Ian McEwan is one of the distinguished novelists of England today. He has written ten wonderful novels so far that form the very basis of our textual and analytical study. In addition to these novels, he has also written some plays, librettos, screenplays, short stories and books for children. Owing to his outstanding contribution to the field of literature, he has been appropriately declared as the ‘International Voice of Modern British Fiction’ (Rosenhelm 1) by British Broadcasting Corporation. Its announcement of conferring this international status upon him could be considered as a testament to his popularity in and outside the United Kingdom.

Very few novelists except Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes and Graham Swift are interpreted with enthusiasm and insight as Ian McEwan. He is equally famous in Europe, U.S.A., Australia and many Asian and African countries. The credit of his popularity goes to his ‘macabre’ and scientific themes, a powerful sense of time and history, his documentary narrative style, a disquieting sense of inevitability and his engagement with the society and its values (Matthews 3).

This chapter examines the literary portrayals of seductions and betrayals and the consequent cultural transformations in McEwan’s ten novels namely The Cement Garden (1978), The Comfort of Strangers (1981), The Child in Time (1987), The Innocent (1990), Black Dogs (1992), Enduring Love (1997), Amsterdam (1998), Atonement (2001), Saturday (2005), and The Chesil Beach (2007). This chapter aims at going a step further in assessing the outcome of various seducing agents such as love, money, frustration, optimism, pessimism, war, violence, death, maturity, innocence and the sense of loss resulting simultaneously in betrayal and thereby bringing about a cultural transformation. Though the transformation seems to be related with the contemporary Englishness of British people, it is a transformation of the whole world and that of the humankind.
McEwan’s first novel *The Cement Garden*, published in 1978, looks like an extension of his two story books published earlier. The claustrophobic atmosphere in his short stories is carried forward in his first two novels, *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers*. The four children and their fantasy of living like a family and enjoying freedom and adventure is later on distorted by the harsh experience of reality. It seems to be based upon Enid Blyton’s books for children, Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and McEwan’s first wife’s childhood days (Byrnes 126-30).

*The Cement Garden* (1978), a novella close to a long short story, is full of dark elements that create a mysterious atmosphere in a decaying house. The breadwinner of the family who is also the father of four innocent children suddenly dies of heart attack and the responsibility becomes unbearable on the weak shoulders of his ailing and bedridden wife. Soon after the ailing mother’s death, the four children, Jack (15), Julie (17), Soo (13) and Tom (16) are left behind, shocked to find themselves traumatized by the fear of loneliness, orphanage and the loss of family ties. They instantly acquire the role of adults and decide not to disclose the death of their mother to the outer world.

They lock themselves inside the house and become numb on the matters of the outside world. In order to avoid being taken into custody, the children hide their mother’s death from the outside world by encasing her corpse in cement in their basement. Hardly realizing to lament her death, these children grow older – Jack and Julie as parents and Tom and Sue as children. Their family life goes on as usual except Tom’s intermittent crying and Derek’s (Julie’s boyfriend) short visits.

In the meantime, these children remain engaged in the doctor-patient games -examining Sue’s secret organs and watching their respective physical growth in the mirror placed in the semi-dark house. Derek, a well-built sportsman and their supporter, is not allowed to enter into their private world. He however comes to know the secret of the underground burial. The mice start moving into the cellar, searching for the decomposed body and the foul smell starts emanating. Jack and Julie are engaged in an incestuous act and are caught
red-handed by Derek. Finally, he breaks the news of both the incest and the underground burial. The childhood dream of the children to remain happily united forever is shattered into pieces, for their violation of the laws of humanity and laws of England.

The novel written in a neutral tone begins with a very casual but guilt-ridden statement of Jack’s betrayal over the death of his father:

I did not kill my father, but I sometimes felt I had helped him on his way (9). Despite his health problems, Jack’s father keeps on working hard and struggles to maintain cleanliness in and around the house. His plan was to surround the house, front and back, with an even plane of concrete.” (16)

Cleanliness and up to date furnishing of the surrounding area is what had fascinated Jack’s father the most. Seduced by the notion of cleanliness, he neglected his weak heart. He could not pay attention to his ill health for he was more engrossed by the thought of family welfare. In this way, he betrayed himself and as a result, died an early death, thereby completely erasing his self-identity and physical existence. The same is reflected through Jack’s unconscious efforts to erase his father’s body marks stamped on the wet cement plane:

I did not have a thought in my head as I picked up the plank and carefully smoothed away his impression in the soft, fresh concrete.” (19)

From the point of view of morality, this act of smoothing away father’s impression by his son is an act of betrayal. However, Jack does it instinctively and without any special intension, the message that it sends to the readers is that of a betrayal. By doing so, Jack moves a step further to acquire the status of a family head.

The novel begins with the Freudian element of Oedipus complex developed in the adolescent Jack, who easily becomes ‘almost catatonic with his newly found freedom and wanders listlessly around the house’ (Williams 211-13). His elder sister Julie takes charge of the household and starts taking
care of Sue and Tom like their mother did when alive; she is seduced by the idea of mother replacement:

There’s Julie the eldest, a ripe and willful beauty who is almost a woman...These four form an uneasy family, slowly learning to be self-sufficient in this strangely apocalyptic setting. (Wylie 1)

In this way, we come across a family of six; later on reduced to four, with a self-imposing, ‘masturbating’ father, Jack and a beautiful athlete mother, Julie. After his mother’s death, Jack starts narrating the events through his adolescent outlook towards the complicated and dark domestic world and the willingly neglected outer world limited to his school going and Derek’s occasional visits.

McEwan never clearly mentions the place-names, fictional or real (except mother’s distant relative in Ireland), book-titles (except one science fiction), songs (except ‘green sleeves’), films, TV programs, brand names or any other familiar features of contemporary consumer society. It enhances the novel’s qualities of timelessness and mystery. The narrator seems to be ‘withholding information, we don’t know why’ (Williams 219).

Once this small and unfortunate family starts living a parentless life, Jack and Julie replaces their father and mother. Since Julie is senior to Jack by two years, she tries to control everyone. Her efforts are directed towards Tom’s upbringing with full care and love, confronting and consoling Sue’s biologically changing mind, remembering their mother and getting lost in her memories. For Jack and Julie, Sue was like an object with whom they would play patient-doctor games but after the death of their mother, Sue undergoes a complete transformation. She accepts mother’s death, and turns permanently silent. She is unable to cope with the void felt by her mother’s absence. In a way, mother’s absence tortures all of them and they relentlessly feel that they have betrayed her.

Jack has been the dirtiest child of the family. His mother, when alive, deliberately took pains to make him alert, active and look handsome. He was a lazy fellow who always kept himself away from the reality of the freckles and
broad shoulders. Whenever faced by uneasiness, he succumbs to the unstoppable urge for masturbation, thereby releasing himself and seeking relief.

His first experience of self-seduction takes place in the form of masturbation, which pleases him. The moral scientists of the society do not allow talking about it openly. Because of this, a boy like Jack becomes practiced to it and in an attempt to keep it secret, he becomes the victim of guilt. In fact, the incomplete knowledge of human biology and the reproductive system is turns into a role-play of the creator and finds out outlets for the so far stored complexities of chaos. Jack minutely describes this self-seduction as pseudo-masochism:

I worked on myself rapidly. As usual, the image before me was Julie’s hand between Sue’s legs … Then it happened … colourless. As I watched, it dried to a barely visible shiny crust which cracked when I flexed my wrist; I decided not to wash it away. (McEwan, The Cement Garden 18)

Just before her death, when Jack’s mother learns about this practice of Jack, she cautiously warns him of its danger: physical weakness, black circles below the eyes and loss of stamina. Jack sees fearful dreams during nighttime; he is chased by someone he cannot see or a box and something horrible in it – ‘small creature inside’ (27). That is why, even before mother’s death, we sense something gloomy—a kind of premonition: the decaying kitchen, wasps and flies, the rustling of mice and the foul smell of a decomposing human body.

Jack’s idea of laziness is to forget the outside world, go on daydreaming and release through artificial ejaculation. It is his egocentrism that plays the role of a seducing element, which tends to his self-betrayal in the form of anti-social, anti-pathological and anti-cultural behavior. Very rarely, he tidies himself up, watches with pride his growing body, and freckles in the mirror. Ignoring his father’s unuttered wish (to watch in the mirror and feel and be changed with the changing time), Jack resorts to the dark bedroom. When the frequency is reflected on his dull face, his mother acquires the role of his father
and makes him understand the other side of it, which is as terrible as the self-slaughter.

‘Have you looked at your eyes in a mirror lately?’ (28), she questions him and confused, he denies. She explains him the evil effects of his bad-habit and the two-pint-blood replacement theory:

Growing up is difficult, but if you carry on the way you are, you’re going to do yourself a lot of damage to your growing body. (29)

Jack and his new family discuss the issue of marriage, and the intimate relationship between husband and wife in general and their parents in particular: ‘I had been saying that secretly they had hated each other and that mother was relieved when father died … I was just saying I don’t think Mum ever really liked Dad’(33).

After their father’s death, the children experience their father’s absence as a relief for everyone, relief from ‘a frail, irascible, obsessive man’ (9). It might be possible because Jack and Tom had severe problems with their individual identity. McEwan, as the author of this story, seems to be seduced by the benevolent and protector father. Tom’s transgression and cross-dressing is the chief anti-social activity that does not stop McEwan from thinking about the family head. Having thought a lot about the beginning of the novel, McEwan realizes that ‘beginning really belonged with the father’ (Hoffendon, Interview).

After his mother’s burial, Tom’s dependence on Julie proves to be a search for mother replacement. His act of wearing Sue’s school uniform and trying to look like a girl shows a change in his attitude; he thinks, he can be better guarded once he becomes a girl. It is a clear indication of a seduction due to the urgency of love and security and a domestic innocence of a child. Tom’s trans-sexual behaviour turns into transvestism, thereby reducing the chances of being bullied by his schoolmates. Jack tries to help Tom by punishing his fellow enemies in the school, but it does not impress him. He is always busy in the thoughts of changing himself into a girl, externally though:
What is it like being a girl? And I said, ‘It’s nice, why?’ and he said he was tired of being a boy and he wanted to be a girl now … I said, ‘Why do you want to be a girl?’ and he said, ‘Because you don’t get hit when you’re a girl!’ (46-7)

In fact, Jack detests it, and his open denial infuriates a sense of protest in both the girls; they try to exhibit it in the same way, as the radical feminists would have done. The turning point in this story of childhood and adolescence approaches when they try to keep their ‘introvert independence’ (Paulin, Review) intact and decide to bury their mother in the basement of the house. The decision is taken hesitantly without even thinking about the soul of the dead, its purification, the doom’s day and salvation. McEwan never mentions their religion in this book, but one can assume the family to be belonging to Christianity. When they bury mother’s body in the cellar, they seem to have paid no attention to its preservation, the laws of the church and the legal and moral consequences of the secret burial.

Daddy’s old trunk and the fresh cement bags bought for the garden work jointly help them. They are also motivated by the availability of the larger space in the cellar. They keep the mother with them because sending her away to the public graveyard may also send them to an orphanage, or an adopting family, and neighbours may seize the house. In order to avoid being taken into custody, they easily hide their dead mother in the wet cement.

They are afraid that if the death is made public, the small family will be vanished as a single unit. It is as if they have claimed the inheritance to remain alienated and isolated amidst the chaotic twentieth century urban life of England. They are seduced by transforming themselves, doing something extraordinary and making a show of their courage, role modeling and capacity to mature a few years beforehand. They consider Derek’s entry in Julie’s life and in their house responsible for various humiliating and unwanted situations. The typical smell spreading in the house, the horrible scene of cracks in the cement revealing mother’s nightie and the pretended stories of their dog’s (Cosmo) death make all of them tense and nervous. Suddenly, they realize the mistake of hiding the death, burying the body and telling lies after lies.
Whatever they did, was done in haste for specific reasons that they honestly justify. Jack’s open comment makes it more transparent:

If we tell them … they will come and put us into care, into an orphanage … They might try and get Tom adapted … The house will stand empty … People will break in, there’ll be nothing left. (58)

Freud’s idea of Oedipal impulses which undermined the concept of pristine innocence of childhood, provided 20th century writers with new ways of depicting childhood and adolescence. The child characters of Lewis Carroll, R.L. Stevenson and J. M. Barrie tend to escape the real world. Joyce’s children convey self-centredness of adolescence and the awakening of sexual desire. In post-war fiction, we have children who are the victims of adult designs, reduced to the savage primitivism. Something along those lines, we have McEwan’s child characters like moody and lethargic Jack and a childish adult Julie. Jack and company justify the statement of Charlotte Bronte—‘children can feel, but they cannot analyze their feelings’ (Bronte 56).

Jack, who is bewildered by his growing body and physical appetites, while performing the role of the family head, forgets at one unfortunate moment that he is Julie’s brother. Julie, too, while performing the role of the mother to Sue and Tom, forgets that she is Jack’s elder sister and has a good, caring and handsome lover in Derek. Actually, their mutual attraction was not a recent invention. From the beginning, when both of them had played the role of doctors and performed the examination of Sue’s intimate body parts, Jack had always longed to examine Julie’s secret body parts. He had always watched her with extra care – sunbathing, half-naked on the rockery, running with quick and attractive legs on the ground, her eyes, her hairs, her bulging chaste and her transformed format after seeing Derek. He even had developed a kind of jealousy for Derek and always called him weak in his comparison.

Jack’s up-to-date living, clean washing, nail cutting and wearing good dresses fascinate Julie. They get attracted to each other for they do not want Derek’s interference, intervention, and the unwelcome questioning about the crumbling pile of cement and the whereabouts of their parents. In this way, the
situation seduces both of them and they ultimately long for each other’s company.

Jack’s acute observation of Julie’s body details is more than a brother’s emotional attachment and care. When she runs in the race, Jack very watchfully observes her movements and needlessly comments- ‘she wore stockings and black knickers, strictly forbidden’ (20). When mother was alive and Jack sang ‘Green sleeves’, he was actually, accurately observing Julie’s merry-making in an objectionable manner: ‘Her skirt fell down over her head … A few black hairs curled out from the white crotch…’(38). Christina Byrnes, in her psychodynamic study of McEwan’s work, states that these kinds of experiences are usually undamaging (Byrnes 122).

As after effects of the incest, all of them are termed mentally sick by Derek and by everyone. Both of them and Julie in particular, betray Derek, his true feelings for her and his wish to look after the family as the family head, replacing himself with their absent father. Derek’s reaction is very natural and comes instantaneously. He is denied a certain privilege and he is nervous. He calls the police in; breaks the trunk open with father’s sledgehammer and reveals everything that earlier seemed mysterious. Did Derek betray the family? A tough question to answer for any lover on the earth remains unanswered.

In this way, we can see that the root cause of all the upheavals in the story is seduction and betrayal. The dark novel ends in a tragic and pitiful situation. At the end, we come across the transformation of the adapting minds from innocence to maturity. Had Julie not engaged in sex, had she honestly loved Derek, had she made him a partner in the secret burial, had she been a ‘wise’ woman, the novel would have been altogether a different story the boys who kept the family united and loved their mother forever.

The Comfort of Strangers, published in 1981, is a brief narrative with only four major characters and a very short time scale. It narrates the story of one young English couple, Colin and Mary, holidaying in an unnamed tourist city resembling modern day Venice, a famous tourist destination in Italy. Colin,
who is an angelic figure, works in a publishing firm. Mary, his seven-year life partner is a divorcée and a mother of two from her earlier marriage. She has a ten-year-old football-playing daughter and a three-year-old athletic son. She is an actor who used to work with a women’s theatre group and is a staunch feminist. Though Colin and Mary have been together for seven years, they have no great passion for each other at present.

During their monotonous visit to Venice, they meet Robert and Caroline, who offer them hospitality. Robert’s brutal machismo and Caroline’s subservience and broken back colours this hospitality with uneasiness. Nobody seems to converse with the other with openness and something mysterious and unsaid element seem to be hovering over the city, the hotel and Robert’s residence.

Finally, the dark, McEwanesque plot ends in a tragic death, when we find the beautiful Mary abusively and forcefully drugged and the angelic Colin murdered to death. Robert seduces them with his sweet tongue and kills him at the end. However, the situation proves that Colin’s love for Mary was true and so, sacrificed his life for her. The reception of this novel was a mixed one. It was nominated for the Booker Prize even before the publishers had released it. However, it attracted more negative reviews than any of McEwan’s previous works:

[The Comfort of Strangers] start with tingles, promises, true shivers and the catharsis of shock, and delivers only gore … It is an unsatisfying suspense-horror, even for an upscale beach read, and therefore quite hateful. (Eliot, Village Voice)

Martin Richard terms it as ‘a sad disappointment’ (American Rev. 1982) and Leonard John describes it as ‘definitely diseased’ (New York Times, 1981). Hossein Payandeh powerfully refuted the charges of Douglas Dunn who had dubbed this novel as ‘absolutely unwholesome, full of negative stimulus, socially uninformative and a book that assigned the reader the unwilling role of voyeur of abnormality’ (Dunn, Encounter (49-53). Payandeh reacted by exploring McEwan’s penetrative analysis of sado-masochism as ‘a patriarchal
distortion of sexual pleasure with brutal paradigms of dominance and subservience’ (Payandeh, Journal of Arts and Sciences).

This novel’s origin takes us back to McEwan’s weeklong visit with his wife Penny Allen to Venice at the height of one particular year’s tourist season. One can observe very easily the superficial similarities between McEwan – Penny and Colin-Mary. Leaving apart the harsh criticism, one cannot deny the creative height of McEwan to have created such a wonderful book. The readers, while coming out of the psychoanalytical sphere, can easily find out the elements of seduction and betrayal in abundance. The same elements transform the characters from simpletons to easily vulnerable to sexual fantasies. All of them seemingly appear as immortal, but in reality, they get tortured and are punished likewise. The claustrophobic and seedy episode, which narrates the story of the evils of power and the power of evil, is the culmination of human and non-human elements of seduction. The betrayal that is evident in the novel is a type of ‘split-subject-turning-upon itself’ (Seaboyer 57-8).

The two epigraphs foretell the complete story; one of which is an extract from Adrienne Rich’s poem, Sibling Mysteries. It introduces McEwan’s feminist concerns. The second one is Cesare Pavese’s description of travelling as brutality. Pavese’s comments about travelling poses it as a seducing agent for the forthcoming betrayals. In short, travel in the novel proves to be the best means of cultural studies – Venetian streets and the mysterious hosts waiting for the innocent’s trials.

Colin and Mary’s visit to Venice, though the city remains unmentioned and obscure, is a form of compulsory obsession on their part to carry out. The city of Venice where labyrinthine streets make the two visitors confused and lost, symbolizes a state of hypnosis. The street here functions as a powerful seducing agent. They walk and walk forward and tired and completely exhausted finally come to Robert’s lodging. The tourists dutifully take some time off and find leisure to wander on the Venetian streets:
They dutifully fulfilled the many tasks of tourism the ancient city imposed, visiting its major and minor churches, its museums and palaces, all treasure packed. (3)

Had both of them been able to understand the intensity of future catastrophe, they would not have depended very much on Robert and Caroline. However, they were unfortunately seduced by the host’s hospitality; they betrayed their own selves and the liabilities they shouldered. Venice, as a seducing city and an unmappable and invisible beast devours them, for they are unconsciously seduced by the thought of exploring the mental map of the city space and equate it with the physical map. Of course, they fail to succeed and their struggle ends in a meaningless triviality. McEwan tactfully plays on the Venetian sense of enclosure and claustrophobia by introducing only four major characters.

[But] only Robert, the schematic pervert has the key, the controlling power that comes from a knowledge of the city that enables him to co-opt it as a stage for the drama by means of which he will transform psychic reality into real event, although by the end of the text, it is apparent that Caroline has been directing them from the wings. (Seaboyer 7)

In their Venetian hotel, Colin and Mary, in contrast to the four children in *The Cement Garden*, ‘revert to a child like state, dependent on their hotel maid’ (Childs, *Encyc.Brit*.). They depend on each other and grow lazy with their possessions. They even become incapable of looking after each other’s needs. The same hotel and city, which worked as a seducing agent, also witnessed their shifting moods, and offences in the form of temporary and repairable betrayals:

> As individuals they did not easily take offence; but together they managed to offend each other in surprising, unexpected ways. (4)

Their chance observation of the two dummies in pajamas and nighties clearly reflect the sex act that they had just enjoyed. The next thing that they come across is a lengthy declaration of radical feminists wanting to castrate the convicted rapists and their hands chopped for theft. Mary, herself a staunch feminist is later on converted into a passive, inert and subservient woman who
lauds very much the hypothesis of violence in sex-men tend to be aggressive and women willing to be victimized. It clearly describes Mary’s betrayal with herself, her principles, her life values and her one time life mission.

After going through the terrible experience of one night compulsory outing, the couple enjoys the masked hospitality at Robert’s house. Robert is obnoxious from the beginning. He engages them in his fake childhood stories of torture and makes them feel sorry for him. They start pitying him and he figures as one who has sacrificed his innocence at an early age. He slowly builds his image as a childhood victim of his father’s biased attitude towards his sisters.

Robert’s machismo and misogyny are undisguised, yet Colin and Mary follow him deeper into the labyrinth. Both Colin and Mary are made to sleep during daytime and when they wake in Robert’s house, both of them start looking at each other’s naked bodies. She becomes, because of this seduction, forgetful of her earlier feelings of imprisonment and the frequent, disturbing dreams of her children in danger. Leaving behind two innocent children on the pretext of a tour to Venice with Colin, she has undergone a traumatic experience of shame and guilt. Her seduction here seems to be responsible for creating in her a feeling of betrayal.

The angelic, classical sculpture like beauty of Colin, lying naked in Robert’s bedroom seduces her and she feels intoxicated. McEwan beautifully describes this scene of immobilizing two-dimensionality and the eroticized horizontal nudity:

Like her, he was naked and lay above the sheets, prone below the waist, above it twisted a little awkwardly towards her. His arms were over his chest and his slender, hairless legs were set a little apart, the feet abnormally small like a child’s, pointing inwards.
(Seaboyer 8)

The forced, open exhibition of male-female nudity exhibits the voyeuristic attitude of Robert and Caroline. It also shows their betrayal as far as the moral laws of hospitality are concerned. The nude show of the guests comes to an abrupt end with Robert’s hitting Colin in the stomach. On their
return to the hotel room, Colin and Mary find their desire for sex increased. The sudden closeness sets off a four day spate of almost continuous love making between the two: ‘…their lovemaking had no clear beginning or end, frequently concluded in, or was interrupted by sleep’ (18).

Their betrayal with the self, though practiced unintentionally, resulted into the awakening somnolent passion after their meeting with the sadomasochistic couple. However, the details of Colin and Mary’s renewed life suggest that ‘McEwan sees this difference between them and the perverted strangers they have come to know’ (Payandeh 153).

Robert, the sadist and arch misogynist, as sketched in the novel, was brought up in a family of four sisters, a passive but kind mother and a very strict father. From then on, he has instilled in him, a hatred for women and always advocated supremacy of male over females. In support of his hypothesis of sex and violence, he scornfully speaks of women:

Whatever they might say they believe, women love aggression and strength and power in men. It’s deep in their minds … They long to be ruled by men … They talk of freedom, and dream of captivity. (55)

Robert marries Caroline and finds her dreams of the unique experience of copulation shattered to pieces. She finds the magic of sexual intercourse distorted. However her inherent feminine resilience turns into adaptability, and she starts enjoying the scenes of beating and biting as a form of foreplay. Caroline actually belonged to a well-to-do family of an ambassador. Knowing nothing about sex at the age of twenty, she was married and absolutely yielded to the demands of Robert. The conventions and the duties assigned to a newly wed bride made her suffer a lot. Before she could understand the implications of Robert’s ill treatment, she slowly started enjoying Robert’s abusive language. It is, of course a political betrayal for an innocent woman to have an abnormal husband. Slowly afterwards, Freud’s negative Oedipus and moral masochism activates and Caroline, the ‘split-subject’ turns upon herself (Seaboyer 13).
In spite of her broken back, she supports Robert and finally drugs Mary, watches with silent eyes Colin’s vein cut and his death approaching slowly. By highlighting her physical inability as a tool of seduction, she poses herself as a figure to be loved, listened to and to be sympathized. She is responsible for Colin and Mary’s next visit to their house and the final act of drugging and killing.

Robert’s sado-masochism and cruelty, analyzed from psychological point of view, is the result of his upbringing in a male dominated family, his abnormal childhood memories, and his physical inability to become a father. He had a pathological problem with the motility of his sperms. As a combined result of his deficiencies and Colin’s extraordinary nature, he starts hating this angelic, womanish Colin, and eventually kills him. Seaboyer aptly describes:

> The unconscious desire to master the trauma of childhood betrayal and punishment at the hands of his father leads to the reproduction of his psychic reality in an effort not to bind it, but to shatter the guilty ego once and for all, and in so doing to achieve a jouissance that can only be attained with the complete destruction of the self. (Seaboyer 12)

McEwan’s third novel *The child in Time* (1987) is a strange and frightening story of a chilly and disturbing landscape. This novel reads as ‘a radical departure from violence and shock’ of McEwan’s earlier works (Slay 205). Certainly, a departure from the blood, pus and semen that had always been at the centre of his short stories and novels is not found here. The incest in *The Cement Garden* and the mindless violence in *The Comfort of Strangers* are left behind to give a new turn to his creative imagination, making him one of the best stylish and descriptive novelists of the U.K.

*The Cement Garden* ends in the destruction of the family unit whereas *The Child in Time* ends with family unity. *The Comfort of Strangers* uncovers only death and destruction of love, whereas *The Child in Time* discovers life and resurrection of love. This novel reads as ‘a magical work filled with warmth and hope and love’ (Slay 205). Excluding the themes of childhood and gender relations, the important change seen in this novel shows a six-year gap
in writing and ‘the widening of social interests’ (Childs, Literary Encyclopedia).

The novel is set in a near future at the end of the twentieth century, particularly, the last decent summer of the 1990s. The projected future as described in the novel dreams of a more democratic England having licensed beggars, private educational institutions, withdrawn welfare schemes and scientific theories like feminine quantum physics and fluidity of time. It is a neo-Thatcher government regime making all sorts of cutbacks simply to keep in order and to defend the state against its enemies:

McEwan’s London seems like another version of Baudelaire and Eliot’s ‘unreal city’ – a city of sleepwalking clerks and unhappy lovers, traffic jams and faceless crowds. (Kakutani, New York Times)

McEwan took the title of this novel from Tippett’s Oratorio, A child of our Time. McEwan’s own oratorio and The Ploughman’s Lunch provided the groundwork for this novel that is set in London and the English countryside, both described in realistic detail (Byrnes 177). This novel according to Taylor is obviously a political book indicating McEwan’s developed imagination and his conscious preoccupation with state policies, science and feminism (58).

The hero of this novel, Stephen Lewis, calls himself an accidental author. Whatever he had written was not meant for children, but one day Charles Darke read it and Stephen’s Hashish and Lemonade were published. Stephen’s wife Julie is a calm and watchful woman, and is a violinist by profession. She has even formed a string quartet along with her three friends. She loves Stephen for all his plusses and minuses. Earlier, Stephen worked as a cutting clerk in a newspaper office. Later on, he works as a full-time writer and leaves the job. He has a daughter Kate from Julie.

When the novel begins, we find Stephen working on a sub-committee on ‘Reading and Writing’ headed by Lord Paramenter. Charles had made it possible through his contacts. Kate is abducted when Stephen is on a routine Saturday morning trip to the supermarket. Waiting in line, accompanied by Kate, Stephen’s attention is slightly diverted and Kate is kidnapped. This
unfortunate incident in the life of Stephen and Julie brings about their separation – Julie vacates the house in London and moves to Chilterns. Stephen engages himself in watching TV and drinking the Scotch. The Committee work leading towards the preparation of ‘Authorized childcare Handbook’ is the only solace for Stephen; finding out Kate and completing this report becomes Stephen’s the sole mission now.

One another sub-plot, which narrates the story of a couple, Charles and Thelma, runs parallel to Stephen’s story. Charles was a publisher and a Jr. Minister. Dejected, he leaves everything behind and takes Thelma to the dark and deep forest to live like a ten-year-old boy. Thelma is a quantum physicist who talks about the idea of time, space, children and art. Finally, Charles dies; the Prime Minister of England who loved him and whose gender is left unknown keeps on lamenting. Stephen, because of his sexual union with Julie, becomes once again a father of a newborn baby of unknown gender. In between, McEwan takes the readers to the North-African ideal child life, where readers meet Stephen’s parents during the World War II discussing the possibility of Stephen’s conception.

Each chapter of this novel is prefaced by a quotation from a fictitious text, The Authorized Childcare Handbook. These prefaces put forward the views in purely beaurocratic language about childhood, about men and women’s roles within the family and the family’s role within the State. This handbook functions as a non-human seducing agent and makes Stephen devote his time fully to attend the meetings and prepare the drafts. It later on proves to be fake and manipulated by Charles and the Prime Minister. This fake report and the human machinery involved in it betray the whole of England; McEwan the writer for having broken the oath of authenticity and secrecy also betrays the readers.

Stephen is a straightforward, kind young man, who is becoming day-by-day more kind, nervous and sympathetic. It is already two years since Kate was lost in the supermarket. Stephen is literally uprooted, devastated and takes to drinking, sleeping and constantly thinking about Kate - at the corner, in the
school premises and at the crowded squares. He is so severely seduced by the sense of memory and loss that he always keeps on thinking about ‘what was and what might have been’ (5). Kate proves to be a weak point of Stephen and a constant object of obsession—‘He was father of an invisible child’ (2).

The post-kidnapping scenario represents the harsh reality of individual interests and conflicts. Police reports are filed, searches are organized and posters and flyers are sent out. Stephen goes on a door-to-door search for Kate, while his wife Julie, stays at home, retreating further and further into her private grief. At this point of time, Stephen is actually in severe need of moral support but Julie is lost in her own world. Stephen, who for the last six years has been seduced by the compact and unblemished beauty of Julie, suddenly feels betrayed for her inability to comfort him, which he urgently needed.

Unable to comfort each other, the couple starts drifting apart. During the ensuing weeks and months, their marriage unravels. They sell the flat and part from each other—‘If there was love it was buried beyond their reach’ (55). Julie moves to an isolated cottage in the countryside, and Stephen settles into a solitary routine of television watching and daydreaming. Though he is insulted in this way by Julie, we find him as firm as rock, making himself busy in the committee work and the occasional visits to his friend Charles Darke and his physicist wife, Thelma. Julie’s acts of betrayal, retreating to Chilterns does not make Stephen envious of her. On the contrary, we find in him an irresistible urge to see Julie. Seduced by Julie’s memory, he visits her countryside, where they come together; perform an act of sexual unity for a new child in time. At the end, because of the seduction and betrayal, husband and wife’s love turns into an everlasting happiness and continues with a hope of the arrival of a new guest.

Stephen, seduced by Kate’s recurring memory develops a habit of watching for a four-year-old girl who resembles Kate’s features. During this kind of search, he meets a beggar girl twice. When he comes across her for the first time, he gives her a five pound note and she arrogantly replies, ‘Fuck you, mister’ (3) and ignores him.
According to Kakutani, it is McEwan’s success as a writer to make the reader feel compassion for the hero, and share all his shifting emotions (The New York Times). Stephen desires to anesthetize his grief with ceaseless activity (making lists), theorizing over Kate’s disappearance (perhaps she has been stolen to replace a lost child!) and descends into magical thinking. He decides to celebrate her 6th birthday and buys a walkie-talkie for her-symbolic of the bond of love and communication: ‘He will invent what he has lost’ (Byrnes, Antigonish Review).

Stephen thinks that before all else, it would be an act of faith in his daughter’s continued existence, which would make him fresh and confident. Therefore, he plans to buy a present, which would demonstrate that he is not yet beaten. He is all set to challenge the fate by showing extraordinary patience: ‘Look, I’ve brought the present, now you bring back the girl!’ (137)

Unknowingly, Stephen is betraying himself by neglecting the naked reality of her loss. He faces an insulting situation, when he mistakes one beautiful girl having a mole on her cheek for Kate and is reprimanded by the school authority. After this, when he begins to fear that his life is slipping out of control, he sets about constructing a new routine for himself- ‘he will practice tennis, take instruction in Arabic and start a new book’ (Kakutani, New York Times).

The theme of childhood and time, as observed through various run-ins and run-outs of Stephen’s own confusion, is at the base of her memory and hallucination that cuts back and forth in time. In his ‘Stream-of-consciousness’ wanderings, McEwan unfolds Stephen’s own problematic childhood as the son of Douglas and Claire, their courtship, romantic rides, a long discussion in a roadside hotel, ‘The Bell’. They are shown conversing about the child’s future and their agonizing decision to marry.

Stephen’s tour to Turkey, Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier Province changed his attitude and interests. He lost interest in his clerk’s job in News cutting agency and set about writing a novel:
He had a secret which was growing at one thousand words a day and he had all the usual fantasies. He was Thomas Mann, he was James Joyce, and perhaps he was William Shakespeare. (26)

Stephen wrote two successful novels, Hashish and Lemonade. The immediacy Stephen felt for writing was so urgent. Charles Darke welcomed it. His transition from a clerk to a writer was very smooth and simple. His love for writing brought him near the publisher’s family, a forty-nine year old Charles Darke and his wife Thelma, a kind motherly woman of sixty-one. Stephen always remained thankful to this couple for publishing his books and referring his name to the Childcare Commission. Thelma supported him after Julie’s retreat.

Lost in memories, dreams and future childhood ambitions, Stephen even denies seeing the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, probably Margaret Thatcher, is in love with Charles but she never mentions this. It is made clear when Stephens suggests the Prime Minister to ‘disarm...for the sake of the heart’ (209). Ronald Reagan described her as ‘the best man in Britain’, and Alan Clerk as ‘one with the legs of Marilyn Monroe and the eyes of Genghis Khan.’ The Prime Minister’s obsessive trailing of Darke foreshadows an extreme form of obsessive and deluded love of Jed Parry for Joe in Enduring Love.

The kindhearted Stephen, who dares to deny seeing the Prime Minister, is doing everything for the sake of a neurotic person, Charles. This publisher cum Junior Minister in the Cabinet one day leaves behind everything and goes to the thick forest, of course, accompanied by wife, Thelma. She is a woman of science and has a scholarly command over the changing scientific scenario in the U.K. and the world. She enacts the role of Charles’s mother (mother transference). Byrnes fits him in the category of men about whom Freud has said, ‘where they desire, they cannot love’ (182).

He is the same Charles who, pretending at present to live like a child in order to compensate the lost childhood, earlier lived with wife Thelma, flirted with the Prime Minister and visited numerous brothels and prostitutes. Stephen
is lured and made to be a by-stander to witness all these amusing, if not edifying, activities of the couple. The story of Stephen’s last visit to the remote forest where he had to follow the trail in the darkness to find Charles’ dead body is very frightening. The long cherished dream of Charles to escape from city life to a carefree childhood inevitably turns to a tragic death:

When [Stephen] carries [the] dead body home from the woods on his back, the scene serves as an image of McEwan himself bearing off the corpse of a cherished daydream he has long outgrown. (Kiernan 51)

Prior to this accidental and suicidal death, Stephen was made to listen to Thelma’s strange stories of scientific rationalism dealing with time shifting, feminine quantum mechanics and the philosophical story of Schrodinger’s cat.

Charles’ leaving for the remote and desolate forestland can be compared with Stephen’s mind journey to his pre-natal visit to his loving parents. Charles is seduced by pre-pubescent, childhood bliss, whereas Thelma is seduced by the sublime idea of supporting the neurotic Charles. However, contrary to his or her understanding, it is Charles, who betrays everyone. His suicide betrays Thelma; it leaves her shelter less and broken hearted. Stephen’s frequent visits (on mental level) to his childhood are a result of his knowledge that his parents did not want him. Now, when he loses Kate and is left lamenting all alone without Julie, he is fascinated by the idea of waking the child in everybody. It is in a way, an act of escapism, which is later on, converted to hope and optimism. The death of the neurotic Charles is changed into the birth of a new baby.

Though a creative writer, Stephen could never realize the way Charles betrayed the voters when he was in politics. The sweet, ornamented and attractive language played the role of the seducing agent and Charles enjoyed his political career as long as he remained there:

He was a barrage-of-woods man … and all the time he kept talking, jabbing his forefinger in the air, uttering opinions he never thought he had, developing the oracular high style of the spokesman – ‘I think I speak for all of us when I say …’ (33)
To have an old friend like Charles in high office as a Junior Minister transformed the Government into an almost human process and made Stephen feel rather worldly. Stephen finds Charles’ political betrayal less severe than the childcare fake report prepared by Charles and the Prime Minister, which ultimately nullifies the intellectual efforts of Stephen and his fellow committee members. Parents all over the United Kingdom will never come to understand the conspiracy behind the childcare report. However, Stephen was betrayed like his English counterparts who were denied access to free education, pure and sufficient water, war free society and family welfare and supply schemes. The child in Time exemplifies ‘how time is not a certainty, not a reality of the world:

Time is a magical essence of life, an inexplicable entity that allows Kate to grow and exist within her father, that allows the ephemeral childhood of each person to continue existing throughout life …’ (Slay 205)

McEwan’s cold war espionage and a psychological thriller, The Innocent, is set in the divided Berlin around 1954 and the later Berlin of 1987. The plot of the novel is based upon an actual, but little known incident of the secret tunnel under the soviet sector which the British-Americans built in 1954 to gain access to the Russian’s communication system (Steinberg, Pub. Weekly). This novel is about ‘male concerns in an adult masculine world’ (Byrnes 205). It is an adventure story having a bizarre blend of spy stuff with sex, passion, murder and intriguing possibilities.

We have, in this novel, Leonard Marnham, a young innocent of twenty-five, a post-office technician from Tottenham, London who is sent on a mission- ‘Operation Gold’, a joint venture of CIA and MI6, as a clearance four spy. The Berlin, divided between West and East, was the occupied territory of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Leonard carries out his missionary work of constructing a net of wires and machinery. Simultaneously, he falls in love with Maria Eckdorf, a thirty-year-old German divorcee. Her ex-husband, a torturer by nature, Otto, is the chief concern of her uneasiness and insecurity.
Otto is not simply murdered at the end but dismembered and packed in two suitcases and hidden secretly in the warehouse in the tunnel. Eventually the news of the tunnel and CIA-MI6 spy network is revealed. Maria marries Bob Glass, an American spy and settles in Iowa, USA. Leonard returns to England and Otto’s death is covered up. The postscript of the novel mixes Leonard and Maria’s ‘present’ in 1987, with their past in 1954-56 and rekindles a hope for the readers to see the ex-lovers united after a gap of thirty years.

McEwan has very cleverly described the ‘innocent’ soldiers of USA and its allies and juxtaposed it with the cruel and exploiting Russians. Germany suffers a lot due to the cold war, the conspiracies and intrigues, seductions of innocents and betrayals in various forms. The spy effect may be politically acceptable and justifiable but socially, it was never enriching; it took Germany far behind the other war-torn nations. The ‘1987’ picture of the fast moving Berlin as narrated through Leonard’s perspective foreshadows the Berlin Union of November 9, 1989.

The Berlin Tunnel was a joint CIA-MI6 venture and operated for just under a year until April 1956. McEwan had first read about the Operation Gold in Spy Catcher. His efforts to discover more about it were controlled by the official secrets Act, so he finally went to America and obtained information through the American freedom of Information Act (Byrnes 206).

The beginning of the story itself reveals the act of seduction. The political heads of the spy agencies seduce Leonard initially and later on, the pride and the idea of false patriotism seduce this young, naïve, unsophisticated post office technician. Hardly had Leonard crossed the threshold of teenage, when he was invited for this tough job, the intensity of which was still unknown to him. He leaves Tottenham on the pretext of working on deputation in the war-torn Berlin. Only after reaching there, when he enjoys the luxury of his posh flat and gets the tag of clearance four spy, he realizes the danger. However, as usual there is no easy return possible. Once knowing the secrets, he gets carried away in the process of events so much so that he loses his
decision making capacity, forgetting what he had planned for and what he was made to do.

A series of seducing agents such as the fine job-offer, availability of elite-class facilities and life enriching love affair with Maria, seduce him literally and he gets lost in the chaos of digging the tunnel and wire works. Astonished and alarmed to find himself involved in top-secret operations, he feels politically betrayed. The way the Americans treat the Britishers in Berlin, though they are allies, has also some traces of betrayal. Lofting openly criticizes the notion of American teamwork:

They agree on one thing, and then they go their own way. They go behind our backs, they withhold information, they talk down to us like idiots. (10)

The ‘spying’ career of Leonard starts with a typical identity crisis, which he has to struggle with until the end of the novel. ‘Make sure you are who you say you are’ (4), Lofting pronounces and Leonard is warned not to reveal his identity. One finds the internal betrayals so common among fellow companions that the sense of superiority, loyalty and honesty lose its very meaning in the dark clouds of double crossing, leakages and dismissals. Leonard experiences the violation of the code of conduct to be followed meticulously by Britishers and Americans equally with a sense of loyalty and friendship. The special relationship masquerading as friendship includes ‘mutual distrust and efforts to spy on and steal information from one another’ (Byrnes 209).

Leonard’s role is made clear when Glass tells him to remain watchful, more watchful at 26, Platanenalle than his Dollis Hills post office back in England. Leonard meets one thirty year old Maria and gets relief from his routine work for a short interval. The state of women in Germany after the Berlin division was no better than an abused woman. Maria however succeeded in maintaining her privacy to some extent. Her marriage with Otto, when she was twenty, was a hasty matter, which later on collapsed, as expected by her parents who lived in East Berlin. Her first meeting with Leonard in a bar proves fruitful for both of them. Leonard is easily seduced by her beauty and
boldness. In spite of Glass’ warning, he meets Maria and is easily seduced by her invitation:

Mein Schoner, I have been watching you from my table. I would like it if you come and ask me to dance. But if you can’t do this, I would be so happy if you would turn and smile in my direction. (36)

From then onwards, Maria the seducer, a typist and translator by profession at a small British Army vehicle workshop in Spandau plays very important role in Leonard’s life.

Leonard finds out that she actually embodied contradictions – womanly power into her silent abstraction and a child like dependency in her quiet attentiveness. Throughout his stay in Berlin, he was lost in the mysterious glow of her face: ‘[The Face] shone for him, the way faces do in certain old paintings’ (43). Leonard is actually virginal, shy and awkward on his arrival in Berlin and until his arrival in Germany; he had conventional attitudes and conservative tastes. Maria, on the contrary, has considerable sexual experience and is able to teach him all about sex in a loving relationship.

Her initiation in the first act of sexual intercourse, a sort of nervous relief, easily seduces him. She finds herself freed from the bonds of self-constraints- ‘She had been suddenly absolved from the pressures and rituals of seduction’ (53). His tunnel activity at the warehouse turns into this ‘tunnel’ experience – ‘he was in a tunnel whose only end was his own fascinating annihilation’ (54). The so far virgin Leonard melts in her and she is proud to have him as her lover: ‘when this is your first time, then I am a very lucky girl’ (55). McEwan very aptly describes the confusion that arose in Leonard’s mind when he sees her naked for the first time.

It was rather like going to see a film that everybody else had been talking about; difficult to imagine in advance, but, once there, installed, partly recognition, partly surprises. (58)

Lastly, when he confronts Otto in Maria’s house, he tries to skip but it is Maria’s seductive urge, which turns to be a challenge to his manliness. Maria shouts back right into his face, saying, ‘now I want a man to look after me. I thought it was you, I thought you could do it’ (139). Maria’s seductive
challenge ignites an irresistible urge in Leonard and all set to save her dignity, he wrestles with Otto and kills him and cuts his body into pieces, packs it out in two suitcases and keeps it in his office room.

This murder keeps him awake for two consecutive nights. He is under tremendous pressure and the fear of getting caught red-handed hovers over him. Finally he succumbs to the demands of Maria’s safety, goes to Hans, reveals the secret of ‘Operation Gold’ and flies back to England. He betrays, for the fear of being caught or for his love affair, sexual relationship and Maria’s seductive behaviour.

‘I killed, dismembered, and betrayed’ (201). Leonard speaks to himself and feels guilty for having betrayed Maria by revealing her address. Even Otto, a kind teetotaler before seven years, thinks that Maria has betrayed him. A pervert and voyeur, Otto remains unlucky not to have watched Maria in bed with Leonard or anyone else from Berlin. After coming back to London, Leonard recalls the scene at the airport when he had seen Maria with Glass. It is enough to make him think that Maria has betrayed him. It is only because of Maria’s betrayal that he never writes her and the love story ends without any verbal battle.

The cold war between USA and USSR, the division of Berlin into West and East sector and its illegal occupation, can be identified as a form of political betrayal. Only the good news is that Leonard plans to visit Maria finally and comes back to see Berlin and the roads they had wandered on and the bedroom where they had seduced each other and the warehouse, where they had betrayed the USA government. Leonard, in 1987, is very much seduced and delighted by the idea of revisiting the places. He gets lost in the Berlin crowd of youngsters wearing tea shirts full of messages like ‘fuck you’. Leonard is anxious to show Maria the transformed Berlin and the people around, now singing Elvis Presley’s ‘Mystery train’ and Domino’s ‘Ain’t that a shame’.

McEwan’s next novel, Black Dogs (1992), is written in a ‘memoir’ form that depicts an ideological conflict between a couple, resulting in a cold war.
running parallel to the cold war between Russia and America or for that matter, between KGB and CIA. The story moves from the present to the past and vice versa and covers around forty-five important years in the history of Europe.

It begins with some last years of the Second World War and ends in 1989, with the fall of Berlin wall. The beginning of the novel symbolizes the delayed unification of humankind and the end suggests the victory of seducing capitalism over the betraying socialist utopia. Black Dogs takes the readers to England and then makes them wander in Italy, South France, Poland and Germany. It depicts biographical sketches of June and Bernard Tremaine as narrated by their son-in-law, Jeremy.

It stresses on the rift between a loving couple; the rift because of June’s life altering experience of ‘a transformational confrontation’ (Seaboyer 29) with the ferocious dogs left behind by the Nazis. It highlights her discovery of religion and the presence of God, her renunciation of the communist ideology, Bernard’s over-rated belief in socialist utopia, scientific rationalism, future welfare of the universal humankind and a pseudo-self pride. The two families – one that of Jeremy and Jenny and second, that of June and Bernard supply enough material for this psychological thriller of public life and politically inclined ideology.

It is also about the ways in which the past infects the material present of individuals and communities. The novel comments upon the socio-cultural situation in England during 1944-89, the concentration camps at Majdanec, the end of Communism in Russia and its disintegration into eighteen small countries and the fashionable use of Perestroika and Glasnost. In addition to this, the attacking ferocious dogs always remain at the centre.

According to Ann Skea, there seems to be a fashion in recent novels for confusing the reader about the identity of the storyteller – ‘for blurring the lines between fact and fiction, autobiography and biography, reality and fantasy’ (Skea, Eclectica). Skea opines that McEwan confuses matters more than usual in this book by naming the first chapter ‘preface’, making it sound autobiographical, and leaving his narrator un-named throughout. The careful
construction of the re-telling of events and the unusual sharing of intimate secrets between a woman and her son-in-law hints that he sounds ‘completely plausible and inconsistently believable’ in his role and in his story (Skea, Eclectica).

In this novel, we come across seducing agents like idealism, spiritualism, skepticism, parent replacement, cultural taboos, sex and its mystery, wife replacement and negativism. It is also full of betrayals in the form of broken political faith, disloyalty, genocide, escapism, secret revelations and dreams of freedom, acceptance of God, atheism and compensation. The title is quite suggestive and symbolic which at the outset creates the mood of darkness and a possibility of something sinister to happen. Christina Byrnes deciphers the title:

The black dogs are a powerful symbol from the universal unconscious. Black usually denotes death, the shadow or the evil side of the psyche and dogs or other dangerous animals stand for man’s animal nature, his instincts and uncivilized impulses…All these dogs bite, tear, dismember and are the objects of terror and the instruments of death and damnation. (243)

McEwan, very schematically uses the symbol of black dogs to denote the quarrel between the couple and the extremities as far as the political ideologies and the sense of pride is concerned. The culturally sanctioned meaning of blackness is approved by the author and further, he narrates through his mouthpiece, Jeremy, how this one time politically matched couple proved mismatched for their beliefs in spirituality and skepticism. June’s transformative confrontation with the mystic dogs leads to the acceptance of the divine power whereas Bernard’s disillusionment with the communist Utopia forces him to join the Labor party. Still they are kept apart by the destiny thanks to their ‘who will speak first’ complex and the egoistic approach resulting from the excessive individual freedom.

Jeremy talks directly to the readers about June, Bernard, Jenny, Sally and the broken wall. He is always present in the story except the last part of the novel. Jeremy has lost his parents at an early age, so he has to stay with his
sister Jean, her quarrelsome husband Harper and their loving child Sally. He leaves their house and joins Oxford and afterwards, he leaves Oxford and becomes a publisher of textbooks. Since Jeremy is seduced by the memory and loss of his parents, he develops a kind of habit of leaving one place after another. He leaves Oxford after four terms and continues to leave addresses, jobs, friends and lovers. He solves his oedipal problem by finding pseudo-parents and by fathering four beautiful children with Jenny:

I should have learned from my experience with Sally that the simplest way of restoring a lost parent was to become one yourself; that to succour the abandoned child within, there was no better way than having children of your own to love. (18)

Jeremy is unable to distinguish between guilt and love, so he seeks out other families. At the same time, he is haunted by Sally’s memory and by his inability to help her when she reports him her parent’s history. Jeremy’s act of getting engaged in memoir writing sometimes makes him nervous when he remembers that he himself had wanted to attain spiritual perfection and plans to support Sally, like a father. He feels that he has not only betrayed his own self but also Sally’s innocence: ‘I was out, I was free. But Sally’s dogged, suspicious question… were an indictment of betrayal… I felt them all behind. My guilt, my sense of betrayal would not permit me to return to Notting Hill, not even for a weekend’ (17). It is for the feeling of guilt that Jeremy invites an unwelcome fight with a rude family in France, as if to compensate his own absence from the black shadow of his foolish parents.

Besides Jeremy, it is June and Bernard who are seduced and betrayed a lot during their lifetime. Their first meeting and subsequent meetings until the end of the Second World War show the impact of war on their delayed marriage, as if the war betrayed and postponed the peaceful copulation of two holy souls. In this way, the realist focus of the novel can be summarized as the portrayal of the repercussions of the Second World War. McEwan later on relates war as a means of violence, with the fearful black dogs left behind by the Gestapo. The war fought with the lethal weapons betrayed humanity and
the ideological war of pride and ego between June and Bernard betrayed both of them reciprocally.

It was a happy time in their life when June would visit Bernard’s office and seduce him to invite her for a lunch, and he would happily agree to it. They married in 1946 and after leaving their jobs, went on a honeymoon trip to Italy and South France. In Italy, they worked for some weeks in a Red Cross Camp and afterwards went to France, the place that haunted June’s mysterious understanding and Bernard’s scientific approach, marching forward like a slow and steady procession of caterpillars.

Before marrying Bernard, June as a member of the local socialist Cycling club wanted to make a positive difference in the world: ‘Youth, optimism and bicycling along the Thames that was her impression of Communism’ (Bookrags.com). They both join the Communist party, as was the fashion of wartime England, with a hope to make the world free of war and class oppression. They feel that belonging to the party associates them with all that is youthful, lively, intelligent and daring. In France, they visit an ancient burial site, the Dolmen atop a hill overlooking the river Vis. They plan a long hike and get engaged in the discussion of the philosophy of socialist idealism. They were full of enthusiasm and are lost in the blissful memory of reciprocal seduction - their first sex:

I urgently wanted sex with Bernard, and I was terrified.  
We went up to the guest bedroom and stared to undress…  
And I knew that I was not able to turn back. I was miserable about it but I was also testing freedom. (56)

Her fear of pregnancy aptly throws light upon the socio-cultural obligations practiced in the England of twenties and thirties. While on their hike, she suddenly comes across two fearful dogs, which were actually trained to rape a woman. Her meeting with those dogs changes her life. The dogs work as a means of transformation and revelation; a mind is changed and occupied.

When the dogs begin to walk towards her, she looks back for Bernard but he is some three hundred yards away, busy in watching a very unusual caterpillar procession. She calls out to God and realizes God might be the only
protector to save her. In that instant, she feels an energy streaming through her, which she later describes as a coloured invisible light. She is saved but it brings about her total transformation from communism to spiritualism, faithless member to a faithful disciple, rational mind to a meditative soul and from a body of blood and flesh to a body of knowledge and spirit.

Later on, they live together for five years, ‘produce’ three children and are separated. They keep on loving each other but do not make a show of it until the end. Bernard, since a man of science, does not give ear to her dog phobia, the coloured invisible light and the pregnancy. She feels betrayed. She leaves communism that creates a feeling of betrayal in Bernard’s mind. Afterwards, it creates an invisible war of loyalty and disloyalty and the same goes on throughout their life.

Bernard denies the presence of such black dogs, suggesting the presence of evil thoughts in her mind at that time:

Churchill’s black dogs. You remember. The name he gave to the depressions he used to get from time to time… So June’s idea was that if one dog was a personal depression, two dogs were a kind of cultural depression. (104)

What the Mayor of St. Maurice de Navacelles said about the dogs remains unheard by Bernard. June is now fully under the spell of the revelation of the divine presence of God and remains so until the end of her life, without even thinking of having betrayed Bernard for accepting a belief that is against his atheism. She says ‘yes’ to Jeremy’s request to allow him to write her memoir because she had always considered herself neglected and had wanted to prove herself honest, real and practical. To Jeremy’s embarrassment and surprise, she reveals a delicate matter (small sized penis of Bernard) of her married life. Jeremy considers it a betrayal on her part.

The troubled relationship between June and Bernard symbolizes the conflict between intellect and feeling. Their lives epitomize the tug of war between political engagement and a private search for ultimate meaning. Their ideological and spiritual differences force them apart but never diminish their mutual love. In the familiar world of these two, the rational mind struggles with
superstition and faith—a fair struggle in which we are not sure whose side to support. The superstitious or ‘enlightened’ June suddenly apprehends an infinite, invisible but salvational good. The leaping, donkey sized dogs emerge as ‘an incomprehensible evil and a crucial turning point’ (Lesser, Republic).

The middle part of the novel that deals with Jeremy’s courtship with Jenny is also remarkable. It throws light upon Hitler’s betrayal as observed by them in Majdanek death camp where no name of murdered Jews has been mentioned. Bernard’s case is quite different from June. June confesses that she has been altered whereas even after joining Labour Party, Bernard inwardly supports the communist cause at Check Point Charley- Berlin wall demolition location.

Bernard has betrayed himself for his mistaken political allegiance and fake pride for keeping away from June and his sons and daughter. He does not realize that he has been seduced by the sense of loyalty and the names like Lenin and Stalin. June lives in the past, uselessly glorifying the dog event, whereas Bernard lives in future, in a dreamy world of permanent bliss. Had he paid attention to June’s dog anecdote (as he calls it), Auriac’s explanations of wartime Gestapo tactics at the hotel des Tilleuls and his inner voice of flexibility, the end of the novel would have been different.

The fall of Berlin wall in 1989, which had earlier been overshadowed in The Innocent reaches to its Zenith and comes down. Then only the people of East Germany realize that they were seduced by the American dream of ‘capitalist’ freedom and were betrayed by the communist utopia of the then U.S.S.R. The epigraph by Marsillio Ficino, which stands for ideological dilemma of Bernard, Lao-Tzu’s preaching as experienced by June, and Jeremy’s parent replacement, jointly contribute to the production of this fictional memoir.

Enduring Love (1997) begins with the death of a man in a ballooning accident that triggers a tale of stalking, fixation and erotomania. In this psychological thriller, we come across a Jesus freak stalker whose obsession with the protagonist disrupts normalcy of a number of lives. This novel is a
brilliantly written account of how a disturbing personality like Parry can invade and damage the lives of rest of the normal people. McEwan, in his unusual narrative style narrates the collision of everyday lives with the evil. In short, this novel can be read as a kind of commentary on all his fictional works:

> It asks us to choose between competing visions of events, and, in the process, forces us to examine the way we react to both art and life when something terrible happens. (Nesson, Boston Globe)

The novel opens quietly, with Joe Rose and his long time partner Clarissa Mellon enjoying a picnic in the English countryside. She has just arrived from U.S.A. where she had been doing research for her thesis on John Keats. As soon as they arrive at a desolate spot on the edge of a large meadow, they hear a man’s desperate shouts, and a loud cry of a child.

The novel opens with a catastrophe -the accident of a hot-air balloon, which carried in it one James Gadd and his ten-year-old grandson named Harry. James is unable to control the balloon and the balloon starts soaring, circling and dipping in the tumult of currents. The five brave bystanders who rush towards the balloon are Joe Rose (the protagonist), Dr. John Logan, Joseph Lacey and Toby Greene (the farm labourer) and Jed Parry, a young man of twenty-eight. The balloon lands safely, but in their combined effort to bring the balloon on the earth, Dr. Logan falls down from a considerable height and dies on the spot.

Almost all reviewers, notably Brian Morton, Peter Kemp and Jan Dalley have praised the first chapter, for its clarity, brevity, excitement and suspense (Byrnes 250). After the first chapter, the story takes unexpected turns and builds to become a kind of parable about obsession. One of the five rescuers, Jed Parry, a religious fanatic, believes that he and Joe are brought together by the will of God. Joe actually suffers from a homoerotic obsession, with religious overtones – a clinical variant of *de clambault’s syndrome*. Appendix- I of the novel describes that the patients of this syndrome suffer from strange religious convictions, delusions and suicidal tendencies. The
victims of *de clerambault’s syndrome* may endure harassment, stress, physical and sexual assault and even death.

Mentally ill, Jed Parry is a young man with sufficient time and money at hand. He starts chasing Joe, writing him love letters, telephoning him, waiting below his apartment window and threatening him through indirectly suggestive language. Joe is initially confused, but soon recovers. Since Joe is a rational thinker and a Ph.D. holder on ‘Magnetic field of the Electron,’ he tries to go to the root cause of Jed’s strange behaviour. Joe’s research takes him to *de clerambault’s syndrome* and he starts feeling sympathetic. In the meantime, Clarissa leaves Joe and he is left suffering. Joe’s own family problems, personal ambitions and Jed Parry’s uninvited overtures make Joe alienated and mentally disturbed.

Joe goes to the police station for lodging a complaint against Jed’s behaviour. The police, too, could not realize the seriousness of the situation. For them it was simply a case of homosexual attraction not stated clearly by Jed and not openly accepted by Joe. A clash between Jed’s spiritually coloured, revivalist language and Joe’s practically applicable humanist terms takes place. Finally, Joe escapes a gun firing attack by chance and in return fires a bullet to save Jed from committing suicide. The novel ends with Joe and Clarissa adopting a child and Jed Parry being sent to a mental hospital.

As seen in earlier novels of McEwan, here we have many instances of seductions, betrayals, and cultural transformations. As the story unfolds, a group of people is seen running towards the unfortunate balloon. This accident disrupts the normal life of all of them. A get-together party of Joe and Clarissa, Dr. Logan’s travel to London, Joseph Lacey and Toby Greene’s farm work and Jed Parry’s simple life is thoroughly disturbed. Moreover, it also changes the lifestyle of Mrs. Logan and her children. Mr. Tapp unfortunately falls victim to a bullet. Prof. Raid and Ms. Deed’s love affair is revealed. Inspector Lively gets confused over the strange love-hate relationship of two males. Clarissa’s fear of Alzheimer’s outbreak in the family shatters her peaceful family life.
Joe is a man of science who writes in science journals on various topics like Dinosaurs, the philosophy of smile and the telescope. He has researched on Quantum Electrodynamics with special emphasis on magnetic field of electrons. He is a rational thinker and is of the opinion that the world can do well even in the absence of God. His wife Clarissa is working on Keats and his poetry. This couple has enjoyed seven years’ childless married life. At the time of the unfortunate accident, she had just returned from the U.S.A. where was seduced by Keats and his romantic philosophy. In the same way, her ambitious lover had wanted to be a faculty member of the University department, wanted to do something extraordinary, but fails and feels guilty for not achieving his goal. These days, his regular lecturing and writing on science makes him feel that he was just copying the original material and doing nothing creative. A sense of betraying the past scientists has developed in him.

Therefore, it was a seduction party of Joe and Clarissa, which would have been more colourful and enjoyable in the bed of their London house but fate had something different in mind. Just as he was to open the cool neck of a bottle – a 1987 Daumas Gassac, he hears the shout and the uproar and he runs, as if seduced by the moment:

> What idiocy, to be racing into this story and its labyrinths away from our happiness. I ran faster. And there, suddenly, from different points around the field, four other men were converging on the scene, running like me. (1)

This moment was responsible for the complete transformation of Joe, Clarissa and Jed Parry: ‘…our white shirts brilliant against the green, rushing towards each other like lovers, innocent of the grief this entanglement would bring…’ (1). Joe’s premonition later on proves utterly true and the vulgar episodes of love scenes follow. When he lets the wine bottle fall to run across the field towards the balloon, towards Jed parry and others, he unconsciously chose, ‘a branching in the paths that foreclosed a certain kind of easeful life ’(1).

This act of benevolence of the five bystanders however brings the balloon down, but while doing so the most courageous athlete and mountaineer
Dr. Logan dies. Just after his death, Joe meets Parry: ‘…facing me, with the ground sloping away to left, was Jed Parry. He was twenty eight, unemployed, living on an inheritance in Hampstead’ (12). The exchange of their glances, though seemingly a natural process, breeds the seeds of something inhuman and pathologically ill defined:

He looked wretched, like a dog about to be punished. In the second or so that this stranger’s clear grey-blue eyes held mine. I felt I could include him in the self-congratulatory warmth I felt in being alive. (20)

This meeting of Joe with Jed Parry revives the so far hidden personality of Jed and he gets lost – forgets his status, morality and dignity. Instantly, he requests Joe to pray together for the deceased person. It gives rise to an erotic homosexual and false spiritual urge in the delicate mind and body of Jed Parry. Thereafter, he leaves no stone unturned to meet and talk to Joe. The over obsessive attraction, later on described by Joe as *de clermambault’s syndrome*, a combination of erotic delusions and schizophrenic psychosis, shatters the hitherto so simple and happy life of Jed Parry. He is seduced by Joe’s invisible attributes and betrays God, himself and Joe. The next, when he phones Joe, he hides it from Clarissa – starting a new feud – by allowing her to think and be misunderstood.

McEwan’s extreme patience with a story targeted at disintegration (Brookner 28) impresses the reader in the same vein as he had demonstrated in *The Comfort of Strangers* - the dangers of instant friendship and offers of hospitality. Joe, who is a freelance scientific populariser, finds his own world as fragile as the drifting balloon. The amorous behavior of Parry outdistances the behaviour of any normally constituted person and believes that it is because of the will of God. Both Joe and Parry honestly think that each one of them needs other’s help. On such occasions, they both seem to be seduced by each other. Only the difference is that Joe looks at it with a scientific approach and Parry never accepts or realizes that he is a pathological victim.

This affair, as Anita Brookner explains, is ‘erotomania disguised as concern, religion without morality, loving kindness designed as endless pursuit
and in the final analysis a will to extinction’ (Brookner 28). Parry is never tired of showing his urge to unite with Joe. He covers up the same sex attraction by bringing God in between:

The fact that you love me … and that I love you is not important. It is just the means to bring you to God, through love. You will fight this like mad because you are a long way from your own feelings. (66)

Thus, his continuous pleading and appealing deceives Joe and he starts feeling genuinely sorry for him. Slowly, when Parry’s urge becomes intense, he starts threatening Joe, telling him that with money and men at hand, he can achieve anything. The police and even Clarissa do not find anything frightening and worth worrying about. For her, Parry should be talked to freely and understood and reprimanded with love. Clarissa doubts the intelligence and scholarship of Joe in handling Parry; Joe feels betrayed by Clarissa and her seven-year-old love. He is hurt when she finds similarity in Joe and Parry’s handwriting and terms Parry’s case as his own invention: ‘You were so intense about him as soon as you met him. It’s like you invented him.’ (86)

Notwithstanding the pressure of his inner urge to love Joe, Parry arranges a shootout in which Joe escapes by chance. As a last resort, Parry intrudes in Joe’s house, threatens Clarissa and plans to kill himself in front of Joe. Appendix II in the novel states that Parry is still suffering from the erotic syndrome. McEwan has successfully narrated Parry’s dilemma and the sense of love by showing him imprisoned within love’s prison of self-reference: ‘You know it already, but I need to tell you again that I adore you? I live for you. I love you’ (245). In the process of expressing himself, Parry never thinks that he is unknowingly mimicking the sincerity and purity of love and betraying it by disrupting the happy life of a couple.

The accidental death of Dr. Logan has been deeply rooted in the mind of Joe. He feels sorry and guilty and considers himself and other rescuers responsible for it. So, when Mrs. Logan raises doubts, Joe feels betrayed by all the women folk of the world. He develops a peculiar male dominating nature, starts telling Clarissa that he is all right, and is the only right person. Clarissa,
on the other hand, pursues her own reasoning and exhibits her longing for a child through her open praise for Harry and Logan’s children.

*Enduring Love*, in this way takes the readers to a land of common pedestrians where sometimes eratomiomanics trod on and try to change the whole, existing cultural set up of a family and ultimately that of the society. Parry’s syndrome is as monumental and antique as the group of hippies who commit sins and still beg for absolution. It is as fresh as the dictum-Nazis wanted to always win and always cheat.

*Amsterdam* is described by McEwan as a contemporary fable. Three men- a composer, a newspaper editor and a politician- meet at the funeral of their former lover and a bitter feud is sparked off. This novel was awarded the Booker Prize for fiction in 1998. It is a morality tale and depicts something more than that revolves round these three important characters. Pamela St. Clair describes *Amsterdam* as McEwan’s ‘macabre’ modern morality tale (*Suite 101*)while Juliet Waters considers it an easy Sunday afternoon read tightly woven, plot driven and funny in a nasty way (*Mirror*).

Ian McEwan’s natural milieu is not Britannia but Europe. Amsterdam is set in London and for a short period, particularly at the end, in Netherlands. The title suggests its internationalism - though the novel is set in London, ‘its final destination is the Dutch city whose liberal euthanasia policies allow McEwan a poisonous final twist’ (Elie, *Village Voice*). According to Gabriele Annan, *Amsterdam* is ‘an intricate satirical Jeu d’esprit and topical to the point of Tom Wolfishness’ (*New York Review*). It is a thriller as well as a farce, as swift as a lethal bullet and as timely as current headlines and is indictment of human nature, with special reference to the sixties’ generation (Annan, *New York Review*).

This novel won the prestigious Booker Prize and the reviewers expressed that McEwan fully deserved it. However, they thought that the right writer was tapped for the wrong book (Kohn, *Critical Survey*), for it has flimsy satire, smart synthetic ending and cartoonist characters. McEwan’s earlier
interests such as grotesque private behaviour, the violation of privacy and a couple threatened by circumstances are also present in this novel.

The story runs in a linear motion and is far from complicated. Molley Lane dies in her forties. She was a restaurant critic, gorgeous wit, photographer and a darling gardener. She has just died after suffering from a terminal disease, which caused rapid deterioration of her healthy body and romantic mind. Her husband George Lane and her three former lovers, Clive, Vernon, and Julian, along with some acquaintances have gathered at a crematorium in London to pay her last respects. Clive is a well-known music composer who is busy in composing for the Millennium symphony. They have known each other from their college days. Vernon is the editor-in-chief of ‘Judge’ who had stayed with Molley for a year. Vernon is married to a beautiful and intelligent woman named Rose. Julian Garmony was Molley’s lover at the time of her death. He is a politician – a foreign secretary, and is sure to step up as the Prime Minister of England in the next election. Both Clive and Vernon detest Garmony for his strange socio-political views- Garmony favored ‘hanging’ and opposed the emerging alternative sexual life in metros.

Molley’s husband, George- (‘his own evil agent’ Baker: TLS) is a wealthy and greedy person who has made his living as a publisher. He owns one and a half percent share of the ‘Judge’. Molley always treated him badly and had many extramarital affairs. When Molley fell ill, he took her charge and looked after her, but, as a part of revenge, did not allow her friends to see her. Though she is no more at present, she remains at the centre of every activity in the novel.

One day George finds out some obscene photos of Garmony in which Garmony has cross-dressed to declare his ‘transvestite’ inclination. George sells those photos to Vernon. Vernon plans to publish these photos to attract the readership. Clive does not favour this. He travels to the Lake District to get inspired and to compose the symphony. One day, while wandering in the hills, a bird’s call inspires him. He gets so seriously lost in the fascinating tune that
he avoids being diverted by rescuing a woman from the grip of a highland rapist.

Both Clive and Vernon had earlier made a pact to euthanize the other one if he turns mad. Vernon, the self-serving, morally insensitive man is sacked for the publication episode of Garmony’s photos. He arranges Clive’s visit to the police station without his knowledge. When at last Clive and Vernon meet in the hotel in Amsterdam, they are fully prepared to euthanize each other. Both of them die in this way and Garmony lives happily ever after. All of them, until the end of the novel remain busy in betraying each other and exhibiting the loss of trust. Amsterdam has lots of seducing elements like beauty, wealth, political influence, name and fame: ‘In Amsterdam, McEwan lays claim to a world of terrifying violence and desire and offers us a world without metaphor, necessitating the triumph of melodrama’ (Burrows 2).

Molley’s was a fickle beauty and the long list of her lovers testifies it. While handling her successful career as a photographer and a restaurant critic, she simultaneously went on changing her lovers. Seduced by the sense of pride and beauty, she lived her life in her own way —maintaining physical beauty and mental balance. She had always been a matter of common gossip, among Londoners and media men and even until the ‘tingling in her arm, she could still turn a perfect cartwheel at the age of forty-six’ (3). Although a fickle friend, she seems to have betrayed nobody except her husband George by having extra marital affairs with Garmony. Because of this, Molley and George lived in two different corners of the same mansion. George felt betrayed and after her cremation, leaves no chance unexploited for ruining the images of her past lovers. In short, the whole terrifying tragedy of euthanasia and the spoiled image of Garmony is the result of George’s villainous character and vindictive nature. George, McEwan unconsciously suggests, must have speeded up Molley’s death: There was something seriously wrong with the world for which neither God nor his absence could be blamed. (5) Molley’s death was so painful to absorb for Clive that he wished she should have been killed before
she caught the mental disorder: ‘when she started to go under, I would have killed her with a pillow or something and saved her from everyone’s pity’ (9).

Obviously, it is a savage comment but it is a proof of Clive’s love for her. He had known Molly first, when ‘they were students in ’68 and lived together in a chaotic, shifting household’ (4). McEwan seems to have modeled Molley upon Joyce’s Molly Bloom in Ulysses (Kohn 5). He loved her feminine qualities, maternal empathy, social understanding and preferred her femininity to his colleagues’ masculinity, which always tended to destruction. She naturally possessed attributes of creativity, sensibility, mystery and a sense of participation with nature. Her openness of disloyalty was anytime better than the repressed hatred between Clive and Vernon that finally caused them to kill each other.

Clive is a composer, who has been commissioned to write the Millennial Symphony. Haunted by the thoughts of original creation, he forgets himself and even forgets the fact that he had requested Vernon to euthanize him in case he turned mad like Molly. As a composer, Clive has a high opinion of himself and even considers himself a genius; at times, immodestly though, compares himself with Beethoven. Musical notes seduce him to the extent of forgetfulness of his own self and his social and moral responsibility. Struggling to compose his Millennial symphony, he takes a short hiking trip to the Lake District in order to get inspired. On one of his hikes, he is inspired by a bird’s call and he says, “Yes, it is what I want!” With a pencil and a notebook, he tries to capture it, with the fear that the fragile inspiration may be destroyed if his mind is diverted. Unfortunately, at the same time the highland rapist was assaulting a woman in the nearby valley. Caught in the dilemma of capturing creativity at the perfect moment and helping the woman thereby forsaking the jewel of inspiration, he finally succumbs to the bird’s call. Of course, it is a betrayal on his part but McEwan vindicates his stand:

If he had approached the couple, a pivotal moment in his career would have been destroyed. The melody could not have survived the psychic flurry … He was in his music. His fate, their fate, separate paths. It was not his business. (96)
Clive openly abuses Vernon for his planned publication of Garmony’s photos in ‘Judge’. He considers it as an act of betraying Molly’s feelings, and Garmony’s private life: ‘We don’t like Garmony but [Molly] did. He trusted her, and she respected his trust. It was something private between them… she would have hated what you’re doing. Frankly, you’re betraying her’ (81).

Vernon is described as a blond man without much personality or charisma. This editor-in-chief was Molly’s lover in the mid ’70s and is an old friend of Clive: ‘He was widely known as a man without edges, without faults or virtues, as a man who did not fully exit. Within his profession Vernon was revered as a nonentity’ (32).

Vernon becomes a controversial figure within the ‘Judge’ campus after he proposes to publish the strange photos of Garmony. Initially he is opposed but after a successful campaigning, he wins the support, and admiration of his colleagues. He is helped and advised by Frank Dibben, who later replaces him. Vernon is seduced by the idea of tarnishing the popular image of Garmany and doing something like the holy crusade, saving England from an ill-natured prospective Prime Minister. While achieving his goal, he is betrayed by Clive, Frank and Rose. Just after Vernon was fired, he receives Clive’s postcard. It carries a threat and a warning- ‘You deserve to be sacked’ – which Vernon thought as an act of rubbing salt into the wounds:

The blindness of his accusers, their hypocrisy, their vengefulness, and above all the element that he considered to be the worst of human vices-personal betrayal. (161)

Frank acts as a spy for Vernon, informs him about his staff member’s views and helps Vernon in getting everybody’s support for the ‘photo-publication’ drama. However, the story is spoiled by Rose Garmony’s press conference and as a result, the management sacks Vernon. Vernon, forgetting the good qualities of Clive as a friend, reports the police about the Lake District episode and betrays his trust. Finally, the mutual betrayal arranged wisely by both Clive and Vernon and directed by each of them to kill the other, turns
tragic and both of them are ‘happily’ murdered, proving Amsterdam a pure
tragi-comedy in every sense.

Garmony has a reputation for his ultra-conservative political views. He
publicly declares his intolerance for alternative sexual lifestyles and
expressions. Moreover, what an irony! He is posing in the photograph – in a
woman’s dress, a transvestite. Whatever Garmony’s sexual interests might be,
his photos contribute to Vernon’s downfall in the publishing profession.
Amsterdam, like Enduring love, deals with many common issues like the fear
of mortality brought on by a recent death and the terror of madness. While
Enduring Love was a novel about how much it takes to destroy a solid,
ordinary man in a good marriage, Amsterdam is about ‘how little it takes to
destroy the lives and friendship of two vain, shallow, self absorbed characters’
(Waters, Mirror).

Three years after Amsterdam, McEwan published Atonement (2001) -
an impressive, engrossing, deep and surprising novel. It is a rich, meditative
world war II – era novel about ‘a headstrong 13-year old girl named Briony
Tallis who witnesses a rape at her wealthy family’s country house, sends an
innocent working class man to jail and ruins more than one life in the process
(Jeff, Newsweek). Shortlisted for the Booker Prize for fiction, it is widely
regarded as the best of McEwan’s fictional works created ever.

McEwan utilizes several stylistic techniques in this novel such as
psychological realism, metafiction (a novel about novel writing) and prolepsis
(the rhetorical trick of anticipation). It contains intertextual references to a
number of literary figures and their works including Jane Austen (Northanger
Abbey), E. M. Forster (A passage to India), Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen,
James Joyce, Rosamond Lehman, D. H. Lawrence and George Eliot. McEwan
called it ‘my Jane Austen novel’ (Jeff, Newsweek) and while writing this
novel, he says he had ‘a notion of country house and of some discrepancies
beneath the civilized surface’ (Jeff, Newsweek).

This ‘quivering love story set against a backdrop of war’ (Winder 40)
has been narrated in three parts – before, during and after the World War II,
including the post script as the part of postmodernist metafiction. For the readers, the novel is written by Briony Tallis, to be published after her death making McEwan as Briony’s meticulous, posthumous editor, of this ‘much more enveloping and less schematic structure’ (Sexton: Evening Standard). In continuation with his creative mood, McEwan emerges victor-leaving behind all the ‘macabre’ memories and shedding away the influence of William Burroughs, Philip Roth, Henry Miller, Saul Bellow, John Updike and their shocking writing (Sexton, Evening Standard).

Atonement consists of four parts. The first part spans only twenty-four hours of narrative time and takes place during the excessively hot summer of 1935. Most of the actions take place in the Tallis house. The second section moves between France and London during the days of the Dunkirk retreat in 1940, and includes some superb re-creations of wartime Dunkirk and St. Thomas’s hospital, where a group of trainee nurses treat the wounded soldiers of the war. The short, final section describes the developments of the later-day London. The last part is the epilogue, in which the central character of the novel, Briony Tallis, at the age of 77, suffering from visceral dementia, lastly finds solace in attaining the lifetime goal – atonement.

The Tallis Estate, located in the Surrey Hills in Southeast England is the scene of action in the first part of the novel. The first part narrates the incidents in the ‘Tallis’ mansion and its surrounding- the fountain, the groove, the small bungalow where Robbey and his mother Grace Turner reside. Emily and Jack Tallis is a middle aged, mature couple who has three children-Cecilia, graduate in literature from Cambridge, Leon, a plain banker and Briony, an imaginative girl of thirteen, constantly haunted by precocious ideas of creation. Jack works in Whitehall and is busy in pre-war preparations in the Ministry. He is an obvious philanderer, who stays away from Tallis Estate frequently on the pretext of busy work schedule. In fact, he is engaged secretly with someone else. Emily knows this well, but she keeps quiet and keeps on enjoying the luxuries of the Tallis Estate.
As the novel opens, Briony plans the performance of her play *The trials of Arabella* on the eve of the arrival of her brother Leon and his friend Paul Marshal, the chocolate emperor. Hermione, Emily’s only sister, now in Paris with her second husband, has left behind her children Lola, Jackson and Pierot at the Tallis Estate. Though the performance of the play fails, other more important events, as if crafted by destiny itself take place. Robbey Turner, son of the housekeeper, is also the part of this family as Jack financially supports him. He has, like Cecily, just returned from Cambridge after completing his graduation in literature.

Cecilia and Robbey, as watched through the window by Briony, argue about the vase, which in turn falls and breaks down. Cecilia, in order to impress Robbey, or to overcome the repression of her love towards him, strips off in front of him and climbs into the fountain. It results into their friendship and he sends Cecilia a letter via Briony about his dreaming of kissing her triangular lower part of the body. It excites Cecilia, but disturbs Briony. Next, when they make sexual advances in the dark corner of the house, Briony interrupts. Just after this, Hermione’s twins run away; search parties are arranged to make extensive search, Lola is assaulted by Paul Marshall and Robbey is sent to jail for five years imprisonment. Around 1940, Robbie is being sent to France to fight against the Nazis as a soldier on parole. He is wounded while retreating to the coastal area of Dunkirk. However, he comes back to England and meets Cecilia, who now works as a trained nurse. Once Briony knows the truth of Robbey’s innocence, she joins as a trainee nurse and tries to heal the wounds of the soldiers.

Briony, an imaginative girl, who had always dreamed of becoming a great writer, and who mistakenly had sent Robbey to prison, realizes her fault and tries to mend it. Finally, at the age of seventy-seven, she writes a novel, *Atonement*, which cleverly hides the deaths of Robbey and Cecilia, unites them, and considers herself fully atoned, free from sins. The novel covers seventy long years, from the pre-World War II period to the end of the twentieth century and comments upon the socio-cultural changes during this
period. The strange mishaps that take place in the novel are, ultimately the result of some seductive promises and betrayals in different forms. The first part of the novel, which ushers us into a domestic crisis, turns into a crime story centered on the hyperactive thirteen-year-old Briony. As an intelligent child with a rage for order and a tendency to judge before comprehending, she is one of the novel’s achievements (Woods, New Republic).

The first part of the novel opens with the arrival of Lola and her twin brothers who are supposed to act in the play, The Trials of Arabella written by Briony. She had wanted to give a grand welcome to her elder brother Leon, who was coming to Tallis Estate on that particular day. The play termed as 'stupendous' by her mother Emily, was ‘at some moments chilling, at others desperately sad’ (3). Briony was convinced that it was only possible through writing that she could make an unruly world into something, which was well planned and well organized. McEwan, while writing the novel must have been thinking about ‘the pitfalls of being seduced by one’s own literary powers’ (The Economist, Review 2001). Here, it is noteworthy to mention that Briony is seduced by two ambitions - she wants to be a writer and she wants to be an adult.

Because of this, she prefers to become an onlooker seduced by every incident that takes place in and around that well protected Tallis estate. Her brother arrives but to see the failure of the play. Irritated by this, Briony the child writer, starts weaving webs in order to give vent to her literary inventions. She watches Cecilia and Robbey’s meeting at the fountain, breaking down of the vase, Cecilia’s stripping off her clothes and after reading his erotic letter, enters into the dark space of the library and separates the nearly copulated couple. Finally, she witnesses Lola abused by Paul Marshall and in her creative mood, wrongly blames Robbey for his so-called misbehavior. It reminds the reader of the incestuous siblings watched by Derek in The Cement Garden. In the same way, Briony’s charges based on wrong assumptions, shatters the love story of Cecilia and Robbey. Her seduction betrays not only herself but also every member of the family in general and Cecilia and Robbey in particular:
She trapped herself; she marched into the labyrinth of her own construction, and was too young, too awestruck, and too keen to please, to insist on making her own way back. She was not endowed with, or old enough to possess such independence of spirit ... She was able to keep from mind the damage she only dimly sensed she was doing. (170)

In part IV of the novel, Briony is once again seen seduced by the thought of Robbey’s love. She declares that she is to be mentioned as Briony Tallis and not as Nurse Tallis. This action of Briony betrays the rules and regulations of nursing profession laid down by Florence Nightingale. Her act of secretly reading Robbey’s letter to Cecilia, which declared his wish to kiss her body, is also the result of her fragile and fickle mind, easily tempted and seduced by the thought of becoming an adult writer. However, she deliberately neglects the assertion of the fact that reading the letter and narrating the contents of the letter to Lola, was an act of betrayal on her part. She betrayed Robbey’s faith and innocence:

Listen to me, I couldn’t mistake him. I’ve known him all my life. I saw him ... It was the sound of his voice, breathing, noises. (167)

Cyril Connolly, describing her imaginative material lacking in substance and credibility, returned what Briony saw as the absolute truth with a word of advice: ‘Your address suggests you may be either a doctor or suffering from a long illness; if the latter, then all of us wish you a speedy and successful recovery’ (315). Briony never recovers, after that dreadful night of assault in 1935. She laments her testimony – sending Robbey to jail and consequently Cecilia’s estrangement. She madly pursues Cecilia and Robbey and declares her readiness to recant the testimony. She is severely seduced and haunted by the thought of atonement that she at once decides, to write happily ending story and to unite Cecilia and Robbey. In this way, she tries to come out blameless and erase the memory of her betrayal.

Briony’s parents are a happy couple in the sense that they do not fight openly, neither do they make any apparent show of their inward, smoldering combustion. Jack is a beaurocrat in the Ministry and mostly stays away from
the house. Actually, engaged in an affair, he tries to hide it from his wife. His efforts to undo his seduction, passion for sex or relationship with other women betray himself. Betraying herself and seduced by the luxury Emily enjoys Jack’s social and financial status. McEwan comments upon Jack’s conventional hypocrisy and still glorifies the couple’s sense of maturity, which have kept them united.

Apart from Jack’s unfaithful behaviour, he is otherwise a considerable head who looks after his family and at the same time, as a token of benevolence, helps Robbey financially. Even Emily, who is an accepting, ineffectual and migraine-ridden mother, never hesitates in helping Robbey. A young Cambridge graduate in literature, Robbey lived with his mother Grace on the Tallis Campus. It was not until he saw Cecilia’s half-naked, wet body at the fountain that he started dreaming of her. Though seduced by each other, both Robbey and Cecilia never expressed their love. Seduced by the thought of punishing Robbey for his distancing, indifferent attitude and her own frustration, she strips off:

She kicked off her sandals, unbuttoned her blouse, and removed it, unfastened her skirt and stepped out of it and went to the basin wall. He stood with hands on his hips and stared as she climbed into the water in her underwear.(30)

Her idea was to humiliate him, tempt him to rise above his ‘thank you’ attitude and show him how beautiful she was. He is easily seduced and by mistake, sends an obscene letter to her and all the rest becomes known to the world. Blamed and accused by Briony, Robbey is sent to jail. Both Robbey and Cecilia keep quiet and betray each other by accepting the unfortunate situation.

‘Cecilia’s provocative stripping had more to do with erotic challenge than submission of fear’ (Wood, New Republic) but she is unable to maintain the mood and the courage. Since he is wrongly punished, instead of making a revolt, she contracts inside. Robbey’s attraction towards Cecilia betrays Briony – as he becomes forgetful of one old swimming tank incident with Briony. It is Cecilia’s letters, declaring her lifelong desire to wait for him, which rekindle in him the flame of hope and a wish to come back to England from France.
Finally, the Dunkirk retreat casualty and Hermione’s escape to Paris shows that a divorce is also a type of betrayal with self and the society. The most heinous act in this novel is the marriage of Lola and Paul Marshal. For Briony, it is a shock. For Cecilia it is a relief, and for Robbey, it is simply an act for act’s sake. McEwan, as usual, relies on the narrative twist and succeeds in leaving behind the ‘macabre’ image.

Two years after this bestseller, McEwan published his most ambitious work Saturday in 2003. Written in ‘Medical English’, Saturday unfolds the events of a day-in-the life of one renowned brain surgeon Dr. Henry Perowne. The day starts with Henry’s waking up at 3:40 am and ends with a complicated, exhaustive brain surgery. It is February 15, 2003 and it is a special Saturday, which is an eventful day with many household and personal responsibilities for Henry. On this very day, he visits his hospital, plays a squash match with Jay Straws, and meets his ailing mother who is kept in an old age home, witnesses a long march of anti-war demonstrators and goes on a shopping stint. He meets a small car-accident, indulges in a physical and verbal clash with a street thug, cooks fish for his daughter and father-in-law and even attends a rehearsal of his son’s forthcoming musical ‘blues’ feast.

The novel captures the nuances of Henry’s public and private life by making the readers look at the events of twenty-four hours through his spects. It may not be a perfect work, but it has become ‘very intelligent, scholarly, informative and a hyper-real work’ (Brookner, Spectator) for it has ‘bravura evocations of surgical operations that are unrivalled in fiction’ (Raine, TLS). In the ‘foreword’ to this novel, McEwan quotes a passage from Saul Bellow’s Herzog, which suggests a complete transformation of the iPod generation, ‘in a society that was no community and devalued the person’ (Bellow, Herzog).

The novel opens with Henry, forty nine year old, wealthy athlete waking from his bed before dawn, feeling alert and inexplicably elated. He sees a plane coming down over the Post Office Tower, trailing a fireball from its wing. This doctor, living in a 7000 sq. ft. luxurious bungalow is a man of profound competence, and is blessed with a loving marriage and a pair of beautiful and
talented children. His daughter, Daisy, an undergraduate student, is influenced by her grandfather John Grammaticus’ poetry. On this very day, she is coming to London from Paris. His son, Theo, is a musician singer, guitarist and pianist. He is busy composing and rehearsing for his future concerts to be performed by his ‘New Blue Rider’ group. His beautiful and loving wife, Rosalind, his past beloved and ex-patient, works as a legal advisor to a London Newspaper.

We come across Jay Strauss, Rodney Brown, Gita sayal, Sally Madden and Heather in his well-established Brain Hospital. Henry is obsessed by work and has, as always, a calculated timetable, which does not work according to his plan. It is the morning of the antiwar march, the greatest ever massing of people on the city streets gathered to oppose the Iraq war.

Further on his program list is his routine Squash match with Strauss, which he loses. He visits his mother suffering from Alzheimer’s and returns with a heavy heart. His events start to run out of control when he crashes his car and is confronts with the road rage of Baxter and his two friends. Baxter, the only villain in the novel functions as an outside menace. He has a degenerative brain disorder termed as Huntington’s disease. He feels humiliated and betrayed by Henry and God. He decides to seek revenge by intruding into Henry’s house. The whole family goes through a rigorous tension. Daisy’s pregnant, naked body and her rhythmic and touchy recitation of Mathew Arnold’s Dover Beach finally save them. At the end, Baxter, the aggressive young man, is taken to Henry’s hospital and the novel ends with a happy note.

The seducing agent in this novel is not visible to the naked eye; it is just as the Schrodinger’s dead cat locked in a box of uncertainties can only be decodified once it is opened. It is either covered under the foreign policy of the U.K. and the U.S.A. or is hiding in the human mind, trying to resolve the age-old battle between reason and violence. The Second World War and its consequences, the scientific revolution, the spiritual degradation of the ‘mixed’ generation, colonization of human mind, constant fear of the unknown and threats from the sky have joined hands with each other to make the modern
man maniacally interested in everything. A machine is what has become of a man gaining motion at the button start and coming to a standstill with the closure.

Henry Perowne, whose pre-dawn session, a warm up for the whole day, starts with a typical motion. Seduced by fear, security, work, love, curiosity and longing, he is apparently making a show of bravery, courage and superiority and while doing so, is betraying his own self. McEwan’s choice of the familiar motif of outside menace is in fact vividly conspicuous here; outside here becomes inside and the vice-versa. Henry represents the sensible and hypersensitive youth of post 9/11 Europe who has lost faith in God and has become lost in the limbo of doubts. It is perhaps due to the memory of captives in the plane that Henry is under a constant threat of something devilish and unforeseen. It is that fear of life deeply rooted in Henry: Everyone agrees airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed (16).

From the very first page of Saturday, readers usually find themselves, like Joe in Enduring Love, running towards a catastrophe, which haunts throughout the novel until the violent forces subside and the domestic contentment wins over the roadside rage. McEwan seems to have learnt everything of brain and its ‘breaking’ under the guidance of Dr. Neil Kitchen, a consultant neurosurgeon from London. His attraction for making fictional work look like a matter of fact document of non-fiction, to be preserved for the sake of truth, seems to have borne out of his obsession and attraction for fame, name and glory. In fact, McEwan is seduced by the taxonomy, which is so dear to him.

His friendship with medical terms like ‘radiofrequency coagulation,’ ‘multilever lumbar laminectomy, ‘vestibular schwannoma’ makes his work look more real but to his dismay, it turns more complicated for the readers, who may feel betrayed by a writer of his stature. This betrayal may be because the novelist has overused them for making it more convincing.

The prevailing mood of the public who protest against the Iraq war is due to the fear of extinction and the sense of insecurity. It is evident in the
opposing forces between despair and courage aptly composed by Theo, in one of his songs –

… Baby, you can choose despair,
Or you can be happy if you dare,
So let me take you there,
My city square, city square… (Saturday 170)

The feeling of security is so urgent that as Mark Lawson observes, if Saturday were to have another eight-letter S-word as its title, it would be security. Henry’s ideal London life needs it severely as there has always been the fear of ‘sudden ambush of the safe and smug’ (Lawson, Guardian). Henry’s familiar dilemma of ‘intervention’ or isolationism’ sometimes makes him doubt the very authenticity of the Government. At times, he feels betrayed when he questions himself about the foreign policy of the government that is exposing him to danger.

The fact that Henry’s comfortable life is shaken following a run-in with Baxter is the best example of foreboding and that of the entry of outside menace. It proves how ‘even the simplest events can snowball into complex moral dilemmas’ (Rosenheim, Pub. Weekly). As he drives through the crowd, Henry has a minor fender-bender with Baxter. In order to prove his superiority and ensure safety he makes the mistake of humiliating him by correctly diagnosing: He has the impression of himself as a witch doctor delivering a curse (94).

Baxter feels humiliated, insulted and betrayed by Henry and the God in heaven who has made him such ‘a biologically determined villain’ (Cooper, Arena). He is the worst caricature and pitiable, the outcome of McEwan’s ‘pitiless stereotyping of Huntington’s disease’. Nancy Wexler, herself being the victim of Huntington’s, calls it ‘unintelligible’ on the part of McEwan to have made Baxter so (Wexler and Rawlins, Lancet). Frank Keating compares Henry with Jonah Barrington, a famous Squash champion, who once, after defeating the opponent, had said, ‘I looked deep into his eyes and could see his defeat, his utter humiliation, his degradation …’ (Keating, Spectator).
The same type of sadistic savagery is evident in Henry’s profession. He tactfully degrades Baxter. In response to this, since he was incurable, and had nothing to lose, Baxter returns violently to confront Henry at home, where he is busy preparing food for the guests. Culture wins once again in the battle between culture and barbarism. Baxter is seduced by Daisy’s reading of Arnold’s *Dover Beach* and is saved from committing one more unforgivable sin of raping an innocent.

Henry is a workaholic doctor seduced by work and love for his wife. He is almost maniacally interested in everything around him and always keeps the ‘pedestrian diagnostician’ inside him busy (Tait, *TLS*). The fundamentalists, who are fighting for the wrong cause and adopting wrong ways, are betraying themselves and the millions of innocents around the world. At the same time the Iraqis think that they are betrayed by the world politics of the U.S.A.: Henry utters what is still largely impossible to say in the west- that the possibility of terrorism perversely excites us, that while everyone fears it … there is also a darker longing in the collective mind, a sickening for self-punishment and a blasphemous curiosity’ (Cooper, *Arena*).

*On Chesil Beach* (2007) described sarcastically by Karl Miller as McEwan’s ‘south coast romance’ is actually no romance at all (Miller, *TLS*). On the contrary, it is a story of failure of a romantic couple, who had loved and tied a knot of marriage, missed the bus to an everlasting happiness of sexual intercourse. Edward Mayhow, 23, is a history lover who has lately started working in his father-in-law’s office. He is carrying forward the legacy of damaged mother and an Oxfordshire trained father.

Florence Ponting is a music lover like *Amsterdam*’s Clive Linley, who readily says, ‘yes’ to Edward’s offer of love but finally proves uninterested in ‘sex’ as was expected and honoured by the society of pre-1960 England. It is 1962, the pre-sexual revolution period in ‘Modern’ England which, with its taboo (lack of sexual communication), is responsible for the failure of marriage of these two young lovers. Edward loves Florence and envisions lifelong
domestic joy with this beautiful lady. However, plagued by their past and private anxieties, they cannot bring themselves to discuss ‘sex’ openly:

[The Chesil Beach] is not fabulous. It is accountable, domestic. It imagines, with humanity, the plight of a severely bashful virgin. (Miller, TLS)

The novels also imagines the plight of a young man, who had day dreamed of having sex, masturbated regularly and hadn’t learnt the skills of handling a woman in the bed. For him, the act of sex is a means of proving his manliness, strength and love; for her, love is pleasing and sexual intercourse is disgusting, better if avoided. Both Edward and Florence are seduced by the idea of love but they unconsciously betray each other. Rachel Aspden looks at this episode from a different point of view. According to her it is the story of two innocent youngsters who are longing for the transition from innocence to maturity and are trying to replace the old order of conservative rules and conventions with the new world of CND rallies, music and sex (Review). For Windor, it is ‘a story of [two] youthful energies [who] were pushing to escape like steam under pressure’ (Winder, New Statesman).

The opening line of the novel itself sums up the unavoidable clash of feelings and the well judged separation of the married couple.:

They were young, educated, and both virgins on this; their wedding night and they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible. (3)

Edward and Florence, arrive at a hotel on the Dorset Coast. After dinner in their room, they struggle to suppress their private fear of the wedding night – he is afraid of ‘coming’ pre-maturely and she is not prepared to accept something ‘in’, that is not ‘Edward’. She considers his testicles, pendulous below his engorged penis, something horrifying and hates the idea someone, even Edward ‘touching her secret part, down there’ (8). His personality and praise for her that ‘she was the squarest person in all of Western Civilization’ (127) seduces and, pleases her ego and makes her ready for the intercourse. Nevertheless, she repents that she has not told him about her idea of love, which was love minus sex for her:
She knew she should have spoken up long ago, as soon as he proposed… But what could she have said, what possible terms could she have used when she couldn’t have named the matter to herself? And she loved Edward, not with the hot, moist passion she had read about, but warmly, deeply, sometimes like a daughter, sometimes almost maternally. (9)

Once settled, they indulge in the ‘honeymoon’ sex act, he ‘comes’ over her body and she like a mad vampire, starts wiping it and making herself clean. Tempted with sudden outbreak of anger and the sense of degradation, she runs away from the hotel room to the Chesil beach, about two miles away from the hotel. When finally they meet on the beach, their struggle to understand each other and efforts to make reconciliation fails. Edward is blamed for his violent, animalistic instinct and Florence is blamed for her unwomanly likings and frigidity. They betray each other, though no one of them does it deliberately.

McEwan, throughout his considerably long novelistic career, which began in 1978, developed a strategy for analyzing the intelligent heads and oxidizing the warm hearts. He is still at the writing table creating and erasing, and recreating some angelic innocents who can be easily seduced and betrayed and a flock of conspirators whose only mission will be to inflict the tortures.

*****
Works Cited


- Bronte, C. Jane Eyre. Harmondsworth: Penguin, (1847) 1985, P. 56 as cited in Ostuni (Brindishi) by Christopher Williams


• -------------- Enduring Love. London : Jonathan Cape, 1997; Vintage, 2004


• Nesson, Nicholas. “Are the Catastrophes of Life tragic or only horrible?” Boston Globe Online. 21 Sept. 2007. <www.boston.com/globe/search/stories/books/ian-mcewan.htm>


