

**The Elements of Postmodern Gothic: A Critical Study of the  
Selected Works of Ian McEwan**

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

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in

**ENGLISH**

By

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## Introduction

The present age is an age of deepening despair and appalling catastrophes, where people talk of peace but in actuality prepare for wars. The people of this era are grievously beset with pain and fear on many accounts. The things seem out of harmony, incongruous and unreasonable and the accent is placed on the senselessness of life. The postmodern life is seen to be embittered, lacking emotional bonds and full of conflict, disorientation and depression which is presented by Ian Russell McEwan in a penetrating manner. The postmodern writers depict different ways to meet the challenges of surviving the changing scenario, when people are living under continued nuclear threat, destruction of the family and loss of faith in institutions which previously provided them security and ordered society. The fear is so widespread in society that it has become the central problem. The contemporary writers are mostly inclined to make their novels realistic by unravelling the inner workings, emotions and feelings of the characters. The novel as a literary genre holds a unique position in this world of cultural impasse as it reveals greater truths.

The title of the present thesis is “The Elements of Postmodern Gothic: A Critical Study of the Selected Works of Ian McEwan. This thesis intends to explore the elements of postmodern gothic such as fear, death, terror and horror through the analysis of the selected works of Ian McEwan (1948-present) such as *The Cement Garden* (1978), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), *Enduring Love* (1997) and *Nutshell* (2016). McEwan’s novels explore the darker images and the realms of psychological issues that people face in everyday life. He wants to enlighten his readers about the fundamental problems and issues through his characters, who are mentally paralysed by their circumstances. In his works, the readers see a society that is striving towards addressing the burning issues of time which he elucidates through his tales of alienation, fear, terror, horror and death etc. His writings explore the darker images of humans as well as society which sometimes go unnoticed in day-to-day existence.

McEwan wants to enlighten his readers about the conditions and sufferings of the present world, who get effected by them. He uses shocking scenes, dreary diction, dark imagery, dissolution of relationships and a macabre atmosphere so that a morbid tone is created, thus showing the actual scenario to people. There are some of the significant issues dealt in his novels that traumatise people all over the world.

McEwan tries to address the broader issues of this bleak postmodern world. Writing for about four decades from 1975, his novels can be classified under various categories such as novels of ideas, historical novels, or documentary novels. There is a radical change in McEwan's train of thought from the dawn of his writing career. It is preferred here to briefly introduce his novels based on the gradual expansion of the scope of their themes that begin with microcosmic issues such as personal conflicts, domestic violence, maturity motifs etc. and then move on to larger issues that concern the British society and Britain's national predicaments. Finally, McEwan's works move toward international macrocosmic matters such as the catastrophic Iraq war, terrorism and cosmic issues like global warming or the energy crisis. The first two novels of McEwan namely, *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers* are concise narratives of dark revelations. *The Cement Garden* is a gothic novel dealing with the sexual maturity of adolescents and the destruction of a family. McEwan's second novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, is a tale of sexual menace and pinpoints sadomasochistic love in a twisted relationship between two couples in a macabre atmosphere. Passing the noticeable themes of his early works which are masculinity and femininity, violence, perverse behaviour and macabre atmosphere etc. McEwan in his next novel, *The Child in Time*, recounts the traumatic impact on a couple, whose daughter is abducted. The novel also discusses the idea of time and synchronicity.

A reliable indication of the expansion of McEwan's literary vision is his next three novels, where McEwan, writes the novels of crisis and of transformation. The examples of this stage are *The Innocent*, which is an idiosyncratic version of the spy thriller based on a real story of the Berlin Tunnel. It was set during the early Cold War years of espionage. *Black Dogs*, a potent parable of evil in which a couple encounter two terrifying dogs while on honeymoon in France, followed by the mysteries of their relationship. McEwan's treatment of contemporary issues in fiction merits critical concern. Within the frame of a family dispute, *Black Dogs* touches upon major events such as World War II, the 1940s German death camps and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 etc. The novel concludes with a bold message that the black dogs will revisit the world at some point in time. *Enduring Love* opens with a horrific helium balloon accident and traces its effect on the surviving onlookers.



As a historian of the contemporary time, he gives a prophetic portrayal of the disintegrating civilization of the present. McEwan through his writings depicts the meaninglessness of daily life. Moving from microcosmic issues and initiating macrocosmic subjects, McEwan writes a satirical novel, *Amsterdam*, whose focal point is national vicissitudes like the end of the Conservative party and Thatcherism in 1998. The next novel in this stage is *Atonement* which is a self-reflexive historical metafiction, exploring guilt and reparation. *Saturday* is another novel in this cluster which introduces the reader to the post-9/11 scenario and the manifestation of the Middle-East crisis in Western fiction. *On Chesil Beach*, which is set in the year 1962 tells about the huge shift in sexual and social relations and *Solar* with its multidimensional themes, is an ethical confrontation of the phenomenon of Global Warming. His *Nutshell* is a classic tale of murder and deceit.

In his novels, McEwan gives a graphic account of the horrors of the cities. The city has a dehumanizing effect on the characters: it takes away from them, the ability to form a life-affirming relationship. The characters fail to establish an interpersonal relationship and hence are on the periphery of the societies. Some of them are outcasts and some are ostracized to such an extent that they become rebels of the society. Many of the characters in Ian McEwan's short stories are derelict adolescents, who are at odds with society. The narrator deplores the plight of the city of London in *First Love*, *Last Rites*. The chemical smell, the yellow scum, is emblematic of the stagnation of the post-industrial city. The dehumanizing aspect of London is repeatedly stressed in the later novels. The overall picture of London is as an 'evil entity.' The picture of London is presented as a dystopian vision in the novel, *The Child in Time*. The recurring concept of tragedy in McEwan's novels is remarkable. He wants to drive home the idea that it is quite easy to step from stability and happiness to a world of nightmares. Colin and Mary took a wrong corner in *The Comfort of Strangers* and fell into the trap set by Robert. Stephen loses his daughter on a casual shopping visit in *Child in Time*. There is an unhappy turn of events on the day of the engagement party, Maria and Leonard come face to face with murder in cold blood. In *Enduring Love*, the ballooning incident brings clouds over Joe's pleasant life.

The postmodern gothic readings of the fiction stress more on the resemblances than the differences. The city as depicted in the late twentieth century novels is not a sustaining entity, it has now become a cesspool of modern afflictions. The city has

come to typify all the human wrongs; it is an objective correlative of the inhuman cruelties. The image of the city in the novels of McEwan is a presence and not a setting. The city is depicted as a desolate wasteland in *The Cement Garden* and an 'ominous entity' in *The Comfort of Strangers* which has a corrupting influence upon the characters. They are neither restricted to any particular nation nor limited to any specific period. The novelist comes to look upon life in its entirety and complexity. The characters in McEwan's short stories are psychopaths or perverts. He explores the abnormal relationship established by characters, who crave for affection and companionship. They are a helpless, lifeless lot and they are to a great extent being isolated by the city. The shock strategies, that earned him the title 'Ian Macabre,' were unambiguously the hallmark of his early short stories and novels. Through these shocks, McEwan wants to make his readers realize the sordidness and disorder outside, in the real world. The truth on the other hand is also that the modern world is immunized to the shock.

McEwan's novels draw the attention of the readers to the conditions of the contemporary world. His works depict the present crisis in one way or the other. In his fiction, the characters are found trapped between fear of both the past and the future. His characters are aware of the existence of evil and his fiction is written from the perspective of a fallen world. His novels revolve around characters who violate the rules and values of society. His characters deeply expose the presence of evil and cultural crisis in this world, thus tempting the readers to think, what way of living one should follow to live and attain a happy life? The novels of McEwan show a fairly dull perspective on society, brimming with mean and fraudulent figures. They clearly express the fears, terrors, horrors and deaths etc., commonly viewed as the scenario of the present world. The writers of this period are fully aware of the fact that there is no stability- socially, morally and economically.

In this rapidly changing social scenario, the writers like McEwan understand that people are swaying between pessimism and optimism. These are the times which make even the common people think about the deplorable conditions of their society. McEwan's literary world involves a great extent of gothic writing, but this lavishness is not easily brought out through his narrative description of bizarre landscapes. The gothic identity of McEwan in many senses is revealed through the psychological darkness of the characters. Though he does not make extensive use of gothic imagery but a distinct gothic identity is aroused by an apocalyptic quality in his works. In his

novels, he creates a loathsome vision of the convict world with the most expressive remarks. The terrifying scene on the human psyche is unbearable as he presents a disfigured, nightmarish and fragmented world which is full of suffering. In his novels, he adopts gothic conventions like the dreary landscapes, criminal mind, unlit muddy streets, gloomy outskirts and vast tenements with their twisting dark staircases etc. which have a disturbing diabolical influence over characters and events.

McEwan evokes a dark underworld of the tormented human psyche, later on becoming tangible threats. His vivid description of characters and incidents evokes a mood of concern, dread, oppression, fear, terror and horror. But his writing is not confined to haunting psychic darkness and frightening landscapes. His images are as weirdly mysterious and effective as other conventional gothic novels. In *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers*, for example, McEwan's description of the landscape and certain appalling images are extremely gothic, representing a world of sinister menace. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, he depicts the image of the city as dark and hostile presenting moments of extreme uncertainty and alienation. McEwan builds his mature vision of evil humans upon the insights of human psychology.

The destructive power of man's basic nature is the focus of authors such as Jack in *The Cement Garden*, and Claude and Trudy in *Nutshell*, with their murderous and barbaric impulses. Through his novels, McEwan depicts, how the characters are alienated and how they are ostracized not only psychologically but socially and emotionally as well. Sometimes, the alienation is self-opted and sometimes forced by external agents. His narrative elucidates the darkest characteristics of human nature or race. Through his novels, he analyses human nature and exposes the complexities of life. He comprehends the problems of his fellow humans and has a sympathetic understanding of them. The people can take a lesson from his works and make their lives better and the world a better place. His exploration of the unexplored inner regions of the human self has won him laurels in the literary world.

The characters in McEwan's novels suffer as psychic case studies and experience traumas and mental crises. While thinking or reading about his characters, the readers have the propensity to analyze their own conduct and the general population around them. The people are experiencing an existential peril, particularly that of life being in continual suffering in the form of emotional emptiness, exploitation, loss of faith, deprivations and displacement etc. which are the common denominators in the lives of people these days. McEwan's novels are a symptom of a

situation that needs redressing. With regard to an emphasis on the gothic story as a purposeful anecdote, McEwan has managed the contemporary concerns in most of his works. He exposes the life of the postmodern world by projecting the loneliness and longing of an individual.

The gothic genre in general creates consciousness and an awareness in readers about the plight of humans and this research reconnoitres the commitment to it through the analysis of the selected works of Ian McEwan. The gothic tradition in the novels of McEwan is quite strong and evident. Gothic fiction associates much with the anxieties, fears, terrors, horrors, death and changes in the present as with the past. It is the clearest method of articulation in writing for voicing fear. Although, gothic and postmodernism are two different genres but some of the concerns that they share are actually the same. The postmodern gothic joins these two diverse artistic types, gothic and postmodernism, and thus makes a literary style of its own. The unpredictability of the postmodern highlights joined with the gothic subjects do make this type remarkable, and advantageous for scholarly consideration.

The presentation of the elements of the postmodern gothic in this thesis actually defines the condition of the postmodern world. McEwan tends to explore the realms of the social, political and cultural conditions in his narratives which raise many queries about the daily existence of people. His narratives indulge in catastrophic accounts in order to portray discontent, resentment, dysfunctionality, fear, terror, horror and deaths etc. Hence, these narratives address the unknown and darker aspects of daily life. He points out the state of the human condition in a postmodern age and how life has fallen upon evil days, and the life of a human is not at all thought to be important. The dominant themes in his novels are usually found to be alienation, incest, perversion, grotesque, fear, terror, horror and death etc.

The present research work modestly attempts to trace the elements of postmodern gothic in the selected novels of Ian McEwan. The works taken for investigation are *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Enduring Love* and *Nutshell*. McEwan uses postmodern gothic elements such as ‘fear,’ ‘terror,’ ‘horror’ and ‘death’ to create an affectation in the readers. In the analysis, the researcher has unfolded these four elements of postmodern gothic in the selected novels of McEwan. The main argument underlying this study is to bring out the elements of postmodern

gothic in McEwan's selected works. As far as the theoretical approach is concerned, the concept of Sigmund Freud's uncanny is followed. The study attempts to reach a conclusion after studying and analysing the primary and secondary data. To be more specific, this thesis has the following objectives:

- To trace the genesis of gothic literature up to the present era.
- To explore the relation of gothic fiction to that of contemporary scenarios.
- To find the elements of postmodern gothic in the selected works of Ian McEwan.
- To apply the concept of 'uncanny' in the works of Ian McEwan.

This thesis shall be structured into an Introduction, followed by five chapters and a Conclusion. The "Introduction," presents a general overview of the research plan, objectives, scope, limitations and a general layout of the thesis. The chapter one of this thesis which is entitled "Brief Candle" seeks to present a brief biography of McEwan and his literary oeuvre etc. The chapter also traces the historical roots of gothic fiction right from the eighteenth century to the present era. The chapter also centres around the idea, scope and relevance of postmodern gothic fiction. The chapter two entitled, "Fear in Ian McEwan's Fiction," chapter three entitled, "Terror in Ian McEwan's Fiction," chapter four entitled, "Horror in Ian McEwan's Fiction" and chapter five entitled, "Death in Ian McEwan's Fiction" seeks to study the 'fear,' 'terror,' 'horror,' and 'death' respectively as elements of postmodern gothic in the selected works of McEwan as cited above. These chapters shall also apply Freud's concept of uncanny while analysing these elements in the selected works of Ian McEwan. As an established fact, the theories of Freud have considerably influenced contemporary literature and McEwan was also greatly influenced by the psychological theorist. The third and fourth chapters shall cover two more objectives of this thesis.

The fifth chapter shall be followed by "Conclusion" which shall sum up the arguments of the earlier chapters, offer a summary of the findings and highlight the scope for further research that it opens up for future researchers. As a terminal part of the thesis, it shall arrive at the points to express the view and show how the novelist and his novels made a great impact on postmodern gothic literature. It shall further bring to account the findings and limitations together to reconsolidate the present research. It shall be a final attempt to accentuate that Ian McEwan in the light of his

novels is eligible to carry the label of a postmodern Gothic novelist, whose preoccupation has been more or less to present fear, terror, horror and deaths of the contemporary world. This chapter shall be in the form of a summation to establish the relevance and significance of the thesis. There shall be a bibliography appended at the end of the thesis.

The postmodern gothic genre has not been widely studied as it is relatively a new field, and neither has been the prize-winning novels of Ian McEwan in a gothic sense. Due to this gap, the subject was found to be relevant and worth studying. The domain which has been taken in this research work is unexplored yet and the thesis shall be carried out from a fresh perspective to fill the gap. Although, eighteenth-century gothic fiction has received a lot of academic attention but contemporary gothic fiction has not received much attention. Hence, this added dimension on Ian McEwan in the form of research work will prove helpful for the readers to develop an overall critical insight about how the postmodern gothic elements are incorporated in his works and how this study fits in the contemporary scenario. There are other novelists also who can be investigated from the postmodern gothic perspective and this study can be a field of further research for scholars. As for the limitation of the present study is concerned, this thesis shall be limited to the study of only four novels by McEwan. There are other works of McEwan besides these four novels as cited above which can provide opportunities for further studies of similar nature.

The present study shall be qualitative in nature, hence analytical and descriptive methods shall be followed. In order to trace out the elements of postmodern gothic in the selected works of McEwan, a close analysis and reading of primary and secondary texts shall be made with the application of Sigmund Freud's concept of 'uncanny'. Further, a critical assessment of selected works of the novelist shall be undertaken by using an analytical approach. The selected novels of Ian McEwan have a great potential for postmodern gothic analysis and display a number of such references which is the hypothesis of the present study. Moreover, the format of the study shall be based on MLA 8th Edition. This added dimension on Ian McEwan in the form of research work will prove helpful for the readers to develop an overall critical insight about the postmodern gothic elements and their relevance in the present times.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Brief Candle**

The task of contemporary writers is a challenging one in the face of increasing physical violence, crimes, moral degradation, disasters, fears, terrors, horrors and deaths. One of the darkest phases of human history and the greatest historical catastrophes that failed humanity were the two World Wars. Over period of time, the human condition has ostensibly become more horrendous and horrific by the brutalizing effects of these Wars. These Wars and their aftermath had their impact on society and the literature of the time as well. The world and humanity suddenly became more uncertain, out of control, perilous and more inhumane than it was before. The chaotic dark clouds had overwhelmed the whole world. The humans are themselves unleashing destruction that they neither comprehend nor control and such is the awful nature of humanity.

The present times are full of fears, terrors, horrors, deaths and disasters. The age does not have a clear vision and not even a clear name. The novel as a literary genre holds a unique position in this world of cultural impasse as it can reveal greater truths. The British fiction in the 1990s addressed the issues like specific regional and national identities, provincialism, multiculturalism, globalization, experimentation with a realist tradition as well as renewed engagement in a variety of different identities which are both distinct and overlapping such as race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and so on. The novels of this period have concentrated on contemporary social and cultural issues on the one side and historical legacies on the other. Like the preceding decades, the literary techniques have been of crucial concern in articulating the subject matter in the twenty-first century too.

At this critical juncture, the writers are expected to be visionaries and Ian Russel McEwan (1948-Present) as a visionary warns contemporary society against the inhuman cruelties that rock it every moment. Jack Slay points out that there is a painstaking development in the evolution of McEwan as a modern prophet (145). In his early writings, McEwan's role is that of a sensationalist. As he progresses, "he becomes more conscientious both politically and socially as a writer" (Slay, 145). As a writer, McEwan records the experiences of traumatized human beings and the overall world. The technological advancements in weaponry, the developments and the introduction of weapons of mass destruction have led to the slaughter of humans and horrified the people dramatically. Keeping the devastation and destruction in view, the writers of different ages respond to such alarming situations, the impact of which can be pessimistic, leading to anxiety, aggression and finally a wounded psyche.

This chapter presents though briefly, a biographical sketch of Ian McEwan, a brief introduction to his selected novels considered for this research and a historical overview and relevance of gothic fiction etc. The secret of McEwan's appeal lay in his postmodern sensibility, socio-cultural realities, stylish morbidity, the macabre, the perverse, contemporary chaos, the grotesque, sadistic torment, sexual abuse and pure insanity. He has minutely observed and examined the socio-cultural situation of contemporary life which he has portrayed in his works.

His writing is usually characterized by gothic elements such as a brooding atmosphere, shocking scenes, violence, insanity, fear, terror, horror, deaths and a macabre atmosphere. His fiction deals with multifaceted aspects of culture and society in contemporary situations such as patriarchal structure, relationships and violence etc. The repulsive descriptions and visceral images of society in his novels present the



darker aspect of humanity. Jack Slay opines that McEwan exposes the haunting desire and politics that lurk beneath the facade of an everyday world and creates dark portraits of contemporary society (1). According to Marc Delrez, McEwan is the “unrelenting analyst of evil in our time” (7).

Ian McEwan enjoys the reputation of an outstanding fiction writer and a remarkable artistic genius. The works of this impressive novelist are qualified by structural finesse, contextual relevance, organizational tightness, artistic control and verbal brilliance. His fiction is further marked by artistic maturation, originality, depth and clarity of vision, reflecting on the issues and problems of life which are experienced universally and have a lasting value. His literary works enable the perceptive and critically oriented reader to detect the range, imagination, craftsmanship, scope, significance and dynamism in his works. His imaginative bent of mind, creative capacities and expression have inspired one and all. As a fiction writer, he has excelled with his rich imaginative capacity and clarity of vision. He is considered an artistic genius of heightened sensibility and language power. He has great technical mastery, and inventive capacities and is undoubtedly among the greatest fiction writers of all time.

As a postmodern writer, McEwan tries to look at various aspects of daily life through realism in his narratives. He is a critically acclaimed postmodern writer and at the pinnacle of contemporary authorship, adopting heterogeneous styles to express his new ideas. He uses allusions, intertextuality and quotations etc. in his novels. His novels are an erudite and impassioned presentation of the attitude towards life. His literary spark and deep fascination triggered his foray into the literary world. Being an avid reader and a minute observer of society, McEwan is deeply fascinated by the field of writing, bringing him onto the international literary stage. Although McEwan

belongs to the club of postmodern writers, he employs a number of conventional gothic formulas such as traditional gothic images and landscapes to create an uncertain and fearful space.

Nowadays human beings have enslaved themselves to the mechanical and dull daily routine. Most of the human values, ethical tenets, moral principles and spiritual directions are lost to humans. They are now drifting away from the moral and spiritual centre, resulting in chaos and frustration which leaves a great impact on their minds. They have enslaved themselves to materialism and changed the world into one of degeneration, degradation and dehumanization. The accepted norms, beliefs, principles, values and prescriptions carry no conviction. The people now confront mysteries, doubts, uncertainties, pain, decay, fear, terror, horror and death. In fact, the divorce between people and their lives truly constitutes the meaning of life now. Human beings now have to cope with the mental pressures, psychological wounds, ethical dilemmas, disillusionment, guilt, tests of courage, the cruelty of real life, meaninglessness, bereavement, trauma, fear, terror, horror, fear of death, emotional emptiness, and different kinds of loss, leading to questions of existence and meaning of life, the hint of which is given in the succeeding chapters of this thesis.

Ian McEwan was born in Aldershot, England on 21st June 1948. His father, David, was a Scottish Sergeant Major in Glasgow. As but natural, McEwan had to spend his childhood years in military camps of various countries like England, Libya and Singapore. His mother, Rose Lilian Violet was a very gentle and polite lady. McEwan writes that his mother was always frightened of his father and so was he himself. It was during McEwan's 20s when he actually realised the violence at home.

He got his early education in an English Boarding School- Woolverstone Hall in Suffolk and later on graduated in English in 1970 from Sussex University,

Brighton. While studying at Sussex, McEwan began his literary career by writing stage, radio and television-oriented scripts. He did his post-graduation from the University of East Anglia, Norwich with creative writing under the tutelage of Angus Wilson (1913-1991) and Malcolm Bradbury (1932-2000). It proved to be a turning point in his creative life. It made him a creative writer by bringing out the hidden expressive urge on the surface and moulding his creative sensibility in a proper shape.

Soon after his post-graduation in creative writing, McEwan went to Afghanistan. His experience there added much to his post-1968 counterculture ideology that he believed in before the Russian invasion. In 1974, he settled in London and gradually became a Londoner, enjoying the chaotic crowd, the malls, multiplexes and so on. In a short span of time, McEwan's reputation started to develop in the literary world. His life has been like any other middle-class Englishman, full of tests and troubles. Despite facing these hardships, he has been continuously engaged in writing scripts for movies, and pieces for musical presentations while looking at the darker side of the world (Matthews 3). His life is strongly reflected in his writings. His narratives explore psychosocial conflicts through his personal experiences.

Ian McEwan articulates and defines the gruesome reality of contemporary life. He is a highly contested and widely praised postmodern author at the forefront of contemporary authorship. Owing to his outstanding contribution to the field of literature, he has been appropriately declared as the 'International Voice of Modern British Fiction' by British Broadcasting Corporation which is a testament to his popularity in and outside the United Kingdom. As a famous novelist of the present era, 'Granta' in 1983, included him in the 20 Best Young British Novelists, while as 'The Times' in 2008, listed him in the 50 greatest British writers since 1945. He is

equally famous in Europe, the U.S.A., Australia and many Asian and African countries. The credit for 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 society and its values (Matthews 3).

McEwan presents the dystopian social spaces of the twentieth century which have more relevance in the present context. Many a critic has commended the clinical precision of McEwan's prose style. The restraint that he exercises over language conceals the underlying violence and eroticism. In his novel, *The Cement Garden*, he maintains an austerity of style and tone throughout. The detachment with which the novelist describes the murder scenes indicates the placidity of the style. In the novel, the horror of the murder is concealed. The 'confessional possibilities' of the first person narrative enable the narrator to take the reader into confidence. *The Cement Garden*, *Black Dogs*, *Enduring Love* and many of the stories are related in the first person. The characters in his novels- some of whom are child molesters and murderers-divulge their secrets to the readers, who become their confidants.

McEwan was initially influenced by the writings of Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Edward Osborne Wilson (1929-Present) and Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966). His interests in the later period of his writing shifted to John Updike (1932-2009) for his 'great intellectual reach and an insidious emotional penetration', Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) for the psychopathology of everyday life, Philip Roth (1933-2018) and Saul Bellow (1915-2005) for a largeness of ambition, a generosity of imagination, and a wicked sense of humour (Chotiner, 'Interview'). In McEwan, there was always a latent urge for writing something shocking and memorable that made him such a great writer.

His literary career spans approximately the last four decades. The short stories he wrote, before his attempt at novels, revealed his potential as a writer of fiction. In 1976, McEwan won the Somerset Maugham Award for his short stories collection, *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) and the Booker Prize for *Amsterdam* (1998). His *The Child in Time* (1987) won the Whitbread Novel of the Year Award. The novels like *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), *Black Dogs* (1992) and *Atonement* (2001) were on the short-list for the Booker Prize Award.

He earned the reputation of being a dark historian of the present-day world. The fictional perspective, McEwan imbibed over the years is evolutionary in nature. His preoccupation with the perverse, uncanny and grotesque in the early years earned him the title 'Ian Macabre'. The claustrophobic menace that looms large in his earlier works gives way to a spatial elaboration, diversity, universality and issues of wider social and political import.

McEwan grew up as a child, sharing the postwar disillusionment and matured as a writer under the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013). The Second World War and the aftershocks of modernism had a devastating effect on the imagination of the writer. McEwan depicts the contemporary crisis by attempting to "link the social aspects of British fiction with the underground psychic and sexual realms" (Bradbury 391). The sexual desire is here related to the cultural and political crisis. The psychology that Sigmund Freud propounded, provided an elaborate rationale for sex and the revelations of the unconscious which gave the writer a better understanding of the self and reality. Freud advocated channelizing the instincts toward loftier goals in society. Equipped with the theories, the novelist attempted to dig up the dark terrain of the unconscious. Frederick J. Hoffman (1909-1967) writes

about the influence of Freud and that he has a more revolutionary effect on writing than any other thinker of literature of our day (Glicksberg 14).

McEwan shares not only an element of contemporaneity but a tendency to vex and disturb the readers. Every novel he writes ignites a new debate. The outrageous novels of McEwan brought new savagery to British fiction. His intention in the short stories and early novels seems to shock the readers, as he himself puts it, they are histories of perversions. The world McEwan created in his novels is one of violence, murder, rape, incest, consumerism and sadomasochism. By focusing on this alternative world of horror, his intention is not only to shock the readers but to help them see their own world clearly.

McEwan's writing began on the threshold of a period of new developments in British politics and English fiction. The year of McEwan's publication of *First Love*, *Last Rites*, witnessed a transition in British politics due to the elevation of Margaret Thatcher as a Conservative Party leader. The change in the political arena marks a change in the social, economic and cultural sphere, which is reflected in the writings of several writers. The novels and short stories of McEwan are written in the context of these changes.

The mid-1980s ushered in drastic changes such as the new ethnicities and plural identities, the rise of multiculturalism, the rise of worldwide neoliberalism, access to information technology, and deconstructing of Enlightenment's narratives of emancipation. Moreover, the explosion of theories promoted anti-foundationalism in history, politics, philosophy and other cultural values. These transformations are enormously evident in the literary fields through postmodernist experimentations; narrative fragmentation, textual self-referentiality, demolition of the all-pervasive omniscient narrator and anachronism in time and space.

McEwan dwelt with grotesque themes and in his macabre fiction, he found delight in shattering the borders. Bradbury comments on him that “McEwan’s works explored the fictional boundaries of the perverse and uncanny, breaking the frame, admitting the forbidden” (392). The widening moral chasm and disillusionment continue to be the dominant note of the fiction. The threats of international terrorism, chemical warfare and capitalist supremacy loom large in the background of the present-day world. The nuclear terror has been supplanted by other graver and perennial threats like industrial pollution and environmental hazards. The social and scientific utopias have turned out to be grim dystopias. As part of the changed sensibility of the postmodern era, both time and space have lost their traditional relationship to the novel. The advancements in science and technology, especially the epoch-making revelations have led to a rewriting of the established norms. “Our pleasures have become our pains: our food and drink, . . . all threaten to injure us” (McCaffery 143).

McEwan’s experimentation with time and narrative, display considerable progression. McEwan has accounted for the thematic evolution as he shows the progression from narrower issues to broader issues. The ‘closed-off quality’ of his earlier short stories and novels was due to his ignorance of the wider world. When he began to write for television, dialogue gave him moral freedom. By the time, he wrote an Oratorio *Or Shall We die?* (1983) about the threat of nuclear war and *The Child in Time* about the Thatcherite excesses, he was opening up possibilities of ‘bridging the earlier small canvases of intense psychological states with a broader public reality’ (Louvel et al. 10). McEwan’s early fiction such as *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), *In Between the Sheets* (1978), *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers* deal with the shockingly psychopathological world.

McEwan's later works include *The Child in Time*, *The Innocent*, *Black Dogs*, *Enduring Love*, *Amsterdam*, *Atonement*, *Saturday* (2005), *On Chesil Beach* (2007), *Solar* (2010), *Sweet Tooth* (2012), *Nutshell* (2016) and *Machines Like Me* (2019) are concerned with broader social, political, historical and other issues like the problems of the Thatcherite era, the Cold war, destruction of the Berlin wall, rationality, science, robots, love, World War II, attack on World Trade Centre, war on Iraq, problems of victorian values, climate change, global warming, communism etc. In addition to these novels, he has also written plays, librettos, screenplays, short stories and books for children. Additionally, he is regularly contributing his write-ups to newspapers and journals.

McEwan's stance in the fictional scenario of the last phase of the twentieth century is remarkable. He has followed the general trends of the British fiction of his times, yet has also shown certain divergences from them. The concern with history is a predominant trait in novels of McEwan. For example, in *The Innocent* (1989), he reconstructs the Berlin of the 1950s. The skirmishes of the Cold War and the age-old power politics of the US form the background of the novel. Dexterously woven into the psychological and personal problems of the couple Bernard and Jane in *Black Dogs* (1992) is the dark history of the Second World War. Though *The Cement Garden* (1978) or *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) do not have any pretensions to historical considerations, the historical undertones in these novels cannot be ruled out. The children's free fall into anarchy and their escape from all forms of social and moral standards is a significant phase in the history of Britain. *Enduring Love* (1997) and *Amsterdam* (1998) treat history in different ways.

McEwan is one of the leading novelists of contemporary British fiction. Beginning with a narrow scope, he wrote two much acclaimed, short story collections



(*First Love, Last Rites* and *In Between the Sheets*) that display McEwan's talent for the macabre. According to Rennison, they are "unsettling stories told with a chilly precision of language with a reputation for glacially cool prose directed at the macabre and bizarre subject matter" (87). McEwan's debut as a writer was with the publication, *First Love, Last Rites*. The very title of *First Love Last Rites*, attracts the readers by means of sensationalism.

This short story collection, which was in every sense his initiation into the literary scenario, revealed his innate fictional potential. These short stories were a kind of laboratory, where he experimented with form and themes such as perversion, sexuality, fear, adolescence, anxiety, grotesque, incest, regression, interpersonal relationship etc. The characters in most of the stories are derelict adolescents or children. In his short stories collection, *In Between the Sheets*, there is a perceptible thematic improvement from *First Love Last Rites*. The central figures in these short stories are marginal and alienated from society. He has earned the tag 'Ian Macabre' for these claustrophobic tales of childhood showing deviant sexuality, disjointed family life, and dark themes and it was so overused that he developed a disliking for it. Imagining the worst things and converting them into compact writing had the desired effect for McEwan.

McEwan's dismal experiences of his childhood days had a cumulative effect in shaping his perspective as a novelist. He felt a crisis as to where he belonged, the middle-class world did not suit him. Black humour, an experimental literary phenomenon, predominates his short stories, symbolising the blackness in life such as death, sickness, dehumanization and fragmentation. The philosophical foundation of black humour is a nihilistic outlook on life that nothing has intrinsic value. The black humorist like the absurdist believes in the meaninglessness of life. The lowest

common denominator in McEwan's novels is the debilitating violence and moral depravity that has become the hallmark of the postmodern age.

The novel, *The Cement Garden* by Ian McEwan, describes the fearful atmosphere of the English countryside and the experimental lifestyle of four innocent children. It was written in a neutral tone, beginning with a 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" (*The Cement Garden* 9). It 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 a 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, Julie, Sue and Tom 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 to the matters of the outside world. These children encase their mother's dead body in cement in their basement to avoid being taken into custody.

In the novel, McEwan hardly mentions things clearly or any familiar features of contemporary society which enhances the suspense and timelessness of the novel. The narrator seems to be withholding information in this novel as well. In the story, Jack becomes a victim of guilt and sees fearful dreams during nighttime; he is chased by someone he cannot see or a box and something horrible in it 'small creature inside' (*The Cement Garden* 27). Even before his mother's death, the readers 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. The children also

experience their father's absence as a relief for everyone, relief from 'a frail, irascible, obsessive man' (*The Cement Garden* 9). It might be possible because Jack and Tom had severe problems with their individual identity.

When they bury their 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. 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. The dark novel ends in a tragic and pitiful situation. In the end, the reader comes across the transformation of the adapting minds from innocence to maturity.

McEwan's second novel, *The Comfort of Strangers* is a tale of bizarre subject matter, obsession, violence, suspense, shivering, shocks and delivers only gore. It is an unsatisfactory horror story. It is generally said that this novel by McEwan was an attempt to rewrite the gothic novel. It is a murder story, set in the haunting atmosphere of an unknown city. The story is a mixture of fantasy, violence and obsession. It is a simple tale with a short time scale and just four central characters.

It narrates the story of an English couple, Colin and Mary, who are holidaying in an unnamed tourist city resembling modern-day Venice, a famous tourist destination in Italy. During their visit, they meet Robert and Caroline, who offer them hospitality. The brutal machismo of Robert and Caroline's subservience and broken back colour this hospitality with uneasiness. Nobody seems to converse with the other with openness and something mysterious and unsaid element seems to be hovering over the city, the hotel and Robert's residence. Finally, the dark, McEwanesque plot

ends in a tragic death. 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.

This novel's origin takes the readers 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 similarities between McEwan-Penny and Colin-Mary. 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 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 (Seaboyer 57).

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 finally come to Robert's lodging. Had both of them been able to understand the intensity of future catastrophe, they would not have depended very much on Robert and Caroline. They were seduced by the host's hospitality and Venice as a seducing city.

Hence, an invisible beast devours Colin and Mary, for they are unconsciously seduced by the thought of exploring the mental map of the city space and equating it with the physical map. Of course, they fail to succeed and their struggle ends in a meaningless triviality. Robert, the sadist, misogynist and voyeuristic as sketched in the novel, has instilled in him, hatred for women and always advocated the supremacy

of males over females. In support of his hypothesis of sex and violence, he scornfully speaks of women. Caroline understands the implications of Robert's ill-treatment and she slowly started enjoying Robert's abusive language. Slowly afterwards, Freud's negative Oedipus and moral masochism activate 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. She is responsible for Colin and Mary's visit to their house and the final act of drugging and killing. Robert's sadomasochism and cruelty analyzed from a 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. Douglas Dunn dubbed this novel as absolutely unwholesome, full of negative stimulus, socially uninformative and a book that assigned the role of voyeur of abnormality to readers (49-53).

*Enduring Love* is a story which begins with the death of a man that triggers a tale of fixation, stalking and erotomania. In this psychological thriller, the reader comes across a freak stalker, Jed Parry, whose obsession with the protagonist disrupts the 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 the rest of the normal people. McEwan, in his unusual narrative style, narrates the collision of everyday lives with evil. The novel opens with a catastrophe- the accident of a hot-air balloon, which carried in it, James Gadd and his ten-year-old grandson named Harry. The novel ends with the adoption of a child by Joe and Clarissa and Jed Parry being sent to a mental hospital.

Almost all reviewers, notably Brian Morton, Peter Kemp and Jan Dalley have praised the novel, 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. As seen in earlier novels of McEwan, here also the novel contains many instances of seductions, betrayals, and cultural transformations. The story impresses upon the readers the dangers of instant friendship and offers of hospitality as demonstrated in *The Comfort of Strangers*. *Enduring Love* takes the readers to a land of common pedestrians, where sometimes erotomaniacs trod on and try to change the whole cultural set-up of a family and ultimately that of the society. Parry's syndrome in the novel 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.

Ian McEwan's *Nutshell* is in a way an adaptation and a modern retelling of William Shakespeare's classic play, *Hamlet* (1599). In this novel, an in-utero child within Trudy's womb plays the role of Hamlet. The narrator learns that Trudy and Claude are planning to kill John, who is the narrator's father and Trudy's estranged husband, making the narrator furious. Through his/her hearing and knowledge of Trudy's biological responses, the narrator is able to make inferences about the outside world and the actions of other people. The narrator, while not quite born, is wiser than many full-grown people.

The narrator is uncomfortable with Claude and Trudy's intention to poison one of John's smoothies with anti-freeze and make his death look like a suicide by planting items in his car. Before the day of the murder, John brings his friend home (in which Claude and Trudy now live). John tells Claude and Trudy to move out of his house as he knows about their affair, but they deny it because they want to sell it, once John is dead. Later, during the sexual act of Claude and Trudy, the narrator

attempts to hang himself/herself with his/her own umbilical cord. The novel is a classic tale of deceit and murder.

The four selected works of Ian McEwan dealt with in this thesis and as briefly summarised above are concerned with themes such as perversity, fear, terror, horror, death and violence etc. which disturb the accepted moral standpoints. The one aspect which is common in these novels is that they reveal the beastliness of humans. The fiction of McEwan is replete with macabre elements. The characters in his initial writings (short stories and first two novels) are described as perverts or deviants, who defy social norms and morals. In Freudian terms, their behaviours are governed more by the 'id' than by the 'super-ego'. In consequence, their behaviour and desire are not regulated and no distinction is maintained between what is wrong and what is right. McEwan is a good example of the psychoanalytical and space-time-centric postmodern narratives. He looks at various aspects of daily life through realism in his narratives.

McEwan, as an advocate of postmodernism, portrays the cultural condition of contemporary times in all its complexity. His novels have achieved immense space in both public and academic circles and have earned him global critical acclaim. He writes on serious subjects concerned with issues crucial to the present situations. His novels offer insights into family and its perversion, violence, gender relations, international politics, wars, science, rationality, and the quest for new world order. His novels not only epitomize serious themes but also incorporate them in an economical stylistic narrative form that offers a new dimension to analysis or interpretation of the texts.

His novels and short stories depict the prevalence of the social type of the present day, the voyeur or the peeping Tom. They are the product of the present

cinematic society. The detective, crime reporter, psycho-analyst and investigative journalist can be interpreted as the various guises of this social type. The theatre is a dark world from where the modern man gets the chance to peep into another world. There is in fact no part of one's life that cannot be observed by others, Denzin writes: "We live on a broad horizon of 'voyeuristic otherness' where others' presence is variously distinguished, disguised, hidden, obtrusive, noticed and taken into account" (207). The hidden worlds of evil and disorder that are enacted in the public sphere are brought under surveillance of others' gazes.

McEwan is a widely read author and a number of books, theses, research articles, interviews and reviews are available on his writing, primarily focussing on his themes, ideas, symbols and contemporary influences but no work is available on the elements of postmodern gothic in McEwan's novels which is aimed in this thesis. The novels of McEwan have been reviewed by a number of renowned writers like Peter Childs, an English Professor at Newman University, Birmingham, who in his book, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* (2005), presented a range of critical approaches to McEwan's fiction. This book guides the readers mainly to the themes of Ian McEwan.

Elaborating the relation between science and fiction in *Enduring Love*, David Malcolm (1952- Present) reads *Enduring Love* differently. As he argues in his book, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, the questions of knowledge-epistemological questions, labelling Joe a "materialist, rationalist and empiricist" (167). This book examines the relationship of McEwan to feminism, science, rationalism, moral perspective and proclivity towards fragmentation. Malcolm recognizes McEwan's early short stories as traditional and conservative in technique despite their shocking subject matter, and he views McEwan's novel *The Child in Time* as a bold step into social engagement



and the novels *Enduring Love* and *Amsterdam* as a return to the psychologically disturbed world of his pre-1987 writings.

In *Conversations with Ian McEwan* (2010) by Ryan Roberts (1951- Present), the writer collected sixteen interviews with the author of highly praised novels like *Atonement*, *Enduring Love*, *On Chesil Beach* and *Saturday*. This book contains McEwan's views on authorship, major themes, the status of literature in contemporary society and global politics etc. It also contains McEwan's candid discussions with notable contemporary writers-Martin Amis (1949-Present), Zadie Smith (1975-Present) and Ian Hamilton (1946-Present) etc. which provide readers with the most in-depth portrait available of the author and his works. Through this book, the readers can find McEwan engaging, humorous, and intelligent as his writings suggest.

Tomasz Dobrogoszcz (1970-Present) in his book, *In Family and Relationships in Ian McEwan's Fiction: Between Fantasy and Desire* (2018) provides an analysis of Ian McEwan's fiction, spanning forty years of McEwan's literary career. The work studies the aspect of relationships between partners and between family members taken up by the writer apart from a general discussion of McEwan's works. McEwan employs interpersonal relations to establish a pertinent context in which he can dramatically portray the process of identity formation in his characters as demonstrated in the book. He consistently uses references to psychoanalysis, either veiled or direct throughout his fiction.

The book entitled, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2009) edited by Sebastian Groes (1950-Present), guides the readers about the future course of McEwan's studies. The book presents Ian McEwan as one of the most significant British novelists and his works as academically and critically acclaimed readings. Across many forms that he has written, his works explore questions of morality,

history, nationhood, sexuality and gender. This book covers both his early as well as later works including his latest books, *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth* and incorporates a detailed and original analysis of his works.

Karam Nayebour in his book, *Mind Presentation in Ian McEwan's Fiction* (2017), explores the mental workings and the mind presentation in the three popular narratives of McEwan which includes *Atonement*, *Amsterdam* and *On Chesil Beach*. The book analyzes the function of fictional minds and their operational modes in these narratives. It also explores the impact of the characters' experiences on both their mental functioning and their behaviour. The tragic atmosphere in these narratives, Nayebour argues, is the result of this imbalance.

Margaret Reynolds (1957-Present) and Jonathan Noakes (1934-2017) published their book, *Ian McEwan: The Essential Guide* (2002) which throws light on the genre, narrative techniques and themes employed by McEwan. The readers find it an essential guide to the works of Ian McEwan. This book also deals with a close reading of the texts. Another book entitled, *Ian McEwan: Art and Politics* (2009) by Pascal Nicklas (1965-Present) puts forth the view that McEwan's early works seem more concerned with family issues after the publication of McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*. McEwan shows some interest in politicization. In *Amsterdam* or *Black Dogs*, politics is vividly shown in relationship to art. There are a number of other books, articles, research papers and theses on Ian McEwan which deal with issues other than what is aimed in this research work.

Sylvia McLeod's (1947-Present) thesis "Aspects of Voice in Ian McEwan's Fiction" (2018) explores Ian McEwan's aspects of voice in his writing initially, as there was a predominance of male voices. The thesis also shows McEwan's concern toward social and cultural aspects. O'Hara in his thesis entitled "Mimesis and the

Imaginable Other: Metafictional Narrative Ethics in the Novels of Ian McEwan” takes up the idea of narrative self-consciousness in *Atonement* and directs it toward ethical issues. Indeed, considering the metafictional aspect of *Atonement*, O’ Hara attempts to show “how metafictional devices are sometimes used, not as a means of deconstructing the language of realism, but in order to disclose and thereby reinforce the dialogical role of mimesis.”

The summaries of the major psychological readings have been done on the select novels, *Enduring Love* and *Black Dogs* by Christina Byrnes in her dissertation entitled “The Work of Ian McEwan: A Psychodynamic Approach”. With respect to McEwan’s *Black Dogs*, among the various psychological issues which Byrnes touches upon, the issue of Jeremy’s mid-life crisis sounds more significant. In terms of McEwan’s *Enduring Love*, Byrnes does her psychodynamic reading in the light of Carl Jung’s theory and pins point to some archetypal instances in the novel. As she remarks “all archetypes are morally ambiguous and can be experienced from their positive or negative side”(196).

Kiernan Ryan invites our attention to the theme of ‘fall’ in terms of *Enduring Love* and remarks, “almost everything that transpires in *Enduring Love*, takes place in the wake of the fatal fall that expels its hero from the Eden of innocence in which his story begins”(45). This is how Ryan in his article, “After the fall,” traces the footprints of biblical allusions, particularly the idea of ‘fall’ in *Enduring Love* and examines Joe Rose’s narrative with respect to the seeds sown and revelations contained in the opening pages. Indeed, Ryan attempts to show that the novel deals with the idea of the Fall from innocence and God’s grace extend to Joe and Clarissa, who become fallen lovers, cast out of their Edenic existence into deeply troubled lives. Finally, Ryan argues that the circumstances of Logan’s fall, like that of Adam

and Eve's fall from innocence in Eden, can be assumed as "an objective correlative for the emotion the reader should feel over the fate of Joe and Clarissa's love" (45).

Butler in her influential article "The Master's Narrative: Resisting the Essentializing Gaze in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*" believes that some literature including McEwan's *Saturday* suggests methods for resistance in terms of denied subjectivity. She further believes that the white protagonist of the novel, Henry Perowne, upholds gender and racial stereotypes. Dana Chetrescu's article, "Rethinking Spatiality: The Degraded Body in Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam*" does the feminist reading of McEwan's *Amsterdam* (164). Jonathan Greenberg in his article, "Why Can't Biologists Read Poetry?: Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*," presents a series of interrelated conflicts between science, literature and religious discourse.

Sean Matthews in his article "Seven types of unreliability" is another interesting investigation in the field of narrative study vis-a-vis McEwan's fictional oeuvre. In an analogy to William Empson's famous book, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Matthews dissects the novel based on seven types of inconsistencies as well as unreliability and puts Joe's narrative under acid test in terms of "his knowledge, self-knowledge, veracity and self-delusion"(92). With respect to *Enduring Love*, Peter Childs' in his article "Believing is Seeing: the Eye of the beholder" assumes a reversal of the conventional phrase "seeing is believing" and attempts to show how perspectives, prejudice, conviction and faith can affect perception and Joe's narrative is one of the best examples of that. Focusing on the veracity and subjectivity of Joe's narration, Childs examines more closely some of the "similarities between Joe, Clarissa and Jed as well as the ways in which the three main protagonists are wrapped up in different narratives" (107).

Rhiannon Davies in her essay “Enduring McEwan,” scrutinises the presentation of masculinity in *Enduring Love*, she explores the novel in terms of ‘the gaze’, as the unreconstructed male, Joe, is objectified by the unwanted attention of his admirer, Jed. Davies proceeds to argue that *Enduring Love* concludes with the breakdown of Joe’s “strategies of masculine self-fashioning” since this protagonist tries to assert the heroic triumph of his male adventure ideal in the display of machismo. Randall wants to bring home in his essay “I don’t want your story: open and fixed narratives in *Enduring Love*” a multiplicity of narratives concerning events shared among a group of people. He attempts to show the competing viewpoints and versions of events. The different viewpoints of the six men holding down the balloon are the prototypes of individual attitudes both within and without, affecting a larger group. Randall examines the narratives of Joe, Jed, Clarissa and Jean Logan on the incidents and highlights how heterogeneous their narratives are since each of them gives importance to a different aspect (60).

A lot of academic attention has been received by Ian McEwan. Apart from the works discussed above, there are still a huge number of other works available on the author which deal with issues other than those aimed in this thesis but all of which cannot be discussed due to certain limitations. Hence, the domain which has been taken in this research work is unexplored yet and the present study is original and will be carried out from a fresh perspective to fill the gap. Hence, this added dimension on Ian McEwan in the form of research work will prove helpful for the readers to develop an overall critical insight about how the postmodern gothic elements are incorporated in his works and how this study fits in the contemporary scenario.

This study intends to make a modest attempt to study the postmodern gothic elements such as fears, terrors, horrors, and deaths in the selected works of McEwan

and seeks to explore the same within the ambit of Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) concept of "uncanny". Although, gothic fiction can be studied from multiple angles and a number of concepts and theories can be applied to it such as Baudrillard's concept of the 'sublime,' theories such as Marxist, Psychoanalytic or the Deconstructive reading of the gothic, but in this research work, the concept of uncanny by Freud shall be applied on the selected works on Ian McEwan. This concept was introduced by Freud in his 1919 essay, 'Das Unheimliche'. It may be understood as the psychological experiences of humans for something as 'strangely familiar', rather than simply mysterious. Sometimes, in an unsettling, eerie or taboo context, humans encounter a familiar event or thing which is described as uncanny. Freud discusses the term both in terms of the intellectually surmounted and that of the return of the repressed from the psyche.

In other words, the uncanny leads us back to what is already familiar and known to us and it is a class of frightening things. For Freud, the uncanny may also locate the strangeness in an ordinary event or thing. He merged the aesthetic and psychoanalytic modes of thought to develop this theory. Generally, aesthetics prefer to concentrate on beauty, the attractive and the sublime on more positive terms and neglects the study that is frightening and fearful. For him, the uncanny can be called as aesthetics of anxiety or the aesthetics of the fearful. In postmodernism, there is a growing trend of 'negative' aesthetics, the grotesque or the ugly. Several other notable theorists expanded on the idea of 'uncanny', the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was of the view that the uncanny places humans in the field where they are not able to distinguish bad and good or pleasure from displeasure which results in irreducible anxiety. The concept was further taken up by theorists such as

Mashiro Mori (1927-) and Julia Kristeva (1941-), who presented their own versions of it.

The continued hold of gothic on the human imagination is owed to the darkened and unconscious space of dreams. From the beginning, Sigmund Freud was concerned to analyse and articulate the excesses- that which are more than the rational and conscious. His theories have been effectively used on a large scale to approach gothic studies. gothic concerns or interrogates the past's anxiety on the present. In the same vein, the concern of Freud is the questions like what is dead or surviving in the consciousness and finding the familiarity of humans with such emotions and experiences. In clear terms, humans are haunted individually as well as collectively from both within and outside. To interrogate the unconscious anxieties, fears, terrors, horrors and deaths of humans and new ways to represent them, the study of postmodern gothic genuinely comes to help. The revival of gothic, questions the social structures of the time and fictionalises contemporary fears.

The postmodern era in art and literature is an era of heterogeneous ideas and thoughts. Diverse peculiarities and various idiosyncratic features such as ambiguity, hyperreality, adaptation, flexibility, openness, plurality, irony, pastiche, parody, decentering, metafiction, anti-foundationalism, techno-culture, temporal distortion, paranoia, hybridity, minimalism, maximalism, intertextuality and so on, define the literature of this period. Postmodern literary works usually centre on temporality, and reject the conventional notion of eternal or universal truth, in order to remove the reader, from attempting to view the world from a vantage point outside time. What the postmodern authors really intend to do is to leave the reader exposed to a world lacking everlasting essences. In the words of Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), the grand narrative has lost its legitimacy, the older narratives no longer fit in society as

people have left modernity and entered a postindustrial or postmodern condition defined as “incredulity towards meta-narratives.”

Interestingly, the postmodern narratives explore avenues of terror in humour and those of humour in terrifying elements of narrativity. This exploration of parody through the terrors and horrors of daily life has presented itself in a contrast to modernist and romantic literary works. Psychosomatic disorders, dystopia, dysfunctionalities, natural disasters, social disorders, political affectations, technological dysfunctions and economical dissimilarities are the effective themes that haunt most postmodern narratives. These themes were also common among the modernists and the romantics. But while the Romantics treated these disorders as fundamental ethical disorders, the modernists and postmodernists saw these themes as a psychological breakthrough and a moment of loss.

It is evident in the viewing of the postmodern narrative that realism when applied alongside intertextual references to gothic romances provokes a deeper darker sense of catharsis. This is done deliberately to desensitise its readers and to address the fears that have been engraved deeper in humans. It is almost as if the terrors and the horrors of the Germanic tribes have been invoked and placed before human eyes in retrospection. Botting states that the dark and mysterious gothic atmospheres have constantly evoked emotions of terror and signalled the disturbing return of the past upon the present (1). This emotion, fundamentally identified as nostalgia, keeps lurking in dark narratives of all times.

The postmodern narrative is a melody of despair, degradation, and discontent. It is a narrative of interplays, mostly between two worlds; the physical and the psychological. These narratives explore the realms of the psychological, the philosophical and the material world simultaneously. They create avenues for many



artistic endeavours within artistic reason, rationale and truth, allowing a wider range of experiments in narrative methods and contents to be accepted irrespective of their social status as highbrow or lowbrow. The postmodern ethos objects to the holistic, unified, and all-encompassing universally valid theories, these are replaced with respect for differences and embracing the local. postmodernism characterises very critical changes in the arts that came into existence after the modernists. It is considered difficult to place the term within a time frame but, it is widely agreed that such developments took place after the two World Wars.

The postmodern condition has left the writer with no 'grand narratives.' Instead of the 'totalizing explanations,' there came to vogue an eclectic and random variety of narratives. In contrast to former epochs, postmodernism has no overarching model of reality and where the overarching concepts have lost their significance. Nevertheless, it is held together by a network of electronic communication which surrounds the globe like a second atmosphere. The culture as has been depicted through the language of fiction is fragmentary and pluralistic. The novelists looked back to history, not to the solid cultural foundations, but to some fragments, which bore a remote resemblance to the present. The recent history is seen as the sequence of past disasters, which in turn reminds people of the imminent catastrophe and figures up for the fictional portrayal. In the fiction of the eighties, apocalyptic visions, corrupted utopias and threatened cities were everywhere. The world of the fantastic and grotesque has come back; innocence is invariably corrupted and sexual violence is rampant.

On the other hand, gothic fiction also deals with such elements and dreaded subjects. It intends to curdle the blood and freeze the spine and has come to mean a number of things in the present era. gothic, as a sub-genre of the novel, features

grotesque characters, desolate landscapes, dark settings, fear, terror, horror, deaths, bizarre situations, violence and supernatural events etc. which are considered the hallmarks of gothic fiction. Gothic fiction scares its readers and viewers by creating a weird and frightening atmosphere. It depicts fears and horrors about what could be lost and what could go wrong, in case the desired changes are not brought about. Through gothic narratives, the writers can express the anxiety generated by political and social disorders. Therefore, increasing participation in society and wishing for a change becomes a need.

The word 'Goth' originally referred to the Germanic tribes, who ravaged ancient Rome and certain parts of Europe from the third to fifth centuries and from here, the term 'Goth' or 'gothic' came to mean barbarous. The word gothic is also used for different architecture like arches, high vaulted ceilings etc. which was prevalent in Europe between the 12th to 16th centuries, adventurous or mysterious stories and an ornate style of writing. Sometimes, gothic literature deals with abnormal states of mind, which is not a phenomenon of only medievalism or modernism rather it finds relevance today as well. In this connection, Catherine Spooner asserts:

. . . the past returns with sickening force: the dead rise from the grave or lay their cold hands upon the shoulders of the living. This fearful scenario is compounded by physical imprisonment: the labyrinthine underground vaults and torture chambers of eighteenth-century gothic texts: the secret passages and attics riddling the ancestral mansions of the nineteenth century: the chambers of the human heart and brain in twentieth-century writing. (18)

The above quote establishes that the scope of gothic fiction is far and wide. gothic literature is said to be born in the second half of the eighteenth century, it

flourished in the nineteenth century and has relevance even today. gothic literature originated from several aspects like artistic precedents, history and culture. In the eighteenth century, the theological, political and social landscape of Europe changed, which served as a stimulus for the gothic movement. The gothic narratives of the eighteenth century were greatly a response to anxiety, triggered by incidents like French Revolution (1789), thus bringing an overall change in the social and political structure of the society. It is generally believed that *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), by Horace Walpole (1717-1797), set the stage for gothic and it was with this work that gothic fiction is said to have begun. The novel, having the ingredients like a haunted castle, mysterious deaths, supernatural happenings, a villain and violent emotions turned out to be highly popular.

The writers, who followed gothic writing often added new elements to it and created works with additional consequences and the process persisted through the later centuries. Many romantic writers influenced the development and evolution of gothic literature. In William Blake's (1757-1827) works like *The Four Zoas* (1795–1804), *Poetical Sketches* (1783) and *The Keys to the Gates* (1818), the reader can see several instances which hint toward the gothic such as plot, characters as well as scenarios like the vulnerable heroine, the unknown lands, emphasis on secrets and several other dangerous incidents. Turning to Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), he gives more importance to psychological moods such as disappointment, dejection, melancholy etc. In *Christabel* (1816), he presented some explorations of the gothic aesthetic.

Of all the major romantics, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was the one, most immersed in gothic writing. His gothic works, *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvyne* (1811) describe social violence and social injustice etc. The works of Lord Byron

(1788-1824) are also full of gothic allusions. The description of Newstead Abbey in his *Childe Harold* (1812) and the description of the apparition in *Don Juan* (1819-24) are straightforward references to the gothic conventions. The relation of John Keats (1795-1821) towards the gothic is in some ways simple and marginal. There are also some darker gothic assumptions in Keats' poem, *Isabella or The Pot of Basil* (1818).

The relationship between gothic tradition and Romanticism has been debated for years now by many literary critics. According to Montague Summers (1880-1948), the gothic novel is primarily a Catholic and Romantic genre (38). In *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000), Michael Gamer finds new ways in which Romantics theorised and reacted to gothic, rather than seeing it as a debased form (15). In this period, horror took the centre stage and one can see many texts by some important novelists which are replete with torture, cannibalism, imprisonment, murder, incest, rape and violence whom *The Edinburgh Review* identified as “. . . class of caterers to the public, ready to minister to any appetite, however foul and depraved.” (Anon 359)

In Victorian gothic fiction, the defining features are primarily marked by the domestication of gothic themes, horrors, spaces and figures. The gothic villain of the past was transformed which gave way to robbers, criminals, scientists and madmen. The traditional gothic motifs of the previous times like the labyrinthine passages, castles and convents are replaced by the cities with their narrow, dark winding streets and the terrors described or experienced are quite specific to the urban experience. The settings and exotic of the earlier gothic served to separate the horrors of the reader's world, got replaced with something disturbingly familiar such as new urban settings and domestic crimes etc.

According to Robert Mighall, the preoccupation of Victorian gothic fiction is to depict and identify the scandalous vestiges of age and the threatening reminders from which the present is relieved to have distanced itself which are variously found in the slums, prisons, minds of criminals or deviants, lunatic asylums etc. (26). It is worthy to mention that many novels were written along this line of thought such as *The Woman in White* (1859) by Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), *The House by the Churchyard* (1863) by Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873), *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) and short stories of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) *The Oval Portrait* (1842), *The Black Cat* (1843), and *Hop-Frog* (1849) etc.

In the Victorian era, there was the popularity of ghost stories which was partly due to the emergence of literary magazines and periodicals as well as the expansion of the publishing industry. Dickens (1812-1870), for instance, brought out many such ghost stories in the magazines (*All the Year Round* and *Household Words*), which he edited. These ghost stories focussed on the familiar as is obvious in their titles itself as 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852) by Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), 'Green Tea' (1869) by J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) and 'A Terribly Strange Bed' (1852) of Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) etc. Dickens relocated gothic within a contemporary setting. Dickens opposed the glamorization or the romantic representations of the criminal's life and favoured the straightforward depictions of a criminal's everyday life.

In his novels like *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), the gothic was appropriated by Dickens in the service of realism. A number of other gothic classics have been written by some writers of repute. Some of them include *Trilby* (1894) by George du Maurier (1834-1896) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henry James (1843-1916) etc. Towards the end of the 19th Century, in America, the

tradition of gothic literature was established by notable writers like Robert William Chambers (1865-1933) and Ambrose Gwynnett Bierce (1842-1914) etc., who wrote horrific and pessimistic short stories.

In the cornerstone texts of modernism, one finds the traces of gothic like the oppressive city streets and spoiled priests in James Joyce's (1882-1941) *Dubliners* (1914), the walking dead in *The Waste Land* (1922) by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), cannibal threats and claustrophobic jungle in the Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) *Heart of Darkness* (1899). All of these works have been quite successful in invoking familiar gothic concerns in new registers. It is also a fact that these texts cannot be straightforwardly referred to as gothic texts as is done with the works of Radcliffe, Walpole and Lewis which have a different sensibility. These texts contain gothic imagery, episodes, traces etc. and it becomes one tool among many for summoning the interior terrors rather than the determining feature of these texts. For H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), horror writing offered an antidote to the modern world. He shared the influences of some of his modernist contemporaries like Arthur Machen (1863-1947) and Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) (Botting 39).

Gothic writers participate in consistent narrative experimentation and wider literary developments even if obliquely but they do not work in a vacuum. In Elizabeth Bowen's (1899-1973), ghost story 'The Demon Lover' (1941), the uncanniness of the wartime city is exploited by the writer. Her novel, *The Last September* (1929), set shortly before Irish independence in one of the embattled 'Big Houses' ends with the house's blaze and devastation. Her fiction is haunted by spectres of the Irish gothic tradition. William Faulkner's (1897-1962) novel, *Sanctuary* (1931), casts an incarcerated gothic heroine, who is finally forced into a brothel. The novel *Nightwood* (1937) by Djuna Barnes (1892-1982) pays an explicit

debt to gothic conventions and is shockingly modern in both subject matter and style which is fragmented and deliberately oblique. Eve Sedgwick describes the novel as quintessentially gothic as it narrates its preoccupation with the past. He adds that in diffusing the damaged psyche into outward trappings the novel has an important role (86).

In terms of the origin of gothic, its chronology, contexts and its development to the present day, the gothic is found to be dynamic and constantly reinventing itself. From the eighteenth-century plot (castles, persecuted heroes/heroines) to the nineteenth-century Frankenstein's monster, vampire, there are constantly new inflexions of gothic literature in the succeeding centuries as well. In this connection, Michel Foucault asserts in *Discipline and Punish* that the barbaric modes of punishment have been dismissed which were once meted out to the criminals as modernity has found new ways to control and discipline them (12).

Postmodernism offers a favourable space for gothic fiction to flourish and presented some of the problems as modernism does: of sensation, spectacle and its embrace of the popular. *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) by Shirley Jackson (1916-1965) may be one of the earliest examples of postmodern gothic. In 'The Lady of the House of Love' (1979), Angela Carter (1940-1992), explores the intense concern of gothic and modernist narratives with time. A number of coincident concerns between gothic and postmodern texts are listed by Allan Lloyd Smith (1945-Present) which include technology, paranoia, indeterminacy, archaism, history, nostalgia, criminality, reflexivity, pastiche and excesses (Sage 17).

The writers, who follow the gothic genre add new elements to it and produce works with further implications. The process continued and for example, the gothic works of the nineteenth century appear to reflect more horrific nightmares than the

previous century. The gothic presence continued and was invigorated throughout the twentieth century by fantasy and science fiction writers. The contemporary gothic fiction is influenced by the realistic setting and psychology.

The important characteristic of the gothic genre is that it provokes a psychological, emotional or physical response within an individual that causes someone to react with fear. The entire genre is based on the fear of the unknown and anxieties. The gothic fiction of the postmodern era reflects the anxieties, fears, terrors, horrors and deaths etc. of the present world. Human fears are inherent and remain the same over the years, some of which have morphed into new kinds of anxieties, having not as much to do with physical terror, but instead on a more psychological level. According to Beville, through the terror of postmodern gothic texts, people can question their own unconscious fears and beliefs etc. (16).

The present era seems to be a better and reasonable platform for gothic literature to flourish as the whole world is marked by the scenes of violence, fear, horror, terror, dark spaces, the fragmented humanity, the monstrous cities, the sepulchral visions, the huge graveyards, the hostile identities, the apocalyptic visions, the suicidal tendencies, the spectral atmosphere, the damp scenery, the devilish characters, the gloomy vistas, the slippery paths, the twisting darkness, the bizarre landscapes, the fiendish realms, the fearful spaces, the gothic cemeteries, the monstrous agents, the evil animation, the hellish functions, the deserted monasteries, the maltreatment, the impending collapse, the mood of concern, the dread, the oppression, the apprehensions, the diseases, the nightmares, the terrifying human psyche, the poisonous touch, the tangled maze, the motionless writhing, the dark jungles, the sinister menace, the brooding oppressions, the gloomy sky, the dark settings, the gothic frames, the tragedy, the suspense, the malicious forces, the



ominous streets, the barbarism, the intoxication, the shrieks, the cries, the proclivity of barbarism, the gratuitous cruelty, the breach of faith, the bestial actions, the darkness of death, the greed, the starvation, the savagery, the filth, the stench, the thriller, the romance, the adventure, the detective, the pollution, the dangers, the infertility, the fear of time, the fear of mind, the fear of unknown, the fear of surroundings, the fear which come across, the perversions, the awful obscurity, the spectres, the corpses, the demons, the monsters, the stifling atmosphere, the sordid spaces, the ominous disappearances, the bizarre deaths, the inexplicable behaviours, the galore of scandals, the hysterics, the epileptic fits, the depravity, the malice, the conspiracy, the mercilessness, the lurid silences, the tormented natives, the tales of espionage, the political unrest, the personal turmoil, the shadows, the grime, the death in life, the amoral structures, the horrid dreams, the political, social and intellectual crisis, the cynicism, the hauntings, the threatening otherness, the deformed cities and the emotionally stunted humanity etc.

The world seems devoid of grace and reminiscent of hell more than of heaven. It is totally devoid of meaning, where only misery and bondage are certain. The world is described as unfriendly to humans with its coldness, darkness, formlessness and its ugliness that recall horrid and inhospitable nightmares. The life seems formless, dark, choked, enveloped, interspersed, oppressed, penetrated and suffocated resembling at once death and the irrationality of the unconscious life. All this darkness, impotence and stagnation destroy existence. The spread of gothic paranoia so implied is seen all through the world as the inhabitants are figured to be trapped in death-in-life existences. So, after reading the above paragraph, it can be undoubtedly said that gothic fiction is a perfect fit in these times of crisis.

Throughout history, gothic literature has always addressed or resolved the mental desires and quandaries, from which it derives its power and longevity. The contemporary fears and desires were always verbalized hyperbolically by gothic fiction and it follows this trend in a fictional style. gothic is found everywhere in the twenty-first century, as Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) claims that there is as much terror as we can take, given to us by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and there is a desire for its return too (5). The gothic has also been perpetuated by cinema distinctly by making films on various gothic novels and in popular culture, it has always thrived and is completely at home.

Nowadays, due to the prevalence of scientific devices, there is a shift in the objects and effects and divergent gothic strategies are followed. The new objects of gothic elements are presented in strangely mutated life forms, future worlds and alien invaders etc. The world seems unrelated and a mere object to human beings as its decay and confusion have denied humanity with its moribund look of incurable decay, awaiting demolition. It is indeed, soulless. The sickness of postmodern life spreads accordingly, finding its most promising incubator in the chaos, devouring monster and jaws of death of life.

The postmodern gothic works which are written on gothic lines seem rarely naive and at times, the gothic aspect of the writers emerges only, when they are read in the light of previous generations. In contemporary fiction, gothic has evolved as one of the most crucial and widely used modes of expression. Generally speaking, gothic exaggerates the darker side of the human psyche and outwardly, it presents the thought which may linger in the back of one's mind. Gothic literature represents the existence of the darker aspects of life. According to Beville, through gothic, people can access the unconscious and the dark side of subjectivity and reality (50).

Gothic is still common across the literature of present times and has made its way into mainstream writing with many changes and variations over 250 years. gothic is the language of terror and horror that signifies the writing of excess and transgression. It appeared in the terrible darkness and awful obscurity of the eighteenth century, shadowed the despairing attractions of idealism and individualism of the Romantic era and the Victorian decadence and uncanny realism. The disturbing return of pasts upon presents has been repeatedly signalled by the gothic and evoked emotions of terror through its gloomy and mysterious atmosphere. In fact, the brooding terror and overwhelming atmosphere of menace is an important element of gothic fiction which is characteristically achieved by creating profoundly threatening landscapes and evoked before the central protagonist. The use of shadows is another prominent feature of gothic art as they define the parameters that are necessary to build an enlightened world.

The world today is draped in shadows and grime and puts people in contact with sordid and slothful spaces, monstrous presences etc. In this plague-ridden, sinister world, everything is potentially dark, macabre and evil-natured, where people are imprisoned in dark space, who are more dead than alive and the image of terror, doubt, fear and horror at the heart of which lurks anxiety. They are not in a position to rise to a utopia. They are caught in the absurd world of darkness and madness in which physical grotesqueness is the mask for their one-sided, fractured and estranged selves. The people are enveloped by the effect of permanent darkness and there seems no escape from the gothic nightmare, only the waking into another form of the horrid dream. The gothic concerns are also found in postmodernism. postmodernism always assumes new roles and frequently combines aspects of diverse genres, thus challenging the set assumptions.

The concept of postmodernism covers a broad range of disciplines or fields of study which participate in varying ways in the postmodernist era. The culture of contemporary life forms a part of postmodern literature. One can compare postmodern art with an empty room, where he/she is free to furnish according to his/her choice, wish or fancy, without caring for the results or responses. In postmodernism, the conventional styles of discourse are rejected in all disciplines, preferring audacious, intriguing and provocative forms of delivery or presentation. The distinction lies in the fact that its presentation shocks, startles and unsettles the readers, instigating them to new and unaccustomed reading.

Postmodernism rejects the “grand narratives” and favours “mini-narratives” which tell us about local events and small practices. These “mini-narratives” are always provisional, situational or temporal and they make no claim to stability or universal truth. So, the very idea of stability or permanence disappears here. Postmodernism supports and refocuses on what has been taken for granted, the repressed, the eccentric, the resistance, the irrational, the insignificant, the marginal, the silenced, the sublimated, the subjugated, the suppressed, the nonessential, the peripheral, the excluded, the isolated and so on. Postmodern literature highlights the meaninglessness of human existence and the alienation of individuals.

Postmodernism is hard to locate historically or temporally as it is not clear when it exactly began. It has many interpretations and no one seems adequate as it is a broad intellectual phenomenon, focusing on global innovations. It may be defined as anything shocking and not conforming to the tradition in itself. It rejects the idea of absolute truths and the stability of values. In postmodernity, it is urged that people try to live without explanations and forget certainty. While explaining postmodernism, John Barth asserts in his essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967) that the

literature of post-war faced the dilemma of “to be or not to be” and “how to be?” There are various writers who have interpreted postmodernism in their own way, the important ones being, Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), Ihab Hassan (1925-2015), Michael Foucault (1926-1984), Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Linda Hutcheon (1947-Present) etc.

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche, a German critic, states that there is a rebellion against the fundamental presupposition of life. There is a fear and horror of the senses, reason, beauty and happiness (127). The self-empowerment and self-reliance were celebrated by Nietzsche as against the herd mentality of blindly following others. The very collapse of truth and reason was also glorified by him. Another influential theorist and critic is Jean Francois Lyotard, who advocates the use of mini and micro-narratives in literature instead of “grand narratives” in his book, *The Postmodern Condition* (27). He further asserts that the postmodern puts the unrepresentable in the presentation itself and the pre-established rules do not govern postmodern artists or writers (81). Jean Baudrillard, who is a French philosopher and sociologist, gave the concept of simulacra and simulacrum in his work, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1983). For him, the original or the real largely disappears in the postmodern world of mass media, only imitations exist (39). In the postmodern era, there is a complete loss of reality and there is a loss of referents.

In the present world, there is a sense of detachment, alienation, passivity, and nihilistic existence among the people. The postmodern society is engaged in brutal conduct of savage, recklessness and incredible outrages full of gothic manner, regular bullying and insulting people for mere pleasure. The people are strongly immersed in a gothic world in which horrendous events abound everywhere, involving themselves

in evil deeds and committing bloody crimes. The world simply seems to be possessed by devils and evil ideas.

The inhospitable and unfriendly spaces-repository of wasteland with their dark labyrinthine streets, formlessness and ugliness recall horrid nightmares. Life is devoid of grace and its inhabitants are trapped in death-like existences, where each scene or state implies fear and terror and where everything seems haunted, thus spreading the gothic paranoia. A postmodern loss of self represents nihilism or emptying out altogether and it does not strive for something like a centre or truth etc. The people do not really exist as themselves as they are transformed into an unthinking existence. There seems an inversion of Descartes' (1596-1650) definition of selfhood: "I think, therefore I am," and now the case seems to be "I was not thinking, therefore it was not me," the people are denying their responsibilities now.

Ihab Hassan, another literary theorist, who coined the term "Indeterminance" in his book, *The Postmodern Turn* (1987). The major tendencies of postmodernism are designated by him as the disintegration and disjunction of various power structures in social institutions (7). Another postmodern literary theorist and critic, Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian academician, argues in *A Poetics of postmodernism* (1983) that postmodernism is full of contradictions that it installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges (1). In consonance with these theorists and their theories, one discerns that postmodernists believe in taking an interrogative stance towards everything. postmodern fiction blurs the lines between the real and unreal as it contains destabilization, indeterminacy and fantastic or magical elements. It renders absolute truths nonexistent and challenges the existence of reality as fact and fiction become interchangeable here.

The postmodern texts are often borrowed, pulled together and involve the readers actively in contemplation or interpretation as the postmodern authors employ bricolage or pastiche and present an open meaning. The postmodern narrative is a melody of despair, degradation and discontent. It is a narrative of interplays, mostly between two worlds: the physical and the psychological. These narratives explore the realms of the psychological, the philosophical and the material world simultaneously. The things around us are heightening our experience of terror. postmodernism has too wide a field to describe and it can adopt almost anything. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009), Bran Nicol (1969-Present) asserts that postmodern fiction is too diverse to be a genre (xvi).

To fill the void, the gothic literature or the gothic atmosphere in a way aids and appends this postmodern scenario of decay, emptiness and feelinglessness. Through the gothic occurrences, the anxiety, fear and terror are heightened for the reader. These terror experiences reign the tone of postmodern gothic texts like the anxieties, deaths, murders and paranoia of the characters. Sonia Baelo Allue while presenting the evolution of the gothic in her article “American Psycho or postmodern gothic,” states that according to the social reality and its encounters, gothic stories change themselves to adapt to the atmosphere, setting and style (31). She adds that the gothic castle or forests has been replaced by the modern city and the villains of the past are replaced by psycho-killers (31). She includes *American Psycho* (1991), a psychotic horror novel by Bret Easton Ellis (1964-Present) as a member of the postmodern gothic genre (31).

This postmodern gothic expresses common fears and desires peculiar to contemporary culture and as an adjective, it signifies baser human emotions, collapse and decay of human creations. Beville asserts that postmodern gothic has a genre of

its own much like other genres (17). These two genres (gothic and postmodernism) may seem different literary genres but they are similar in a number of ways. For Beville, this postmodern gothic bridges the gap of over two centuries (31). For her, postmodern gothic is a genre in its own right and a distinct literary movement (34). She further asserts that postmodern gothic is used to comprehend the terrors of the postmodern age (9). According to her, sometimes the postmodern gothic genre uses traditional gothic topoi such as gloomy settings, suspenseful tone, visions, omens and the supernatural presence so that the postmodern tendencies are amplified. While pointing to the “overriding idea of terror”, she asserts that the excessive quantity of fear unifies both the gothic and the postmodern (Beville 9).

Arthur Redding (1964-Present) also defines the relationship between gothic and postmodern. While quoting an essay “gothic postmodernism” by Allan Lloyd-Smith, he says that Lloyd also finds parallels between postmodernism and gothic (Botting 13). Beville asserts that sometimes the themes of traditional gothic are also used in postmodern gothic (14). She adds that there is an interplay of the metafictional and supernatural, the doppelganger, the suspenseful atmosphere and the unrepresentable aspects of reality (15). According to her, there are many issues which are actually the same but they are separately explored in gothic and postmodernist literature (53). Beville asserts that the hybrid of the genre of postmodern gothic is found at the intersection of the terrors of the gothic and the terrors of the postmodern (53).

The postmodern gothic works purposefully exacerbate the anxieties and fears as these gothic tropes present the diagnosis of postmodern anomie and detachment. As an important slant, the world is full of examples of the effects of postmodern fears, terrors and horrors of the postmodern world such as mass shootings, violence, 9/11,



disfigured bodies, Covid scenario, Capitol Hill violence, live suicide coverages and so on. In *The Postmodern Explained* (1993), Lyotard asserts that the postmodern inquire into new presentations and invokes the unrepresentable in the presentation itself (9). In the present times, there is a proliferation of gothic narratives. Gothic is a genre that characterizes dramatic actions, a general mood of decay, gloom, violence and bleak settings.

According to Catherine Spooner (1974-Present), the association of gothic has always been with the popular (1). It often merges with other literary genres. For Clive Bloom (1953-Present), the gothic novels of the popular twenty-first century borrow elements from other literary genres such as *Twilight novels* (2005) by Stephanie Meyer (1973-Present), the *Sookie Stackhouse series* (2001) by Charlaine Harris (1951-Present). These works are a “mashup” or “recombination” of the mixture of gothic elements and romance stories. Hence, it can be said that postmodern gothic fiction is often a mixture of different literary genres and not always purely gothic, creating new and relevant items from different genres. Gothic fiction not only represents the terrors of the past rather it is more concerned with the anxieties and fears of the present. gothic fiction has always expressed the fears of particular times, whether it is the eighteenth or twenty-first century. According to Fred Botting:

The gothic fiction has always been successful in transforming itself from the beginning of the eighteenth century to this day. The gothic horror now no longer lies in a barbaric, superstitious past, as it did for Radcliffe in the eighteenth century; or the horrid paternal transgressions and guilty family secrets of the Victorians or the primordial, atavistic or decadent energies embodied by Count Dracula or the callous sadism, the horror of today has taken a different form. (141)

One of the central themes of gothic fiction has always been the apprehension of new technologies. According to Botting, this techno-science is a cause of horror and terror and a harbinger of barbarism and degeneration. The scientific discoveries are as much a threat as a promise, as hinted from *Frankenstein* onwards and the techno-science is no longer a guarantor of enlightened progress as it seems (Botting 86). Beville mentions that the loss of self and the terrors haunting our postmodern age finds as one of the key themes of postmodern gothic and there is a quest to find inner peace (201). According to her, existence now means fragmentation, evanescence, guilt, transience and the deconstruction of standards. (130)

While defining the postmodern identity, fragmentation and existential anxieties seem to be keywords. The postmodern gothic seems to seep into the postmodern lives and through it, the multidimensionality of the human psyche can be analysed. The postmodern gothic is largely introspective in spirit and it places fear, horror, terror and fragmentation before our eyes for introspection. The gloomy and mysterious atmosphere of the gothic repeatedly signals the disturbing return of the past to the present. This emotion, fundamentally identified as nostalgia, keeps lurking in dark narratives of all times. According to Catherine Spooner:

The past returns with sickening force and there is a fearful scenario all around, the dead putting their hands upon the living. This is compounded by physical imprisonment, the torture chambers of eighteenth century, the secret passages of the nineteenth century mansions, the chambers of heart and brain in twentieth-century writing. (18)

Spooner's dark impression of the gothic provides a glimpse into the darkness and discomfort. She defines the processes of gothic narrativity as seen in the popularly endorsed gothic texts such as *The Shining* (1977) by Stephen King (1947-

Present) and *Beloved* (1988) by Toni Morrison (1931-2019) etc. These postmodern gothic narratives explore avenues of terrors and horrors of daily life, dystopia, psychosomatic disorders, natural disasters, dysfunctionalities, political affectations, questions of sexuality, social disorders and technological dysfunctions which also form an effective thematic concern that haunts most postmodern narratives. This brings the question of reliability, where one struggles to set a mark for good or bad literary exercises.

The postmodern gothic narratives depict and explore the loss of structure, psychological displacements and dysfunctionality etc. of daily life. It is safe to infer that the devils, evils, monsters, magic, romance and supernatural elements have been replaced with science, technology, war, psychological despair etc. and it is to infer that the gothic genre exists within postmodern narratives. This postmodern consuming society has begun to face the tussles of ethics and what was once a terrifying object has developed into a lifestyle product that emphasises the beauty of the abjected or horrifying. The stillness of graves, the disquieting tranquil, the sinking unease- the signs of morbid anxiety are strewn all around. These were the 'numbed years', the decades that followed the World Wars. Even though the wars had ended, its spirit was hardly put to rest in the interwar period. The time was ripe for its spectre to stalk humankind.

The postmodern gothic fiction reflects this wholesale situation of fragmentation and disintegration at all levels of life. The structure of society is fractured and the lives of people are alienated, displaced, dislocated, disintegrated, fragmented and in a state of total loss. There is endless talk of anxiety, debasement, defeat, disorientation, fear, terror, horror, loss, panic, groundlessness, solipsism, meaninglessness, paranoia, self-indulgence, indifference and paralysis. Modern

societies are afflicted by the loss of losing. There are several psychics, perversion and inversion that have been associated with loss. The most common of these forms are alienation, disintegration, anxiety, fear, phobia, fetishism and melancholia. Beville argues that postmodern gothic plays an important role in expressing the postmodern experiences through literature such as alienation, darkness and death (53). It can be comfortably said that the relevance of gothic is more today in the postmodern era.

In order to stay relevant, the literary genre of gothic fiction also evolves and updates itself along with the changing anxieties or fears of the times. The elements of gothic have also had to evolve according to Clive Bloom in his *New Companion to the Gothic* that the gothic elements that scared our ancestors may or may not scare us (210). While noting this “historical change” in gothic fiction, he argues that despite changes, gothic fiction retained some archaic elements which otherwise one could imagine to have been abandoned (Bloom 211). The elements in postmodern gothic fiction have always been reflecting the ideas and feelings of its own time and are thus an issue of supply and demand as literature. Beville also states that gothic fiction meets the needs and desires of their particular times and she is of the view that in postmodern societies, the terrors are much more alarming and are defined by disorientation, violence, loss of meaning and faith (99). Although there is a whole range of postmodern gothic elements, the important ones are as under:

The fear as a postmodern gothic element is more psychological than physical and long-term than short-term, unlike the conventional gothic fear. The postmodern era keeps adding new dimensions to these postmodern gothic elements via the latest technological advances and developments. The postmodern gothic elements cover a broad base in contrast to the conventional gothic elements which had a limited base. Due to the progress of science and technology, more new forms of fear, terror and

horror experiences are added to the domain. Fear is usually induced by a perceived threat or danger which may cause behavioural or physiological changes. In human beings, fear may arise as a result of anticipating or expecting a potential danger which is perceived as a risk to oneself.

The response to fear generally arises from the perception of danger which may lead to an escape from or confrontation with the threat or danger, sometimes known as a fight or flight response and there can be a freeze response in extreme cases of fear such as horror or terror. The cognition and learning modulate this fear in humans and animals. Generally, the fear can be appropriate or rational and inappropriate or irrational and this irrational fear is termed as a phobia. According to Freud, fear is located deep down in each and every one of us and it is ever-present in the mental apparatus. There are few chances to escape from our fears as it is innate. According to Freud, fear signals danger and humans fear the destructive forces of Nature, physiological decay, death and of course, people sometimes fear themselves.

Every emotion produces physiological and psychological effects that humans can identify if they pay attention. Fear is an emotion that evolved to keep people safe, and is the reason that the species survived. A million years ago, if a human living on the Chinese continent saw a flash of black and orange, their heart would start pounding, their body would become doused with sweat, and they might struggle to breathe, which alerts them to the fact that they'd better get ready to fight the approaching tiger, or fly from it. Fear produces some of the most obvious effects because it's critical for humans to pay attention to it. Anxiety also produces strong effects, but many of them are the same as fear, which makes it sometimes difficult to distinguish. But there are some clear differences between the two, particularly in how humans behave. The emotion of fear is closely linked to anxiety which is triggered by

threats that are considered to be unavoidable or uncontrollable. It is an emotional reaction to a perceived or real threat. Suppose, if a person is walking on a road and someone points a knife at him/her then he/she would likely experience a fear response because the danger is definite, immediate and real.

Fears are both innate as well as learned and there are certain fears which are more common than others. On the other hand, learned fear can be innovated through learning by humans and animals. This fear conditioning has been studied by John B. Watson in 1920. Humans can learn fear by witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident. For Example, a child can develop a fear of wells if he/she falls into one. Similarly, there are other fears also which can be learned such as heights (acrophobia), water (aquaphobia) or enclosed spaces (claustrophobia). The fear is also affected by historical or cultural contexts as at the beginning of the twentieth century, Americans had the fear of polio which would lead to paralysis. Then, there is this irrational fear or the fear of the unknown which is brought about by the pessimistic thoughts or worrying which may arise from anxiety. The places of conflict or war-ridden places, where the situation is uncertain and unpredictable can also be reason for causing anxiety among individuals.

Anxiety, as an emotion, is often accompanied by nervous behaviour and is said to be an unpleasant state of inner turmoil. It is an overreaction or feeling of uneasiness and worry over a menacing situation or an unpleasant feeling of dread over anticipated events that are only subjective. This emotion is closely related to fear which can be said as a response to a perceived or real threat while anxiety involves the expectation of a future threat or simply, an intense worry about events that could happen in the future. Again as an emotion, anxiety is stronger than fear and according to Freud, in anxiety, people feel an impending danger which can be based on neurotic,

objective, or moral threats. The difference between anxiety and fear is that anxiety is future-focused and long-acting while fear is present-focused and short-lived.

In anxiety, the symptoms may range in frequency, number and intensity depending on the person. It can sometimes lead to depression as well. Among the behavioural effects of anxiety, there may be changes in habits, sleeping patterns and food intake etc. The emotional effects include restlessness, feeling tense and apprehension or dread etc. while among the cognitive effects, anxiety includes fearful thoughts. The symptoms of anxiety and fear can sometimes overlap but the terms are not interchangeable. Anxiety follows from an expected or unknown threat whereas fear relates to a known or understood threat.

The other important elements such as terror and horror are literary and psychological concepts which usually apply to gothic fiction. Terror is said to be a feeling of apprehension or dread associated with the prospect of something terrifying, while horror can be said to be repulsion or shock associated with seeing the terrifying thing. In her essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (pub. posthumously 1826), Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) claims that on the surface, horror and terror may seem synonyms, but they are so far opposite. According to her, the terror awakens the faculties to a high degree of life or expands the soul while the horror freezes, contracts and nearly annihilates them. To the uncanny, Freud likens the experience of horror. In simpler words, the sound of an unknown creature scratching at the door gives us a feeling of terror while seeing someone being eaten alive by some animal is horror or suppose someone comes home and realises that something is out of order or place, he/she may be terrified but when someone finds that someone close to him/her has been murdered, he/she is horrified and often the terror leads to horror.

In a horror film, one can get a loud scream when the killer leaps into the frame howling. This may shock humans, but that shock will be ephemeral. It will not stay or linger in the mind of people like a proper moment of terror. Some works rely on non-stop gore and shocks and bypass terror are often dismissed as “cheap thrills.” It is worth noting that horror as a feeling is easy to achieve than terror. Apart from being an element of the gothic, horror is also a separate genre which intends to frighten, scare, or disgust. J.A. Cuddon (1928-1926), a literary historian defines the horror story as a prose fiction of variable length, shocking, frightening or inducing a feeling of loathing or repulsion in the reader. It builds a spooky and terrifying atmosphere, depicting the larger fears of a society.

Horror fiction includes several elements such as demons, ghosts, ghouls, serial killers, psychopaths, apocalyptic spaces, the gore, macabre and torture. The horror genre provokes a physical, emotional or psychological response within readers, where they react with fear. In this vein, H. P. Lovecraft, who popularized the genre of horror asserts that for mankind the oldest and strongest emotion is fear or the fear of the unknown which is the first sentence of his essay, “Supernatural Horror in Literature.” In the twentieth century, there was a boom in horror writing due to the proliferation of periodicals. The cinema also started a tradition of horror films while getting inspired by many aspects of horror literature and all this continues to this day.

There was an enormous commercial success of books also in the late 1960s and early 1970s which created a horror boom. The horror novels such as *Carrie* (1974) or *The Shining* (1980) by Stephen King (1947- Present), and *The Other* (1971) by Thomas Tyron (1926-1991) etc. encouraged publishers to release other horror novels. There were other authors too, who wrote popular horror fiction and among these, popular ones were Anne Rice (1941-Present), Brian Lumley (1937-Present),



Clive Barker (1952-Present), Dean Koontz (1945-Present), Graham Masterton (1946-Present), James Herbert (1943-2013), Ramsey Campbell (1946-Present) and Peter Straub (1943-Present) etc.

The gravest of all misfortunes is death, another important postmodern gothic element and Freud calls it the aim of all life. The concept of the death instinct was initially proposed by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in which he asserts that the goal of all life is death. He adds that death is an unconscious desire that people hold to but it is largely tempered by life instincts. The cause of most people's beliefs, behaviours or even feelings about death is unconscious. Then, there is an element of disintegration that the world is undergoing now and it deals with terms like dis-assimilation, dissociation, fragility, fragmentation and split etc. This disintegration prevails everywhere in modern life. Everything is disintegrated into fragments. The world is replete with disintegration and there is the disintegration of spirit, soul and moral values. The fragmented body indicates the state of fragmentation and disunity on the physical as well as the psychological level.

Generally, the fragmented body does not refer to the images of the physical body only but it also refers to any sense of fragmentation and disunity. One more common and associated problem which people generally undergo at all levels is dislocation. It is a partial and prejudicial practice which is generally imposed by the dominant class over the dominated class or people. It designates a state of in-betweenness and its forms are usually migration, displacement, exile and indenture etc. Then there is an element of inclination toward self-destruction which has become a part of postmodern existence. This destructiveness inclination is observable by everyone and everything is experienced, exercised and exposed to it either

consciously or unconsciously; the daily quarrels, the personal fights and so many other forms of destruction.

Then, there is alienation, covering a wide and diverse range of physical and psychological attitudes, manners, behaviours, conduct and actions. Its manifestations extend to encompass every social and individual act inwardly or outwardly and it affects every aspect of life. It can be reflected in the feelings of being helpless, hopeless and powerless and at the psychological level, it can be manifested in various psychological syndromes such as introversion, depression, melancholy, nostalgia, frustration, solitude and lustful sexual disorder. The most prominent features and aspects of alienation are self-alienation, self-estrangement, isolation, double consciousness, split, meaninglessness, powerlessness, disharmony, fading, contradiction, repression, sexual desire, aggressivity, illusion, fragmentation and other manifestations of the psychological and social levels. Alienation is a condition of being estranged from someone or something.

There are various things which are included in alienation such as angst, anomaly, confusion, dejection, disillusionment, disintegration, frustration, helplessness, loneliness, meaninglessness, nothingness, stress, powerlessness, rejection and rootlessness. The person doesn't experience being himself as a creator of his own acts and considers himself to be an alien. Alienation in a broader sense can be described as the belief that one's fate is decided by external forces such as institutional estrangements or fate. It represents loneliness from oneself or exclusion from social relations and it is intimately linked to man's existential predicament. While making an evaluation of contemporary society, Edmund Fuller (1914-2001) in his book, *Man in Modern Fiction* (1958), claims that man suffers not only from external problems such as famine, persecution, ruin and war but also from internal

problems such as despair, isolation, meaninglessness and randomness in his very existence (3).

There are other elements also in addition to the ones discussed above which form a part of postmodern gothic such as concern, which is a very mild level of fear when people feel that something potentially bad or unpleasant may be going on. For example, the concern arises, when people think that a child may be sick and so on. There are various related words or synonyms for concern such as agitation, disquiet, doubt, consternation, qualm, perturbation and worry etc. next comes nervousness, a feeling, when there is no real danger but people are scared that something might happen or when they are afraid that something unpleasant could happen very soon can be called nervousness. It is the emotion or feeling that people get when they are about to go on a rollercoaster, or when they are going to make a speech on stage. Some of the synonyms which are related to nervousness include apprehension, trepidation, uneasiness and worry.

Then comes preoccupation which is a worry that people don't let go of. Next, comes dread which is when people are strongly afraid of an event, thing or place that they have seen before and is stronger than simple apprehension. It is an anticipation of danger or a fear of something very bad happening. Next, comes alarm which is a sharp fear or sudden appearance of something dangerous. For example, when someone grabs people suddenly or sneaks up behind or a monster in a scary movie jumps out of the dark. Certain synonyms related to alarm are disturbed, fright, shocked, startled and scared etc. Next, is panic which is when someone is in imminent danger or breaking down mentally and cannot take their fear any longer, the emotion is called panic. This emotion causes one to lose control of their mental faculties or become unreasonable. The synonyms related to panic include strong alarm, strong

terror and strong horror. There is a void and meaninglessness everywhere and they are corroding every sphere of life to the extent that people suffer from a gnawing sense of it. Apart from the elements discussed above, there are other elements of postmodern gothic such as mystery, suspense, claustrophobia, supernatural, dreams, visions, sublime, sadism, carnivalesque etc. All these elements of postmodern gothic cannot be discussed here due to various limitations.

The postmodern gothic functions more on the level of unconscious fears and traumas of the modern age. In terms of postmodern fears, the experiences and sources of terror in postmodern societies, are much more alarming. In the present times, it is the metaphysical terrors which have a stronger resonance than the physical terrors of earlier times. Beville states that as the world is defined by violence, disorientation and the loss of meaning and faith, the gothic terror and anxiety have a natural connection to it (23). Gothic fiction often portrays the collective fears, anxiety, traumas and terrors of the modern world. Therefore, in a world which is brim with instabilities, a genre such as postmodern gothic would be an ideal vehicle through which such issues can be raised and addressed. One can easily infer the importance of gothic literature based on the issues of anxiety, death, fear and terror in the postmodern era which further paves the way for writers and theoreticians to step into this realm of literature.

## Chapter 2

### Fear in Ian McEwan's Fiction

The whole time schedule seems to be replete with persecutions and perturbations. There is “no outward change, no remorse” (*Enduring Love* 120). The world seems psychologically disturbed as it is full of nightmarish events. There is violence in the air and a real danger of it becomes the reason for unhappiness. Fear has become so common that people take it as a normal phenomenon and a course of their lives. Life has “dwindled to almost nothing,” people could have never guessed at and it is being threatened on many fronts (*Enduring Love* 217). There is ache, fear, desolation, panic and death. According to Freud's concept of uncanny, humans have such types of familiar experiences repressed in their psyches which come to the surface while encountering incidents of similar nature and these incidents are in a way return of the repressed.

McEwan finds the limitlessness of human moral depravity and spiritual perversion. In fact, he has an extraordinary view of human perversity and provides a profound look at the world which is overwhelmed with bestial proclivities. The population is tormented by inarticulate anger, fear, contemptuous of governance and murdering sleep with every new handgun (*Nutshell* 25). These postmodern gothic fears are more psychological than physical. While seeing the treatment of non-human creatures, is equally pathetic. They too are treated very badly in an absolute crude and fearful way. The people should try to get over these ghastly things, the distress that concerns them.

The postmodern gothic elements such as fear, terror, horror and death etc. usually trespass the conventional boundaries of age, space and time. They are

scattered everywhere and engulf the entities easily. There is domestic decay, relationships are cracked and people are left in sadness (*Nutshell* 17). The people are immersed in abstractions, burdens and contradictions. They excite themselves with dark thoughts and pessimism. The population is “languishing, angry and bored” (*Nutshell* 25). According to Freud, humans have such experiences buried or repressed in their psyches.

The focus of this chapter is to study ‘fear’ as an element of postmodern gothic through the textual analysis of selected novels by Ian McEwan. A brief introduction to various elements of postmodern gothic fiction has already been given in the previous chapter of this thesis. According to Beville, the genre of postmodern gothic also uses traditional gothic literary devices and themes (15). It can be seen that the novels blur the lines between the fictional and the real and use thematic elements to portray the fears, anxieties, terrors, horrors and deaths etc. which to a great extent are not dependent on place or time but are universal.

The world is collapsed and people are in the gloomy recesses and begging for mercy. The people are living through tragedies, the “terrible loss,” the “ferocious gaze,” the “extra pain” and the incarnation of worst fears (*Enduring Love* 227). The quote suggests that as the world is living through tragedies, it is facing the worst kind of postmodern gothic fears which constantly evolve in new forms and shapes. There is a touch of sadness everywhere, a typical postmodern gothic scenario. According to Freud’s concept of uncanny, humans have their respective experiences of various sorts repressed in their psyches which get activated when they face similar incidents in their real lives.

The uncanny is something familiar and old-established in the mind and nothing new or foreign which is estranged only by the process of repression. It merges

the repressed and the returned, the present and the past and the familiar and the strange and the literary zone of 'what is like-but-unlike' marks it out strikingly. The uncanny can be applied to various genres to analyse the fears, terrors, horrors and deaths etc. in the works of literature. As emotions are crucial in the development of one's personality. Calvin Hall states in his book, *A Primer of Freudian Psychology* that emotional experiences are produced by the autonomic nervous system (61). These emotions are highly associated with the psychological conditions of any individual or character and thus the specific usage of Freud's concept of uncanny is the right choice to discuss the psychological conditions of the characters as it could explain the general repercussions and the relevance of these emotions in individual lives.

The elements of postmodern gothic are seen in most of the novels of Ian McEwan both in literal and abstract ways. Gothic fiction and its elements have to change along with the changing scenario in order to stay relevant. Clive Bloom notes this 'historical change' in gothic fiction and states that "the elements that scared our ancestors may or may not scare us" (211). He argues that some of the archaic elements have been retained that one may think should have been abandoned (Bloom 211). Therefore, it can be argued that some elements of gothic are not dependent on place and time rather they are universal. The uncertainty manifested in McEwan's novels through the instability of the landscape, the dilemma of characters and the setting of the novels, relate to various postmodern gothic themes.

The title of McEwan's first novel, *The Cement Garden*, itself gives us a hint of gothic, describing the fearful atmosphere of the English countryside and the experimental lifestyle of four innocent children. It is full of dark elements that create a mysterious atmosphere in a decaying house. From the story's inception, the characters experience psychological disturbances that affected their lives and started to threaten

normality. The novel explores the conditions of fear, terror, horror, alienation and death etc. represented by the siblings in the novel. Through alienation, the siblings in the novel are threatened by feelings of fear. They experience fear now and then in the novel. These fears are projected, long-term and affect them psychologically which is a feature of postmodern gothic fear.

The house in *The Cement Garden*, itself has a gothic landscape, where the siblings bury their mother. The presence of a grave in a house where one lives is apt imagery to understand the postmodern gothic, where the difference between a graveyard and a house has vanished and is almost taken as a normal thing. Maria Beville states that “in fiction, the ‘turbulent landscapes’ are a central part of the generic substance of postmodern gothic . . .” (15). She claims that some movies also employ elements of postmodern gothic such as Francis Ford Coppola’s trilogy movie, “The Godfather” (Beville 59). In a way, the postmodern gothic filmmaking resembles the novels of Ian McEwan, as the gothic postmodernity of these works comes from the nuances and thematic elements and might not be obvious at first sight.

Much like the house and its surroundings in *The Cement Garden*, the hotel in *The Comfort of Strangers* is also presented as a fearful site which presents a feeling of fear to the characters as well as readers, a typical postmodern gothic element. In the novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, Mary is vocal about the atmosphere of the hotel which according to her is quite fearful and strange. The rooms in the hotel are “cramped” (*The Comfort of Strangers* 96). This novel narrates the story of an English couple, Colin and Mary, who visit Venice, though the city remains unmentioned and obscure. The city of Venice, where labyrinthine streets make the two visitors confused and lost, symbolizes a state of hypnosis. The quote below gives the reader a clear



picture of the place and the atmosphere surrounding it. In the hotel which resembles a traditional gothic setting, Mary feels fearful. She asserts in the novel:

. . . with narrowing bloodshot eyes and muttered something through cracked lips that were beginning to swell . . . All those mountainous and wide open spaces, Mary said. You know this place can be terribly suffocating sometimes . . . It's like a prison here . . . Colin folded his arms and looked at her a long time without blinking . . . Colin stared past Mary's head . . . and voices, murmurs of awe, children's shouts . . . commands of restraint. (*The Comfort of Strangers* 56-58)

From the above quote, it can be established that the spaces described are prison-like and suffocating at times. The place and the surroundings present a feeling of fear to the characters. The place gives Mary a prison-like feeling and it also gives a feeling of suffocation to her. According to Freud's concept of uncanny, humans usually have their own familiar experiences of such sorts; here the fearful and terrible spaces etc. Such repressed experiences which are already present in human minds come to the surface, when certain similar incidents are witnessed by the people.

The concept of the Freudian uncanny has also been studied by David Morris. According to him, "the humans can never entirely expunge or escape the uncanny confronting them with part of ourselves which we have denied or disowned. It achieves its strange and disquieting power like the double by confronting us" (307). To clarify the concept further, Gordon states that 'uncanny' is the haunting experience which is there and which people strongly feel (34). It is highly symbolized and its evidence is barely visible (Gordon 51). It may be claimed that all the experiences of life or the whole journey of it result in uncanny experiences. On the other hand and as said in the previous chapter that many human fears stay the same through the times

and are inherent, seen to be expressed in postmodern gothic fiction. Beville asserts that “our fears, prejudices and unconscious beliefs can be questioned in terms of the repercussions for society in general and not only in terms of the desire that instigates them” (16).

In the novel, *The Cement Garden* there is repression of emotions and every individual of the family was subjected to the father’s scrutiny when his scrutiny was challenged, the patriarch of the family retreated to silence. The father’s silence demonstrates his authority. It is in these constructs that the children can be seen struggling against fear and repression. Jack narrates the repression he experienced due to his father’s orderliness and what follows as a result of this repression. The readers see the children rebelling against institutionalised norms and struggling with their sexualities. The people are exposed to a world of patriarchal practices that are knowingly and unknowingly ingrained in them through institutionalised methods. Here is an expression of an anti-superstructure created under the garb of social and cultural practices. They hold moral and strong ethical reasoning behind such superstructures. It is in this narrative that the readers can see a strange combination of sensitisation, fear and constructs in cultural practices.

The postmodern gothic fear is haunting the siblings in *The Cement Garden* and it is always present in the back of their minds. According to the Freud’s uncanny, the presence of such repressed fears is a very common thing among humans. The siblings are traumatized by the fear of loneliness, orphanage and the loss of family ties. They lock themselves inside the house and become numb to the matters of the outside world. Once this small and unfortunate family starts living a parentless life, 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. 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. Tom's dependence grows on Julie as a replacement for his mother. Tom was his mother's pet and her death left him bewildered and confused. He once gets badly beaten in school and the incident has developed fear in him. He, therefore, wants to change his identity to safeguard himself from future beating as is vivid in the pages of the novel: "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 . . . and he said he was tired of being a boy . . ." (*The Cement Garden* 46-47).

The above quotation clearly shows the fear and identity crisis in Tom, the youngest of the siblings, who is carrying the burden of taking the identity of a girl as he was once badly hit in which his body got bruised in blood and everyone was shocked to see little Tom in such a frightful condition. The fear of the incident haunted him. Apart from fear, this little child also faced an identity crisis. The fear can be sometimes represented alongside the theme of imprisonment and this idea of imprisonment manifests itself both in the physical and existential sense. For example, in Tom, the reader can see the abstract means of imprisonment and fear, who is struggling with his respective problems like fear, suppression or identity crisis. In fact, Jack detested the idea of being a girl, and in the course of events, Jack has to drop him to school sometimes. Jack says that Tom told me that he had an 'enemy' at

school who is gonna bash my head. The words sounded eerie on his lips and then I understood what he actually meant (*The Cement Garden* 44).

While Tom, who is filled with fear, spoke to his elder brother Jack about the boy, who had hit him previously in school and thinks that he may hit him again. Jack's inner thought gets outburst in the form of violence which affects his psyche and he hits Tom's classmate badly. Tom points out to that boy who "was a scrawny looking kid, red-headed and freckled . . . ." Jack "seized him by his lapel . . . gripped round his throat, banged him hard . . . His face shook and seemed to bulge . . . 'You lay a finger on my brother, 'I hissed . . . I'll rip your legs off'" (*The Cement Garden* 45).

Tom, the little boy who was traumatized by the hitting experience of the school in which he got bloody scratches on his body gets his revenge on that boy. Tom's elder brother, Jack leaves that boy with intimidation as mentioned in the above quote. Hence, the fear of Tom shifts to that boy now on receiving threats from Jack. So, the postmodern gothic fear now shifts to the other side also and runs on both sides. The mysteries that the children were exploring, the social responsibilities, the social taboo and the breaking down of a structural system in order to recreate a similar practice are all indicated in the novel. 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 fearful and nervous. The novel mentions in this regard:

The surface of the concrete was broken by a huge crack . . . As I stared the surface formed itself briefly into a face, an eye, part of a nose and a dark mouth. The image dissolved into convoluted surfaces once more. I thought I

was about to fall over . . . Did you see? Sue said. The sheet is torn and you can see her nightie underneath. (*The Cement Garden* 129)

The scene described above is so fearful that Jack while peeping through the cracks in the cement almost faints. 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. Thus, the childhood dream of the children to remain happily united forever is shattered into pieces, for their violation of the laws of humanity and the laws of England. There are inconsistencies and lopsidedness everywhere for which sometimes we need to distract ourselves.

In the novels of McEwan, an 'evil twin' type of character sometimes exists inside the characters themselves and shows the dark side of the human psyche. The past memories and traumas take characters or readers to dig deep into the past and find a double of it. The human traumas or dark side of their past which they try to suppress. The childhood traumas, fear and sometimes the expressions of feelings of guilt and an existential crisis about burying their mother inside the house and thus the conscience haunts them (siblings) at times. This way the physical as well as the mental imprisonment is important that act as traps for the characters in the novel.

McEwan explores the abnormal relationship established by characters, who crave for affection and companionship. They are a helpless lot and they are to a great extent isolated from the people and society. The characters fail to establish an interpersonal relationship and hence are on the periphery of the societies. They become rebels of the society such as the estrangement of the siblings as is clear in the novel. The siblings are derelict characters who are at odds with society. Due to the death of both parents, the siblings decide to lead an isolated life and avoid society in general.

McEwan's novel considers and describes the humanistic burden of fear and death, it narrates human failure to control the dark side of life. Much like the characters in the novel, human lives are engrossed in fear and the inability to cope with its effects. Fear as a painful emotional experience is easily acquired by being unable to cope with external dangers. Such experiences usually overpower an individual to helplessness. The symbol of fear can be understood through inexplicable illnesses, deaths or disappearances that evoke the feeling of dread. As fear is a very general term that may comprise various things. Another fear, the reader can find in the books is the fear of otherness. People, in general, tend to be afraid of things that are for them beyond normality; behaviour, appearance, sexual orientation, etc.

McEwan paints an ugly picture of contemporary society and gives a warning to contemporary society against the inhuman cruelties that rock it every moment. His novels depict the prevalence of the social type of the present day, the voyeur or the peeping Tom. Norman K. Denzin (1941-Present) argues in *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze* (1995) that "We live on a broad horizon of 'voyeuristic otherness' where others' presence is variously distinguished, disguised, hidden, obtrusive, noticed and taken into account" (207). The hidden worlds of evil and disorder that are enacted in the public sphere are brought under surveillance of others' gaze. There is in fact "no part of one's life that cannot be observed by others" (Denzin 207).

The people have started fiddling with the natural systems which have now fallen upon them. The words have lost their balance and the people have started to suffer for their own faults. One can very well compare the present times with that of old times. The novel mentions that in the earlier times, there were fewer complications in the world as it had fewer diseases, no allergies, and no hay fever but then people suddenly started polluting the world by putting chemicals into the air,

food, and water. The immune system got trapped due to “all this crap” which is accompanied by fear (*Enduring Love* 197).

In addition to the things discussed above, the narrative form of the novel also gives readers a gothic feeling. The novel mentions a vast area of baked desert which is broken only by great fissures caused by earthquakes. There is no wind, no air, no tree, hill, house or water (*The Cement Garden* 129). Everything seemed still and fixed . . .” (*The Cement Garden* 148). This typical scenario presents the postmodern gothic fear, where the people feel suffocated. The condition of the world is so pathetic and fearful that it seems like we are “watching funeral” (*The Cement Garden* 120). In his novels, McEwan represents both internal as well as external fears in his novels. He takes the postmodern fear-provoking traits and exacerbates them with gothic. As the world seems to be an empty place and the people feel death in everything. Along these lines, the main characters in McEwan’s novels become quintessential gothic figures themselves.

McEwan’s novels are replete with the feeling of fear which functions as a common and recurring postmodern gothic element as different characters manifest it through their actions. The fear psychosis and terror can be found within the readers themselves, and the readers always desperately try to hide their existence. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, there is a brief description of the place on the first page of the novel, the imagery of which gives a gothic feel. The description of the place fills both the characters and readers with fear. The novel mentions:

Each afternoon when the whole city beyond the dark green shutters of their hotel widows began to stir, Colin and Mary were woken by the methodical chipping of steel tools against the iron barges which moored by the hotel cafe pontoon . . . their voices too filled the darkened hotel room, rising and falling

in waves of laughter and dissent, flooding the brief silences between each piercing blow of hammers. (*The Comfort of Strangers* 1)

If the above-quoted lines are carefully looked at, the word selection is such that it gives readers a gothic feeling as if everything is engulfed by the postmodern gothic. The “darkened hotel rooms,” “waves of laughter” and the “chipping of steel tools” present a feeling of fear in both the characters as well as readers. The nightmarish novel is about a travelling English couple, who are caught in the traps of a sadist couple. It narrates loathsome violence and the most distasteful, perverted obsession. It also presents an inseparable mixture of fear, fantasy, violence, obsession, bizarre subject matter, suspense, shivering, shocks, and delivers only gore.

The major characters, seduced by the sense of violence, betray the simplicity of a soul. Colin, who is an angelic figure and Mary, his seven-year life partner is a divorcee and a mother of two from her earlier marriage. It is said that Mary “dreamed most frequently of her children, that they were in danger . . . frightening her with their insistent questions” (*The Comfort of Strangers* 2). The disturbing dreams of her children in danger and leaving behind them on the pretext of a tour to Venice with Colin, she has undergone a traumatic experience of guilt and psychological fear.

Like Tom in *The Cement Garden*, Mary’s daughter is also “savagely tackled by the boys . . . she had to spend a week in bed. Then she cut her hair . . . to avoid persecution . . .” (*The Comfort of Strangers* 91-92). She also faces persecution, fear and trauma at an early age as a postmodern gothic phenomenon, where the age number hardly matters. In order to avoid such happenings in future, she faces an identity crisis exactly the same way as Tom. The couple (Mary and Colin) then meets Robert and Caroline during their monotonous visit to Venice. Robert involves the



couple in several stories about himself and how he met his wife Caroline. After the evening ended, the couple moved back to their hotel which is enclosed on its sides by:

. . . arcaded building and dominated at its open end by a redbrick clock tower and beyond that a celebrated cathedral . . . Everywhere pigeons banked, strutted and excreted, and each cafe orchestra paused uncertainly . . . there were no tables, there were no tables even that could be shared, and . . . the square consisted of people in search of a place to sit down, and that those who left for the labyrinthine street did so in exasperation. (*The Comfort of Strangers* 54-55)

In such a fearful place as described in the quote above, Colin and Mary, depend on each other and grow lazy with their possessions. The same hotel and city, which worked as a seducing agents, also witnessed their shifting moods, and offences in the form of temporary and repairable betrayals. However, the next time they forgot and lost their way and slept on the streets. They wake up the next morning, to find themselves hung-over and hungry since the previous night. The street here functions as a powerful seducing agent. They walk and walk forward and tired and completely exhausted. The couple enjoys the masked hospitality at Robert's lodging, who offers them the hospitality that the couple finds hard to refuse. Even the otherwise welcoming gallery of Robert's apartment looks fearful to Mary as it is set in such a way. She stops and sees "a monstrosity of reflecting surfaces whose every drawer had a brass knob in the shape of a woman's head . . . Carefully arranged on top was a display of personal but ostentatious items . . . cut-throat razors . . . a row of pipes . . . a fly swat . . ." (*The Comfort of Strangers* 72).

The couple faces an overall fearful experience as the novel describes it. Regarding the outside settings of Robert's apartment which again presents a fearful

sight, the novel mentions that “a few stars had already broken through a sky of bruised pastels . . . the dark outlines of the cemetery island. Directly below the balcony, forty feet down was a deserted courtyard. The . . . flowers gave off a penetrating fragrance, almost sickly. The woman lowered herself into a canvas chair with a little gasp of pain” (*The Comfort of Strangers* 73). So, both the inside and the outside of Robert’s apartment are open to the readers to form an opinion. It is while Caroline and Mary are talking to each other that there is a “ferocity in Caroline’s voice” (*The Comfort of Strangers* 79). These two women further highlight their frightening experiences in the apartment. The women take it as the presence of ghost. In a way, The postmodern gothic fear is continuously looming large on their lives and making them feel miserable time and again, sometimes giving the impression of no respite at all. The novel mentions:

. . . , and the balcony was suddenly illuminated through the glass door, and divided by the lines of deep shadow. Isn’t it the one with the ghost? Mary nodded. She was listening to footsteps which had passed the length of gallery, and which now stopped abruptly . . . The footsteps started, and stopped immediately. A chair scrapped and there was a succession of metallic sounds such as cutlery makes. There’s a ghost, she said vaguely. And a convent, but we can never see it. (*The Comfort of Strangers* 84)

The above quotation shows the disturbing condition which the Caroline and Mary face. The mysterious sounds, shadows and approaching footsteps makes the atmosphere quite fearful, frightening Mary to the extreme. This incident of postmodern gothic fear also leaves the characters in utter confusion with which the readers can have their own familiarity. In the novel, nobody seems to converse with the other person with openness and something mysterious and unsaid element seems

to be hovering over the city, the hotel and Robert's residence as a postmodern gothic experience.

There is some strange feeling in the air as is mentioned in the novel, "a matter of perpetual concern" (*The Comfort of Strangers* 6). Mary and Colin "moved slowly, clumsily, effecting lugubrious compromises, attending to delicate shifts of mood, repairing breaches" (*The Comfort of Strangers* 6). Had the couple been able to understand the intensity of future catastrophe which gives them multiple experiences of fear, terror and horror, 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.

In the novel, Venice is a seducing city and an invisible beast devours Mary and Colin. The city itself gives a sense of a gothic setting as described in the novel, the narrow streets and shops giving way on both sides to high and dark walls. The deeply recessed doors and windows, crisscrossed with iron bars, break these walls at irregular intervals (*The Comfort of Strangers* 23). The city presents a threatening site as its streets open up into dark and narrow alleys. At certain points, the streets vanish into "total darkness" as mentioned in the novel. The streets vanish into total darkness with a series of "buildings . . . converged in gloom . . . and reddened . . ." (*The Comfort of Strangers* 47). In the given quotation, apart from the postmodern gothic elements, the gothic imagery is vivid. The usage of words like 'darkness,' 'gloom,' 'reddened,' form an essential part of gothic fiction and is usually associated with fear.

The origin of *The Comfort of Strangers* 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 similarities between McEwan-Penny and Colin-Mary. One cannot deny the creative height of McEwan to have created such a

wonderful book. In the novel, the readers can easily find out the elements of fear, terror, horror, 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. (Seaboyer 57)

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, lost, fearful and symbolize a state of hypnosis. The street here functions as a powerful seducing agent. The couple is seduced by Robert's hospitality and Venice as a seducing city and an invisible beast devours them. Of course, they fail to succeed and their struggle ends in a meaningless triviality. Both Colin and Mary are made to sleep by Robert and Caroline during the daytime and when they wake in Robert's house, both of them start looking at each other's naked bodies. The couple is quite confused by the developments happening around them. They are not able to understand what has happened to them. As mentioned in the novel:

Colin is still dazed, he looked from his empty bed to the pattern on the wall, to the Mary on the floor. 'Where are we then? 'Mary lay on her back. I'm not sure exactly . . . Colin stood up again . . . looked around . . . 'What has happened to our clothes? '. . . Aren't you worried? Colin sighed. Well I'm going to find out what's going on" (*The Comfort of Strangers* 69).

In the quotation above, it can be seen how one worry is taken by another one in quick succession, typical of postmodern gothic elements. Mary becomes fearful,

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. This shows the typical postmodern gothic attitude, where things get mixed and messed up.

McEwan beautifully describes the scene of immobilizing two-dimensionality and the eroticized horizontal nudity as both of them were naked. The forced, open exhibition of male-female nudity exhibits the voyeuristic attitude of Robert and Caroline and it consequently instils fear in Colin and Mary. 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. Robert, the sadist and arch misogynist, as sketched in the novel, has instilled in himself, hatred for women and always advocated the supremacy of males over females. In support of his hypothesis of sex and violence, he scornfully speaks of women that they "love aggression and strength and power in men. It's deep in their minds . . ." (*The Comfort of Strangers* 55).

The other gothic elements in the story are made by the descriptions of various settings and objects that are contrasted heavily; the contrast of darkness against the brightness as mentioned in the earlier quotes such as dim lit streets outside the hotel of Colin and Mary. Darkness is a key feature of both the conventional as well as postmodern gothic in which the eerie episodes are more pronounced. This could be due to the fact that the characters in gothic novels or plays often carry out their evil activities under the cover of darkness. The gothic setting in which the novel develops is also remarkable. There are dim streets, dark and narrow stairways as well as

cramped corridors and squalid alleys. Such a setting evokes a sense of fear and dread in the readers; a typical gothic aspect which enhances the threatening evil atmosphere.

The use of dark visions and nightmarish dreams is also found in McEwan's novel which again creates a feeling of fear. These nightmares also show the darker side of humanity which portrays the intimidation in real life. McEwan uses these aspects to explore the unconscious side of the human psyche. He uses language as a tool to depict a sense of longing and meaninglessness in daily life. Mundane routines and striking imageries created by the locales of their surroundings in Venice convey a certain underlying sense of nostalgia for an unknown time and desire.

McEwan, in his unusual narrative style, narrates the collision of everyday lives with evil. In McEwan's *Enduring Love* which is a story of Jed Parry's homoerotic obsession, is described pathologically as a de clerambault's syndrome that causes the sufferer to obsess about a person or an object. The patient misconstrues his/her obsession as a strong romantic bond. The disease mentioned here is related to the psyche of the person rather than his/her physical self which is mostly the postmodern phenomenon, where the maximum number of people are psychologically inflicted. Jed being suffering from the disease is described as a delusional and dangerous person. He gradually begins to haunt Joe and threatens him to bring an end to his relationship with Clarissa: and he stalks him everywhere. Jed eventually turns violent and aggressive which makes the situation fearful for Joe.

The novel gives an insight into delusions that affect humans in ways that are particularly peculiar. Jed is portrayed as suffering from his disease and his character is caught between Joe's perceptions and experiences, and his own personal experiences, which the reader encounter only through the narrator's voice. Clarissa's disappointments and dejections are left to readers' conjectures based on what they are

socially capable of deciphering. She has her own fears. Her fear of Alzheimer's outbreak in the family shatters her peaceful family life. "her father died of Alzheimer's, and it's always been a fear . . ." (*Enduring Love* 83).

A number of events lead to descriptions of Jed's growing torture and insanity much like the postmodern gothic elements increase in intensity. While having their lunch, Joe and Clarissa witness an attempted murder of another man. This results badly in the man getting shot on his shoulders. Later, Joe realises that the bullet was meant for him and that a familiar figure on another table misleads the killer into thinking that the man next to Joe was their target. Before the hit man can deliver the fatal shot, Jed, who originally planned this event, saves the life of an innocent man and he leaves the scene. Subsequently, an interrogation by the police takes place. Joe is sure about his involvement of Jed in this attack but he is not believed by the detectives. Here is a brief reflection of Joe about Jed, "when are you going to leave me alone? You're playing . . . torturing me . . ." (*Enduring Love* 91). In the novel, Joe further says:

I sensed my tormentor closing on me . . . I was disgusted and frightened . . . He had followed me and now he was trapped in the centre of the road, waiting for a gap in the traffic. There was just a chance he could have fallen forwards under a passing set of wheels, and I wanted it, the desire was cool and intense, and I wasn't . . . ashamed . . . I never quite lost faith in the redeeming possibility of a bus crushing him . . . (*Enduring Love* 90-91)

The tortures and torments do not seem to stop which frightens Joe to a great extent. Here, the postmodern gothic fear is followed by certain negative thoughts as well. As Freud puts it that the human unconscious mind is a reservoir of all sorts of experiences, although repressed at times. Joe reminds Clarissa that both of us should

have been protecting each other and standing side by side (*Enduring Love* 101). Almost all reviewers, notably Brian Morton, Peter Kemp and Jan Dalley have praised the novel for its brevity and suspense (Byrnes 250). The novel shows fear, loss and alienation all around. The quotation here makes for interesting reading. “The . . . father and a teenage son . . . mourning a loss, oblivious to the baggage trolleys jamming around them . . . women in their fifties, greeted each other with clear distaste, just touching hands and kissing without making contact . . .” (*Enduring Love* 4).

The above quote reaffirms that there is no goodwill in the contacts among people. The meetings happen or the people meet just for formalities with no strong base. It seems that there is always “difficulty and pain ahead of us . . .” (*Enduring Love* 93). The pain is usually accompanied by the feeling of fear. Mentally ill, Jed Parry on the other hand starts chasing Joe, writing him love letters, telephoning him, waiting below his apartment window and threatening him through indirectly suggestive language. In the meantime, Clarissa leaves Joe and he is left suffering. The postmodern gothic Fear seems to have engulfed Joe from all sides. The conditions like this are sometimes faced by common humans or simply they have some sort of parallel past experience which comes to the surface on encountering certain similar experiences.

Joe’s own family problems, personal ambitions and Jed Parry’s uninvited overtures make Joe alienated and mentally disturbed. It seems as if the postmodern gothic problems surround the humans from all sides just like Joe here. Joe says to Jed that “Look, . . . I don’t expect to hear from you again . . . What was so exhausting about him . . . tears, desperation, vague threat” (*Enduring Love* 63-65). Jed, while making his plea to Joe, “. . . perhaps you want to hurt me . . . It was as if I had fallen



through a crack in my own existence” (*Enduring Love* 66-67). A clash between Jed’s spiritually coloured, revivalist language and Joe’s practically applicable humanist terms takes place. The quotes above show the fear of Joe and the common people too sometimes find themselves engulfed by such awkward situations. According to Freud, people sometimes find parallel experiences in their psyches to the events happening outside.

In the novel, Parry is never tired of showing his urge to unite with Joe and when his urge becomes intense, he starts threatening Joe. About Parry, Joe says that “I could not even trust his derangement” (*Enduring Love* 131). The threats as well as ambiguity fed my fears. It was quite a frightening experience for Joe and now difficult for him to come out of this “illuminated envelope of fear . . . ’Johnny . . . Need your help. I need a gun” (*Enduring Love* 188). The readers can very well judge the gravity of the situation, the fear is so grave and intense that Joe is asking Johnny for a gun to safeguard himself. The readers have often similar and strange experiences too according to Freud’s concept of the uncanny. With the shock of shooting, a condition has been reached that “words died in my throat . . . I felt weightless and shivery . . . the background fear . . . I knew I was lost . . .” (*Enduring Love* 192-195). His choices have now narrowed either to death or embarrassment. Life thus seems overall fearful and at a dead end.

Life is full of torture and “sad dry thoughts” (*Enduring Love* 133). In such a condition, the people can implore God to deliver them from this meaninglessness. Humans should order their troubled lives as soon as possible. The novel also mentions words like “anger,” “upheaval,” “turmoil,” “curse,” “difficulty,” “pain,” “despair,” “rejection,” “fury” and “bitterness” etc. which show the despair and meaninglessness (*Enduring Love* 138). The people are living in times that are badly drained and “sink

into the darkness . . . .” (*Enduring Love* 6). The novel, *Enduring Love* is full of gothic imagery and the reader can find words like “gloom,” “delusion,” “forlorn,” “embittered,” “obsessions” “perturbed,” “fear,” “terror,” “horror,” “deaths” besides others which also reveal the condition of the present world.

In *Nutshell*, there is a “touch of dissociation” between the narrator and his/her mother because she has cheated and ruined both her son/daughter and husband. The narrator adds that by nature my father is defenceless, “as I am by circumstance” (*Nutshell* 32). For the narrator as well as the reader, it seems that there is the wretched subsistence and curses everywhere. “There is a silence” and people are left in the dark to confront troubles (*Nutshell* 29). In the novel, the narrator asserts that “I’m in turmoil. What was I in my father’s peroration? Dead . . . I hear in them the form of my ruin. Shadow figures on a bloody screen are arguing in a hopeless struggle with their fate. So, here, the experience of postmodern gothic fear is deep, intense and elongated, where even the unborn children are not spared. The voices rise and fall . . . they conspire . . . and the house feels the ruin too” (*Nutshell* 71-72). Adding to it, the narrator further puts it:

I’m . . . troubled by a sickly fascination to know his scheme . . . This, he says, must look like a suicide, . . . These vessels must show no trace of her fingerprints . . . It should seem as though he ate alone . . . all traces of Claude . . . especially, must be eradicated, cleaned to extinction, every last hair and flake of skin.” (*Nutshell* 57-58)

The narrator is deeply disturbed by the strange and disturbing developments happening around him/her. He/she is sick of knowing the schemes of the outside world, feels bad and is full of fear. The narrator says the notion that “my mother wished my father dead” haunted me (*Nutshell* 74). “. . . my private gloom lost to

eternal darkness. I've nothing to hold on to but hope . . ." (*Nutshell* 76). These thoughts have illuminated my fears and constant discord. The narrator is desperate to the end, he says that "I'm feeling strange. Famished. Exhausted. Desperate . . . Fear is an emetic. (*Nutshell* 155).

The readers can very well make out the concern which is loaded in the above quotation. The above-quoted lines are full of fear. Keeping all this in view, it seems that there is barely hope for this world and the above quotation is an apt description of the postmodern world, where gothic images and elements prevail everywhere. It is an omnipresent phenomenon now, wherever human sight goes. The presence of postmodern gothic fear is found throughout the novel which is always running in the minds of various characters in the novel. On the other hand, humans, in general, have familiarity with such emotions and experiences as well according to Freud.

In the novel, the murder plan of Claude and Trudy does not go perfectly well. There were certainly some lapses which landed the duo in trouble. The fear of repercussions is vivid and can be seen in their body language. Additionally, the duo are ready with many fake stories to convince people and police that they are not a party to the murder. But somehow their crime gets caught in the end. The narrator is also disturbed by the fateful event. The narrator asserts about Trudy that "her small, faraway voice chills me. "I'm frightened. She already sees how their plans have gone wrong, despite signs of early success. She's shivering . . . it scares her, disorients her" (*Nutshell* 123-124). Then arrives the police at the scene to inform them about the dead body which is followed by their investigation. The novel mentions the police officer, Sergeant Crowley, who confirms the news of John's dead body to them:

I'm afraid we have some very bad news. May we come in? . . . The Sergeant breaks the news . . . resuscitation was attempted during the race to hospital,

but he died along the way. A sob . . . , rises through my mothers body, rises through me, to burst into the faces of the attentive police. ‘Oh God! ’She shouts . . . and start to shiver . . . (*Nutshell* 106)

Here, the extent of postmodern gothic fear can be easily gauged in both Claude and Trudy. They are stupefied, fearful and in mollifying mode, impatient to witness the inspector’s skills. The fear is evident on the face of Claude and Trudy. They freeze as the doorbell rings. The narrator says that he can gauge the anxiety of his uncle (*Nutshell* 164-168). The quote shows the omnipresence of the postmodern gothic fear in the characters of the novel and for which the readers would have their own familiar but repressed experiences according to Freud.

Trudy “tells them in dulled voice all that she’d rehearsed, returning at the end to her own culpability” (*Nutshell* 107). “She’s confronting the unanswerable world she’s made, of all that she’s consented to, her new duties, . . . kill John Cairncross, sell his birthright, share the money, dump the kid” (*Nutshell* 47). The narrator is confused about the fallibility of humans. It is beyond the imagination of ordinary minds that how people can be so heartless by making their own people die and suffer which again is an important feature of postmodern gothic.

The postmodern gothic fiction represents fears in a form other than the ghost story in the traditional form. In the present world, anxieties and fears are more psychological than actual threats of real life and people suffer from various types of existential crises and traumas. James Laughlin (1914-1997) states that postmodern fiction while making use of certain features, challenged the expectations of the readers, how fiction could work, how persons could be situated and how the world be known (285). gothic fiction depicts the alienation of an individual and the meaningless life of a human, associating much with the anxieties, fears, crises,

suspense and terror which is found in everyday settings. According to Beville, who asserts in *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* that the essence of gothic lies in the fact that it deals with the dark recesses of the human psyche, morbid and terror (3).

In the novel, *Nutshell*, Trudy cooks up several stories in order to convince people that she is not at fault. She narrates several false stories to Elodie, an apprentice of John such as he was suffering from depression and several other things. She tells her that you know depression is brute and it takes all good things from your life. Trudy further adds that “I really have to spell it out for you? Company in debt. Personally in debt. Unhappy with his work . . . Chronic skin complaint. And depression. Is that clear? ” (*Nutshell* 139-140). Even after all this much narration, Elodie is not convinced by Trudy’s logic. Elodie says that John’s death under such mysterious circumstances made her “nearly faint with fear” (*Nutshell* 151).

The narrator says that Trudy’s tears and grief are proof of probity although she convinces herself with her fake narratives of suicide and depression. The fact is that ‘lies will be her truth ’and “her status as a murderer is a fact . . . ” (*Nutshell* 146). On the other hand, Claude owns his crime unlike her, he is like Machiavel, a villain who thinks of getting “away with murder” (*Nutshell* 146). So, from all sides, there is news of fear, death and depression which gives one a typical postmodern gothic feeling as the postmodern gothic fear surrounds one from all sides. The humans can again find similar sorts of experiences in their psyches.

Apart from the postmodern gothic element like fear, there is too much gothic imagery and gothic jargon used in this novel. A large part of the novel incorporates and presents dark images of human lives. If carefully observed, there is too much gothic imagery and vocabulary used in the novel such as “Leviathan,” “evil djinn”

“mortuary,” “creak of rib cage,” “dead of night,” “satanic,” “revenge,” “loathe,” “death certificate,” “the bleeding,” “hell,” “killed,” “ghost,” “spectres,” “skull,” “teaching toddlers to slit the throats... “smell of death,” “the floor strewn,” “lidless pots,” “unguents,” “suspicious eyes,” “the gothic,” “the witches,” and “curses” etc. which again makes the McEwan’s work a part of gothic fiction.

The gothic writer journeys through the domains of emotional waste-lands, fear, psychic trauma, psychological chaos, hysteria and all that is hidden beyond the shifting borders of consciousness and the dark side of the mind. It is through gothic fiction that people find adequate symbols or descriptions for their deeply rooted fears, darkness, destruction, evil, violence and so on. As an important characteristic, the gothic genre provokes an emotional, physical and psychological response within an individual and to elicit the response, various techniques are used such as phantoms, unreal figures etc. The anxieties of the people or the fear of the unknown plays an important role in gothic and the entire genre is built upon it. H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) asserts that “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (41).

Gothic depicts the anxiety, fear, disorientation and pain which are contributed by the actions, feelings and mental states of the people. For Beville, gothic is a means of accessing the real and the unconscious (50). She adds that one can expunge or realise the pervasive and stifling fear through the medium of gothic fiction (87). Thus, it can be said that literature acts as a perfect medium by which anxieties or fear can be addressed. In global politics today, various types of threats and overall instability are often seen, and it is gothic fiction which portrays these threats and collective fears. Beville further adds that the postmodern world is plagued by death and spectrality which sets an appropriate setting for the gothic fiction to return (37). Therefore, a

genre like postmodern gothic is a perfect medium through which the issues can be represented, when the world is in a constant state of instability.

In McEwan's novels, the readers come across many such occurrences, feelings and experiences which look familiar to them as described in the above pages. With all such experiences, they find some connection and some entanglement as described in the above pages. The chapter describes the parallels between such experiences and situations in the daily lives of people and in the postmodern setting. The readers or the people have seen and understood how fear as a postmodern gothic element is related to the postmodern condition. In psychological terms, such a phenomenon is described by Freud's concept of the uncanny. The uncanny refers to leading humans back to some class of terrifying which is familiar or long known to them, the psychic life of their infantile and primitive selves. Sometimes the mental activity within humans is brought to expression and the uncanny fulfils the condition of stirring those activities into expression.

When considering the anxieties, fears, terrors, horrors and deaths etc. in the novels of McEwan, the humans have a tendency to analyze their own behaviour and the people around them because according to Freud's concept of uncanny, people find a parallel to their experiences which are repressed at times. The human heads are usually filled with an array of jumbled thoughts which incline people to overthink and sometimes they are pushed into paranoia. The people are given the impression that they are being watched everywhere. In postmodern literature, the concept of someone watching and observing is quite common. For Beville, the gothic has endured history because its uncanny figures have offered humans to determine their repressed desires and hidden fears (40). The aspects of fear, terror, horror and death etc. are represented through the scope of gothic postmodernism.

McEwan presents a graphic account of the postmodern condition. He hardly mentions things clearly like the names of places, religion or any other familiar feature which enhances the suspense and timelessness of the novels. The narrators also seem to be withholding information in his novels as well. In his novels, the city has a dehumanizing effect on the characters, it takes away from them “the ability to form life-affirming relationship” (Slay 26). This dehumanizing aspect of cities is repeatedly stressed in his later novels as well. The overall picture of the city is an ‘evil entity’ (Malcolm 97). The cities present a sight of fear. The settings as depicted in the late twentieth century or twenty-first-century novels are not a sustaining entity as they had been in earlier novels. Now, the city or setting has become a cesspool of modern afflictions of which the people have their own familiar experiences.

The city is depicted as a ‘desolate wasteland’ in McEwan’s *The Cement Garden* and as an ‘ominous entity’ in his *The Comfort of Strangers*, having a corrupting influence upon the characters. The city in McEwan’s works encroaches upon and interfere with individual lives and relationship (Slay 58). They are not restricted to any particular nation. Nor are they limited to any specific period. The physical places in his novels prove to be impossible for the characters to escape. There is also instability in the characters which becomes evident, who are suffering in one way or the other. The settings of McEwan’s novels themselves give us a feeling of postmodern gothic, as in *The Cement Garden*, a living place with a mother’s grave in it, functions as a catalyst for the psychological problems of the characters. It sometimes serves as a kind of trap from which they can’t come out even if they wish so, haunting them in the back of their minds.

The anguish, damage, cruelty, fear, selfishness, delusions and decomposition has spread everywhere. Life has lost its meaning in the true sense. Every entity of the



planet is at stake due to the selfish intrusion of humans. People have fiddled with nature and are now facing its repercussions. The post War consumer boom in the advanced societies has been a springboard for postmodern conditions. The rise of consumerism has given rise to the consumer culture, which commodifies everything and has its impact on the value system as a typical representative of the present era. The urban sprawl, growing industrialization, globalization and privatization have given rise to problems like terrorism, bombings, suicides, sudden deaths, kidnappings, rapes, riots and mysterious psychosomatic diseases etc. The modern man is in a dilemma like Eliot's (1888-1965) Prufrock. Unless and until some concrete steps are not taken, people are destined to suffer.

There is a massive change at the social, political and psychological levels in the contemporary world. This study also discloses McEwan's response to the rise of moral deterioration in the postmodern society, a theme that has been accentuated by many other writers as well. The need of the hour is that people should realize and prepare themselves to understand the moral and ethical way of living which will help them to lead happy lives in the postmodern world. This study can also be taken as a social satire of contemporary times, drawing one's attention to the chaos around the world. According to Farnell, gothic helps people to face the material reality of death itself and in a way, it promotes the life of the living (593).

The postmodern gothic fiction is read so that people can face 'reality' with all its fear, terror, horror and its inherent spiralling death drive. McEwan explores the world of crisis and uncovers fears, deaths, destruction in relations and its persistent effect on contemporary society. He creates uncanny sensations in readers through his novels and provides more opportunities than are possible in real life. The gothic tropes in the novels of Ian McEwan present the gothic atmosphere of fear, terror,

horror, anomie and death. An alarming diagnosis of the condition of postmodern crisis is provided by these gothic tropes. The postmodern gothic tropes in his works heighten the fear for the readers. McEwan through his novels focuses on the fears and anxieties of the modern world. In one aspect the novels can also be taken as a critique of the postmodern societal scenario.

## Chapter 3

### Terror in Ian McEwan's Fiction

The world is fractious, weak and not well. It is full of aggression, armed struggle, conflicts, existential crisis, organised crime and barbaric fringes (*Nutshell* 24). People are seen dying of wars, terror, horror, and violence etc., the familiar experiences of which already lie deep in human psyches according to Freud's uncanny and come to the surface once they come into the contact with similar events or experiences. Life now seems devoid of grace, a shadowy repository of wasteland, the inhabitants are trapped in death in life existences and gothic paranoia. Everything seems haunted with features like formlessness, ugliness, irrationality, darkness, death, blood, labyrinthine streets and so on.

The novels of McEwan sketch the terror of the characters which underline the plight of individuals boiling with restlessness. In his works, such characters figure recurrently, who find life full of agonies and indifference. The characters undergo a physical and spiritual harrowing of the postmodern age, thus leaving them with no future. While reading McEwan's novels through a postmodern gothic lens, they provide an early-warning view of things that how they can go bad for people so that they can lace up with tools to cope with the intricacies of the postmodern world. McEwan's novels narrate the issues of sadomasochism, terror, horror, murder and some other abnormal practices. Peter Childs writes that McEwan's fiction has a "seeming preoccupation with violent relationships" which are "at once . . . bleak and compelling, squalid and unconventional, yet recognizably and disturbingly human" (2). In addition, such concerns are described by Kiernan Ryan, Jack Slay, C. Byrnes, Angela Rogers and many others as unsettling and perverted humanity (Ryan 13). The characters in his novels are considered in some way 'abnormal' towards social norms,

customs, responsibility and their own desires. Through McEwan's narratives, the people are enmeshed in the uncanny experience of its open-endedness.

McEwan's fiction is replete with macabre elements. His novels present characters as deviant and perverts, who defy social norms and morals. The behaviours of such characters are governed more by 'id' than by 'super-ego' in Freudian terms. There is no distinction between what is right and wrong and no control over their desire and emotion in consequence. In his novels, such characters have not internalised social values, and therefore whose societal responsibilities and expectations are completely opposed to the super-ego. While talking, Colin and Mary in *The Comfort of Strangers* hear some strange voices and sounds from outside and they are frightened. As Mary begins to tremble, she clasps her knees, the sound of approaching footsteps, the shivering and fumbling make the atmosphere full of terror. As the postmodern terror presents itself unwarned or at any moment of time, without any sign or signal. The novel mentions:

From the room next door to theirs came the murmur of a voice and the sound . . . Mary clasped her knees and began to tremble . . . There are footsteps across the nearby room, a door opened, and footsteps again the corridor, which broke off abruptly as if to listen. What is it, Mary? Colin said . . . as though witnessing a catastrophe from a hilltop. Colin was naked, and he shivered as he fumbled . . ." (*The comfort of Strangers* 107-108)

In the quotation above, the scene of terror is vivid as presented by McEwan in his novel. Here, the postmodern gothic terror is confusing and incomprehensible as obvious from Colin's reaction. Sometimes, humans have similar experiences repressed in their psyche. McEwan exacerbates postmodern terror-provoking traits with the terror-provoking traits of the gothic. As the world seems to be an empty place

and the people feel death in everything. The characters in the novels of McEwan become quintessential gothic figures themselves along these lines. In McEwan's novels, terror functions as a common and recurring theme as different characters experience them. In readers also this terror psychosis can be found as humans always desperately try to hide their existence according to Freud. The novels of McEwan make statements on the terrors which are seen in the postmodern world.

In the above-cited novel, Mary is frightened to an extent that she began to tremble on hearing the strange voices outside. She says to Colin “. . . with desperate repetition. I'm so frightened . . . I'm so frightened, she cried. Her body grew tauter and shook till her teeth chattered and she could no longer speak.” (*The comfort of Strangers* 109). Mary rocks backwards and forwards, almost crying and says to Colin, “Why is it so frightening . . . Why is it so scary?” (*The comfort of Strangers* 114). For Mary, things are turning out of her control and the experience is full of terror. She is not able to accommodate this much terror which is surrounding her in one way or the other, the parallel experiences which can be found in the repressed psyche of humans. Again the postmodern terror is multidirectional and presents itself on many fronts. The problem of survival as well as the evil existing in the world is predominant in the novel.

McEwan's novel, *The Cement Garden* is a wide-ranging study of darkness, devilry and a pinnacle of gothic writing. The title of the novel gives readers a gothic hint, its title alone is enough to instil a terrifying sense in the reader and it is so horrid that even a casual reader hesitates to continue to turn the pages of the novel and look at its contents. The very title attracts the readers by means of sensationalism. It obviously uses shock to lure readership. The novel clearly represents the evils that threaten societal makeup and humankind in general. It opens with the death of the

narrator's father. Jack, the hero of the novel asserts: "I did not kill my father, but I sometimes felt I had helped him on his way" (*The Cement Garden* 1). The "confessional possibilities" of the first person narrative enable the narrator to take the reader into confidence. The advantage of the first-person narrative is that "it creates an illusion of unmediated intimacy" (Ryan 213).

Next, in the novel, the terror is vivid in Tom's roughed and wounded condition, who was badly beaten and wounded by his classmate. Tom the youngest of the siblings, enrolled in a local school, was badly hit and there was blood on his legs which instilled one with a feeling of terror. The condition of Tom was such that his siblings could not bare the sight that they had to hide the incident from their mother while taking Tom to the washroom to wash the dried blood on his body. The classmate who has tormented and mistreated him, Tom exacts his vengeance on him. The novel presents the sight of Tom as under:

His shirt was hanging in shreds . . . One side of his face was swollen and red, and a corner of his mouth was torn. Both his knees were grazed and dried blood ran in streaks down his shin. . . . Don't let Mum see him like that, Julie shouted. We were on him like a pack of hounds on to a wounded rabbit . . . in the hollow acoustics of this room Tom's cries were deafening. (*The Cement Garden* 45)

The above quote displays postmodern gothic terror where the barriers of age and innocence have trespassed and in which a little boy becomes a victim. Tom's condition was such that it seemed as if he was attacked and hounded by animals. His wounds were painig him and the way he cried was of a deafening sort. All his siblings were shocked on seeing his condition and this presented a feeling of terror in them. The incident gives the reader the impression that in the present world there is a

lack of moral order, where even the children are not safe. As is seen, the present world is replete with such examples, where people come across such terrible incidents on daily basis or which already lay repressed in their psyches.

The terror seems to have engulfed the whole world and pushed people to the wall irrespective of age and gender. Everyone is suffering in his/her own capacity which cannot be nullified. Here, again people can see the familiarity of such incidents in different forms according to Freud. Instead of becoming a better place, the world is becoming a bitter place to live. Everything seems out of order and presents a dismal look. In postmodern times, people are dying violent deaths, presenting a bleak scenario about the scary life. There is always this feeling that some terrible moment is waiting for people. Jack asserts in the novel that “At the back of my mind I had a sense of us sitting about waiting for some terrible event, and then I would remember that it had already happened” (*The Cement Garden* 59).

McEwan’s novels present both internal and external terrors. The terror experienced by several characters in the novels is vividly presented by McEwan. In his novels, the manifestation of terror is also shown through several hallucinations. Sometimes the readers imagine and experience the narrator’s thoughts and actions and also feel guilty for wrongdoings like characters in the novel, further reading is taken as a mode of experience. In “What Writers Do: The Value of Literary Imagination,” Richard Eldridge draws upon Aristotelian theory to explain that literature is an imitative representation, in which “the subject matter is presented not simply for the sake of classification and theorizing, but rather for the sake of dwelling in the experience of the subject matter as it matters emotionally to and for an observer or reader”(13). This statement also connects in a way to Freud’s concept of the uncanny.

McEwan was greatly influenced by the psychological theorist, Freud, who has been a potent influence in the life of McEwan as the theories of Freud have considerably influenced twentieth-century literature. In his early novels, the unconscious is quite transparent in the characters. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that characterization has only a secondary role in the novels. Like the nameless characters in the barren world of "The Waste Land" by T. S. Eliot, McEwan's characters hardly create any lasting impression at all. The shock strategies, that earned him the title Ian Macabre, were unambiguously the hallmark of his early works, developing the darker themes of the period.

This chapter while focussing on the postmodern gothic terror explores the details of events, incidents and characters from the perspective of Freud's concept of uncanny which states that the familiarity of events and experiences buried in the human psyches come to the surface on witnessing or reading similar events or experiences as discussed earlier. The texts of Ian McEwan are to some extent timely with regard to issues of fear, terror, horror and death emanating from the overall war scenario in different parts of the world in the form of mass shootings, the threat of death by unknown, the crumbling of the institutional values, domestic violence etc. that continues even more so today. For characters, it is difficult to find meaning in their very existence as they are estranged from their essential being and their life as well as society. The characters as well as readers suffer from meaninglessness, terror, and a gnawing sense of void and every sphere of life is corroded. As stated earlier, postmodern gothic fiction work along these lines. Neville asserts:

Postmodern gothic can be regarded as an artistic response to the terror that currently haunts our collective unconscious as part of our postmodern culture



of fear and also as part of our subjective desire for its return and for discourse to open into the darker side of our known realities. (24)

The postmodern gothic works such as McEwan's novels act as an artistic response to fear, terror, horror, death etc. and the experiments of Freud are used to understand these issues and to make unthinkable, thinkable. Through Freud's concept of uncanny, the repressed feelings are brought to the surface which somehow have connections with humans. The postmodern gothic presents itself with added dimensions of fear, terror, horror and death etc. It became emblematic of addressing wider issues of moral and social obligations. To anticipate postmodern times, the issues of the older gothic are reworked within new models. The fear, terror and horror and death etc. are traits of both gothic and postmodernism, connected by McEwan to several characters in his novels. In his novel *The Cement Garden*, McEwan mentions the killing of a little creature by Jack in a dreadful way. The novel mentions:

A creamy green substance was spilling out of its stomach and the sac under its chin blew in and out rapidly. With one bulging eye it stared up at me in a sorrowful, unaccusing kind of way . . . I waited, hoping it would recover or die suddenly. But the air sac was filling and emptying faster and it was attempting hopelessly . . . That's enough, I said out loud and brought the flat stone down sharply on the small green head. (*The Cement Garden* 123)

The description of the quote above fills one with terror especially when the description of organs is given. The cruel treatment of the little creature does not even stop here. Jack says that "I found another stone and dug a short deep trench. "As I pushed it in with a stick I saw its front legs tremble. I covered it quickly with earth and stamped the grave flat" (*The Cement Garden* 124). So, this is how the story of this little creature comes to an end.

The characters in *The Cement Garden* get lawless. They disregard the accepted norms and traditional values of society and many other actions from the very beginning. On their mother's death, the siblings foresee a complete 'sense of freedom.' There is a deterioration of order on many fronts and violation upon violation. In the words of Malcolm, the novel, "depicts a collapse of norms, rules and order", some of which are embedded in the text, and the others depend on the cultural knowledge of the reader (63).

The novel depicts the society as negative and undesirable, where the conditions of life are characterized by violence, terror, human oppression and pollution which in a way is a vision of the present society as well. In such a setting or a dystopian society, the conditions of life suffer from oppression, terror, horror and deprivation. In McEwan's novel, *The Cement Garden*, this dystopia unfolds through the loss of the personal freedom of siblings. Jack is depicted as a thoroughly inhibited personality in the novel, highly restricted by repressed desires. He is kept in bonds both psychologically and physically. Considering physical subjection, Jack is not allowed to do what he likes or wants. He is facing constant terrors on which the narrative is based and which keeps the story coherent. The atmosphere of typical gothic prevails in the novel due to the impending dangers, and several absurd things, reversing the normal order and terrifying the siblings more and more.

McEwan's novel, *The comfort of Strangers* is suggestive of a sensation offered by 'strangers' in a strange place. The title itself may be inferred as having ambiguity in its quintessence. This uncertainty intends to engulf the various possibilities that the word 'strangers' has to offer. The novel narrates the story of Mary and Colin, who are on a holiday in a city which resembles modern-day Venice. One night the couple loses their way amongst the canals and they meet and befriend Robert, who takes

them to the bar and later to his home. They meet Caroline, Roberts' wife, at his home. Colin and Mary explain to Robert that they had previously lost their way and not been back to the hotel, "that they had slept in the street, Robert gasped in horror and sat up straight . . . This is my fault, Robert cried . . ." (*The comfort of Strangers* 63). Thus, Mary and Colin get trapped in an absurd, bizarre and irrational world. Colin and Mary's experiences in Robert's home are ingrained with an underlying sense of terror. They are exposed to a world that is beyond their expectations.

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 cobbled streets of Venice, cultural imprints and the sense of terror in the novel evoke a sense of familiar and yet elusive memories. Had Mary and Colin been able to understand the intensity of future catastrophe, they would not have depended very much on Robert and Caroline. They were seduced by the host's hospitality and Venice city. The enigmatic city of Venice is "portrayed as the fifth character in the novel" (Slay 3). The city serves as a hindrance to the protagonists of the novel, Colin and Mary. "They were woken up by the methodical chipping of steel tools . . ." (*The comfort of Strangers* 9). The labyrinthine city spaces often disorient them and mislead them to such a terrible extent that they rely on the comfort of strangers. Such a setting of a city along with the hotel in which Colin and Mary are staying presented a gothic feeling.

Upon reaching his apartment, Mary and Colin discover that the apartment is a museum of Robert's childhood memories, especially of his father. Robert's brutal machismo and Caroline's subservience and broken back colour this hospitality with uneasiness. Robert's persona is elusive, mysterious and obnoxious from the beginning. The relationship between Robert and Caroline appears to be sadomasochistic. According to Caroline:

Robert began to really hurt me . . . I was terrified . . . he whispered pure hatred, and though I was sick with humiliation . . . My body was covered in bruises, cuts, weals. Three of my ribs were cracked. Robert knocked out one of my teeth. I had a broken finger . . . the madness of what we were doing, and my own acquiescence in it, terrified me . . . Robert confessed one night that . . . He wanted to kill me . . . (*The comfort of Strangers* 143-144)

The above quotation gives a fair idea that how brutal and ghastly treatment is given to Caroline and her acceptance of it. Surprisingly, all this process is taken to be a normal phenomenon even when one's body is put out of order which is a feature of postmodern gothic terror. Robert mistreats Caroline in an inhuman way and even confesses to killing her one day and his treatment is full of terror as mentioned in the above quotation. The couple later starts dominating the lives of Colin and Mary and finally murders Colin.

The novel is a tale of bizarre subject matter, obsession and violence. The abnormal behaviour is not restricted to Robert and Caroline only. The experiences of terror have been normalised in such a fashion that every human activity seems to be associated somehow with these experiences. The characters also have something of style. They may be children, but childish qualities are absent. They commit incest. The 'innocent' in the world of McEwan is capable of doing criminal acts. Complicity appears in McEwan's fiction "not merely as a theme, but as a condition of writing and as a consequence of reading" (Ryan 212). According to Beville, the world is changing rapidly and is defined by disorientation, violence and the loss of faith and meaning and the gothic terror and anxiety is deeply related to it (23).

Apart from covering a number of gothic scenes, there is a lot of gothic jargon used in the novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*. These words embody the representation

of the gothic tradition. A few of which are mentioned here as “darkness,” “corners,” “chocks of a city,” “shacks,” “streets,” “intrigue,” “stacking chairs,” “narrow passageway,” “blackened walls,” “war memorial,” “rifle,” “dimmers,” “pitted pillars,” “hanging,” “life for a life,” “landscape in cracked,” “screaming,” “crying,” “chasing,” “trauma,” “muffled snore,” “cemetery,” “mist,” “crucifixes,” “statuettes,” “arcaded buildings,” “redbrick clock tower,” “cathedral,” “writhed in their seats,” “craned their necks,” “snapped their fingers,” “crests of the arches,” “sombre clothes,” “muddy backgrounds,” “leafless trees,” “cut throat razors,” and “murky paintings” etc.

The postmodern world confronts alienation, fear, terror, horror and death etc. on a daily basis and the fundamental role is played by gothic fiction in expressing the postmodern experience through literature such as lack of meaning and authority, darkness, confusion and chaos etc. (Beville 53). The readers of the postmodern and gothic genres indicate similar experiences because of the similarities of the two genres, and one finds them together also in the hybrid genre of postmodern gothic as is found in the works of McEwan. Many such characteristics are found in the novels of McEwan which render his texts a participating member of the postmodern gothic genre.

According to Joe, the people as a society are disintegrating. They work selfishly, always keeping in mind self-interests only without giving a thought to the larger good of society or other people. In the novel, Joe aptly asserts that society is disintegrating (*Enduring Love* 19). People have become too selfish and look only for themselves. The places all around brim with terror. People are not ready to help those who are in need of it and they don’t take even serious situations seriously as the novel mentions that “. . . bodies were thumping to the ground . . . the more terrible it was, so terrible it was funny, it was a stunt, a joke, a cartoon, . . . the kind of thing that

happened to Bugs Bunny, or Tom, or Jerry . . .” (*Enduring Love* 15).

From the quotation cited above, it can be inferred that the tragedy of the present times is that even the serious and terrifying situations are taken in a casual way which again the people are familiar with, as per Freud’s concept of uncanny. There is a lack of seriousness on the part of people. It can generally be said that the novels of McEwan offer an overall gothic sense with scenes of scandal, attacks, ruining social structure, cruelty, hypocrisy, the inevitability of destruction, moral intricacies and much more.

In order to create terror and suspense in the reader, McEwan employs melodramatic effects in the novel. In most gothic novels, the gloomy feeling is usually accompanied by darkness to elicit fear and terror. It is also believed that the evil characters who live in these dark houses are actually an illustration of the mental status of the individuals. In other words, an accurate reflection of the protagonist’s tormented psychological state is obviously seen in the gloomy condition of the character’s estate. John Logan’s death terrifies Joe and Clarrissa to the core and the impact is such that it will not go away easily. The world is becoming so much cruel that some of the cruelty or terror is willingly accepted even by fellow members. In this regard, Jed says to Joe, “You can be cruel to me - but not too much” (*Enduring Love* 97).

Beville asserts that in postmodern societies, the sources of terror are much more alarming and the physical terrors of previous eras have no more profound resonance than the metaphysical terrors of the present times (49). Instead of actual physical threats, the postmodern gothic terrors are more of the mind. Beville asserts that among the key themes of postmodern gothic, “the loss of self” is the one while considering the quest for trying to find inner peace and one’s true self and the terrors

that haunt our postmodern age (201). Beville argues that existence in the postmodern world means guilt, evanescence, transience, fragmentation, heterogeneous identity and the deconstruction of standards (130).

The characters as well as readers see and face terror in their surroundings. In the novel *Enduring Love*, Joe says to Clarrisa, “What I know is that I come back from a terrible day and walk straight into yours” (85). According to Joe, there is “. . . a terrible freedom is in the air” (*Enduring Love* 86). The whole world seems to be engulfed by the feeling of terror. The inhabitants feel choked and disintegrated. The moments of calm and peace seem evasive, a whole range of terrors appear before humans for which the people can find their respective experiences, although, momentarily repressed in their psyches. In this connection, Joe says: “As I settled back to calm myself . . . I projected all kinds of inarticulate terrors” (*Enduring Love* 69). On the other hand, Clarissa is also perturbed and Joe reads a passage to console her. “Everything was stripped down . . . and in the process, some larger meaning was lost . . . of no real interest . . . love which only had meaning through time” (*Enduring Love* 70).

As Jed’s obsession with Joe increases, the readers are exposed to the dangers that lurk around in deranged minds. It seems that the situations open unto them as calamities where they are being harassed and threatened at every stage of life. The novel mentions the terror scene of Tapp in which he gets hit by a bullet. While being hit by a bullet, the blood spray is spread across covering the people which are around the place. This shocking incident presented scenes of terror and horror to the onlookers as it presents to the readers. The novel presents the scene in the following words:

His puzzlement, congealed in terror, . . . The silenced bullet struck through his white shirt at his shoulder and lifted him from his chair and smacked him against the wall. The high velocity impact forced a fine spray, a blood mist, across our table cloth, our desserts, our hands, our sight . . . I did not believe what I was seeing . . . Tapp flopped towards across the table . . . On our table we could not move or speak . . . I looked at Clarissa. Her face was roughed on one side . . . So we sat there, unmoving, hopeless in shock . . . .” (*Enduring Love* 172-173)

The quote details the event of a bullet hitting Colin Tapp while he was sitting near the table of Joe. This ‘restaurant outrage’, ‘lunchtime nightmare’ and ‘bloodbath’ sends shock waves to Joe. This incident fills the onlookers with terror and such type of incidents are common in the postmodern world. The human minds possess a repository of such experiences. The gothic image of spilled blood has always been the horrid manifestation of death in the demonic world. Joe says that Clarissa finally starts crying. “I’m frightened, she said . . . He could get violent . . . Her voice was croaky . . .” (*Enduring Love* 149). She adds that “he’s a real threat, he could be dangerous” (*Enduring Love* 148).

There are overt expressions of frustration and disappointment and the real threats are still to see. The text demonstrates that there is no escape from the gothic nightmare, only the waking into another form of the horrid dream. Joe felt cramped by the accumulation of horrible certainties borne out by events (*Enduring Love* 213). According to Joe “my score was depressingly high” (*Enduring Love* 215). One more terrifying incident figures in the novel, wherein the character Xan got his hand under the chin of Steve to squeeze him. The scene is described as under:



Xan's next move was to slip a headlock on him, right arm round Steve's neck, left hand pulling on his own wrist to tighten the squeeze . . . Steve was going slowly to his knees. He was moaning and his hands were flailing, then beating weakly against Can's legs. I tapped Xan's face . . . You're going to kill him ... If he dies you'll be inside for the rest of your life (*Enduring Love* 202).

From the above quote, it can easily be guessed that the novel contains many incidents where a person is trying to kill another person, thus finding a parallel and familiarity with the postmodern gothic scenario. Here in the above quote, can be seen Xan's move to kill Steve. Again, according to Freud, the familiarity of such incidents can be found within the human psyche as in daily life people usually come across such incidents or experiences. In the novel, Joe meets the wife of Mr. Logan and narrates his incident of death to her. Joe says that “. . . we stood and watched him fall from the sky . . .” (*Enduring Love* 127). While narrating the horror tale to Jean Logan, Joe said to her that everything “looked tense” and “was being threatened” (*Enduring Love* 129). The feelings looked tense and threatened which can be related to the postmodern condition.

Like many other McEwan's novels, the novel, *Enduring Love* includes nouns which possess negative meanings which are particular to the gothic genre. These nouns dominate throughout the novel such as darkness, ghost, graves, loneliness, blood, crying, boredom, tears, death, funeral, night, danger, hooks, wreath, spy, crash, scream, awkwardness, lightning, hunger, dampness, thunder, weakness, shadow, uncertainty, etc. While describing the feelings, physical state or situation such words are used by the writer. Apart from nouns, there are adjectives which contribute to the prevailing gothic mood of the novel such as trembling, dusky, drugged, dangerous, sad, frightened, forbidden, outrageous, brutal, terrified etc. and phrases like a stab,

large empty houses, black veil, dead branches, grey shadows, lonely place and half dead worms etc. Then there come verbs which perform their role as well such as to freeze, to betray, to kill etc.

The words described above have their own impact on the creation of the overall gothic atmosphere and the gothic elements used in the novels are refashioned by postmodern gothic. The representation of the mood and the emotions evoked by the readers as well as the depiction of psychological or physical states contribute a lot to the creation of a general gothic view of the novel. A general warning is served to people through the dreadful scenes as to what the future has in store for them. It looks as if there is “permission to kill” (*Enduring Love* 206). Everybody is “very frightened,” while some scream in terror (*Enduring Love* 211).

It can be inferred that McEwan is trying to bring home the idea of destruction, terror, horror and other mishappenings which are happening around the world and thereby giving a message to the reader to act before it is too late. In *Nutshell*, McEwan says that the world is trampled by brutes (*Nutshell* 18). There is no idea of what is happening. The prospects are dimmed and the existence is denied “rightful claims to a happy life . . .” (*Nutshell* 19).

On the first page of *Nutshell*, there is a quote followed by another on the last page of the same novel. The quote goes as “I’m terrified by what awaits me . . .” (*Nutshell* 1) followed by “chaos” on the last page (*Nutshell* 197). This in a way can be interpreted simply as that from beginning to end there seems to be chaos and trouble. There is terror, horror, hopelessness and pessimism. There is anger, exhaustion, wars, rapine and enslavement. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator learns that Trudy and Claude are planning to kill John, which is the narrator’s father and Trudy’s estranged husband. In a way, the narrator feels contented that he is unborn and

covered by the amniotic sac which protects him from the world and its bad happenings. The narrator asserts: “Enough. My amniotic sac . . . holds the fluid that protects me from the world and its bad dreams” (*Nutshell* 191). Through Trudy’s biological responses, the narrator makes inferences about the outside world and the actions of other people. The narrator says:

I’m close to my mother’s heart and know its rhythms and sudden turns. And now! It accelerates at her husband’s voice, and there’s an added sound, a disturbance in the chambers, like the distant rattling of maracas, or gravel shuffled softly in a tin. From down here I’d say it’s a semilunar valve whose cusps are snapping shut too hard and sticking. (*Nutshell* 80)

The narrator feels quite terrorised and draws inferences about the outside happenings. The reader can draw the inference here that the postmodern gothic terror unlike the conventional gothic is not restricted by things like age, event or space, it can unveil itself anywhere and at any age as quoted above and experienced by an unborn child. Claude and Trudy’s intention to poison John, makes the narrator uncomfortable. It is revealed by the narrator that Claude is actually his/her uncle, who plants items in John’s car so that it looks like a suicide case. The narrator says that my uncle “has entranced my mother and banished my father . . . He’ll crush me. Unless, . . . a wisp of a word, ghostly token of of altered fate, bleating little iamb of hope, its drifts across my thoughts like a floater . . .” (*Nutshell* 19). The narrator seems to have lost faith in life and displays absolute pessimism. For him/her, life is bleak and loveless and the deceit is all around.

The world presents a dismal scenario and it seems as if humans are surrounded by “grunts and exasperation” and “there’s blood all through . . .” (*Nutshell* 38). Again, there is a mention of blood in the quote which is a prominent gothic image and plays a

key role in the postmodern gothic elements of terror. The narrator further says that “I’m frightened . . . Her blood beats through me in thuds like distant artillery fire . . . her single treacherous utterance, appears to issue from my own untried mouth . . . she says it into her lover’s mouth. Baby’s first word. ‘Poison’” (*Nutshell* 41).

The narrator fully understands the treacherous deeds of his/her mother and is so depressed that he/she gives a random call for help. He/she calls out to his/her father for rescue. He/she says, “Beloved father, rescue me from this Vale of Despond. Take me down with you. Let me be poisoned at your side rather than placed somewhere” (*Nutshell* 43). There is terror and threat of death from every side. The whole scenario presents a bleak picture before the readers as the things are going in a horrible direction. The narrator is too much worried about his post-birth condition and asserts:

What despicable part of myself . . . When I’m born and allowed at last to be alone . . . My affair with Trudy isn’t going well . . . We’re alone then, all of us, even me, each treading a deserted highway, toting in a bundle on a shouldered stick the schemes, the flow charts, for unconscious advancement. Too much to bear, too grim to be true. (*Nutshell* 33)

The above quote paints a grim picture of the postmodern condition beyond what one could have even thought. The narrator once attempts to hang himself/herself with his/her own umbilical cord during Claude and Trudy’s physical relations. This is how the novel mentions his/her plan to kill himself/herself within the mother’s womb. The narrator declares the terrifying plan in the following words:

I’m going to kill myself. An infant death, a homicide in effect, due to my uncle’s reckless assault . . . His arrest, trial, sentence, imprisonment. My father’s death half avenged . . . To take my life I’ll need the cord, three turns

around my neck of the mortal coil . . . The fiction of my father's suicide will be an inspiration for my own attempt . . . To be stillborn-a tranquil term purged of tragedy . . .” (*Nutshell* 126-127).

The quotation fairly hints at the multiple crises of the narrator so much so that he/she is compelled to commit suicide. He/she thinks well in advance about the post-suicide repercussions and effects. In a way, he/she forces revenge for his/her suicide which will lead to the trial and imprisonment of the narrator's uncle. In the postmodern world also, people witness suicide cases on daily basis, where the victims are sometimes tested beyond their endurance. People often hear or come across such news items and the incidents like this are usually buried in one's mind. According to Freud, people experience an uncanny, when they come across or witness such incidents in person, they witness a strange familiarity in them.

According to the narrator, before committing the crime of murder, Claude and Trudy “find small talk a burden. Dry mouth, thready pulse, whirling thoughts. Even Claude is stumped . . . There's a clock . . . ticking in thoughtful iambs . . . The painkillers are coming on, but the gain is mere clarity where numbness would suit me better” (*Nutshell* 84). The reader comes to know about the plan of John's murder and to make his death look like a suicide by planting certain items in his car. John's smoothie is poisoned and Claude and Trudy trick him to drink it. The novel actually details those moments of terror in detail like how the thoughts were running and how the time was ticking.

The postmodern gothic terror is further highlighted in other quotes of the novel as well. According to the narrator, Claude plants a smoothie cup, an antifreeze bottle, a receipt and a bank statement with the word “enough” written on it. This all seems “a doomed production of a terrible play...” (*Nutshell* 93). The in-utero child

wanted to stop the plot against his father. He wishes to kill “his uncle to save his father . . . Then murder his mother as the sole witness, dispose of two bodies in a basement kitchen” (*Nutshell* 52).

From the above quotation, the reader comes to know that from both sides there is a planning of deaths which makes the overall scene full of terror. The narrator is perplexed that how can his/her mother launch herself as a murderer, when she never had a job. The novel mentions “Could my mother, who’s never had a job, launch herself as a murderer? A tough profession, not only in the planning and execution but in the aftermath, when the career would properly begin” (*Nutshell* 79). Humans have such familiar experiences of the kind in the present world, where scores of young people launch themselves as murderers without having any previous experiences. According to the narrator:

. . . the line of criminality has been crossed . . . They can only stand back and wait for the antithesis, for the antifreeze to leave him cold . . . Is this the last time I hear my father’s voice? . . . I have lungs but no air to shout a warning or weep with shame at my impotence . . . As he goes out he calls over his shoulder, “Let’s hope that bloody car starts. (*Nutshell* 99)

In the quote above, the extremeness of criminality cannot be denied, the way it is planned and the way it is to be executed. Due to this, the works of McEwan have often been described by critics as macabre and aesthetically violent through his depiction of fear, terror, horror, violence, deaths, murders, mental disorders and daily life exposed in brutal fashions. He involves brutal descriptions in his narrative plots, events and characters. They are symbolically explorative of the postmodern condition.

The brutality of terror is depicted through traumatising depictions of death and deformed bodies. McEwan reiterates fears, struggles, terrors and horrors of the human

psyche that is enveloped in the shell of an exciting sensation for his readers. Such elements heighten the suspense and mystery in its thematic concern even before the reader begins to read. Apart from this, all this process invokes the sensation of uncanny which is the notion of experiences, that a human psyche is capable of consciously recalling at once. It could be assumed that these sensations are buried deep within the human conscience according to Sigmund Freud.

In this rapidly changing world which is defined by loss of meaning, disorientation, and violence, terror as an emotion gets stimulus by eighteenth-century or postmodern events, hinting at unimaginable horrors and leaving the mind to wander that what is going to happen next (Beville 23-24). It causes one to be in a state of suspension or hesitation as a personal experience. The postmodern gothic fiction as a hybrid genre is found at the intersection of the terrors of the gothic and the terrors of postmodernism. Beville writes quite relevantly that some of the issues that are explored separately in gothic and Postmodernist fiction are one and the same (53). She further asserts that postmodern gothic fiction mimics their eighteenth-century parallels such as terror and its effects although generated by different events (Beville 23).

As an important slant, this thesis reveals the postmodern gothic elements such as fears, terrors, horrors and deaths, for which one gets a world full of examples on daily basis such as mass shootings, murders, violence, wars, suicides etc. This presents an overall sense of fear, terror and horror etc. which is intrinsically tied to the postmodern gothic. The characters in McEwan's novels experience the abject terror which not only affect their bodies but also their minds. Such terrifying scenes affect the mind of both the characters as well as the readers. The gothic tropes in his works

create fear, terror, horror etc. and numb the characters and readers through the process of desensitization.

The terror is experienced not only by the characters but also by the readers, as according to Freud, humans have their own experiences of terror etc. The elements of fear and terror contribute to the sense of horror all of which are characteristic elements of gothic fiction. The novels of Ian McEwan provide a means to cope with or master the anxieties, fears, terrors and horrors inherent in postmodern society. His novels are a sort of critique of postmodern society.

The anxieties, fears, terrors, horrors and deaths etc. of the postmodern world can be seen in the expression of postmodern gothic fiction. Such elements stay the same through the times and are inherent, but they may morph into new kinds. These new elements happen on a more psychological level and may be different from the previous elements. Beville argues that people can question their own beliefs, prejudices and unconscious fears both in terms of the desires that instigate them and their repercussions for society through the terror of postmodern gothic texts (16). The present world is uncertain and paranoid, the postmodern gothic fiction thus covers its unconscious fears, terrors, horrors and traumas etc. According to Beville, terror hints at unimaginable horrors and leaves the mind to wander or to be in a state of hesitation or suspension. (24)

McEwan presents the dystopian social spaces of the twentieth century. In Terry Eagleton's opinion, dystopias, rather than utopias have relevance in the present context. All utopia, in Eagleton's opinion, "is at the same time dystopia" because it reminds us that we are bound fast by history (31). In his view, utopian thought is "hardly in fashion in these sceptical politically downbeat days" (36). Many a critic has commended the clinical precision of McEwan's prose style. Ryan remarks about



McEwan that “the contained impersonal prose, purged of emotive resonance, works hand in glove with the nerveless narrator,” applies to almost all novels (11). The detachment with which the novelist describes the murder scenes in his novels indicates the placidity of the style.

McEwan successfully maintains suspense, incorporating melodramatic physical details, reproducing tense and violent dialogue, hinting at apocalyptic and awful overtones and so on. The characters are highly obsessed with evil ideas that make their broader melodramatic histories, life and being like devils. Their tragic implications are such that he takes them very seriously, making a shocking and freezing sense of terror in the reader’s mind. Everything seems in disorder and filthy. It can be clearly said that all these features of the gothic narrative, and many more, may be attributed to the mastery of the storytelling in a space of mystery and suspense, making the reader fascinated, excited and even shocked.

McEwan surprises his readers by presenting bizarre and terrifying events through the use of a large variety of narrative strategies. The breaks in the narrative, indefiniteness in point of view, deviations in diction and unpredictable changeability of focalisation, mirror the disintegrative features of the postmodern human being and the callous indifference of characters to the outrageous elements. The truth is that the modern world is immunized to the shock. The readers are alerted by the writer, presenting dystopias and pitfalls of the present course of society or what it might conceivably take in the future, thus depicting the disastrous, unpleasant and terrifying consequences for the whole of humanity.

The society is engaged in brutal conduct of savage recklessness and incredible outrages full of gothic manners, regular bullying and insulting people mere for pleasure. In gothic fiction, since earlier days, fear, terror, horror and death etc. have

been there. However, in postmodern gothic, this fear, terror, horror and death etc. finds a more complex representation in a much more complex way than the conventional gothic fiction. As said earlier, unlike traditional gothic fiction, postmodern gothic fiction finds many of its literary elements and its overall atmosphere, while the postmodern gothic elements which are represented are connected to the present age of science and technology.

The world assailed by the war seemed barely able to totter to its feet. It is only through imploring God, who can solve all the miseries and succour all grief from the face of this earth. The people are crying for a world unsullied by the tarnish of violence. The need of the hour is to diagnose the roots of a malignant evil and look for solutions. The situation is grim, a time filled with an air of dejection and the people had been badly let down. Life is feeling too shabby for any good thing to be present in people's minds as something to fight for. The wars, the slump, the economic depression, and the rampant unemployment have paralysed the whole of humanity and brought the worst fears, terrors, horrors and deaths true. Today, the venomous forces, the shudder on hearing the exploits of the bombs are raging in all corners of the world and the words of peace seem a mockery. There is a need to call out to all those, who are ready to fight the ills of these forces and the decaying society.

In the present scenario, instead of ghosts, the creations of modern technology are actual terrors. The reader is strongly immersed in a gothic world in which horrendous events abound everywhere. The world is involved in evil deeds and bloody crimes, it seems possessed by devils and evil ideas. The condition of life in such a culture suffers from oppression, deprivation and terror. The writer's view of the future is overshadowed by the stimulating fears of the ugly consequences of present-day behaviour. There is a suspicion, a "cry of loneliness" and "there is no

happiness” in this time of crisis. “We had lost heart, we had lost our heart. We are loveless, or we had lost the trick of love . . .” (*Enduring Love* 135-140). The people linger on the expressions of frustration or accusations. The suspicion of humans is alive and sooner or later they become part of this harm. Such logic drives one from love to destruction and from despair to hatred in one leap. At times, it seems “we are finished. Don’t you?” (*Enduring Love* 145).

## Chapter 4

### Horror in Ian McEwan's Fiction

The dreaded scenario of the present era is “whirling our lives apart” (*Enduring Love* 222). The humans are “in a terrible state” and it is panic really, they should try to calm themselves and think about what to do (*Enduring Love* 229). Life is “touched by despair” and there is “horror of public relations . . .” (*Enduring Love* 221). All this chaos, confusion and dread reminds one of “The Waste Land” (1922) by the famous poet, T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), where the situation of the world is depicted along such lines. One is also reminded of “The Second Coming” (1920), a famous poem by W.B. Yeats (1865-1945), where again the deteriorating situation of the world is portrayed in vivid terms. Although, the world is on the threshold of the third decade of the twenty-first century but it is still haunted by the ‘horrific’ memories of the Wars. The aftereffects of Wars are still evident in the form of an invisible and everlasting imaginary horror.

Ian McEwan throws light on the contemporary cultural and social anxieties of the people. For him, the present society lacks faith and morality and is filled with horror. As Edmund Fuller argues in *Man in Modern Fiction*, that “man suffers not only from war, famine, persecution and ruin but also from isolation, inner problems and a meaninglessness in his way of existence” (3). In McEwan’s novel, *Nutshell*, the narrator sums up the desolate scenario, resembling the condition of the present world:

There are still last things to gather up. In Nigeria, children burned alive in front of their parents by keepers of the flame. In North Korea, a rocket is launched. Worldwide, rising sea levels run ahead of predictions. But none of these is first.

That's reserved for a new catastrophe. A combination, poverty and war, with climate change held in reserve, driving millions from their homes . . . vast moments of people, . . . angry or desolate . . . crammed at borders against the razor wire gates, drowning in thousands to share in the fortunes of the West . . . Old Europa tosses in her dreams, she pitches between pity and fear . . . And always, there are problems closer at hand. As radios and TVs everywhere drone on . . . (*Nutshell* 189)

According to the narrator in the quote above, the whole world is engulfed by problems. There is horror everywhere. Humankind is ushered into blinding darkness and the presence of dreadful locale all around, the dance of macabre death puts the human mind to spectral presence. An icing on the top is the dense showering of fakeness, the sense of danger, the palpable blackness, the stiffening atmosphere and the numbing silence. This is the picture of this world which is painted in the dark with a sinister foreboding and lacks sane inhabitants. The cities are of the living dead and the living skeletons of starving humanity listlessly moving in the lanes and by-lanes, while some lay motionless out of sheer exhaustion. Indeed the world is turning into an unsafe place to inhabit.

There is the dread of an approaching war, a continuation of human catastrophes, the fear of aerial bombardment, dishonest profiteering, the curse of ravaging greed, the scourge of mass famines, starvation and black marketing. Life and living seem to be of little value now. Life has become strange and meaningless, there is the feeling of being homeless at home, the feeling of being an alien within your community, the feeling of estrangement between your people and the endless failure of the attempts of adjusting to the environment either in-home or outside it. People feel alienated from the place where they belong, the place of their birth.

The cruelty and ruthlessness of McEwan's characters suggest that there lies "a subconscious Hitlerism in the heart of men," that is "the desire for aggression; the desire to dominate and enslave" (*The comfort of Strangers* 155). In McEwan's novels, the violence is primordial and ineradicable. McEwan states in *Black Dogs* that violence and cruelty are inherent in everyone (172). Apart from the physical experiences of horror, these experiences have made inroads into the thinking and casual life of humans. The quote below from McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* is a testification to this in which Mary muttered in Colin's ear dark and random stories:

stories that produced moans and giggles of hopeless abandon, . . . Mary muttered her intention of hiring a surgeon to amputate Colin's arms and legs . . . Colin hummed in Mary's ear. Once Mary was strapped in, fitted to tubes that fed and evacuated her body . . . till she was dead and on even after that . . ."

(*The comfort of Strangers* 102)

In the above quote, the strange intention of Mary to hire a surgeon to amputate arms and legs of Colin is unveiled. In the same vein, Colin too expresses his wish almost of a similar kind. From the general perception, there cannot be anything more terrible and horrible than this. The postmodern horror is actually beyond ordinary expectation. On the one hand, it crosses the limits of barbarity and crudeness and on the other, it is being normalised as a way of life. The parallel examples of this kind can also be seen in the postmodern world, where torture, horror, killing and mutilation have become the order of the day and the parallel and familiar experiences of which can be seen in the human psyches according to Freud's concept of uncanny.

McEwan's novels are usually concerned with themes such as perversity, incest, murder, fear, terror, horror, violence and death etc. which disrupt the conventional moral standpoints. One common aspect of his novels is that they reveal

the beastliness of men. The visceral images of society and the repulsive descriptions of the everyday world in the novels of McEwan open the darker side of humanity. Noakes calls his novels as the “novels of ideas” (23). In this connection, Jack Slay remarks that McEwan exposes the haunting desire and dark portraits of contemporary society that lurk beneath the facade of an everyday world (Slay 1). His characters seek refuge from the chaos and turmoil of their very lives as well as the depraved wasteland world (Slay 1).

In McEwan’s novel *The Cement Garden*, the four orphaned siblings bury their dead mother in a trunk and cover it with cement and attempt to carry on a normal life. They do this so that they can avoid being taken into Official Care. Julie says to Jack very quietly: “Bury her, . . . Yes, I said, thrilling with horror, we can have a private funeral . . .” (*The Cement Garden* 60-61). In postmodern gothic fiction, usually, new experiments are done, here, a private funeral for the horror event. The “innocent” in the world of McEwan is capable of doing criminal acts. The preparations for burial and the act of burying present a feeling of horror both in the characters and the readers while reading it. Julie says to Jack that if they keep the dead body in the bedroom, it will “start to smell” (*The Cement Garden* 60). Sue was horrified by the overall happenings and developments around her (*The Cement Garden* 60).

The readers can also well imagine how horrified it would have been. After burying their mother on the premises of the house, the siblings experience constant fear, anxiety, terror and horror as represented in the novel. The house itself presented a frightening atmosphere which is again a feature of postmodern gothic elements in which the surroundings and overall environment are sometimes affected. There is disintegration in the family which is caused by the death of the second parent of these

siblings. Jack asserts that “we were afraid of the house at our backs whose small windows now suggested not concentration, but heavy sleep (*The Cement Garden* 59).

It is the expression of fear and anxiety of being caught as the siblings have buried their mother inside the house and it is the horror of seeing the corpse through the cracks of cement. Then, there is this sense of uncanny, of being outside the home in your home, and of trying to establish a home outside your home, which is again a predominant experience with most of the people. Jack while seeing the corpse through the cracks in the cement asserts that “As I stared the surface formed itself briefly . . . The image dissolved into convoluted surfaces . . . I was about to fall over” (*The Cement Garden* 129). So, through the incidents like this, McEwan employs several gothic markers in his novels to horrify the readers and give them an idea about contemporary society and the affectation of individuals within it.

The overall scene in the house is full of terror and horror. Jack says “The door at the end of the corridor was half open. From in there, we heard the rustling sounds again . . . I did not move but now the door was opening on its own. I cried out and stepped out backwards . . .” (*The Cement Garden* 128-129). Jack further has contracted a horrible skin infection and it was spreading to other parts which are horrible in themselves. He says: “I looked in the mirror and saw that the spots on my face were spreading down the sides of my neck. I wondered if they would cover my whole body . . .” (*The Cement Garden* 89). So, here, the horror as an element of postmodern gothic increases its covering area, base and association with time. In the novel, Jack describes the heart attack of his father to Julie and several other disintegrating things in their house which fills them with a feeling of horror. Jack asserts:



At his first heart attack he stopped work on the garden altogether. Weeds pushed up through the cracks in the paving stones, part of the rockery collapsed and the little pond dried up. The dancing Pan fell on its side and broke into two and nothing was said. The possibility that Julie and I were responsible for the disintegration filled with me with horror. . . . (*The Cement Garden* 12)

In the above quotation, the disintegration in the house is clear. The things falling or the weeds pushing through the cracks of stones in the house fill Jack and Julie with horror. The novel presents a frightening sense of the house and thus produces a feeling of horror in the characters. In the course of things, Sue the younger sister, gives Jack a science fiction novel, the cover page of which also presents horror through its description of a monster's image on it. Jack says in this regard that the cover page had “. . . a great, tentacled monster . . . engulfing a space ship and beyond the sky was black” (*The Cement Garden* 34).

The overall description of the title page fills the atmosphere with a gothic feeling. According to Jack, he had read this novel all the way through. While going through it, Jack comes through several horrifying passages in the novel which present a chilling and dreadful feeling. In this novel within the novel, Jack reads about corpses, beasts and other monsters which terrorises him and present a horrible sight of scene such as:

Minute life bearing spores drifting in clouds across galaxies had been touched by special rays from a dying sun and had hatched into a colossal monster who fed off X rays and who was now terrorising regular space traffic between Earth and Mars. It was Commander Hunt's task not only to destroy this beast

but to dispose of its gigantic corpse . . .Who knows what other monstrous mutation might emerge from this carcass? (*The Cement Garden* 35)

The above quotation gives the reader a sense that how even nature seems to have turned against humans in its absolute ferocious face, the reason being that humans have fiddled with it and disturbed its normal course. The quote further mentions that there are possibilities of other inflictions as there are fair chances of more monstrous mutations. It seems the dangers are always there lurking on human heads.

There is also a mention of words like “monster,” “terrorising,” “beast” and “carcass” which gives one a gothic feel. So, all these hints at the horror of various sorts and the postmodern gothic horror are expected from any external agency of which the humans have their respective familiar experiences. The quote also presents a sense of magnitude and the extension of the dangers which seems a tough challenge for the readers to cope with.

McEwan’s novel, *Enduring Love* is at the heart of discourse as representative of the postmodern times in which people are exposed to a world of dilemmas and ethical questions. It merges horror, macabre, fantasy and science fiction. The novel begins on a cloudless day when a middle-aged couple chooses to celebrate their union with a picnic at a park in the English Countryside. Joe Rose and his girlfriend, Clarissa Mellon look around and find a ten-year-old boy trapped inside a hot air balloon basket. An old man, the boy’s grandfather, drags himself after it by holding on to the rope of the blazing balloon. the hot air balloon with the basket looked like it had been ripped from its moorings. Joe immediately joins several other people in an effort to bring the balloon to the ground and in this horrible incident, Logan dies. The

novel defines this tragic and horror incident in which the people are seen running towards the site of accident in the following words:

What idiocy, to be racing into this story and its labyrinths, sprinting away from our happiness . . . There was the shout again, and a child's cry, enfeebled by the wind that roared in the tall trees along the hedgerows. I ran faster. And there, suddenly, from different points around the field, four other men were converging the scene, running like me. (*Enduring Love* 1).

The above quotation gives an impression of horror to the reader. Just as the men in the novel secure the balloon, they see the old man, hanging by the rope of the balloon, fall to his death. Joe says that there were many people around the area who were seen running towards the catastrophe. The boy was trapped in the basket of the balloon and an old man clinging to its rope, who was in need of immediate help. The reader knew that the incident as well as the fate would soon take new shapes. At the base of the balloon was a basket in which there was a boy, and clinging to a rope of basket, was a man in need of help. For Joe, it was as if they ran away from happiness (*Enduring Love* 3). According to Freud, the readers also witness incidents of such nature in their daily lives and see a strange familiarity in them. In the novel, Joe recalls the death of the Mr. Logan in the most vivid terms as:

In the second or two it took for Logan to reach the ground I had a sense of déjà vu, . . . The setting varied, but the essentials never did. I found myself in a prominent place watching from far off the unfolding of a disaster- an earthquake, a fire in a scrapper, a sinking ship, an erupting volcano. I could see helpless people . . . certain to die. The horror was in the contrast between the apparent size and the enormity of their suffering. Life was revealed as

cheap; thousands of screaming individuals . . . were about to be annihilated . . .  
terror, guilt and helplessness were the components. (*Enduring Love* 18)

The *deja vu* is a French phrase for already seen. The phrase actually fits Freud's concept of the uncanny. Here, the character recollects his past experiences of horror and finds a similar experience yet again. Joe recollects from his past memories incidents of a similar kind which according to Freud is an uncanny experience as it shows familiarity for him. Joe can relate the horror experience which resulted in Logan's death to some similar past event of horror incident which he had already in his mind. Joe through the above passage presents a meaningless and nihilistic outlook on life. Such experiences of horror relate to all humans in one way or the other. A strange familiarity is observed or felt when one comes across such events. The Freud's uncanny perfectly fits here, where something is found strangely familiar and can be related to one's past repressed experiences.

The whole event presented a horrible sight in which an old man was seen approaching his death and both the child and old man were in need of help. A group of people were seen running towards the unfortunate balloon. Joe says that ". . . as I began to circle the corpse. It sat within a little indentation in the soil. I didn't see Logan dead until I saw his face, and what I saw I only glimpsed. Though the skin was intact, it was hardly a face at all, for the bone structure had shattered . . ." (*Enduring Love* 23). This gruesome incident is full of horror and the accident disrupts the normal life of all the onlookers. 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. Joe adds that the thumping of the boy who was tossed from one side to another produced a feeling of inarticulate fear which can't be normally defined

(*Enduring Love* 9). All this created a feeling of horror in the characters who were present at the sight as it creates in the readers while reading.

Joe Rose and his long-time partner Clarissa Mellon had come to enjoy a picnic in the English countryside. As soon as they arrive at this desolate spot on the edge of a large meadow, they hear a man's desperate shouts. According to Joe, Logan was warned by the fellow members of the consequences but Logan did not pay any heed to the warnings and courageous athlete and mountaineer Dr. Logan dies as cited above. The novel mentions the scene shortly before Logan's death as quoted below:

Harry. 'Harry!' We shouted . . . Get out of there Harry! But Harry curled up tighter . . . Our words were like stones thrown down at his body. He was in paralysis of will, a state known as learned helplessness, often noted in laboratory animals subjected to unusual stress; all impulses to problem solving disappear, all instinct for survival drains away. (*Enduring Love* 11)

Although, what Logan was doing seemed ridiculous to the people there. He wanted to deflate the balloon by pulling a cord that was tangled in the basket and his intentions were completely sensible. Joe recounts the horror of the incident in vivid terms. He actually described how from a small distance, they watched the horrible incident of Logan falling to his death. Logan's fall to his death has left an indelible mark on his mind of Joe. Such incidents of postmodern gothic horror remain repressed in the minds of people and are sometimes relatable in real life. Joe asserts in the novel:

He was two hundred yards away now, and perhaps three hundred feet above the ground. Our silence was a kind of acceptance, a death warrant. Or it was a horrified shame, . . . We watched him drop. You could see the acceleration.

No forgiveness, . . . or kindness. Only ruthless gravity . . . I've never seen such a terrible thing as that falling man. (*Enduring Love* 16).

The quotation above adds further details to the horrific incident of the death of Mr. Logan and according to Joe, such a terrible thing, he has never seen before (*Enduring Love* 16). The scene is quite horrible and it is a horror of ruthless gravity. Perusing horror stories like the ones here instructs people about the darker side of humankind. According to Freud's concept of uncanny, people see a strange kind of familiarity in them, though many such events and incidents are repressed in their minds and come to the surface on certain occasions. It acquaints humans with the truth and outcomes of evil. It gives them knowledge of the feelings of trepidation and the ways of dealing with stress by empowering them in certain ways. Bloom says that like classical tragedy, the horror story, frequently educates people morally and suggests vicarious methods to avoid a tragic fall in their lives (62). The tragedies and horror tales affect a catharsis in the audience.

Watching or reading the protagonist's experience helps the audience or reader work through their fears and horrors and helps them avoid the same pitfalls. In the horror tale, these pitfalls often include coming into contact with evil and giving in to its influence. According to Joe, "we could think of nothing but chaos . . . It was rationalism gone berserk. It is the new fundamentalism" (*Enduring Love* 70). The novel further mentions the tales of horror as under:

All around us there are knots, tangles of horror and we are like the prisoners in a cell, who run and beat the walls with their heads. This prison is growing larger day by day. The shocks have dulled our response and everywhere there are shivering and shaking stories. The darkness beyond the gloom of the bedroom was infinite and cold as death (*Enduring Love* 34).

The above quote vividly represents the gloom and horror of the present day world. It further highlights that the situation is deteriorating day by day. It is through such incidents that people interrogate their own unconscious fears, anxieties, terrors and horrors etc. and find a strange familiarity according to Freud's concept of uncanny, although repressed at times. The postmodern gothic helps people to find new ways to represent the conventional gothic elements and the primary task of postmodernists is to construct a route to unrepresentable aspects of self and the unknown as they try to habituate their effect.

The postmodern gothic fiction is more focused on the unconscious fears, terrors, horrors or traumas of the modern age. According to Botting, "gothic shadows flicker among representations of cultural, familial, and individual fragmentation, in uncanny disruptions of the boundaries between inner being, social values, and concrete reality, and in modern forms of barbarity and monstrosity" (156). Postmodern gothic fiction usually reflects the feelings and ideas of its own time. According to Beville, many critics are of the view that the needs and desires of their particular times are met by gothic novels (99).

In *The Comfort of Strangers*, McEwan maintains an austerity of style and tone throughout. Moreover, the sensational possibilities of the novel are blocked in the novel. The novel contains the characteristic quality of his style. The detachment with which the novelist describes the murder scenes indicates the placidity of the style. Mary helplessly views the whole gruesome murder of Colin. She realises that it would be hard to find justice for Colin's murder. Robert seduces them with his sweet tongue, reaches the arm of Colin, draws the razor on the wrist of Colin and opens his artery. The claustrophobic and seedy episode, which narrates the story of the evils 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 57-58).

Colin while staring at Mary describes her in a gothic way. Her physique is compared to that of an apparition. Colin says that "The street lighting had bleached her . . . against the old blackened walls she shimmered, silver and sepia, like an apparition" (*The comfort of Strangers* 17-18). The novel also describes the sadomasochistic behaviour of Robert and Caroline which presents an experience of horror to the readers. The novel mentions:

Caroline said, you've cut my lip. She collected blood from her lower lip on to her forefinger and daubed it on Colin's lips . . . Robert's hand still rested on at the base of his neck close to his throat. Caroline transferred more of her blood on the end of her finger till Colin's lips were completely and accurately roughed . . . wiped the pinkish streaks of saliva from his chin with the back of her hand. (*The comfort of Strangers* 158)

From the above quote, one can guess the abnormal and extraordinary condition of the characters, Robert and Caroline. Blood plays an important role in gothic and it is mostly associated with horror. According to Freud's concept of uncanny, humans have their own familiar experiences of the incidents which are related to blood in one form or the other. McEwan reveals horrifyingly, what could become of individuals in our society. He precisely creates the reader's experience to present the horrors of the postmodern world, such as mass shootings, wars etc. and this corresponds to an unconscious form of potential problems, carefully repressed, masked or vibrating with the spectacle of evil. The reader is shaken by horrors which are part of postmodern gothic literature. Beville asserts that in postmodern culture, the advancement of technology is pervaded by fear, posing new potential uncanny



experiences (181). The novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, presents the horror description of Colin's murder in the following words:

Robert . . . reached for Colin's arm, and turned his palm upward. See how easy it is, he said perhaps to himself, as he drew the razor lightly, almost playfully, across Colin's wrist, opening wide the artery. His arm jerked forward . . . .Mary's eyes closed. When she opened them, Colin was sitting on the floor, against the wall . . . . Curiously, his canvas beach shoes were soaked, stained scarlet." (*The comfort of Strangers* 159)

The above quote is filled with horror to an extent that one can easily feel its intensity. The quote sends shivers down one's spine and delivers only gore. McEwan seems to have worked hard in using gothic tropes that heighten an experience of horror. The restraint that McEwan exercises over language conceal the underlying violence. The horror of the murder is concealed and presented as such that nothing serious has happened which is a feature of postmodern gothic horror. Eliot Fremont Smith comments that the "smooth classy precision that puts us at ease even when we know the effect is calculated to ensnare and scare" (Matuz 283).

The postmodern gothic elements reign in McEwan's novels as they mention several things such as paranoia of the characters, deaths and murders which give readers a feeling of horror as per the reader's experiences and complicity, although imaginative. His novels are charged with the gothic atmosphere of fear, terror, horror and death etc. which frequently find a place in postmodern society. The fears and horrors of the people are used to draw them into narratives and these fears and horrors result from social reality rather than a supernatural influence. This breakdown in the social structure leads to disaster. These horrors are then studied mostly from the context of psychoanalysis, the uncanny and so on.

All the time, people see muggings, murders, suicides, knife point rapes and so on (*Enduring Love* 74). This scenario finds a vivid parallel in the present times and again all these experiences show some kind of familiarity according to Freud. People have such kinds of incidents in their repressed minds which come to the surface at particular times. Like Joe, “sometimes our thoughts also return to how we came to be what we were and how it would have been different” (*Enduring Love* 78). The people are surrounded by the horrifying helplessness which afflicts their calm and organised postures. For Clarissa, the world is “upset by Sunday” even (*Enduring Love* 81). So, in a way, there are no off days from the horrors rather the whole time slot gives an experience of horror. It can be said that the postmodern gothic horrors are continuous and without breaks.

In the novel, Joe begins to rebuke Jed for harassing him. Jed says to him “Does it horrify you that I can see through you so easily?” (*Enduring Love* 97). The novel contains many such similar situations taking place which are socially seen as an anomaly. The novel mentions the horror scene of Tapp in which he gets hit by a bullet. While being hit by a bullet, the blood spray is spread across covering the people which are around the place. This shocking incident presents scenes of horror to the onlookers as it presents to the readers. The novel presents the scene in the following words:

The silenced bullet struck through his white shirt at his shoulder and lifted him from his chair and smacked him against the wall. The high velocity impact forced a fine spray, a blood mist, across our table cloth, our desserts, our hands, our sight . . . I did not believe what I was seeing . . . So, we sat there, unmoving, hopeless in shock . . .” (*Enduring Love* 172-173)

The above quote details every bit of the horror incident. The blood illustrates the abject horror of the situation. The sensation was terrifying. According to Joe, “The bullet that hit Mr. Tapp was meant for me . . . There’s a man out there who wants to kill me” (*Enduring Love* 175-176). People are treated like suspects and unreliable. As Joe is now frightened for his life and for the purpose of his safety. Joe purchases a gun from an acquaintance. After the purchase and on his way back home, Jed calls and tells him that he is at his place with Clarissa. As soon as he reaches his apartment, he rushes in to see Jed sitting on the sofa with Clarissa. Before Joe could say anything, Jed takes a knife and points it at his own neck in a threatening gesture. Then his attention shifts to Clarissa and he tries to stab her with the knife. To prevent Jed from killing Clarissa, Joe shoots him in the arm. In the novel, Joe details the incident of horror in the following words:

I was going to ask him again to let Clarissa move away, when he turned towards her . . . and pulled out a short-bladed knife which he drew through the air in a wide semi-circular motion . . . he was about to slit his throat in front of us presented itself with numbing slowness . . . He . . . seemed to press harder. A plumb line of blood ran down from the knife’s tip. Clarissa too seemed paralysed. (*Enduring Love* 212)

The incident detailed in the quote above is so ghastly that Clarissa seems paralysed and it makes them feel numb when Jed was about to slit his throat. The witnessing of the incident of postmodern gothic horror makes the characters numb. In the same vein, humans have sometimes such numbing and horror experiences repressed in their psyches which come to the surface on certain occasions. The business and the affairs of the world are not going well. The narrator says that “I find myself, in the midst of horror . . . I begin to suspect that my helplessness is not in

transient” (*Nutshell* 52). There seems to be an eternal affliction and the experiences of horror do not seem to stop. The whole world seems “radiating disgust and horror” (*Enduring Love* 210).

The way things are going is quite extraordinary. There is so much sensation and violence involved. “. . . it is a thriller of sorts, violent, sensational . . . with elements of horror . . .” (*Nutshell* 128). In *Nutshell*, the narrator asserts that the world is “at the darker end of pessimism . . .” (29). On John’s death, the readers also witness a strange behaviour in Trudy whose mood keeps changing often and who has a tremor in her voice which is a terrible thing (*Nutshell* 132). The world seems strange in many other aspects as well. The narrator mentions in the novel:

Her mood is shifting again. I think she’s staring at him fixedly as she says simply, He’s dead. It is indeed a startling fact, barely believable, momentous like a world war just declared, the prime minister speaking to the nation, families huddled together and the lights gone dim for reasons the authorities won’t disclose . . . He’s dead . . . dead . . . . (*Nutshell* 114-115)

The above quote throws a light on the behaviour of Trudy. It further tries to compare the news of death with some barely believable moments. There is double horror in the act, first the death of Trudy’s husband and second her involvement in it. As stated earlier, The postmodern gothic elements usually trespass borders or the lines set in conventional gothic. The narrator says that now “. . . my mother gasps in horror” (*Nutshell* 104). Trudy gets confused after the murder, she now feels guilty. The postmodern world is full of such experiences, where the people kill their own people and where the criminals get confused after committing crimes of various nature. According to the Freud, the humans have such strange familiar experiences

although they are repressed at times and which come to the surface on witnessing incidents of similar nature.

In *Nutshell*, the narrator says that my mother “. . .step from John to Claude . . . plan a house theft, inflict monstrous pain and a humiliating death on a kindly man. And now gasp and shiver at what she did, as if the murderess were someone else . . .” (116). An act that is “too crude . . .” (*Nutshell* 117). The narrator says that “I don’t know much about murder. Still, his scheme is more baker than butcher” (*Nutshell* 59). It is not just about the actual murder, it is also about the crude and horrible thoughts which are behind the actual action. On the other hand, for strange reasons, Claude and Trudy discuss in terms of lamenting the state of the world, “even as they scheme to make it worse” (*Nutshell* 5). Such hypocrisy show parallels in the postmodern world as well.

McEwan’s novel demonstrates the characteristics of psychological thriller and murder fiction. The pushing of the very limits of literary devices as shown by McEwan is quite noteworthy, integrating fiction and nonfiction into his novel. The unborn baby in the novel tells the story from the point of view of what he/she feels and hears. The narrator observes the bitter aspects of life and makes grave interpretations for which the narrator is sometimes at a point between reliability and unreliability. According to him/her, it is a “monstrous injustice, to have such pain before my life’s begun . . . A sting, an ache, a throb that hurts” (*Nutshell* 45). Through this novel, McEwan clarifies the fact that just seeing or looking at things is not the only source of knowledge. McEwan examines truth, falsehood, innocence, guilt, good, evil etc. through his novels.

In *Nutshell*, the narrator says that there is excruciating pain everywhere, “nausea, vomiting, hyperventilation, seizures, heart attack, coma, . . . failure”

(*Nutshell* 50). The narrator is too horrified while grasping the idea of the outside developments. For him/her, the world is engulfed by the things like agony, chaos, dread and horror which finds mention in the below quotation. From Freud's perspective of the uncanny, humans have a repressed familiarity with all such things and come to the surface after encountering similar incidents. The narrator asserts:

I'm horrified then crushed by the strength that's unleashed . . . So it continues, wave on wave, shouts and wails, and pleas for the agony to cease. Unmerciful progress, relentless ejection . . . Forward and out . . . I'm dead, blind and dumb, it hurts everywhere . . . I can't deny the dread I feel. The rest is chaos."

(*Nutshell* 192-197)

For the narrator, the world is full of terrible experiences and it hurts everywhere. There is a continuation of agonies and wails. There is horror, dread and chaos everywhere and people feel crushed. All this is not felt by the narrator only but such feelings are aroused in readers also. McEwan's novels bring both the postmodern and gothic into focus. As such, his novels can be seen as a critique of postmodern society. His novels serve as a diagnostic of what affects postmodern society and how individual lives are affected in the postmodern environment which is only multiplying and intensifying. In a way, it can be argued that people can cope with or master the fears, alienation, anxieties, terrors and horrors etc. which are inherent in society through the works of McEwan. According to Beville, through gothic people can access their unconscious or the dark side through its abjections, excesses and monsters (*Nutshell* 50).

The predominant subjects of McEwan's novels inside the bigger framework of the social order are fear, terror, horror, war, deaths, psycho-social problems, alienation and isolation etc. Edmund Fuller in his book, *Man in Modern Fiction*,

mentions that the modern man not only suffers from war, ruin and famine but from inner problems as well, such as existential meaninglessness, isolation and terrible despair (3). While going through the novels of McEwan, one seems conscious of all these things. Some occurrences in reality or techniques in fiction that bring about the feeling that Freud lists in his essay, “The uncanny,” as automatons, déjà vu and doppelgangers etc. The uncanny is felt when the barriers between things appear to crumble such as fiction and reality. Freud’s uncanny is a hard-to-define emotion that arises from a familiar sort of experience. In contemporary fiction, a great example of the uncanny is infused with mystery, unease, terror, and horror. For Freud, this is more powerful in fiction than in real life, depending on the word selection used by the writers. The tools a writer uses can be sharpened to make readers feel only by studying the psychology of these feelings as they are conjured by art.

McEwan is an advocate of postmodernism in the sense Edmund J. Smyth designates it (5). He portrays the contemporary cultural condition as a whole in all its complexity (Smyth 9). Marc Delrez calls McEwan the “unrelenting analyst of evil in our time” (7). In the treatment of evil, he achieves a transition from the confines of a claustrophobic space to a wider panorama of some social and historical scope. McEwan’s allegory of evil grows in scope to ransack materials from world history. As a historian of the contemporary time, McEwan gives a prophetic portrayal of the disintegrating civilization of the present.

The treatment of fear, terror, horror and death by McEwan in his earlier novels has been so banal and perverted that it was often looked down upon. His novels like *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers* earned him the nickname “Ian Macabre” for their bleakness, shocks and macabre obsession. The novels of McEwan present life and the vision of society as miserable which is characterized by disease,

oppression, misery, pollution and violence. The postmodern transformations of the gothic elements are disclosed in these novels.

McEwan mostly reflects the post War fears such as the dangers of nuclear power, environmental degradation and declining values etc. His novels paint a picture of a world which is undone by sympathy and empathy. They are good examples of how postmodern novels transform the gothic mode. McEwan's works are concerned with the horrors, distortions and anxieties of the contemporary psyche, depicting the condition of the postmodern world. In his novels, he melds together the postmodern horror and the real gothic by which his novels can be effectively put into the postmodern gothic genre.

As is known that literature reflects every epoch and always brings something new. The recurring concept of tragedy in McEwan's novels is remarkable. He wants to drive home the idea that stepping from normality or stability into a nightmarish world is quite easy. David Malcolm comments on the predicament of the characters, McEwan seems to suggest: "open the wrong door, turn down the wrong street, loose attention for a moment . . . and you can step into a nightmare" (156). Jack Slay, who defends McEwan's shock strategy, sees the "shocks into literature" as "the origins of a more profound social consciousness," it shocks the readers into realisation: he wants people to realise the sordidness, filth and disorder outside, in the real world (18).

The gothic genre desensitizes the readers to the realities of suffering through the images of mutilated bodies-their invasion, possession, torn asunder, dismembered, slashed and stabbed. The readers are drawn closer to the characters through the pain and sufferings as witnessed in these works and consequently through identification. It is also witnessed that sympathy is created in the readers, who read about the physical or psychological tortures endured by the characters of the novels. The novels of



McEwan concentrate on contemporary social and cultural issues. They also deal with the shockingly psychopathological world, broader social, political, historical and other issues.

The gothic literature adapts the horrors into the contemporary cultural context and addresses the fears, terrors and horrors etc. that exist for all humans for which it has gained worldwide popularity. The nature of evil behaviour in more depth is understood by the readers through gothic fiction. Gothic fiction works in a positive vein as it tries to impose fear, terror, horror etc. among its readers through characters so that they can be careful about the happenings around through crude or straightforward mental images. In the present times, life is perceived as distorted, extraordinary, strange and unnatural, causing fear, disbelief and making it close to fantasy. As a result, it is no wonder that contemporary writers have resorted to the gothic mode as a specific view of life to cope with the present realities. The gothic reflects the horrors of uncertainty and confusion, all of which can be found in the present age of insecurity and unease. As the world is transfused with a lot of inexplicable phenomena and mystery, gothic functions to express inscrutability and shock.

## Chapter 5

### Death in Ian McEwan's Fiction

The whole world seems doomed and there are deaths everywhere. The postmodern gothic deaths are not restricted by regions or spaces as they are scattered everywhere and are unveiled in any form and at any time. There is killing of people all around and scenes, whose repetition people dread. In the present scenario, people sigh, wriggle, shiver and freeze to death (*Enduring Love* 161). Apart from the living components, there is a death of non-living components too, be it air, soil, water etc. The deaths are scattered everywhere in one form or the other, engulfing both human and non-human species. In such conditions, the only hope seems to return to nature and to God. All this scenario perfectly fits the postmodern condition where people are suffering and trying to nurse themselves in exile (*Nutshell* 16). McEwan's novel, *Nutshell*, deftly mentions the gruesome condition of the world and it is worth mentioning the textual quotation here:

The children are dying . . . The forests, creatures and polar ice are vanishing. The agriculture is poisonous . . . The oceans are turning to weak acids. There is . . . the catastrophic decline in population. The free speech is no longer free, liberal democracy no longer the obvious part of destiny, . . . socialism in disgrace, capitalism corrupt, destructive and in disgrace . . . We've built a world too complicated and dangerous for our quarrelsome natures to manage. In such hopelessness, the general vote will be for the supernatural. It's dusk . . . We were wonderful but now we are doomed." (*Nutshell* 25-26)

In the above quotation which is from McEwan's novel, *Nutshell*, the reader feels about the overall scary scenario, destruction and deaths of the present world by

relating such events or experiences to some familiar repressed experiences that he/she has witnessed or experienced in the past. According to Freud's concept of uncanny, humans have their respective experiences, repressed in their psyches which come to the surface, when they face or encounter similar incidents. Freud says that the uncanny is something hidden or secret or strange feeling, coming to the light on certain familiar occasions or events. He adds that the uncanny marks the return of the repressed and it is a type of mistaken or unwilling exposure to something unexpected and surprising.

The novel, *The Cement Garden*, starts with the mention of 'death' only, an important postmodern gothic element which should have been technically at the end of a sequence of events, hinting that the postmodern gothic representation can be at times cruder and non-conforming than the conventional gothic. The 'death' as an element is more rampant in the postmodern gothic. It fills more spaces than the deaths in conventional gothic. Further, death as a postmodern gothic element unveils itself suddenly or at any moment in time. The father of four innocent children suddenly dies of a heart attack and the responsibility becomes unbearable on the weak shoulders of his ailing and bedridden wife. The father of these four children dies a sudden death due to a heart attack which is shocking to the siblings in the novel. The postmodern world is full of such examples, where sudden deaths take place round the clock and according to Freud, humans have their own experiences regarding the sudden deaths taking place in society. In the novel, Jack says:

I did not kill my father, but I sometimes felt I had helped him on his way. And but for the fact that it coincided with a landmark in my own physical growth, his death seemed in significant compared with what followed. My sisters and I talked about him the week after he died, and Sue certainly cried when the

ambulance men tucked him up in a bright red blanket and carried him away.

He was a frail, irascible, obsessive man with yellowish hands and face. I am only including the little story of his death. . . . (*The Cement Garden* 1)

At the very start of the narration, the reader sees no remorse on the part of Jack at the loss of his father. He regards his father's death as an event that led to many other life-changing experiences which is a typical postmodern phenomenon, where deaths or even mass deaths are simply treated as some casual events. The postmodern deaths in a way end up as remorseless. Also, the physical description of Jack's father in the above textual quotation gives a gothic tinge to it. Jack's father dies all of a sudden while laying a cement path in the garden. The persons who initially brought this cement were whistling shrilly and covered in "pale dust which gave their faces a ghostly look" (*The Cement Garden* 1). The garden was kept neat and symmetrical. Thus, this carefully planted garden becomes the site for the patriarch's death and a landmark in the narration of this story. Again the postmodern deaths sometimes get connected to the normal routine work outside the normal order.

Despite health problems, Jack's father kept on working to maintain cleanliness in and around the house. 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. From the point of view of morality, the act of smoothing away the father's impression by his son is an act of betrayal. However, Jack does it instinctively and without any special intention, 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.

This haunting tale of fear, terror, horror, death and alienation with a lack of remorse on behalf of the characters fits perfectly the postmodern scenario. The novel points to a sense of alienation and fear among these siblings. They represent a passive, meaningless and nihilistic existence. By way of narration of this novel, the readers are also pulled into the postmodern alienated world of this novel which is replete with fears, terrors, horrors and deaths etc. According to Freud's concept of uncanny, humans possess certain strange familiar but repressed postmodern gothic experiences of fear, terror, horror and death etc. as well, coming to the surface while facing similar experiences or events in life. As a representative of the postmodern man, Jack, the hero in this novel has come to typify all the human wrongs; it is an objective correlative of the inhumanly behaviour and cruelties.

The readers can well establish that Jack's dilemmas are common experiential factors that dominate our society's moral codes and conduct. His desire to break out of it is not an unheard or unseen yearning amongst most adolescents, but his voice addresses the pressure of patriarchal norms. In this way, it may be inferred that the cultural practice of patriarchy becomes evident when Jack's distaste for his father's authority and orderliness is seen. After their father's death, the children experience their father's absence as a relief for everyone. It might be possible because Jack and his younger brother Tom had severe problems with their individual identity. According to Jack, "who had died was not discussed, probably because the death meant very little to our parents. Certainly, it meant nothing to us children. We were more interested in the fact that we were to be left alone" (*The Cement Garden* 71).

The above quotation from the novel gives readers a sense that death has lost its significance in the postmodern world. It carries a little sense for the characters as well as readers. The mother of these siblings becomes severely ill soon after the death of their father. She is portrayed as physically weak and bedridden. It can be deduced that this disease was heightened by the loss of her husband. While describing the condition of his mother, who is nearing her death, Jack says that “my mother lay surrounded by pillows and . . . was rarely out of bed now” (*The Cement Garden* 36-41). These lines send a cold shiver down our spines. In a way, such a miserable situation can be related to that of the postmodern scenario, where some people are stuck in their fixed places and are hardly cared about.

In the novel, the mother of these children while fearing that she may have to die says to Jack that “I might have to go very soon. It might be quite a long time . . . Julie and you have to be in charge” (*The Cement Garden* 51). She informs Jack and Julie about how to run the household, deal with financial matters and look after the siblings. She gives Julie all the financial and household details to take care of the family. She adds that “I’m tired of lying here doing nothing all day. ’Three days later she was dead” (*The Cement Garden* 52). Actually, the fact is that “She’s been dying for months” (*The Cement Garden* 53).

As is obvious from the above quotations that the mother of these siblings was bedridden for a long time now and consequently doing nothing. She had been dying for months much like the people in the postmodern era, who are not living their lives in a true sense. The family had no neighbours or relatives and the mother avoids seeing a doctor. She succumbs to death without any outsider’s knowledge. In the same way, several deaths occur in the postmodern world, where the dead bodies are noticed after days together because there is no one around. The people again have

sometimes their own familiarity with such incidents according to Freud. While pulling the blanket by Julie, the head of her dead mother was revealed “like an unveiled statue,” presenting a horrible and fearful sight (*The Cement Garden* 56). The novel reflects the scene in the following words:

She’s very asleep, said Sue. For a moment it seemed that through sleep . . . we might initiate Tom in the concept of death . . . As Julie pulled, Mother toppled sideways in a frightening, wooden sort of way, Her head remained wedged between the bed and the table, and now one hand was visible by the pillow. Tom became quiet and still, almost rigid . . . (*The Cement Garden* 57)

The above quotation while describing the position of the corpse makes it quite fearful for both the siblings as well as the readers. So, with the death of their mother which is the second death in the family, the life of these children is almost made crippling. So one death is followed by another in quick succession which is a feature of postmodern gothic death. Jack asserts about his mother that “she lay on her belly, head cradled on her forearms and face turned away from me towards the wasteland next door, where great clusters of stinging nettles were dying of thirst” (*The Cement Garden* 43).

The above quotation presents a vivid picture of the postmodern scenario, it helps the readers to form a vivid picture in their minds and as per Freud, the readers connect such incidents with the familiar memories in their psyche. Here, the chain or linkage among the deaths can also be seen. The quote connects one death to the other as a postmodern gothic element, the examples of which can be frequently seen in the present world affairs, where people die of multiple reasons and such deaths are related to other deaths in a certain ways.

In the novel, the readers can 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 even before the death of the mother of these children, “It was not long before the kitchen was a place of stench and clouds of flies. None of us felt like doing anything about it beyond keeping the kitchen door shut” (*The Cement Garden* 76). There are not just the physical spaces that act as prisons and are found in the novels of McEwan, there are issues of mental imprisonment as well which can be seen in the characters of these novels. For example, while the physical entrapment is caused by the dingy, smelly and a house full of flies and a threatening feeling, a dark basement etc. The storyline happens almost in a prison-like home, where the inhabitants or inmates are living their suppressed lives. The other way of imprisonment in the novel is that of Jack, who is trapped inside his own mind, witnessing the suppression of feelings of guilt and existential crisis. The imprisonment as a theme is also closely related to gothic fiction.

The characters in the novel seem somehow dysfunctional, coming to terms with their own past mistakes. The threat of being taken away by the state if they come to know the reality and hidden truth of their mother's death. After the death of their parents, the four siblings, Jack, Julie, Sue and Tom 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 to the matters of the outside world. The children take the decision not to tell anyone about her demise in order to avoid the separation advocated by social agencies. The siblings bury their mother in the basement of the house. They took the decision hesitantly without even thinking about the soul of the dead, its purification,



and salvation. and the legal and moral consequences of the secret burial. Jack asserts in the novel:

. . . there was barely enough space in the trunk for her. She sank an inch or two into the cement that was already there . . . Sue gave out a little cry . . . I plunged my hands into the cement and threw in a heavy armload. We worked like maniacs. Soon only a few patches of the sheet were visible, and then they too were gone . . . The only sound were the scrape of the shovel and our heavy breathing. (*The Cement Garden* 67)

The burying scene of the dead mother of these siblings presents the fearful atmosphere of the experimental lifestyle of four innocent children who oppose the rule of law. Apart from violating moral and legal standards, the burial scene presents a chilling terror. Such scenes even in ordinary lives have long-term effects on one's psyche. The death of both the parents haunts these siblings continuously and produces long-term effects on the siblings in the novel. These siblings bury their mother inside the house and made use of an old trunk and the fresh cement bags bought for the garden work. They were also motivated by the availability of the larger space in the cellar. They kept the mother with them even in the dead form, 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.

The children are afraid that if the death is made public, the small family will vanish as a single unit. According to Jack, he felt oppressed by the empty weeks ahead as the house was very quiet (*The Cement Garden* 52). He also sees fearful dreams in the night like being chased by someone whom he cannot see or a box with something horrible in it. Further, the rashes and pimples on his face would sometimes scare him a lot, asserting that when I used to look at myself in the mirror, this strange

idea would cross my mind that “I might be rotting away from a slow disease.” (*The Cement Garden* 77). So, from deaths to burial to physical settings to psychological traumas to physical health, it gives the impression that postmodern gothic death has engulfed everything in the surroundings and it has affected the lives of the characters.

After the burial in the house, they (siblings) attempted to carry on their normal lives. Seduced by the sense of protection and threatened by the fear of their unity they betray society and the laws of nature. It creates an imaginary fear of the loss of family as a single unit among the children. As a result, they are seduced to hide the news of the death of their mother and keep distancing themselves from the rest of society. Such incidents can also be witnessed in contemporary times where various social and legal laws are challenged. It can be inferred that *The Cement Garden* is also about the loss of a socially and culturally construed structure. The narrative of this text attempts to display the dysfunctionality that dislocates and absorbs the children in an anti-society or an anti- institutional environment.

The children in the novel hardly realized to lament their mother’s death, carrying on with their lives as a feature of postmodern gothic deaths, where it is treated casually. It is as if they have claimed the inheritance to remain alienated and isolated amidst the chaotic twentieth-century urban life of England. Alienation is one more important dimension here and its parallel can be found in the present world as well, where people escape and alienate themselves from the public space by taking refuge in places of solitude. The mother of these four siblings had informed them that the government may put them in care and the house would stand empty, people will break in, take things, and smash up everything (*The Cement Garden* 51).

The foreboding of the death of their parents left them with a paranoid feeling concerning the impending disaster right through their lives and transformed them into

classic neurotics. The burial of their dead mother inside the house premises and thus rebelling against the authorities fill their mind with apprehension, anxiety and fear which is constantly haunting them as a feature of postmodern gothic. This led to drastic changes in them, culminating in their self-imposed alienation. As a result, they became the sufferers on whom alienation is imposed. Their nervous imagination magnifies everything out of proportion like what will happen if society comes to know about our burial. In being pushed to a state of alienation and in suffering at their neurotic outbursts they bitterly shout at each other. Their tragic situation clearly indicates their suffering in the process of living their lives. There is a failure of effective communication and understanding. So, the postmodern gothic death has a devastating effect upon the siblings and it creates a lot of problems for their adjustment.

Jack's opening comments make it more transparent that If they (siblings) make the death of their parents public, they will be put into an orphanage and their house will stand empty. The people will barge in and nothing will be left there (*The Cement Garden* 58). The siblings are afraid that if the death is made public, the small family will vanish as a single unit. So, the postmodern gothic death is never without repercussions and long-term effects. Likewise, in the slough of the postmodern times, it seems that there is no end to miseries and no escape from the gothic nightmare, only the waking from one form to another form of a horrid dream. So, the readers can see that the topic of death is scattered on most pages of the novel as it is found in the postmodern world. In one way or the other, the element of death is discussed and finds place frequently in the novel.

In *The Comfort of Strangers*, the miseries don't end, rather a series of unfortunate things unfold before Colin and Mary after coming out of the dark streets

of the city, who now try to sit near a quay, where it is the smell of dead fish which play on their nerves. So, much like in *The Cement Garden*, there is again the mention of death on the starting pages of *The Comfort of Strangers*. The novel mentions it as “Colin and Mary sat down near the quay’s edge on packing cases which smelled strongly of dead fish. It was a relief to be free of the narrow streets and passageways of the city behind them, to be staring out to sea . . . completely given over to a cemetery” (*The Comfort of Strangers* 50). In a way, the couple wants to free themselves from misery and entanglements but they aren’t freed in an actual sense like the postmodern humans who only get entrapped from one miserable situation to the other.

The above quote also makes mention of ‘cemeteries’ which reminds the gothic element of death to readers. It seems one displeasure is giving way to another and the whole thing gives readers a gothic feeling. In short, the postmodern gothic space seems deficient in peaceful places. Further, the place in the novel is “wrapped in silence, trudging by with empty shopping bags. From a nearby house came the sharp smell of strong coffee and cigar smoke which mingled with and almost obliterated the odour of dead . . .” (*The Comfort of Strangers* 51).

Death as a postmodern gothic element finds a frequent place in the novels of McEwan. According to Freud, humans have their own repressed experiences and familiarities with all such experiences which come to the surface while encountering such events and experiences. In the novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, Robert’s sadomasochism and cruelty analyzed from a psychological point of view, is the result of his upbringing in a male-dominated family and his abnormal childhood memories. It is, of course, a betrayal for an innocent woman like Caroline to have an abnormal husband. Slowly afterwards, Freud’s negative Oedipus and moral masochism activate

and Caroline, the 'split-subject' turns upon herself (Seaboyer 13). As a combined result of his deficiencies and Colin's extraordinary nature, he starts hating this angelic, Colin, and eventually kills him.

While drugging Mary, Caroline supports Robert, although Caroline was not in good health. She was enveloped in her own problems but strangely she wanted others to be on the same side, a typical postmodern phenomenon. According to her, "I blacked out with pain . . . My back was broken . . . I felt a terrible pain, like an electric shock" (*The Comfort of Strangers* 144-145). She adds that "I became a virtual prisoner. I could leave the apartment anytime, but I could never be sure of getting back . . ." (*The Comfort of Strangers* 146). Here, the postmodern gothic scenario presents a dismal scenario. The novel mentions the desperate condition of Mary while she is drugged by Robert and Caroline:

Her eyes, wide with longing, or desperation, were fixed on his own; a tear welled suddenly and dropped on to the ridge other cheekbone. Colin wiped it with his forefinger . . . The faintest sound, barely more than a breath, left her lips. Colin leaned close and put his ear to her mouth. Tell me, he urged, try and tell me. She . . . articulated from the back of her throat a strangled, hard C. Are you saying my name? Mary opened her mouth wider, she was breathing quickly, almost panting. She held Colin's hand in a ferocious grip . . . With another immense effort she managed . . . and then whispered, 'Go' . . . There was panic in his voice. (*The Comfort of Strangers* 153-154)

The quote presents the helplessness of the characters in vivid terms. Again as in postmodern gothic, people are hardly able to narrate or communicate their pain. According to Freud, the familiarity of such experience can be related to some past repressed experiences in the human mind. Caroline supports Robert and drugs Mary

and 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 sadomasochism and cruelty, analyzed from a psychological point of view, is the result of his upbringing. He eventually kills Colin, and Colin's eyes remain fixed on Mary in such a dreadful event. Through fear and wonderment, the face of Colin changed as he began to sense his approaching death. This narrows to the effort of memory and puzzlement as described in the novel ". . . clamour rose from the packed streets below . . . intensifying rather than filling the silence in the gallery. Colin's body began to tense. Mary could see the trembling in his legs, the tightening across the stomach" (*The Comfort of Strangers* 156-157).

There seems no end to the tests and tortures which is a feature of postmodern gothic fiction. The quote given below from the novel is indicative of the gothic embodiment. This sadistic couple (Robert and Caroline) seems to derive pleasure in inflicting miseries both upon others and themselves too, a typical postmodern phenomenon, where people are always ready to go to any extent to experience new things. In this regard, Caroline asserts that "we couldn't forget what we'd been through, nor could we stop wanting it. We were the same people after all, and this idea, I mean the idea of death . . ." (*The Comfort of Strangers* 144). The novel further mentions the tragic condition of Colin, when he was in a dying condition as under:

Colin was sitting on the floor, against the wall, his legs splayed before him. Curiously, his canvas beach shoes were soaked, stained scarlet. His head swayed upon his shoulders . . . eyes . . . blazed at her across the room in

disbelief . . . his body had shrunk. His eyes still open, still on her, were tired, without expression. (*The Comfort of Strangers* 159-160)

Along these lines, the reader can well imagine the condition of Colin. At the same time, the reader may also be annoyed by the pesky and threatening behaviour of Robert. Technically, neither the reader nor Robert does commit murder. While reading the novel, the reader feels Robert's fear of being caught. As the novel is read, this imitative representation or mimesis causes real fears in readers. Like the characters in the novel, the imagination of the readers too is expanded as they experience, through their imagination. This dark, McEwanesque plot ends in a tragic death when the beautiful Mary is abusively and forcefully drugged and the angelic Colin is murdered to death. Robert seduces them with his sweet tongue and kills them at the end. McEwan's other important novel, *Enduring Love* again opens with a death, like in *The Cement Garden*. In the novel, *Enduring Love*, Joe asserts:

He might not be dead, I said . . . As I was saying this I became aware of the tremor in my legs . . . I did not trust my balance . . . A man dying in the field and no one was stirring . . . Also there was the fear . . . in the field spread like a mist, and sense to the core. As the euphoria lifted, so the fear seeped in. The dead man I did not want to meet was waiting from in the middle of the field. Even worse would be finding him alive and dying . . . (21-22)

In the above quote, the death of a man triggers a tale of fixation, erotomania and stalking. This balloon incident in the novel which resulted in the death of a man disrupts the normalcy of a number of lives. The novel mentions that “. . . the thoughts scrolled across: that man is dead . . .” (*Enduring Love* 19). As per Joe, the corollary of this dreadful incident was that he is alive. It is a matter of chance who was dead or alive at any point time. According to him, their thoughts were up there and they were

in shock but surprisingly, to everyone's shock the rules of social engagement prevailed even when the dead man was between them, showing the carefree attitude of postmodern humans (*Enduring Love* 24).

Ironically, the balloon landed safely and the boy was found physically unscathed but the sight of the old man's body position after the fall is ghastly and the novel highlights the grotesque sight of death. In the novel, Joe asserts that my hands were trembling badly and it was a relief to be out of this ghastly sight. Such experiences of fear and death are common in postmodern settings and people usually have such type of familiar experiences according to Freud. Sometimes death as a postmodern gothic element is so grotesque and ghastly that it is better to be out of sight. Joe says that I could well imagine the position of the dead body of Logan. He has prior and familiar experiences of dead bodies which according to Freud is an uncanny experience. Joe says that he knew that Logan's "skeletal structure had collapsed . . . The quietness was that of the animate and I understood again because I have seen dead bodies before, fear and awe still surprise us in the presence of the dead" (*Enduring Love* 22-23).

The novel under discussion opens with a catastrophic accident of a hot-air balloon, which carried in it one James Gadd and his ten-year-old grandson named Harry. The five brave bystanders who rush towards the balloon are Joe Rose (the protagonist), Joseph Lacey, Dr. John Logan and Toby Greene and Jed Parry. At the time of the unfortunate ballooning accident in which a person dies, Joe 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" (*Enduring Love* 1). The sight of the Dr. Logan's fall to death is terrifying as can be better understood from the quotation. McEwan's novel is at the heart of this discourse as representative of the



postmodern times in which people are exposed to a world of dilemmas and ethical questions that stem from a single incident.

The ballooning accident which results in the death of a man, 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. This moment was responsible for the complete transformation of Joe, Clarissa and Jed Parry. Joe says that we had never thought of the entanglement this grief would bring (*Enduring Love* 1). Joe's premonition, later on, proves utterly true. 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. Joe keeps himself busy to soothe himself and come out of the shock of Logan's death (*Enduring Love* 40). He expresses his state and his feelings of fear in the following words. "I couldn't find the word for what I felt . . . Anxiety . . . Guilt . . . foreboding . . . It was a form of fear. A fear of outcomes . . . I was scared of what it would do to me and what it would make me do" (*Enduring Love* 43-44).

From the above quote, the reader can easily conclude that the death of Logan has disturbed and confused Joe deeply. He has a fear of outcomes. It is not just the fear of the present but the fear of consequences as well which is again a feature of postmodern gothic. While talking to Clarissa, he said to her that it was a shared involvement in his death and that "It's scary" (*Enduring Love* 57). So, the incident still haunts him. In this psychological thriller, the reader also comes across a freak stalker- Jed Parry, who gets obsessed with the protagonist, Joe. Just after this accidental death, they meet.

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 . . .” (*Enduring Love* 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. 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 clerambaul’s syndrome, a combination of erotic delusions and schizophrenic psychosis, shatters the hitherto so simple and happy life of Jed Parry. Jed Parry invades and damages the lives of the rest of the normal people.

The novel gives an insight into delusions that affect humans in ways that are particularly peculiar. Jed is portrayed as suffering from his disease and he is suffering his disillusion. Jed remains caught in his disillusion and disorderliness as in the postmodern gothic scenario. His character is caught between Joe’s perceptions and experiences, and his own personal experiences, which the reader encounters only through the narrator’s voice. Clarissa’s disappointments and dejections are left to readers’ conjectures based on what they are socially capable of deciphering. She has her own fears. Her fear of Alzheimer’s outbreak in the family shatters her peaceful family life. “her father died of Alzheimer’s, and it’s always been a fear . . .” (*Enduring Love* 83). On the other hand, there was news of the baby’s death of Clarissa’s friend in Manchester which had cut her down and as per Joe “I had never seen such a disabling grief” (*Enduring Love* 29).

The postmodern gothic deaths seem scattered all around. Mrs. Logan asserts that “I’d rather not to hear condolences, consolations, that kind of thing . . .” (*Enduring Love* 110). She further hints that “I know what killed him . . .” (*Enduring*

*Love* 122- 123). All these happenings give the reader an idea about the overall scenario and the happenings around them. It seems that what envelopes the characters in the novel are either fears, death or frightful settings which find a parallel and a strange familiarity in the postmodern world according to Freud's concept of uncanny.

In the novel, Joe meets Jean Logan, who utters a death threat about a woman whom she thinks had an affair with her husband. She says that "I'll kill her. God help me, but I will . . ." (*Enduring Love* 117). The idea of death sweeps through the pages of McEwan's novels as in the postmodern world, giving readers an idea that how life is actually obsessed with the idea of fears, deaths and killings. On the other hand, Joe while imagining Clarissa's death, feels grieved and helpless. He asserts that "My numbness . . . Imagining what would it mean, to lose Clarissa, through death . . . sent a hot pricking sensation . . . What I saw in Jean's grief reduced my own situation to uncomplicated elements . . ." (*Enduring Love* 112). In a way, either the dead is before human eyes or it is always lurking in the mind and this is the truth of this complicated life which again connects one to the postmodern gothic element of death.

*Enduring Love*, takes the readers to a land of common pedestrians where sometimes erotomaniacs 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. The novel also mentions Jed Parry's habit of hunting and how he would draw pleasure out of killing. One drawing pleasure out of killing some creature otherwise goes against the mind and is a feature of postmodern gothic death.

Jed tells Joe that the idea of power to bring death on creatures contended him. He would get the creatures on the run, make him do "little skipping somersault, and

then hit the ground, writhing and twitching . . .” (*Enduring Love* 151). This in a way finds relevance in the conditions of the present world where killing each other is fun. In the worn-torn countries of the present world, this idea fits better, where killing humans is a sport. In such a scenario, almost everybody is “gripped by the tragedy” (*Enduring Love* 161). The people are engulfed in the midplay of violent winds and scattered to die. All the creatures are vulnerable to attack in this postmodern gothic scenario in which the people have their own experiences. It is wondering that how the world returns to love, fun and intimacy.

The death threats have become so common that people take them as a normal phenomenon. The novel is brim with death events. “ people die, . . . loose their identity altogether . . . ” (*Enduring Love* 183). In the novel, Joe’s friend John Nolan is convicted “of murder” and one more acquaintance had died of cancer (*Enduring Love* 184). “There is physical and mental dereliction, violence and agonising deaths . . . which flow out of human weakness and defect of character” (*Enduring Love* 187). There is a series and continuity of violence and deaths as a feature of postmodern gothic fiction. The postmodern gothic death also shows continuity. McEwan shows patience while dealing with the story of disintegration which impresses the reader in the same vein as he had demonstrated the drawbacks of hospitality offers and instant friendship in *The Comfort of Strangers* (Brookner 28).

Apart from the deaths mentioned above, there are also other deaths mentioned in the novel such as the death of a “policewoman, Yvonne Fletcher” who was shot dead from a window by a Libyan (*Enduring Love* 44). Then there is a mention of “a mass grave in a wood in central Bosnia . . . ” (*Enduring Love* 46). Jed also gives an account of deaths in his family to give some impression to Joe. He says that four years ago my mother died from cancer and I was eight when my father died (*Enduring Love*

95). The novel further mentions some deaths of scientists like Franklin who dies of leukaemia and of the famous poet, Keats (*Enduring Love* 166-169). All this gives an overall impression of postmodern gothic where the miseries show no end stop. Further, the postmodern gothic death is scattered everywhere irrespective of professions or places as hinted in the above quotes.

In the novel, *Enduring Love*, Joe visits Mrs. Logan, not to tell her about her husband's courage but to establish his guiltlessness in her husband's death (107). The place itself presented a strange feeling and Joe says that "I wondered whether the sense of sorrow in the place predated John Logan's death" (*Enduring Love* 110). The house had a desolate and frightening look giving the readers a gothic feel. "The struts had collapsed on one side . . . It had a sodden, abandoned look" (*Enduring Love* 112). It was difficult to see Mrs. Logan beyond the terms of her bereavement (*Enduring Love* 110). She has her own apprehensions about the death of his husband.

As a last resort, Jed Parry intrudes in Joe's house, threatens Clarissa and plans to kill himself in front of Joe. Clarissa refers to Jed as a "kind of phantom" (*Enduring Love* 102). Jed brought out a knife and took hold of Clarissa and pulled out his knife, which he drew through the air. He brought the knife point under his own ear lobe. The hand was shaking and he was about to slit his throat, pressing it harder and the blood oozed out from the tip of a knife. Clarissa seemed paralysed and witnessed this horror event. Finally, Joe fires a bullet to save Jed from committing suicide. Life comes to a halt following the gruesome incident and what happens on that night, Joe asserts in this connection:

No caresses then that night, none of the kitchen table talk and bed that had held us together in the evening after John Logan's death. Worse though, at the time, was an image that afflicted me during my sleepless night in the cell, and

lingered for days afterwards. I saw the knife on the floor, I saw Parry slumped back on the sofa clutching his arm- and then I saw the expression on Clarissa's face. She was on her feet and she was staring at the gun in my hand with an expression of such repulsion and surprise that I thought we would never get past this moment . . . .(*Enduring Love* 214)

According to McEwan, humans have disturbed the natural order and they try to intervene in nature and that is why tragedies befall humans in every nook and corner of the world. In this connection, Jed in a letter to Joe mentions that people have tried to find intricacies in His creation, the more they jump into it the more they shall be at loss. It is quite childish on the part of humans if they try to deny His reality (*Enduring Love* 135). The fallible humans should not dare to touch the mysteries and must learn humility, as pride always destroys one. While in a hotel with Clarissa, Joe says that he had this feeling that many deaths and crises would have been discussed "round this table" (*Enduring Love* 28). It seems that death is so common that "I wanted to write about the death . . ." (*Enduring Love* 41).

Ian McEwan's other novel, *Nutshell* again starts with a death talk. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator (in-utero child) learns that Trudy and Claude are planning to kill John, who is the estranged husband of Trudy and the father of the narrator. The narrator says that Trudy and Claude speak to each other in whispers about their plan of murdering John Cairncross. The novel mention a brief exchange between Claude and Trudy, who speak in:

in . . . whispers, as if both suspect that wombs have ears . . . they're planning a dreadful event . . . What they intend sickens and frightens them, and they can never speak of it directly. Instead, wrapped in whispers are ellipses,

euphemisms, mumbled aporia . . . and a brisk change of subject . . . We can't do it . . . We can . . . We can." (*Nutshell* 8-9)

In the above quotation, Claude and Trudy are planning a dreadful murder event and as a consequence, there is a lot of fear and risk involved in it. In McEwan's novels, the feeling of fear can be sensed throughout which lurks in the characters' or readers' minds who are reading the novel or is somewhere in the background. The fear in his novels is not aimed much towards something physical rather it is mostly a psychological fear. It is the fear of the memories and anxieties of the characters that they are trying to forget. McEwan also creates the feeling of claustrophobia and uneasiness in the spaces. In the novel, the narrator becomes furious with the devilish intentions of Trudy and Claude and their plan of murdering his/her father concerns him/her greatly.

The narrator asserts that the other half of my genome-John Cairncross" 'fate concern me greatly . . . always leaves in mists of sadness" (*Nutshell* 10). Although, the narrator is yet to be born and has never seen his father but he/she respects the intelligence of his/her father. The readers also get the idea that the narrator, who is unborn, is quite wiser than most of adults. The narrator is able to make inferences about people and the world through his hearing and knowledge of the biological responses of Trudy. There is failure, desolation and discord in the relationship of John and Trudy. John is glad that the relationship between him and Trudy is over. In the novel, he continues:

. . . as though entering a funeral parlour, that love has run its course . . . It died quickly, tragically . . . It's over and I'm glad . . . I can hardly stand the sight of you . . . There have been times when I could have strangled you . . . These are just the dark feelings we need to set ourselves free . . . I suggest we don't see

each other . . . The divorce should be straightforward. Trudy doesn't speak for half a minute. When she does . . . her resolve is clear. I want him dead. (*Nutshell* 69-71)

The above quotation gives a clear idea about the bitter relationship of John and Trudy. On the other hand, their unborn child, who is also the narrator is quite uncomfortable with the intention of Claude and Trudy to poison smoothies of John with anti-freeze and plant items in his car in such a way that his death looks like a suicide. The narrator is unhappy with Trudy also for striking an affair with Claude. The narrator's conscience sometimes haunts him/her to "get born and act!" against his/her incestuous uncle and mother who are trying to poison his/her father (*Nutshell* 46). The narrator says that there is agony, coma and death. The woman my father loves and reveres is "planning to murder him" (*Nutshell* 52). The narrator further adds that "The conspirators are talking . . . She sets down her glass and says, we can't have him dying here. She speaks so easily of his death" (*Nutshell* 54).

This clearly presents the scenario of the postmodern gothic, where death talks are considered so normal. Again, according to Freud, there can be a return of similar repressed experiences in humans while facing such particular incidents. The moment comes, when the heinous crime of murder is executed by Claude and Trudy. There is too much confusion and unrest. Several unexpected things happen after the execution of the plan. The narrator says about Trudy that "I think she's staring at him fixedly as she says simply, "He's dead." It is indeed a startling fact, barely believable, momentous like a world war just declared . . . He's dead . . . dead . . ." (*Nutshell* 114-115). There is double horror in the act, first the death of her husband and second her involvement in it. "We've . . . done a . . . terrible thing, she says" (*Nutshell* 125).



The novel frequently mentions death as a subject. People are dying of violent deaths all the time. Some perspectives about death are also given in the novel. The novel mentions that “around the world, a hundred and five people die every minute. Not far off two a second. Just to give you some perspective” (*Nutshell* 125). Death is showed in opposition to several things and “various couplings are proposed. Art and death. Nature and death . . . birth and death . . . love and death . . . The dead loves no one, nothing” (*Nutshell* 97). There is a mention of a threnody as well which is a song for the dead” (*Nutshell* 88). So, death as a postmodern gothic element is scattered on the pages of the novel, where the reader can easily draw the comparison between the dismal condition of the novel and the world or his/her personal familiar experiences.

In the novel, the narrator is desperate to the end, he says that “I’m feeling strange. Famished. Exhausted. Desperate . . . Fear is an emetic. I’ll die unborn, a meagre death” (*Nutshell* 155). There is an attempt by the narrator to hang himself/herself with his/her own umbilical cord on seeing the physically intimate relationship between Claude and Trudy. The novel is a classic tale of deceit and murder. The narrator is concerned with the fate of his father and continuously thinks about him. The novel mentions a long note about an impending murder, schemed by Claude and Trudy. In the novel, the narrator warns his father to be vigilant about this forthcoming disaster. The narrator asserts:

Before you die, I’d like a word . . . The sort that hits you, hurts you . . . The news is brutal, unreal, a nightmare we can’t wake from. I listened with my mother, rapt and glum . . . Barrels used as bombs over cities, children used as bombs in marketplaces. We heard from Austria about a locked roadside truck and seventy one migrants left to panic, suffocate and rot . . . These are new

times . . . I'll give you some advice. Don't come down the stairs . . . decline the fruit drink . . . I'll explain later. . . .(*Nutshell* 83-84)

The world which is rife with deaths, discomfort, disorientation, melodrama, altered states, unexplained events, labyrinths, suspenseful language and gothic imagery. As the pages of gothic books are turned, the anxiety-provoking tropes are found on every page and as Horace Walpole puts it in *The Castle of Otranto* that everything is tending towards the catastrophe and the attention of the reader is never relaxed (Beville 6). These gothic tropes are used to convey disorientation, psychological problems and the dissolution of reality which act as dramatic awakenings for readers and anticipate or give a peep into the melodramatic realities.

The world seems to be an empty place and the people feel death in everything. In *Nutshell*, the death of John's news is broken by the police, informing Trudy that John is dead. Claude and Trudy are questioned by the police but they create several stories to evade questioning by trying to convince everyone that John was suffering from depression and that John's death must have been a suicide. On realising that the police will soon know the real truth, Claude and Trudy panic and attempt to leave the country just as they are about to leave the house according to the narrator, "Terror and disgust and shame overwhelm her. The moment will torment her until she dies" (*Nutshell* 187). The Inspector shows them gloves which were full of spiders and which according to the police could not have been worn by John. According to the Sergeant, "the real mystery is this. Not a single print on that glycol bottle. Nothing on the cup. Just heard from forensics. Not a trace. So strange" (*Nutshell* 180-181).

With the passing time, gothic is appropriated to represent new and evolving social problems and focuses on the contemporary scenario but this never means that gothic abandons its interest in the past rather it offers a space to it in a modified form.

In gothic fiction, the past always remains a significant motif with an emphasis on recent events with some alteration. In postmodern gothic, it is not just the prominence of location that is important, but also its derealisation and destabilisation. According to David Punter (1949-Present) and Glennis Byron (1955-Present), in various gothic and postmodern conjunctions, the human sense of map stability is forever under siege and it is the manuscripts which guarantee humans this stability, whose own completeness or provenance are deeply uncertain because there are a series of translocations and transfers from one place to another (51).

McEwan's novels show that people are surrounded by melancholy and superficial relationships and their relationships with each other are disconnected and numb. There are many situations in his novels which are seen as anomalies. The readers are drawn into a fear-ridden presentation by McEwan in order to be cautious about their actions. These narratives not only explore the psycho-social but also excavates the underlying reasons of human discontentment. McEwan's narratives set precedence on the struggles, agony and disenchantment in the everyday life of humans. In other words, psychological disorders and setbacks are primary tools employed to gain people's attention.

Needless to say, these narratives reflect upon despair and degradation, deformation and deaths etc. With time the problems are increasing in number and most people feel the effect of it. The people are ensnared in the calamities that came about all around. Adding to the problem is the fact that many people are still cut off from family, friends, and relatives. "The time seems full with threats and insults which can but be sweetly resolved in mutual forgiveness and to absolve each other of death, further to defend against the catastrophes" (*Enduring Love* 40).

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to analyse the elements of postmodern gothic in the selected works of Ian McEwan precisely, *The Cement Garden*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Enduring Love* and *Nutshell*. McEwan voices the concerns of the postmodern world which raises questions in our minds and needs immediate attention. The choice of McEwan's works, encompassing the elements of postmodern gothic, the gist of postmodern crisis, gives the readers a chance not only to question the alarming situation but also to refurbish their ways of life towards overall betterment. The Freudian idea has been infused into the thesis as a tool to analyse the problems and the deteriorating condition of the postmodern times. The thesis has arrived at the conclusion that the elements of postmodern gothic have been overwhelmingly found in McEwan's selected works which offer an insight into contemporary times by contemplating on the social issues fashioned in the world. In this thesis, the postmodern gothic elements such as fear, terror, horror and death in the selected works of Ian McEwan are studied using the concept of the uncanny by Freud.

The selected novels of Ian McEwan provide a means to cope or master the anxieties, alienation, fears, terrors, horrors and deaths etc. inherent in postmodern society. His novels are a sort of critique of postmodern society. For example, the sadistic couple, Robert and Caroline in *The Comfort of Strangers*, seems to derive pleasure in inflicting miseries both upon others and themselves too, a typical postmodern phenomenon, where people are always on the toe to experience new and horrible things. In the novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, Caroline asserts that "we couldn't forget what we'd been through, nor could we stop wanting it. We were the same people after all, and this idea, I mean the idea of death . . ." (144). Strangely, the people show interest in the horrible things as well and have a familiarity with such

things. Freud states that sometimes people come across certain familiar experiences which are repressed in their psyches and they find a strange familiarity with them.

Freud accentuates the power of the unconscious, affecting or influencing human conduct and his impact on literature is unavoidable. His theories have touched all areas of literature, facilitating the readers to understand the fiction from a wider perspective. Through Freud's concept, the repressed feelings are brought to the surface which have connections with certain familiar events and incidents. The Freudian approach caters to the matters of everyday life that are embedded in society. The notion that people have certain familiar experiences holds true relevance. It gives a chance to people for introspection so that they can act well in time. It further opens human observation as well as thought processes while determining the problems and growing crises prevalent in the social set-up.

The postmodern gothic works act as an artistic response to fear, terror, horror, death etc. and Freud's concept of uncanny is used to understand these issues and to make the unthinkable, thinkable. To anticipate postmodern times, the issues of the older gothic are reworked within new models of fear, terror, horror and death. These traits are representative of both gothic and postmodernism, connected by McEwan to several characters in his novels. The gothic tropes in his works create fear, terror, horror etc. and numb the characters as well as readers through the process of desensitization. The terror is experienced not only by the characters but by the readers also, as according to Freud, people have their own past experiences. The Freudian analysis of the characters in the works of McEwan aimed not only to highlight the 'crisis' of day-to-day life but also endeavour to bring about its effects on the deep psyche of people. Through this thesis, peaceful life is aimed at, freeing it from all the ills that bar an individual from a well-deserved life.

The present world is replete with examples, where horrible incidents occur on daily basis. The fears, terrors, horrors and deaths seem to have engulfed the whole world and pushed people to the wall irrespective of age and gender. In this postmodern world, a whole new range of terror and horror forms are continuously emanating in new forms. There is no end stop to the fears, terrors, horrors and deaths. Everyone is suffering in his/her own capacity which cannot be nullified. There is always this feeling that some terrible moment is waiting. In this connection, Jack asserts in *The Cement Garden* that “At the back of my mind I had a sense of us sitting about waiting for some terrible event. . . .” (59)

On the very first page of the novel, *Enduring Love*, McEwan asserts: “what idiocy, to be racing into this story and its labyrinths away from our happiness” as the novel highlights the grotesque sight of the death of an old man (1). The sight of the old man’s body is ghastly. Joe asserts that my hands were trembling badly and it was a relief to be out of this ghastly sight which is full of fear, terror and horror. He says that he could well imagine the position of the dead body of Logan. The people here had actually gathered for some fun but ironically even the fun time in the postmodern times sometimes become part of the death game. The guarantee to hold the onslaughts of time is becoming less with time and technology. So, in the present era, these fears, terrors, horrors and deaths have become part and parcel of a fun time also.

The imitative representation or mimesis of postmodern gothic elements causes real fears in readers. Like the characters in the novel, the imagination of the readers too is expanded as they experience, through their imagination, the fears, terrors and horrors etc. of the characters’ state-altering paranoia. The suffering and the ambience of chaos encountered by McEwan prompted and stimulated his literary instincts all the more. His attachment to society reflects in his works. He portrays the psycho-

emotional atmosphere in his novels and evinces the agony and turmoil felt by the characters. With a pragmatic inclination, he presents the inner storm and fury of the characters as well as the world. McEwan manifests this sense of insecurity, anxiety and bewilderment of the age through the elements of postmodern gothic which form a major framework of his novels. All these things lie at the heart of postmodern culture and he highlights them with great insight and poignancy. He reveals the pathos of the contemporary human condition and the precariousness of human life which is devoid of emotional intimacy, making his readers aware of the problems of postmodern times.

As a representative of postmodern man, Jack, a character in *The Cement Garden* has come to typify the human wrongs; it is an objective correlative of the inhumanly behaviour and cruelties. The novel starts with the mention of death only followed by other deaths which are considered an important postmodern gothic element. While laying a cement path in the garden, Jack's father dies of a heart attack. In the novel, *The Cement Garden*, Jack says that who had died was not discussed, probably because the death meant nothing to them (71).

The above quotation hints at a typical postmodern condition, where deaths are sudden and taken casually. The deaths are not attached much importance. Next in line, their mother also succumbs to death without any outsider's knowledge. While pulling the blanket by Julie, the head of the mother was revealed "like an unveiled statue," presenting a horrible and fearful sight (*The Cement Garden* 56). So, with the death of their mother which is the second death in the family in a short span of time again resembles the postmodern condition, where typically the deaths are linked and show continuity. With all this, the life of these children is almost made crippling.

This death sequence creates an imaginary fear of loss of family as a single unit among the children as it creates in postmodern humans. McEwan presents both internal as well as external fears in his novel. The setting of the novel itself gives us a feeling of postmodern gothic, as in *The Cement Garden*, the living place of the siblings with a mother's grave in it, functions as a catalyst for the psychological problems of the characters. The novel describes the fearful atmosphere of the English countryside and the experimental lifestyle of four innocent children. They experience fear now and then in the novel. These fears are projected and affect them psychologically.

This haunting tale of alienation, fear, terror, horror and death with a lack of remorse on behalf of the characters fits perfectly the postmodern scenario. McEwan as a writer has highlighted the issues which are worth our attention. His stature as a writer is that of a visionary who seeks to present the hard facts before the people and that apply in common measure to all humans irrespective of gender and geography. His works can be seen as a means to establish meaningful values and peaceful life. It can be a long campaign till society is purged of all that is harmful or violent.

The siblings in the novel represent a passive, meaningless and nihilistic existence. By way of the narration of this novel, the readers are also pulled into the postmodern alienated world of this novel which is replete with fears, terrors, horrors and deaths. This is frequently seen in the present world affairs, where people die of multiple reasons and such deaths are related or linked to one another in certain ways. In the slough of postmodern times, it seems that there is no end to miseries. The topic of death is scattered on many pages of the selected novels of McEwan. In one way or the other, the element of death is discussed and the condition of the world is so pathetic that it seems as if the people are watching a funeral.



As writers are the product of their times and their principal subject is society, McEwan too seems preoccupied with the postmodern scenario and human condition. By virtue of his conviction and commitment, he always portrays these dimensions of human crisis. Most of his fiction portrays the harsh realities of society and through his works, he holds a mirror to society. His fiction questions the morality and ethics of human beings. His writings offer a satire on the crumbling structure and the dissolution of human values. The writers or the readers have the moral responsibility to extricate mankind from the chaos, cruelty and corruption.

In McEwan's novel, *The Cement Garden*, the terror and horror are vivid in Tom's wounded condition, who was badly hit by his classmate. "His shirt was hanging in shreds . . . One side of his face was swollen and red, and a corner of his mouth was torn. Both his knees were grazed and dried blood ran in streaks down his shin. . . ." (45). Tom's condition was such that it seemed as if he was attacked and hounded by animals. His wounds were paining him and the way he cried was of a deafening sort. All this presents a feeling of terror and horror. The incident gives readers an impression of parallel experiences in the postmodern world, where there is a lack of moral order and where similarly the children are not even safe.

According to Freud, humans have various types of experiences which are repressed in their psyches and come to the surface on encountering certain similar events or experiences. Further, apart from the physical terrors and horrors of previous centuries, the postmodern gothic terrors and horrors cover the psychological dimension also. In the earlier conventional gothic, due to fewer technological advancements, the elements were not much scattered and broadened in the horizon as is now found in the postmodern gothic, where the progress of science and technology are adding certain new dimensions to it on regular basis.

It can also be said that these texts of Ian McEwan are to a great extent timely with regard to issues of fear, terror, horror and death emanating from the overall war scenario in different parts of the world in the form of mass shootings, the threat of death by unknown, the crumbling of the institutional values, domestic violence, the horrible etc. that continues even more so today. The elements of postmodern gothic are seen in most of his novels in both literal and abstract ways. As a visionary, he gives a warning to contemporary society against the inhuman cruelties that rock it every moment. The modern man is in a dilemma like Eliot's (1888-1965) Prufrock. McEwan has used the elements of postmodern gothic to a great extent as he was interested to portray the contemporary scenario, the psychosis, emotional repression, fear of death and the fear of an unknown etc.

Joe in *Enduring Love* expresses his state and his feelings of fear. According to him, he couldn't find a word for what he felt. It was a form of fear. A fear of outcomes (43). Joe has the feeling of a long-time fear, again an important feature of postmodern gothic fear that is long enough to overshadow his future life as well. A fear that is always in the back of his mind, a fear that always haunts him in one way or the other. It is a fear of outcomes much like the postmodern man, who has always apprehensions in carrying out a job. The repressed fears always find a home in his mind. In other parts of the novel, Jed tells Joe that the idea of power to bring death on creatures contended him (*Enduring Love* 151). This finds relevance in the conditions of the present world, where at times killing each other is treated as fun. In the war-torn countries of the present world, this idea fits better, where killing humans is a sport. In such a scenario, almost everybody seems gripped by the tragedy.

The fear in his novels is not as much pointed toward something physical as to the psychological which is considered an important feature of postmodern gothic fear.

In the postmodern world, humans are doomed to suffer the corrosive effects of fear, terror, horror and death. Life is affected by various quarters and humans have shrunk in spirit, languishing in frustration, confusion, disillusionment and disintegration. Humans suffer from a sense of rootlessness and alienation not only from themselves and their fellow men but also from society itself. Their psyche is left with scars and things around them are falling apart which makes them utterly hopeless and painfully aware of their precarious position. This thesis does not propagate any sort of violence or discredit to human values but rather the thesis is a call to diminish the chaos, violence and vacuum created so that a peaceful order can be established. It is also a call for those unheard human values which have been trampled in the course of time.

The people are engulfed in the mid-play of violent winds and scattered to die. All the creatures are vulnerable to attack. It wonders one that how the world returns to love, fun and intimacy. The death threats have become so common that people take it as normal phenomenon. The novels of McEwan brim with death events. Likewise, the deaths in the postmodern times are umpteen, scattered and linked. Life seems at the worst end, full of torture and sad thoughts. In such a condition, the people can implore God to deliver them from this meaninglessness. The people should order their troubled lives. McEwan's works do not fail to convey all this mess in the lives of people and consideration for it. McEwan presents himself as a strong voice to question the dismal condition of the world. His works are a vibrant medium of questioning the wrongs of society for which McEwan seems to have a serious concern. His writings can be used as a toolbox to be utilised by struggling individuals and society.

In *Enduring Love*, Joe recalls the death of the Mr. Logan in the most vivid terms as "I had a sense of *deja vu*, . . . Life was revealed as cheap . . . terror, guilt and

helplessness were the components” (18). The *deja vu* is a French phrase for already seen. The phrase actually fits Freud’s concept of uncanny in which one recollects a familiar experience. Here, the character recollects his past experiences of terror and horror and finds a similar experience. Joe recollects from his past memories, incidents of a similar kind which according to Freud is the uncanny experience as they show strange familiarity. The whole event presented an intense terror and horror in which the old man was seen approaching his death.

The narrator in *Nutshell* learns that Claude and Trudy are planning to kill John, what they intend sickens and frightens the narrator (8). The novel further mentions that “around the world, a hundred and five people die every minute. Not far off two a second” (125). So, the perspective about the deaths fills almost the whole time slot which is a viable phenomenon in the postmodern era. In McEwan’s novels, people come across many such occurrences, feelings and experiences which look familiar to them. When considering the anxieties, fears, terrors, horrors and deaths in the novels of McEwan, the readers have a tendency to analyze their own behaviour and the people around them and their motives. All these feelings are not felt by the narrator only but such feelings are aroused in readers too.

The whole world is engulfed by problems and there is desolation everywhere. Everything seems haunted with features like formlessness, ugliness, irrationality, darkness, fear, terror, horror, death and so on. In the present scenario, instead of ghosts, the creations of modern technology are actual terrors. The readers are strongly immersed in a gothic world in which horrendous events abound everywhere. People are seen dying of wars, poverty and violence etc., the familiar and parallel experiences which already lie deep in human psyches according to Freud and come to the surface once they come into contact with similar events. The way things are going is quite

extraordinary. “. . . it is a thriller of sorts, violent, sensational . . . with elements of horror . . .” (*Nutshell* 128). There is no happiness, people have become heartless and lost the trick of love.

While presenting the elements of postmodern gothic, McEwan has mirrored the meaninglessness of life and relationships which is an important feature of the postmodern environment by underlying the events and actions of characters. Accentuating the fact of the presence of elements of postmodern gothic, this study predominantly concentrated on the analysis of the characters. The characters are presented as buffeted by chaotic circumstances, confusion and meaninglessness of life. McEwan’s novels mention several things such as the paranoia of characters, deaths and murders which give the readers a feeling of fear, terror and horror etc., although imaginative. His fiction has been influenced by and focuses on the contemporary social, cultural, and political issues of the time. A close reading and analysis of his selected novels help to make it clear that they are replete with postmodern gothic elements.

In the present times, the moments of calm and peace seem evasive, a whole range of fears, terrors, horrors and deaths appear before the human race. Joe says in *Enduring Love*: “As I settled back to calm myself . . . I projected all kinds of inarticulate terrors” (69). Here, one can observe that the flow of terrors has no stop, presenting itself without breaks and in myriad forms. The postmodern gothic terror works unstoppable and presents itself in varied forms. All the time, people see murders, suicides, knife point rapes and so on. The whole scenario finds an obvious parallel in the present times and again all this shows some kind of familiarity according to Freud. People face such events or have such kinds of incidents in their repressed minds which come to the surface at particular times. Almost, all humans

have their respective experiences of fear, terror, horror and death incidents etc. repressed in their minds which come to the surface on certain similar experiences according to Freud. It is not easy to completely free ourselves from the shackles of materialism and the problems associated with it that have been internalised in humans' lives but a balance between materialism and human values is possible.

The whole time schedule seems to be replete with such persecutions and perturbations. There is "no outward change, no remorse" (*Enduring Love* 120). There is a killing of people all around. The whole world seems psychologically disturbed and it is full of nightmarish scenes and events. McEwan's novels provide an early-warning view of things that how they can go bad both for people and society. The readers can lace up with tools to cope with the intricacies of the postmodern world. The Freudian idea has been infused into the thesis as a tool to analyse the elements of postmodern gothic as experienced by humans.

McEwan's novels contain the elements of postmodern gothic in one way or the other and his characters suffer from pain, agony, alienation, fear, desolation, terror, horror and death etc. While investigating the afflictions of the present world, he leaves the readers for serious contemplation, so that the wrongs are set right. These deeper questions that he raises in the selected novels show his commitment to humanity, a commitment that can motivate the involvement of other people. This research exposes the human condition and impresses upon the need to take action and set the order right. The elements of postmodern gothic such as fear, terror, horror and death etc. are the chief causes of disorder in the world.

The novels of McEwan as cited above show how the elements of postmodern gothic are present in the lives of people and are relevant in the present times. The people in postmodern times find themselves trapped in such experiences and they

usually find a strange familiarity in such events or incidents according to Freud. All such experiences are very much imminent as the present era seems a perfect site for the growth of postmodern gothic. It is worthy to note that the solution to the present crisis is not totally absent in the works under study but it is with difficulty that one may be able to come out of the vicious circle which is strengthened by greed and lack of faith in human values. The thesis by no means signals a postmodern society which would be full of crisis rather it is an attempt to warn the people about the wrongs in society and to desire lives towards one's betterment. The aim is to diminish the effects of the elements of postmodern gothic on humans as well as society. Through the analysis of characters, the work highlights the grim situation of the people and the world.

It is not possible to do away with the effect of these elements completely but one can certainly diminish the effect and toll of such things on human lives. It is a call to identify the effects of such elements on the lives of people and take concrete steps to address the burning issue. The elements of postmodern gothic as highlighted by McEwan are found everywhere and repressed in the minds of people. The thesis, suggests a curb on this gnawing and deplorable condition of the world where fear, terror, horror and deaths are ubiquitous which can definitely be diminished to a certain extent. McEwan's works provide an opportunity to look into the postmodern problems for which an overhauling is the need of the hour. People fail to find a dignified place in the present times.

The growth and relevance of gothic fiction and postmodern writing have been immensely contributed by McEwan. Although, the two genres, gothic and postmodernism have unique foundations, as gothic fiction has a long convention with its start in the Eighteenth century, whereas postmodernism is a current scholarly

classification but some of the issues they deal with are actually one and the same as has been expressed in the previous chapters of this thesis. The postmodern gothic deals with dread, the negative, and the absurd, and in it one can see the representation of the dark side of life and fear of the modern technological process. In postmodern gothic fiction, as in McEwan's novels, this dark side exists inside the characters themselves, and they attempt to keep it hidden by keeping up the veneer of their self-made identities. McEwan's works are an indictment of the lack of order and moral values in our society. An attempt should be made to claim dignity and to bring positive change.

Subsuming McEwan under the category of the postmodern gothic novelist by concentrating on his selected works, this study has modestly attempted to trace various elements of postmodern gothic in his selected works. It arrives at a point to express the view that how Ian McEwan and his novels made a great impact on postmodern gothic fiction. It brings to account the findings and limitations together to reconsolidate the present research. As a terminal part of the thesis, this chapter offers an interwoven summary of the investigations performed on the selected works of McEwan. It is a final attempt to accentuate that McEwan in the light of his works is eligible to carry the label of a postmodern gothic novelist, whose preoccupation has been more or less to present fears, terrors, horrors and deaths of the contemporary world. The domain which has been taken in this research work is unexplored yet and hence, this added dimension on McEwan in the form of research work will prove helpful for the readers to develop an overall critical insight about how the postmodern gothic elements are incorporated in McEwan's works and how this study fits in the contemporary scenario?



The fiction of McEwan has not been studied so far from a postmodern gothic perspective, so, formulating a new consciousness in keeping with the contemporary realities, the significance of the present study lies in filling this research gap. This thesis has been structured into an introduction followed by five chapters and a conclusion. The introduction provides a general overview of the thesis, research objectives, methodology etc. The chapter one presents a brief introduction of the author, his works and Freud's concept of the uncanny. This chapter also gives an overview of the history of gothic fiction. The chapter asserts that gothic fiction is dynamic and constantly reinvents itself. From the eighteenth-century plot (castles, persecuted heroes/heroines) to the nineteenth-century Frankenstein's monster, vampire, the new possibilities of its generic expeditions like the sensation novel and detective fiction, there are constantly new inflexions of gothic literature.

The chapter also presents the relevance of postmodern gothic fiction and its elements. The interrelationships between gothic and other generic forms are growing complex and nuanced day by day. Gothic has a rich and complex relationship with both modernist and postmodernist texts that goes beyond straightforward rejection. The postmodern era offers plenty of room for gothic fiction to flourish. It is no wonder that contemporary writers have resorted to the gothic mode as a specific view of life to cope with the present realities. The gothic literature presents an alarming diagnosis of the condition of postmodern anomie, the decay, the emptiness and the feelinglessness.

The postmodern gothic seems seeped into the postmodern lives and it is largely clinically introspective in spirit. It places fear, horror, terror, death and fragmentation etc. before the human eyes for introspection. In order to stay relevant, the literary genre of gothic fiction has to evolve alongside with the changing anxieties

and fears of the reading public. The elements of postmodern gothic have also had to evolve because the gothic elements that scared the previous generations may or may not scare the new generations. Although, there is a whole range of postmodern gothic elements, the important ones dealt with in this thesis are fear, terror, horror and death.

The second, third, fourth and fifth chapters present the postmodern gothic elements such as fear, terror, horror and death in the selected novels of Ian McEwan, wherein the second and third chapters focus on the elements such as 'fear' and 'terror' and the fourth and fifth chapters focusses on 'horror' and 'death' respectively. These chapters also set out to analyse the need for correcting the wrongs to save society from further collapse. In the analysis of the selected works of Ian McEwan, these chapters use Freud's concept of the uncanny. The characters in the works of McEwan show the presence of elements of postmodern gothic in absolute terms. The thesis attempted to study the crisis situation of the postmodern world which is full of fear, terror, horror and deaths etc., where peace seems only an evasive concept. The fifth chapter is followed by Conclusion, aiming to present a conclusive picture of the elements of postmodern gothic in the selected novels of Ian McEwan to initiate critical thinking and interpretation which would give a better understanding of McEwan's works and open new avenues of contemplation, done by analysing the characters, themes and reflections.

McEwan's novels centre on social problems that are faced by the people and his writings clearly depict the neglected moral values. His works explore the postmodern crisis and he exposes these crises and the sufferings of society through his characters. His novels are recognizably gothic in character and he seems to be an expert practitioner of the gothic form. He develops hostile environments that are developed into a language evoking nightmare, and suspense and he also uses inflation

of language and attitude which is regarded as the hallmark of gothic writers. The whole world seems engulfed by violence, discrimination, exploitation and the miserable condition of people.

There is a growing need to bring justice to all and go beyond the defined categories of creed, caste and colour. People should accept their role not only for themselves but for society as a whole. The participation of every individual is a must and a key to changing society for good. The rights should not be denied to anyone. There is a need of working together to save our degenerate humanity and social setup from further damage. There should be strong resistance to all sorts of violence and claim for a life full of respect, dignity, tolerance and integrity. People should devote themselves to peace values, ethics, and human rights so that no one is subjected to any sort of atrocity or violence. McEwan's works present the view that how the characters suffer in their respective ways not just physically but also psychologically as well and this thesis presents this abnormal and extraordinary scenario.

The present study is qualitative in nature, hence analytical and descriptive methods have been followed. While tracing out the elements of postmodern gothic in the selected works of McEwan, a close analysis of primary and secondary texts was done with the application of Sigmund Freud's concept of uncanny. Moreover, the format of the study is based on MLA 8th Edition for the purpose of documentation, quotations and bibliography. As far as the limitation of this study is concerned, it is worthy to note that though the elements of postmodern gothic have been followed exclusively in McEwan's four selected novels, they may be detectable in his other novels also. McEwan's expression of the elements of postmodern gothic in his novels other than the ones selected in this thesis is not that visible but it does not mean that it is non-existent in them.

This discourse on the postmodern gothic paves the way for future investigation in McEwan's other works but that would be another thesis. This thesis advocates more and more similar studies to enrich and broaden the limits of postmodern gothic. There is a scope to carry out research in his works which he keeps adding with passing time to his already existing collection. Apart from the issues dealt with in this thesis, there is wide scope for further research too. His fiction brings out certain areas that need investigation in greater detail. This study hopes that it will be a new reflection on McEwan in the field of postmodern gothic.

The thesis finds its deepest expression in the destructive effects of several wrongs in the societal set-up and the challenges it poses for people in their day-to-day life. The aim is to diminish the effects and to live a life towards one's betterment. A changed way of thinking and a practice of the self with respect to ethics is suggested wherein moral rules are maintained to undo the knots of crisis and the need for correcting the wrongs to save society from further collapse. Apart from presenting this chaotic, spiritually detached and disintegrating world of the post-war era which has fallen upon evil days, McEwan also offers some hope for the suffering humanity. He asserts in *Enduring Love* that "The time seems full with threats and insults which can but be sweetly resolved in mutual forgiveness and to absolve each other of death, further to defend against the catastrophes" (40).

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