". Also, the operation does not take sixty minutes but only forty five in *Saturday*. (McEwan, 2005: 22) That proves that McEwan also had other sources to discuss. By means of this novel, McEwan reinforced his status "*as the supreme novelist of his generation.*" (Childs, 2006: 145)

### **2.5.3 Vast Knowledge in *Solar***

Let us continue with the vast knowledge presented in *Solar*. In this novel, it is ecology and physics which stand in the centre of the plot. The main character is a winner of Nobel Prize for physics and in the novel he deals with solar panel and with a solution how to produce electricity by means of artificial photosynthesis.

Again, McEwan provides us with many details concerning new physical project described in the book; it concerns the simulation of a photosynthesis process. It is important to point out that it is not the fantasy; the scientists are actually working on this project. McEwan, in order to get acquainted with the project, visited the research centre in Colorado. (Matoušek, 2001: 295) Thanks to this action, he can offer to readers in many scientific and convincing details. The scientific invention in *Solar* thus copies the reality. McEwan describes through his anti-hero Michael ultra-thin solar panel, which is able to produce electric current thanks to the Sun. As obvious, McEwan deals with truly top-level science and that is how he shows an extraordinary knowledge of the issues.



This invention is, however, more in a warm-up stage today. There is a long way to go to make this object perfect and cheaper to use it in every-day life. (Matoušek, 2001: 296)

### **3. Space in British Fiction**

This chapter will discuss the subject of space in British fiction and in fiction in general. We will consider space as one of the most important, key features of a novel. Let us mention that whereas earlier in the literary science, the notion of space was something rather taken for granted, today, the examination of space is one of the most important literary scientific disciplines. (James, 2008: 3) The space presents also a typical feature to discuss in McEwan's novels. However, the concept of space in his novels will be discussed in the next chapter.

When investigating the concept of space, we use several interconnected disciplines: we may proceed from literary studies and criticism, cultural studies, postmodernism itself and also from various geographical approaches. (Brazzelli, 2012: 10) We can thus conclude that such an investigation certainly involves multidisciplinary approach. Recently, there has been a significant concern for natural places represented in poetry or novels; the sort of ecological approach to literature can be detected.

This chapter covers three main sections: space delimitation, including its comparison with place and landscape, space construction or how to insert space into text via various techniques, and space representation as well as perception, or how readers perceive and feel the space in the text. Finally, we will inquire the role of the city as an urban space, approaching also the concept of the global city.

#### **3.1 Space Delimitation**

In this part of chapter, as already mentioned, the emphasis will be put on the definition of space. When touching the concept of space, it is necessary to position it next to other concepts that usually appear in the fiction: concepts of place and landscape. In the beginning we have to mention that the three terms *space*, *place*

and *landscape* do not represent static or fixed object of our reality, they are in fact ongoing processes. (Brazzelli, 2012: 21)

It is essential to keep in mind that if we discuss space, even in literary context, this investigation has its origins in geography. We may argue that there is a huge difference between space in fiction and non-fiction; however, we must realize that even fantastic literature has to be grounded on geographical premises and uses geographical data. (Brazzelli, 2012: 9) Geographical studies have been widening their connection with other disciplines. It is especially literary studies that are closely connected to geographical studies and we are thus particularly interested in this branch of study. We could even speak of “literary geography”. This branch could be considered a “*process through which the sense of place is constructed not by social agents but by texts.*” (Brazzelli, 2012: 32)

Let us start with the definition of the formal space in general: we can define it as a “*variety of rhetorical, grammatical and architectural ways of describing novelistic discourse*”. (James, 200: 15) It is also “*the level of the form*”. (ibid.: 6) Space remains an active participant of the story, it influences the whole impression of the fiction (which will be observed for example in the analysis of *The Comfort of Strangers*). Space can be also considered “*the product of interrelations, always under construction.*” In this interpretation, spaces are shaped by both institutional forces and social relationships. (Brazzelli, 2012: 27) In a wider perspective, space is equally seen as a metaphor. (Balshaw, Kennedy, 2000: 1)

In the point of view of critical social theory, space is also a container of human life, a material product, which enters into relations with other elements, which give to space a function, a form or social signification. In addition, critical social theory says the theory of space is not independent, it is only a part of a general social theory. Space is then considered a product of translation, transformation and experience. Soja also argues that space is political and strategic, even though it has been made of historical and natural elements. Space can be divided into space *per se* (space as contextually given), and space created of social organization and production (Soja, 1999: 75, 76, 79)

According to Balshaw and Kennedy from University of Birmingham, there is a certain common understanding that space presents something that is given, that is already there. However, if we take space as a social product, as the critical social theory does, it is a social entity with particular meaning. What is also important is that space is no longer considered a passive element; it is active operator of social power and knowledge. (Balshaw, Kennedy, 2000: 2)

We can continue with the definition of *space* in opposition to *place*. Even if we might think that these terms are close in their definitions, we have to insist that in the geographical tradition, they have been perceived as oppositional concepts. Let us begin with the definition of *space*: Space is an empirical reality, an object, which also exists outside of our own experience and thoughts. Spatiality as such is then a result of cultural practices, their representations and imaginations. (Brazzelli, 2012: 20) *Place*, on the other hand, is a “*singular portion of space to which toponyms are attached, elementary spatial unit, the position of which is easily and precisely identifiable.*” We might consider that it is individuals who attach the meaning to particular places. The places would be thus specific but also subjective. According to Doreen Massey, place can be also defined as “*the locus of complex intersections and outcomes of power geometries, detailed arrangements of individual and institutional authority, including imaginative and material issues.*” However, we must be careful about overly narrow definition of place; it is not only the name or some specific location: people attribute a set of values to such a place and it has thus emotional meaning for them (Brazzelli, 2012: 21, 24, 26) However, we can also detect a common tendency; they both present the forces shaping the infrastructure of the city. (Balshaw, Kennedy, 2000: 9) City as such will be discussed later, in 4.4.

In conclusion it is clear that the relation between space and place is rather complex and also flexible. Nevertheless, it is textual space that is a common category of analysis. This analysis thus represents one part of relationship between geography and literature. (Brazzelli, 2012: 28) Even if one might think that

geography, in contrary to literature, is a strictly objective science, its reality is however rooted in the symbolical (subjective) world. (ibid.: 29)

We also have to deal with the distinction between two terms already mentioned and *landscape*. We normally imagine landscape as something natural of an area; however, the term is polysemic. According to the study “*The Morphology of Landscape*” by Carl Sauer, every natural landscape finally develops into cultural landscape. Thereafter, it can be considered a synthetic vision including also local cultures inside. In another approach, landscape is seen as “*a way of seeing*”. Moreover, landscape can be also defined as a geographical construction or as an ideological concept, a system of signs. In a western point of view, landscape can be also a cultural space. In any case, it can be both familiar and imaginary. (Brazzelli, 2012: 22, 30, 32)

It is important to point out that space can be equally considered a part of geographical imagination. Geographical imagination explains how people imagine and interpret their experience of space. From time immemorial, there have always been various mythical interpretations of the Earth. In the ancient history, there were very few scientific methods to explore the Earth. That is why geographical imagination has always been at the centre of geographical knowledge and also of its representation. And since this time, people also establish their own, subjective relation with the Earth, in the course of living. (Brazzelli, 2012: 10, 23). Space can be equally considered a representational strategy in a text and a socially produced set.

Sometimes we may suggest to interpret space as “*a place of mind*”. (Brazzelli, 2012: 13) We can do so because this “*place of mind*” in fact does not exist independently. To understand this place, we have to understand the meaning which is given through language. According to Maurice Blanchot, if we talk about literary space, we have to realize that it is a non-space, a sort of void. (Brazzelli, 2012: 32)

To make a brief conclusion of the definitions mentioned above, we can say that space, unlike place, is something perceived and experienced by an individual,

whereas place is subordinated as a particular form of space. In addition, place evokes the sense of belonging somewhere. Nevertheless, even though we distinguished one from another, we have to keep in mind that landscape, place and space are all connected. (Brazzelli, 2012: 22, 31)

### 3.2 Space Construction

If we talk about space in literature, geography as a “spatial science” is the most important. In a literary work, space is shaped via text and text is created via geographical language. There is thus strong a relationship between geography and British literature. The main idea we pursue is that geography, whichever, is constructed through human imagination. (Brazzelli, 2012: 9, 23)

As already stated above, space is also constructed thanks to geographical imagination of an individual. This process of “imagining” space covers spatial dynamics, which is connected to time issues, and narrative frames, which represent the space right in the text. However, it was John Wright who introduced the idea that geography is in fact constructed through human imagination. (ibid.: 11, 23) Humans project their emotions and memories onto the specific territory; this is how they transform, construct and reconstruct space in their mind.

“Space making” covers materiality and metaphors, which both present the base of the representation of either space or place. (Brazzelli, 2012: 28)

Let us have a look at the creation of imaginary landscape. In a novel or a poem, author gives us specific and generic names that have both conceptual and narrative meanings. This fact suggests that landscape is in fact never given, but is constructed through the system of signs. (Brazzelli, 2012: 29) This theory leads directly to the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure, who said that the system of signs is interconnected and one sign of a system gains meaning only in relation towards other signs in the system. This rapport towards others presents in fact the identity of a sign. Sign itself, without any net of other signs, lacks meaning.

Space can be constructed, reconstructed or developed via various techniques: it can be a film, a painting or a text that can mediate space. For our purpose, text is of course the most interesting one. Some might state that the concept of space can best be captured by novelists or poets, mediated through their proper imagination. In any case, we must admit that the connection between art, literature and place is very strong. Ever before, the sentimental, subjective relationship between human and the Earth is established. This relationship then creates human's space imagination and also affects his perception. The link between space and emotion is then revealed by language. In a human perspective, space is no longer space itself; it is a living, social space. (Brazzelli, 2012: 23, 28, 36)

The main constituents of space are spatial metaphors, for example position, location of the plot, or liminal space. Especially in 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is an important shift towards space; the globalization. This shift has brought many spatial metaphors, for example points of encounter, contact zone, borderlands or hybridity, which we can all find in literature. It is metaphors and myths that construct a complex whole. (Brazzelli, 2012: 34)

We should point out the relationship between already created space and other structures in a mode of production. Again, according to the critical social theory, organized space is not independent, it is a component of the general relations of production. Even though space itself is automatically given, the organization and the meaning of space is identified later. (Soja, 1999: 78, 79)

We have to keep in mind that whether the space in the novel is named on the basis of the real location or it is unnamed, it is not a coincidence. It is a specific technique to lead the reader where he is supposed to be lead.

In the novel, the location of the settings is usually unknown to us. Here, a narrator or an author provides us a guide. (James, 2008: 3) It means that our perception of the particular landscape depends on our guide, on his point of view, on the details he gives us or not. The landscapes in the novels can be both familiar and imaginary.

Let us talk about temporality in the fiction. It is an element that we cannot divide from space. One is related to each other. We can almost say that the temporality is the part of the space. (James, 2008: 10) According to critical social theory, time and space represent the objective form of matter, whether they are spoken of in the general or abstract sense. (Soja, 1999: 79)

### **3.3 Space Representation and Perception**

Let us continue with space representation and perception: if we think about how readers feel and perceive space, it is crucial to realize that the perception of space is subjective experience.

Perception as a dimension plays an important role, combining human motivation and emotions. We have to point out that perception and knowledge of our planet is made not only through personal experience, but also through mental and emotional activities. For the perception of space, rhetoric as well as aesthetics are crucial. It is also important to point out that space as such is not a simple entity; it has to be always perceived by someone and also represented for someone in a specific situation. (Brazzelli, 2012: 33, 34) Perception can be considered a system, that is not mechanical, but it is created by beliefs and values of individuals. We perceive space as a lived-in space. To understand what it is to dream, create and represent space, psychology and sociology are used. (ibid.: 36)

However, as for representation, it is essential to mention that representation of space is instable; there is a struggle between a visual and a verbal one. We also have to keep in mind that space is also a representational strategy. According to Franco Moretti, spatial representations in novels are ideological and they are influenced by variety of aspects: for example by given culture, economy, and politics or by a specific time and place. Spatial representations reflect the way we see the world. (Brazzelli, 2012: 33) Representation can have an illusory power. (Balshaw, Kennedy, 2000: 3)



Even if we deal with fiction, where precise details are mentioned, we have to point out the fact that even precise and detailed descriptions of space cannot be separated from geographers' (or writers', cartographers', etc.) inner experience and that their emotions and their life have direct impact on the description of space. However, it is of course not only emotions which have an impact on space representation and perception: we also have to take account of territorial consciousness and linguistic production.

Literary space of a fiction is a part of the so-called poetics of perception. It is important to mention that space and its shape influence the reader's feelings. Of course, there is a wide range of aesthetic methods that are used by an author to reach the effects he or she wants to provoke. Poetics of space perception includes for example emotions, memories, mental and ideological attitudes, various literary genres or other cultural strategies of representations. In any case, the perception of either space, place or landscape presents a visual process. (Brazzelli, 2012: 13, 30)

As for representation of space, we can discern four main modes of it: descriptive fieldwork, form of mimesis based of positivist science, radical attack on the mimetic theory of representation and the central role of the interpreter. (Brazzelli, 2012: 31)

It is said that the perception of various places can be different, based on our emotions and our spiritual experience with the place. The perception can thus be considered a subjective experience. Bachelard, the French philosopher, takes an example of home: he says home is a concept that is complex and ambiguous. When exploring the link between our home and emotions, we can conclude that home is in any case a psychic, private space and also a place of caring, safety, deep feelings or warmth. In this case, the relationship between place as home and personality is very intimate and unique. This is why we might consider that the exploration of self-identity via space is a good idea. According to Bachelard, it is even more insightful than psychoanalysis. (Brazzelli, 2012: 35)

As for the perception of space in McEwan's novels, we can see clearly that space as a concept cannot be divided from the literary artistry. Via space, McEwan mediates emotions, atmosphere, etc., directly to readers. Space in his novels is also perceived through the main characters and their reactions. (James, 2008: 10) How McEwan reaches the artistic effect of space will be shown in the following chapter.

### **3.4 City as an Urban Space**

Let us continue with the concept of the city as an urban space. It is essential to point out that city has been the object for multi-disciplinary studies in humanities and social sciences. The city as a universal category has been demythologised and considered a place of spatial formations. (Balshaw, Kennedy, 2000: 1) In this part of chapter, textual representation of urban space will be in focus. In one point of view, city can be characterized as "*a space of multiplicity.*" (ibid.: 14)

#### **3.4.1 Construction of City**

Now let us discuss the construction of urban space. City is at the same time real and imaginary, in both case it is a symbolic entity. (ibid.: 4) When we want to make a map of a city, we have to realize that the map has to be legible in the way that it becomes coherent, knowable, integral and governable. (ibid.: 5) As it has already been said, the interpretation of the space or city depends on the interpreter. When an interpreter or a reader is reading the "map", the action can create metaphorical procedures. However, we can generally say that in modernist and postmodernist culture, there is a universal tendency of searching the truth of the city. (ibid.: 5)

### 3.4.2 Representation of City

It is crucial to understand that city in general is inseparable from its representations. (ibid.: 3) The representation of a city is made via various media: it can be for example photographs, paintings, architecture, city plans, postcards or literature. Every single medium of representation provides a different point of view on the city; every medium uses a different narrative technique, different metaphors or syntax. In different shapes, these media mediate cultural experience and spatiality of the urban living. In any case, the city is suspected of representing identity and location. (ibid.: 4)

Let us approach the literary representation of the city. The city has been frequently represented in the modernist and postmodernist context. It can be perceived as one big metaphor for the condition of the whole society.

This kind of representation of course, depends on various literary techniques used in the books. These techniques include for example language, material, psychic forms and other practices. This proves that city, even in the literary context, cannot be reduced to simple textuality. In this case, the city, represented for example in a novel, has of course many interpretations and every reader takes the representation by his own manner. (ibid.: 6)

What is also important, when discussing the representation of the city, is the visual side of it. The visual side is composed of aesthetic and spatial apprehension of the urban space. At the turn of the century, we may have noticed the notion of spectacle as a new visual understanding of an urban space. As the attention got turned to visual component of a city, of urbanism, we may realize how important representation is for a city. This element also helps to understand that city also presents visual arts and culture. It is interesting that different media also picture the city differently; for example, the filmmakers concentrate mainly on plasticity of space. Of course, there are also photographers, painters and writers, and each seizes the city in a different way. (ibid.: 8) There is another point of visibility of the city that worth commenting: it is disharmony between literary text and image of the city.

This disharmony underlines the interdependence between textuality and visuality in representation of the city. It also highlights the relationship between past and present, viewer and subject. (ibid.: 10)

### 3.4.3 Perception of City

Another interesting point is the perception of the city. Again, as it was mentioned earlier, the perception is a subjective dimension. When perceiving a city, we have to keep in mind that it is charged with affective connotation and it is not neutral space. By contrast, is it rather emotional, mythical space. (ibid.: 6)

The city as a space of difference(s) is another outstanding perception. When realizing the structure of the city, we have to think of inside and inside. These features may show the symbolic order of the city. In this perspective, the city is a “*site of intersubjective and collective encounters through which the formation of identity is spatialized.*” (ibid.: 11) The differences inside the city can be also found concerning its population. The population of the city is diversified; that is why the city can be seen as a “space of differences”. As already Aristotle said, “*a city is composed of different men; similar people cannot bring a city into existence.*” (ibid.: 12) This presents a pluralistic view of urban life. However, nowadays we question the impact of such plurality on the life of locals. That is because plurality can be also seen as the close presence of strangers in a city, which causes privatisation and commodification of the city. This confrontation in a city requires demarcating the self and the others, citizens from strangers. (ibid.: 12) This rapport between a citizen and stranger in a city will be analysed in the analysis of *The Comfort of strangers* in 5.2. When analysing the differences inside the city, neighbourhood, the symbol of coexistence of different individuals, cannot be omitted. In fact, neighbourhood spaces present negotiation of relationships between sameness and difference. (ibid.: 14)

### 3.4.4 Global City

If it comes to the notion of “global city, it is important to realize that cities of a country usually represent the symbolic order of national identity. Nowadays, local cultures are more and more joined together, connected to the large, global system of cultures, economics, etc. Due to this globalization of city or space in general, meaning of a place as such has been changing. We witness a progressive transformation from the local to the global. This gradual process of globalism can be defined as the process “...*in which the stereotypical national culture has become increasingly strained, fractured and demystified, and more complex and heterogeneous forms of local culture have been developed to negotiate the larger system.*” (ibid.: 15)

Globalization stands for a kind of metaphor which is to explain changes in culture and economy, rearticulating the meaning of national identity. If we analyse “global cities” or metropolises, they can be considered central places in global network. Such global city is often seen as both a national and international space. These cities usually want to create a certain image of them which would show their international, global faces.

If we approach the global representation of the city, we can see that many representations, whether film or literature, contain both local and global consciousness of identities. Representation of a global city often treats for example territory, culture, places and communities of urban spaces. Its representation can be also seen as “*the premier arena for battles over rights, independence and identity*”. In any case, it is essential to realize that every representation of a city is only partial and provisional, not total. Every photographer, writer, filmmaker, is only interested in the chosen part of the city, but he cannot possibly display the whole picture, the whole reality of the city. The parts are not standing for wholes. Such representations are rather short-sighted. (ibid.: 16, 17, 19)

There are various opinions on globalization of a city. Gargi Bhattacharyya thinks that due to the effect of globalization, we have to think about the centrality

of the city. Another example can be set by pointing out the example of John Phillips; for him the space of the city fills the whole space of the country. This example shows a theory in which postmodern globalism is geographically and intellectually centred. (ibid.: 18)

In conclusion, let us say that both production and representation of a city reveal a lot of questions concerning power, urban dissimilarity and identity. The issue of global city is rather complex.

## **4. Analysis of Space in McEwan's Novels**

Let us now proceed to the core analysis of this thesis. In this chapter we will try to join together the knowledge taken out of previous chapters. As far as we get further in the thesis, the general portrait of Ian McEwan as well as the main features of his work have already been described. In the last chapter the theory of space has been inserted. The theories mentioned in the last chapter are bound to help us in the following analyses; this time, the feature of space, as one of the distinctive features of McEwan's works will be discussed. For our purpose, it is the decisive factor in which all the elements studied, such as dark elements or autobiographical elements can be linked together.

Here is the scheme of this chapter: By means of secondary literature we will point out the space analysis of McEwan's novels. Also proper ideas taken out of his novels will be presented. Space, places, landscapes, city – all these, already defined elements, will be brought into focus.

Progressively, the novels will be analysed in the order given according to their date of publishing: *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday*, *Solar*, and finally *Sweet Tooth*. In the end, after all the analyses, the conclusion will be made.

### **4.1 The Concept of Space in *The Cement Garden***

Right now, let us concentrate on space represented in McEwan's first novel, *The Cement Garden*. In this part of chapter, the concept of isolated space, image of the city, perception of space perceived by characters and the symbol of cement will be discussed.

First of all, the concept of isolated space will be covered. For the start, it is essential to evoke the impression of a claustrophobic world that readers feel when

reading the novel. The house, the estate of the family is completely isolated, abandoned, like a desert. Jack, the narrator, describes it as a castle that stands alone, with thick wall and squat windows. (McEwan, 1978: 28) In the novel we find out that before it stood in the row of houses, but the houses were destroyed in order to build a motorway. However, the motorway was never built. Apparently, few houses stand around but according to Jack, our guide, they are even sadder than their own house. This image of the suburbs evokes some kind of urban desolation. In this place, there seems to be inherent destructiveness, which is gradually confirmed as we get further in the novel. (Head, 2007: 49) The house gives us an idea of something unreachable, unassailable. This image of space, however, serves mainly as an allegory to the family's life and it functions as a kind of mirror; as the children's moral get worse, also the space around them reflects the deterioration. The family's house is evidently in an abandoned part of the city, standing in an empty street, as we could find out which is "*hardly a street at all; it was a road across an almost empty junkyard.*" (McEwan, 1978: 136) We have to realize that the only space that is really described is the house and the garden. Few times, other spaces are mentioned, such as Tom's school, Jack's walk or Derek's house. However, these spaces, or rather places, are not described; we can observe no further details. The house can be considered the whole world.

The city in *The Cement Garden* is displayed as an empty space. The house is set in the middle of urban sprawl where nothingness rules. (Slay, 1996: 37, 39) The neighbourhood of the house is seen by Jack as "*a wasteland next door,*" that progressively consumes the house and the existence of the children. (McEwan, 1978: 50). Also, readers get the impression that the family's house is in the middle of nowhere. In the novel the city is dead; it does not prove any signs of life. It is always silent, inactive, its image is almost sinister. Except for the house, we consider the whole town almost completely empty. According to Jack's description, we only know that "*further down the road there are abandoned and burned-out prefabs, a place of "no order"*". (McEwan, 1978: 47) The town or city thus does not show any signs of friendliness or beauty. It does not have any name and not even any places in the town are named. It is displayed as a concrete jungle. We



might feel a discreet fight between the nature and culture. Here, urban space, the town, is described as something artificial and dead. (Childs, 2006: 34)

Right now, let us continue with the feeling of vertigo that functions as a spatial element. Generally vertigo can be defined as “*perturbation in the subjective orientation to space which generally takes the form of the gyratory or oscillatory sensation but can manifest as feeling of ascent or descent.*” (Groes, 2009: 23) Vertigo can thus be considered an element of perception, through which Jack often feels the space around him. The changes of order in the house are also perceived in form of vertigo: “*Now that we do not have gravity to keep things in their place... we must take an extra effort to be neat.*” (McEwan, 1978: 20) This loss of stability which is caused by death of children’s parents, “burial” of their mother and followed by complete anarchy in the house, is often perceived via vertigo. Let us mention an example of the mother’s death which causes vertigo to Jack: “*For a moment I thought of snatching the hay, but I turned and, lightheaded, close to blasphemous laughter, followed my sister down.*” (ibid.: 52) Here we can observe that Jack’s orientation in space, in their house is influenced by the feeling of vertigo, which confuses him. Another example could be: “*I felt weightless, tumbling through space with no sense of up or down. As I closed my lips around Julie’s nipple, a soft shudder ran through her body.*” (ibid.: 135) This moment presents another important point for Jack. The excitement of the moment made him completely lose his sense of orientation.

In the novel, readers can mainly find out how Jack feels about space and time (which is connected to space) of the plot. However, he also describes actions of his siblings. The children are generally drawn into a static space-time reality where nothing ever happens. They act like sleepwalkers, completely disconnected from the world. They have no perception of time or outer space. (Slay, 1996: 41) There is thus a significant difference between time and space inside the house, or rather inside the *cement garden* and the outer time and space which is completely different and has nothing to do with the reality inside the family. We can almost say that

there is timelessness in the novel: we lack any cultural or historical references. (Childs, 2006: 34)

As a last issue, the symbol of cement, inserted in space of the novel, will be analysed. Cement, present already in the title of the novel, is again standing for a metaphor. The whole concept of cement garden could be considered a new life of children, after the death of their both parents. Cement and the children are stagnant, inert, do not move or change. (Slay, 1996: 40) Cement, of course, is also an item that symbolizes the construction of a city. It can be interpreted as material involved in the image of a city. Furthermore, cement creates interesting contrasts: First contrast, as already mentioned, could be observed between nature and city. Cement would thus represent an image of a city, of something modern, artificially constructed, far away from woods, meadows or mountains. Second contrast could be noted between life and death. Cement would stand for anything lifeless and sad. It could be the right opposite of life or of live “material”, such as wood, grass, etc. We have to remind that it is also cement that serves as a provisional tomb for the mother. The cement used in the plot entirely delimits the family’s existence. It serves as boundaries of the house and of their world. It was the father of the family who decided to surround the house by the plains of concrete. (McEwan, 1978: 21) Cement somehow goes together with father’s nature. Father, as already discussed, is a very firm and strict personality. Another idea is to find connection between the load of concrete and rejection of the family. (Head, 2007: 49)

#### **4.2 The Concept of Space in *The Comfort of Strangers***

Let us continue with the concept of space in the novel *The Comfort of Strangers*. In this part of chapter, we will concentrate on the concept of city which is the most significant space element in this novel. Then, we will point out the city as a sinister, dangerous labyrinth. As the last point, space as a character of the novel will be discussed. *The Comfort of Strangers* is certainly one of McEwan’s most essential

works when it comes to the concept of space. This time, space is determinative, tricky and living.

First of all, we shall have a look at the identification of the city described in the novel. There are many elements that create together the identity of the city. The city is neither in England nor in any other English speaking country, because we find out that there is a foreign language spoken in the city. It is a city with a sea and we know that it is considered the capital of food. In fact many details are provided when describing the couple's holiday. However, the details could refer to almost whichever touristic destination; we are provided some places, such as beaches, tourist attractions, restaurants, fountains, bars, hotels or little streets. Finally, the little streets all around the city are crucial for its identification. The city becomes unmappable because of them. Even though there is no evidence of place names, literary community generally agrees to identify it as Venice. (Childs, 2006: 46) Apparently the plot is inspired by McEwan's holiday with his former wife Penny Allen in 1978. (ibid.: 48) However, we as readers are invited not to completely associate the story with Venice. It could be any imaginary European city by the sea. The city is in fact representative of all that is foreign and strange when we travel abroad. (Slay, 1996: 73) Venice in the novel represents the city that keeps its original face, with no signs of modernity in its centre. It is represented as museum and historical map for western culture. It also appears to be a kind of magical and fantastic space. Nevertheless, the beauty of the city is gradually destroyed by tourists such as Mary and Colin. (ibid.: 53)

When talking about Venice, we have to keep in mind that writing about it is not a new trend; there has been a long western tradition of writing of it as a dangerous place or a labyrinth. (Head, 2007: 59) However, as mentioned above, we should not adamantly associate the danger with Venice. The city described is to be perceived as a kind of a city. That is probably the reason why no place in the novel is named.

Venice (or another city of this type) represents a constant threat to sightseers. It is a sinister labyrinth that seems to be dangerous. It looks like it is a perfect stage for the drama. As already mentioned, Venice is famous for its little streets that are

so easy to be lost in. Once it is also associated with a prison that is suffocating, in Mary's speech: "*You know this place can be terribly suffocating sometimes... It's oppressive... It's like a prison here.*" (McEwan, 1981: 49) Mary even suggests to leave the city. The city in her eyes is claustrophobic. Even though they remind themselves that they are on holiday, they gradually find the city more and more oppressive, menacing and intimidating. (Slay, 1996: 73) These feelings are of course reinforced by the presence of sinister locals, Robert and Caroline. As already mentioned, the city is considered unmappable and it constantly disorients the couple. They fail many times to find their way to the specific place; they become lost very quickly and that is why readers can see the city through their eyes, considered a labyrinth. It is also important to point out that in the novel there are two main settings: the hotel room where Mary and Colin are accommodated and Caroline and Robert's flat. Between these two there is a menacing city that is confusing. By contrast, the hotel room and flat do not seem to be chaotic. However, there is a big difference: hotel room represents safety, while the sadomasochistic couple's flat represents danger. (Childs, 2006: 47)

Readers can observe that Mary and Colin are really not capable of walking in the city guided with the map. They are getting lost almost voluntarily, led by their intuition and seduction, and they are getting into a trap. They perceive the city as "*a series of jumbled images projected in rapid succession against the screen of the eye as they are swept along on a tide of tourists.*" (McEwan, 1981: 12) This can be observed for example when Mary and Colin are trying to read from the maps; the map is either incomplete or fragmented, in any case it is difficult to read in and to put the city together, like when playing with puzzles. McEwan's textual space gives impression that it is easy to get lost in the city he describes, emphasizing the claustrophobic feelings. (Childs, 2006: 54)

Finally, let us comment on the city as a character. As stated earlier, the city in *The Comfort of Strangers* is considered a living entity. It appears to be one of the main characters of the novel. Readers might notice that the city breathes with the characters and that it serves as mirror of their own psychical and physical condition;

if Mary and Colin are irritated, it is irritating, etc. It gradually poisons their holiday and as they become disoriented in the city, they get disoriented in their lives. (Slay, 1996: 75) As the couple's mood gets worse, also the city shows the darker side. The only place where the couple is really safe is their hotel room. After their first meetings with the strangers, their relationships is revived, but only as they stay in the hotel. The exterior city is always dangerous for them. The city can get the characters where it wants them to be; it has the power over them. We can actually search for connection between the city and Robert, another character; it seems that they cooperate and that the city actually helps Robert to create a drama stage and to plot the whole trap. (Childs, 2006: 55) The city helps Robert to get him closer to the couple. There is some kind of complicity between the city and him. When it is needed, the city disorientates the couple in order to be an easy target for Robert. As they get more and more lost in the city and in their lives, too, they learned to entirely rely on the comfort of strangers.

At the end of the story, when Mary returns from the police station, she however finds a strange comfort in the view of the city. She finds out that nothing has changed in the city; the bars are open, the flowers are in front of houses, etc., for example: "*outside they were banging away as usual on the barges with their steel tools*". (McEwan, 1981: 126) This inertness of the city serves as a contrast to Mary's grief and to Colin's death. We can observe that despite these events, the city will never change or slow down its rhythm. It is a sort of constant that does not change. Again, when evoking the usual city after Colin's murder, McEwan highlights the perversity of the ordinary. (Slay, 1996: 86)

### **4.3 The Concept of Space in *Amsterdam***

*Amsterdam*, as already mentioned above, presents a very different kind of novel in comparison with *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers*. When comparing them, we can find out that *Amsterdam* is in any case less sinister and brutal than other two novels. This element influences not only the plot of the novel

itself but also other features, like space. That is why the approach to space has to be also different.

In this part of chapter we will think about the different places in *Amsterdam* and about their meanings. Equally, we will concentrate on a different perception of spatiality in this novel; the perception of diseased body in connection with spatial surroundings.

First of all, let us comment on the different places mentioned in the novel. In spite of the fact that the novel is called *Amsterdam*, only the very last part is set there. On the whole, there are many places and cities mentioned, but the majority of them is only mentioned peripherally. Here we can find a connection between author's life and his work; as we know, McEwan travelled a lot during his childhood. Thanks to his father's job, he has visited many places and has known many cultures. As a result of his experience, (Slay, 1996: 1) we get to know many different and distant places in only few tens of pages.<sup>4</sup> It is also the case of *Amsterdam*: although the main plot starts and is set in London, in Great Britain, which is common for a plot of McEwan's novels, there are many allusions to various different places. Readers travel to different places most frequently via flashbacks: we can point out the flashback of living in Paris: "*He had lived with her (Molly) for a year in Paris in '74 when he had his first job with Reuters and Molly did something or other for Vogue.*" (McEwan, 2005: 5), of Christmas spent in Scotland: "*In 1978 a group of friends rented a large house in Scotland for Christmas.*" (ibid.: 6) or the reference to Boston, where Molly had lived some time ago: "*...these are the Finch sisters, Vera and Mini, who knew Molly from her Boston days.*" (ibid.: 9). However, the mentions of different places of England are predominant. We also realize that Vernon travelled a lot in his life: he mentions his journeys to Jerusalem, Cape Town, to Manilla, etc. (ibid.: 29)

Although the novel *Amsterdam* is undoubtedly a city kind of novel, as in fact every later McEwan's novel, there is very often the conflict outlined the city and

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<sup>4</sup> This information is valid only for McEwan's later novels

nature, that can be translated as a conflict between (post)modernity and a nostalgia of old times. In this novel, we can find unique extract of nature that is described in a really detailed way. It concerns the situation when Clive, in the Lake District, is trying to finish his symphony: “*During the night a warm front had moved across the Lakes and already the frost had gone from the trees and from the meadow by the beck. The cloud cover was high and uniformly grey, the light was better in late winter. He reckoned he had eight hours of daylight, though he knew that as long as he was off the fells and back down in the valley by dusk, he could find his way home with a torch.*” (McEwan, 2005: 77). McEwan does not offer very often a description of the space or the landscape; even though space is usually a metaphoric element in his novel, it is not described in a detailed way. This scene is one of the rare exceptions. This natural mountain space, landscape, is the only real part of nature described in *Amsterdam*. The landscape that Clive sees supports his creative mind and serves as an inspiration for his seeming masterpiece. (Childs, 2006: 122)

As the second point, let us concentrate on the diseased body in the connection to space. The basis for this analysis is taken out of the work of Chetrinescu (2001): In her work we find out that the illness actually influences the patient’s perception of time and space. According to this work, there is a specific spatial experience of a sick body. Either mental or physical disease can reshape the experience of space. Again, as in 4.4.3, we can observe that the experience is purely subjective. Depending on the type of disease, the space can shrink or expand. If the ability to move is diminished, the space of this person diminishes, too. For example, the whole world can be reduced to one bed. (Chetrinescu, 2001: 2)

This theory can be partly applied in analysing *Amsterdam*. Molly, one of the character of the novel that is actually never present, dies at the beginning of the story of the unnamed disease. As already mentioned, there is a possibility that both main character, Clive and Vernon, might have been infected. When they discuss Molly’s fate, they already mention her space restriction during the dying process: “*Poor Molly. It began with the tingling in her arm as she raised it outside the Dorchester Grill to stop a cab; a sensation that never went away. ... Instead, she*

*was sent for tests and, in a sense, never returned. How quickly became feisty Molly the sick-room prisoner of her morose, possessive husband, George.*” (McEwan, 2005: 3) In this conversation, we can already observe the description of Molly’s gradual downfall that is perceived via complete loss of a private space and also intimacy, because she is entirely dependent on her husband, despite her own will. This must have been probably very painful situation for Molly, who with watchfulness divided her private space from the common space for her and George. The couple, though married, used to have separate apartments because Molly wished so. The demarcation between her space and other spaces was thus strict. During her rapid illness, her husband George not only breaks into her private space but also isolates her, when not allowing any visits. Her space is thus completely isolated and impersonal. (Chetrinescu, 2001: 4)

As the two main characters become ill,<sup>5</sup> they eventually have different space perception concerning their body or the world itself. Clive felt that “*the world grew large and still, and in the grey-blue light of a March morning, his piano, the midi, the plates and cups, Molly’s armchair, took on a sculpted, rounded appearance....*” (McEwan, 2005: 134) Both characters also locate their physical pain across their body spaces. Clive has the impression that “*as though one leg had grown longer than the other.*” (ibid.: 63) By contrast, Vernon is concerned by his skull: “*The sensation, or the non-sensation, still occupied the right side of his head like a tight-fitting cap. When he trailed his finger across his scalp, he could identify the border, the demarcation line where feeling on the left side became not quite its opposite, but its shadow, or its ghost.*” (ibid.: 38) We can thus observe that characters’ fears and concerns are articulated into physical elements.

Another significant character, Garmony, also suffers from illusion of a reshaped space. When he stays in bed, feverish, he feels the space around him has dangerously shrunk and that every item of his room is far away, so far that he is never going to touch any of them because he will not be capable of it. It could be

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<sup>5</sup> However, their illness is a subject of speculations



translated as a masochistic lust for immobility of the body and for isolation. (Chetrinescu, 2001: 7)

There is also a loss of time perception that is connected to space. Clive, apparently ill, remains isolated at home in order to finish his symphony, having no idea about the time and outer space. However, after some time of isolation even his own so far familiar place becomes hostile, distant and unfamiliar and serves no longer as his shelter. He experiences a complete alienation of his own territory. This feeling is probably caused by too much isolation and immobility: “*And he saw the studio he was about to abandon for his bed as it might have appeared in a documentary film about himself that would reveal to a curious world how a masterpiece was born.*” (McEwan, 2005: 134)

In this McEwan’s novel, we thus experience a different type of space perception; we observe an interdependence between space and bodily, physical experience. We have to realize that space as an element is a lived experience that wants to be communicated, for example via bodily feelings. (Chetrinescu, 2001: 8)

#### **4.4 The Concept of Space in *Saturday***

This time the spatiality in *Saturday* will be discussed. The core of this part of the chapter will be the difference between private space and public space that can be found in the novel. Also, the time and space in the city and urbanism of *Saturday* will be developed. Time as well as space are both very important in this novel and act as the main stylistic elements.

Thanks to the space-time dimension of the novel, *Saturday* is often compared to Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*. However, it is important to mention that it is not only the most visible element, the novel in 24 hours, that connects McEwan’s novel with *Ulysses* or *Mrs Dalloway*; for example, both *Saturday* and *Mrs Dalloway* open the first scene with a very similar object – aeroplane, the symbol of industrial, scientific progress and modernity. In addition, both novels are

centred on the same part of London, on Fitzrovia. (Groes, 2009: 107) There is also another parallel – between the relationship between Perowne and his mother, and relationship between Stephen Dedalus' mother and him in *Ulysses*. Both characters have complicated relationships with their mothers and it is too late for them to correct it. This parallel, as already mentioned, can be seen also in connection to McEwan's real life. That is why *Saturday* is considered a modernist novel, because it is closely connected to modernist authors. Nevertheless, McEwan chooses more conventional style of narration than the stream of consciousness. In any case, *Saturday* is strongly intertextual and many allusions to literary works and authors can be found.

The divorce between public space and private space stands in the centre of the novel and is one of the main author's questionings. Through this novel, McEwan is trying to find out whether such intimate feeling as happiness should or could be the subjects of public, political issues. (ibid.: 103) At first, it is crucial to state that the novel includes both spaces and makes a strong division between them. Between the spaces, there is a relatively strong boundary, created by Perowne himself. By Perowne's example, we can observe that the gap is caused by personal experience and difference of the perception. We can see that the gap extends to his position in the city. Both McEwan's and Woolf's opinion is that our post-war world can be characterized by uncertainty; this uncertainty results from aforesaid disconnection between the private and the public side of our lives. (ibid.: 108) Narrator describes the times we live in as dangerous; however, this probably concerns only public side of it, because Perowne can still find the comfort of home, hobbies or family. Not only private and public sector are divided one from another; also individuals seem to be separated into isolated units, which also influences their perception of space. This divorce of visions forces a reader to see the imperfection of the space, which is London in our case. The overall impression we are given from the novel is rather sceptical; (not only) in this case, McEwan is far from being optimistic. As he sets Henry Perowne as an example of modern human, we can observe that according to his opinion, we are not able to join our private and public interests. Habitually, it is just the city that joins together private and public space. This time, even a big city

such as London has failed. There is one of the rare moments where the connection between Perowne and public can be observed; He finds out that it is possible to restore the private life and the public world, through the creative imagination. It is the moment when he listens to his son's band, performing a song: "*Baby, you can choose despair, or you can be happy if you dare... So let me take you there, City square, city square.*" (McEwan, 2006: 170, 171) Henry is deeply moved by the musical harmony and for the moment, he is able to imagine the connection between him and the world.

However, the connection between material and imaginary places can be observed that is provided by the narrator; he refers to specific places of Perowne's world, such as his home, hospital, the interior of his car. On the other hand, Perowne's mind is open to reflect on literature, politics or ecology. These subjects exist outside the novel *Saturday*. Even in 24 hours, except for Perowne's ideas that are not pronounced, we can observe the conversations with his daughter, son and college from hospital, or ideas concerning his mother, that touch by various means many topics: "*There was nothing small-minded about her interests. Jane Austen and George Eliot shared them too. Lilian Perowne wasn't stupid or trivial, her life wasn't unfortunate, and he had no business as a young man being condescending towards her. But it's too late to apologies now. Unlike Daisy's novels, moments of precise reckoning are rare in real life; questions of misinterpretation are not often resolved.*" (McEwan, 2006: 156)

Let us describe the image of the world in the novel. First of all, when taking again Perowne as an example of humanity, we must conclude that in the world of *Saturday*, there is almost zero consciousness. (Groes, 2009: 100) The outer space exists only outside the hero's windows and it is not likely to affect his life if he does not want it to. As already mentioned, Perowne, in the middle of the biggest anti-war protest after 11<sup>th</sup> September is able to ignore it right in front of him, driving his Mercedes, the symbol of modernity. The outer world is experienced by Perowne in form of vertigo, which, again is not a new form of space perception in McEwan's novel, as we could observe it in *The Cement Garden*. The vertigo is caused by "dizzy

*indecision*” Henry feels towards anti-war protests. (McEwan, 2006: 141) The curtain between the “two worlds” is very thick and one might say that the hero is aware of it. The possible reason of his eventual ignorance can be also the fact that he is so afraid of the reality that the best solution is to expel it out of private life. One of the most important characteristics of the world in the novel is the lively memory of the terroristic attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001. It presents a critical event even for Perowne, who is this time aware of possible danger that might concern him, too. In the beginning, when seeing a burning plane out of his window, Henry immediately links this plane to a possible threat of an attack; on one hand, the plane can represent the scientific progress of our age. On the other hand, absolutely same object can represent a threat to humanity as well. (ibid.: 107) It is crucial to realize that readers see the world through either narrator’s or Perowne’s eyes. As Henry Perowne is neurosurgeon, working everyday with patients, also the world is seen as something very organic, as a material, and also the events that happen are considered biological. However, he is not able to see beyond this material. The hero is used to work with logic, analysis and exactness. That is why according to him, also the civilization that surrounds him can be analysed in a simple manner, like a machine. (ibid.: 110) It is an approach of a doctor. This fact suggests that everything in the world, including spaces, is connected; human brain and the world; modernity and danger; local politics and international one; and also public space and private space. This novel, besides other things, discovers the limits of scientific materialism (Perowne’s approach) as a method to understand our world. (ibid.: 114)

At last, the image of city, which is London in *Saturday* will be discussed. It is crucial to mention that the image of the city in this novel is one of the representing and one of the most principal elements we can discuss. The city and its postmodern characteristic is one of the main themes of the novel. Let us start with the fact that introducing London in novels is nothing new neither to Ian McEwan nor to novelist tradition of British authors. McEwan has already introduced the image of London to his novel *The Child in Time*. However, there is a radical change between these two novels; in the first novel, McEwan gives the impression of dark London, serving as a “*spectacle of lust and excess and a theatre of manipulation and moral*

*decline, crawling with lecherous and violent lowlife.*” (ibid.: 100) This way, by means of *Saturday*, he challenges his former interpretation of London. The vision of London he gives us (at least on Saturday morning) is an image of “*clean, light and sanitized Eden*”. (ibid.: 108) In *Saturday*, the city serves, traditionally, as a place of light and learning. Besides this characteristics, the city also represents a place of uncertainties. One might point out that the author has almost desire to correct his earlier representation of this city. This time, we face a modern concept of the city, which is the place of culture and civilization and we seize its complexity.

The metamorphosis of the city is observable: in the morning, the city is not the same as in the evening. This metamorphosis can be seen through Henry Perowne’s eyes. In the morning, he feels almost an ecstasy when observing the city out of his window: “...*Henry thinks the city is a success, a brilliant invention, a biological masterpiece – millions teeming around the accumulated and layered achievements of centuries, as though around a coral reef, sleeping, working, entertaining themselves, harmonious for the most part, nearly everyone wanting it work.*” (McEwan, 2006: 5) This example shows that Perowne thinks of his city in terms of harmony and aesthetic perfection. This perception is again closely connected to his job as a neurosurgeon. However, as a result of all the events of the day, at the end of the day he feels different; he feels threatened and insecure. Such a transformation symbolizes the modern condition of our society. (Groes, 2009: 105)

#### **4.5. The Concept of Space in *Solar***

This time, we will point out some particular information about the concept of space in one of the newest novels – *Solar*. From some point of view, we could consider that both *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth* are somewhat similar; it is the concept of space that appears to be similar: First of all, it is crucial to mention that unlike some of other McEwan’s novels, the concept of space in *Solar* is not a principal element of the novel. As we will see also in *Sweet Tooth*, the space and settings play rather secondary roles in comparison to the plot. In this part of the chapter, we will point

out the places of the novel, private and public space as well as the globalization of the space.

As for the places mentioned or lived in *Solar*, we could discuss whether it is at least partly inspired by the author's life. As we know from the author's biography (see 1.3.3.1), McEwan has been accustomed to travel a lot when being a child, because of his father's job. Also the plot of *Solar* is set in various places, according to the given part of the story. In the part called "2000", the plot is centred in England; Michael Beard is working in a research centre in Reading. In pursuance of the research, he travels to the conference in Arctic to discuss the climate change with other scientists. As we know from the interview with McEwan, this conference is inspired by real event that occurred and that he experienced himself. He said about this conference: "*We spent our evenings discussing, talking about how the world needed fundamental changes of approach and culture, and at the same time there was this growing chaos in the room next door – the boot room, where all our outdoor gear was stored – our snow mobile suits and so on. It was this disparity between the self-made disorder in our lives on the ship, and our aspirations, our ideals, that suggested that one approach to this subject was through a kind of forgiving humour.*" (<http://www.wsj.com>) The last part of *Solar*, "2009", is set in New Mexico, in Lordsburg. As we know from the narration, Michael Beard still travels a lot and is nowhere fixed. Whether it is England or New Mexico, Michael is not able (or does not want to) find a fixed place, home to live in.

Again, we can detect some kind of forced boundary between private space and public space. Michael Beard does not let anyone to disrupt his privacy. He is only able to share some part of his intimacy, only a restricted part of himself and his personal space. He has built walls around his private space and nobody can share it with him. When having love affairs or even parental relationship with Melissa and having his daughter, Catriona, he still does not let them to disturb the circle around him. Michael is not used to share.

In *Solar*, traces of globalization of space can be detected. Even though Michael Beard travels in fact all around the world, changing places to stay and the people

he meets, readers are still under impression that places in the novel are somehow connected. Arctic, England or New Mexico, we cannot really detect the difference; every place seems to be the same and there is no difference in the narration. Of course, the weather in Arctic is an extraordinary element that readers perceive. However, the people readers meet do not seem to be truly different. It is as if all the places around the world could be connected without any problem.

#### **4.6 The Concept of Space in *Sweet Tooth***

As the last step, let us comment on the concept of space in one of McEwan's latest novels – *Sweet Tooth*. First of all, we will point out the places mentioned in the novel. The second part will concern the division between public space and private space. The novel *Sweet Tooth* belongs to the latest McEwan's novels; that means that not only plot, but also the settings and space in general is very different from the novels such as *The Cement Garden* or *The Comfort of Strangers*. While in the earlier novels, space has rather symbolic function and eventually serves as one of the characters, in *Solar* or in *Sweet Tooth*, space is only one of the stylistic components that helps to create the settings.

*Sweet Tooth*, as most of McEwan's novels, is set in England, mainly in London of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this time the image of London is rather in the background and it does not actively appear in the plot. The beginning of the story shows Serena Frome's childhood and teen age in her hometown. However, not many spatial details are given. Since page 45, the most of the plot concerns only London. During the story, Serena leaves for Cambridge or Brighton – other places in England. The only part of England we can see is space in the city, which is also typical of Ian McEwan's novels. As already mentioned, there are several places introduced, even indirectly, in the novel, mainly towns or cities: London, Brighton, Cambridge, etc. When introducing a new place to readers, the narrator often presents it, describes it as a new place, to familiarize reader with it.

There are some discussions about similarities between Thomas Haley, young and attractive writer who falls in love with Serena and Ian McEwan. The similarities would concern their writing careers. It is because both authors, McEwan and Haley in the novel, shared similitudes between the places where they have started their careers. Thomas Haley comes from the University of Sussex in Brighton, which is not one of the leading British universities, such as Oxford or Cambridge. Also McEwan comes from one of the less-known universities, University of East Anglia.

As in *Saturday*, we can comment on the difference between private space and public space. Also this time, the difference between the two can be detected. However, in *Sweet Tooth* there is a special emphasis put on the public space. As the main hero, Serena, leads double life, we can also discuss the double space; space that concerns her work, public space that is also important for the whole United Kingdom, which is in this case the space of the action of MI5, MI6 or CIA. This place seems to be quite distant from the private, everyday reality of common citizens. In this novel, private space is represented by Serena Frome's private life: Her private space is her home, her family house, her shared flat with other flatmates, or space she shares with her lovers. For example, Tony Canning's cottage where they go in their free time, is not only a part of Serena's private space but it can be seen as some kind of secret space, unknown to others.



## 5. Conclusion

The goal of the analyses was to investigate the space in six of McEwan's novels. Intentionally, I have analysed some of the earlier novels and some of the latest novels in order to compare the concept of space in different contexts and most importantly in different author's life periods. Even generally, if I compare for example *The Cement Garden* and *Solar*, I can conclude that the two novels are very different. That applies also for the concept of space. This is why the comparison of concepts of space in such novels has been very interesting.

First of all, let me summarize the individual concepts of space that were observed in the novels. I have concluded that the concept of space and its role in *The Cement Garden* and in *The Comfort of Strangers* is very alike. It could be said so because both concepts play a symbolic role. The space in *The Cement Garden* represents the isolation of the family and later, the isolation of the children; in *The Comfort of Strangers*, space represents a trap, a sinister labyrinth, a danger the couple is heading for. In *The Cement Garden*, the city represents a desolation, and the house of the family represents the violation of the nature. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, the city is vital, lively, never changing constant against the odds. However, its vitality is doom at the same time. The space is a very important element in both novels and thanks to it, the target atmosphere was possible to make.

In *Amsterdam*, I could observe that McEwan already makes the novels where different places are mentioned and joined together. He continues with this tradition in later novels. I concluded that what is particularly interesting in *Amsterdam* is the perception of space via body. Main characters feel the space through their bodies and bodily changes. This perception of time and space through body feelings has also been observed in *The Cement Garden*.

In *Saturday*, time and space have been extremely important stylistic elements. Although the plot is set only within 24 hours in London, the dimension of time and space manifested itself as very interesting. Here I could observe the clear boundary

between two types of spaces; the private and the public one. The incompatibility of the two is one of the main author's concerns in the novel.

I have also concluded that the concept of space in *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth* are alike. When observing the space dimension of the two, one might say that the concept of space is rather secondary, in comparison to *The Cement Garden* or to *The Comfort of Strangers*. However, readers of *Solar* could observe allusions to globalization that are covered not only by the subject of global warming but also by the concept of space. The novel performed a variety of places, mostly cities, joined together without difference. In both novels, *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth*, there can be discussed the boundary between the private space and the public one again.

As a conclusion, I can finally evaluate the role of the space in McEwan's novels. However, it is essential to realize that the conclusions are made only on the basis of the analysed sample. The six novels, of course, do not represent the totality of McEwan's work. For wider conclusion that could be applied without reservation, the analyses should have covered all the novels, stories, plays, etc. Nevertheless, not all the works could have been in our scope of study. That is why only several novels have been chosen. These novels represent a sufficient sample to illustrate McEwan's work; these novels show very well the gradual change in author's writing style. This change of the style concerns the art of space painting, too.

The main conclusion is that the space, especially in earlier McEwan's novels, does not represent only a simple element of style; it is far more. Via space, the author provokes various feelings: isolation, claustrophobia, fear, disorientation. Space is not just one of the elements that contributes to the atmosphere of the novel; it is an active participant that influences the heroes of the novels as well as readers and their sensations. McEwan also uses space to introduce important symbols and to make allusions. Symbols he uses are not applicable only to the novel itself; the spatial symbols often go beyond the boundaries of the novel. An empty town and loads of cement stand opposite to natural laws; the strange land is not only exotic and exciting, but also threatening and very sinister. McEwan successfully joins symbols from the novels with the state of our society.

Another important finding is that London is McEwan's favourite setting. What is far more interesting is the fact that the image of London is changing through the years of creation. While earlier, London represents a kind of dark place with no hope for better future, later McEwan suggests to perceive London as a place of civilization and of a possible perfection. Earlier, McEwan used to think a lot about the space of the novel itself, without connection to the world. However, his later works show that he starts to imagine every space in wider context, in relation to world and to world issues. He starts to realize the problems that concern up-to date society and talks about them in the novels. Space, as one of the significant features of his novels, is then adapted to it. Space becomes more and more globalized alongside the themes of the novels.

Then, another important conclusion is that space in McEwan's novels also functions as an instrument of perception. As we know, the space perception is subjective and it is one of the significant dimension of space. Many characters actually feel the space through their body and they perceive it physically, as for example in *The Cement Garden* or *Amsterdam*.

What is also apparent is that the city as a place in general is in the centre of McEwan's novels. It is not only London but city as such that frequently occurs in the novels. McEwan considers it a perfect setting for a drama he usually introduces. City is intricate, complicated, a crime against nature, mysterious, brilliant invention and a perfect place; the image of the city is changing throughout the author's writing career. I can conclude that the image of the city and its reputation generally goes from worse to better.

I might also suggest that space in McEwan's novels to a certain degree reflects characters' state of mind. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, as the main heroes are half-hearted to each other, also the city does not offer much entertainment. As the heroes get closer to the danger, the city too becomes a dangerous, sinister trap. Another example can be *Saturday*; in the morning, Henry Perowne feels almost excited about himself, about the present and the city. The city in that moment seems to be something brilliant and almost magical.

Let me present some propositions for further research. Next time, in another supplementary research, I could of course cover more novels and I would compare them with McEwan's novels to gain the comparison between the two main literary genres he is working on. It would be also interesting to compare the role and the concept of space in McEwan's novels with other author's novels. It should be someone with the same writing style, whose topics and opinions on world are a bit similar. I would definitely suggest the comparison with Martin Amis, as he is often compared to Ian McEwan in many respects.

## Summary

The goal of diploma thesis called *Space in Contemporary British Fiction* was to present the situation and the direction of British contemporary novel. It was to introduce the postmodernism as the main literary British style in the present, its typical features and to present some of the leading postmodern authors in Great Britain. Another target was to concentrate on Ian McEwan as the core author for the thesis. The purpose was to introduce his biography, work and literary style in detail. Next step was to analyse the typical elements of McEwan's prose; the space dimension is one of the central elements. However, before introducing the concept of space in the novels, another goal was to present the theory of literary space. The main goal was to analyse the concept of space in six of McEwan's novels: *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday*, *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth*.

The first chapter called *Contemporary British fiction* was focused on general information about up-to date literary creation. The main emphasis was put on postmodernism – the most commonly used literary style of present-day British fiction. Postmodernism was defined and its main features and figures were explained. In the same chapter, some of the leading authors of contemporary British fiction were presented: it was Graham Swift, Martin Amis and finally Ian McEwan. The last mentioned was in the spotlight of the thesis. In this part of chapter, his life, work and literary style were discussed.

Next chapter *Ian McEwan's Artistry* was to analyse the crucial elements of McEwan's fiction. Dark elements (incest, death and disease, desire to disgust, savagery), autobiographical elements (isolation, women and feminism), turning points, critics of society and vast knowledge were discussed in terms of six already mentioned novels. The secondary literature as well as observation taken out from the novels were used.

Then, *Space in British Fiction* served as a theoretical background for following space analyses of McEwan's novels. In this chapter, several issues of literary space

are discussed: first of all, space and other terms connected to it were discussed. Next part of this chapter concerns the ways the literary space is constructed in a text. Another interesting point discussed is the representation of space and its perception. The last part is focused on the city as a space construct; I was interested in the process of construction, representation and perception of a city. The notion of global city was also discussed.

The last chapter finally presents the practical analysis of McEwan's novels. Again, the analysis was centred on *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday*, *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth*. The analyses were based partly on the secondary literature and partly on the primary literature itself. The various aspects were discussed: concept of city, perception of space, isolated space, and space divided into public and private one, etc.

The final conclusion summarizes the knowledge acquired in the practical analyses of the novels. In addition, propositions for further research are made.

## Resumé

Cílem diplomové práce nazvané *Space in Contemporary British fiction* bylo představit současnou situaci a směr současné britské prózy. To zahrnovalo představení postmodernismu jakožto hlavního současného britského literárního směru, jeho typické znaky a některé z jeho hlavních autorů. Dalším cílem bylo se soustředit na Iana McEwana, který představoval centrálního autora pro tuto diplomovou práci. Záměrem bylo uvést detailní biografii Iana McEwana, jeho práci a taktéž jeho literární styl. Hlavním cílem práce bylo analyzovat koncept prostoru v šesti autorových novelách: *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday*, *Solar* a *Sweet Tooth*.

První kapitola je nazvaná *Contemporary British Fiction* a je zaměřena na obecné informace ohledně současné románové tvorby. Hlavní důraz byl kladen na směr postmodernismus na jakožto nejčastěji používaný literární styl v současném britském prostředí. Postmodernismus a jeho hlavní znaky byly definovány a vysvětleny. V této samé kapitole byli představeni někteří z hlavních současných britských autorů postmodernismu, a to Graha, Martin Amis a Ian McEwan. Poslední zmiňovaný je v ohnisku zájmu diplomové práce. V poslední části kapitoly je detailně popsán jeho život, literární tvorba, i jeho literární styl.

Následující kapitola, *Ian McEwan's Artistry*, pojednává o zásadních elementech vyskytující se v autorově tvorbě. Projednány jsou temné elementy (incest, smrt a nemoci, touha odpuzovat, divoštví) dále autobiografické elementy (izolace, ženy a feminismus), zlomové momenty, kritika společnosti, a rozsáhlé znalosti. Tyto elementy byly zkoumány na vzorku šesti již zmíněných dílech. V analýzách byla použita jak specializovaná sekundární literatura, tak přímo primární zdroje, McEwanovy díla.

Kapitola *Space in British Fiction* slouží jako teoretický podklad pro následující analýzy literárního prostoru v McEwanových novelách. Tato kapitola se soustřeďuje na několik dimenzí literárního prostoru: nejdříve je vysvětlen literární prostor jako takový a ostatní termíny s ním spojené. Další část kapitoly je věnovaná

způsobům vytváření literárního prostoru v textu. Dalším zajímavým bodem kapitoly je reprezentace prostoru a jeho vnímání. Poslední část kapitoly se zaměřuje na obraz města jakožto prostorového konstruktu: výklad byl zaostřen na vytváření, reprezentaci a vnímání města. Dále byl vysvětlen pojem globálního města.

Poslední kapitola představuje literární analýzy konceptu prostoru v McEwanových dílech. Analýzy jsou znovu postaveny na dílech *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday*, *Solar* a *Sweet Tooth*. Analýzy byly založeny částečně na odborné literatuře, částečně na analýzách primární literatury. Různorodé aspekty prostoru byly analyzovány: koncept městského prostoru, vnímání prostoru, izolovaný prostor, prostor rozdělený na soukromý a veřejný, atd.

Závěr shrnuje poznatky z praktických analýz. Krom toho jsou zde zmíněny i návrhy pro další výzkum.



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