

Freudian psychological analysis of jack in the cement garden



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The Cement Garden depicts an isolated family, and the narrator is the oldest son in the family, named Jack. As a fifteen-year-old adolescent, it is time for Jack to build sex and gender consciousness. However, after the death of his father and mother, he and his sister Julie start to play the role of the parents in family, resulting in the incest. Andrew Birkin argues that Jack's sexual instinct becomes apparent since his father's death, and the death of his mother results in the emergence of Jack's character, because he is eager for taking the role of father. Debashis Mitra and Manish Shrivastava contends that Jack is oppressed by his father who is an obsessive and powerful man at first, while Julie acts as a surrogate-mother and tries to establish a traditional family structure after the death of their mother. In *The Fiction of Ian McEwan*, the author claims Jack sleeps with his sister Julie who is the family's mother, and meanwhile, he expects to an infant again. This paper will apply Freud's theories to an analysis of Jack's abnormal adolescent consciousness and sexuality focusing on the sexual instinct, the alliance to Julie, and the absence of manner.

Jack's strong sexual impulse and curiosity can be witnessed during the stage of puberty, which is incentive of the improper relation with his sister. In Freudian theory, sexual instinct indwells in his unconsciousness of children and even infants, including Jack. As Sigmund Freud notes, the puberty transforms infantile sexual life into its definite normal form, whereas the sexual impulse mostly is dominated by autoeroticism (72). As an adolescent around 15 years old, Jack is addicted to masturbation while going through the puberty. After the first ejaculation, he seriously observes the liquid which is not milky, colorless and tasteless. The biological significance of masculine

connects with the presence of semen (98). Masturbation becomes a meaningless but necessary part of Jack's daily routine which also turns a child into a man gradually. From this side, Jack's awareness of masculinity is growing. In addition, children begin masturbating early in life, especially when they notice the distinction between the sexes in the second year of life, so they show their sexual curiosity towards their parents' genitals and would want to touch the genitals if they could (Josephs 947). The adolescent recognizes the change of his genitals and has to find an object to be his sexual aim. In Freudian theory, sex can be divided into two parts subject and object, and the opposite gender acts as an object are essential to build a gender role. Absolutely, in *The Cement Garden*, Julie serves as a sexual object for Jack. When he plays the sex game with his sisters, he imagines that Julie's body, though he is examining Sue's body through fingers. Jack casts his curiosity and libido on his sister. A description of Julie's female characteristics occurs in Jack's fifteen-year-old birthday. Jack persuades Julie to do a handstand again, and he describes that Her skirt fell down over her head. Her knickers showed a brilliant white against the pale brown skin of her legs and I could see how the material bunched in little pleats around the elastic that clung to her flat, muscular belly. A few black hairs curled out from the white crotch. Her legs, which were together at first, now moved slowly apart like giant arms (McEwan 20). Jack looks forward to seeing Julie's handstand, because he is curious about female genitalia. Freud regards that the union of the genitals is a normal sexual aim (19). The growth of Jack's gender and sex consciousness strengthens the libido, in particular for his sister.

Oedipus complex is the unconscious desire for Jack, which causes the improper relationship with his sister, although the early stage of oedipal complex usually included an obsession with the mother. Referring to Freudian psychoanalytical theory, "mother" originally is the sexual object for people in their childhood and then they look for someone who love as their mother has loved them (Freud 40). The unconscious affection towards mother is considered as Id by Freud, because it gratifies instincts but goes against social convention. There are some details shown that Jack likes his mother. For example, when Jack is eight years old, he comes home from school one morning pretending to be seriously ill so that his mother will indulge me. Jack wants to monopolize his mother while others are out of the house. The unconscious desire to own his mother individually sets a foreshadowing for his affection towards Julie. After the death of his parents, Jack still seeks for the love and care from his parents, although the maternal care has gone. The unconscious awareness is reflected in his dream. Dreams are related to interpretation of thoughts which are repressed as out of harmony with the selected life of consciousness (Freud 5). In Jack's dream, My mother and father were walking ahead of me carrying deckchairs and a bundle of towels. I could not keep up. The large, round pebbles hurt my feet. In my hand there was a stick with a windmill on the end. I was crying because I was tired and I wanted to be carried. My parents stopped to wait for me but when I was within a few feet of them they turned and went on (McEwan 63). Jack dreams he is left on the beach and back to the infant stage (Childs 44). The absence of a primary mother prevents children from fostering a healthy set of relationships with the other objects in the future (Sistania et al. 454). After the death of Jack's mother, Jack's true nature

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emerges. Jack has said, "When Mother died, beneath my strongest feelings was a sense of adventure and freedom", because no one judges his behavior anymore (McEwan 34). He is going to take the responsibility to be a "father" in the family while taking on the role of mother. Jack's affection towards Julie is much more obvious than his affection towards his mother. He keeps himself clean, seldom masturbates, helps Tom get back to sleep when he wakes at night crying, and even has sex with Julie (Birkin 35). In the fiction, the oedipal complex mostly lies on Jack's alliance to Julie who takes the role of an instant mother after the death of their parents. The death of his mother and father provides him a chance to be a father who can love the "mother" Julie. He needs a mother while the position is substituted by Julie, because she takes on features of her mother's personality (Sistiana et al. 454).

Jack's family lacks morality and traditional rules which represents the superego in Freud's theory. Basing on the oedipal complex, children's own jealousy and retaliatory fury on to their oedipal rivals who gain the person they deeply desire to mate, the same as Jack (Josephs 949). The oedipal rival refers to the father who takes the mother's love away. The image of Jack's father is arbitrary, dominating and powerful, totally contrast to his mother. In Jack's words, "I did not kill my father, but I sometimes felt I had helped him on his way" (McEwan 7). Jack is masturbating when his father suffers a sudden heart attack, which hastens the death of his father to some extent.

Moreover, the father stands for the superego, symbolizing the morality and inhibiting the drives of the Id. For instance, Jack's father criticizes Tom who does not talk with his mother in appropriate ways or never sits straightly.

Unfortunately, the symbol of the superego disappears along with the father's

death which directly affects Jack's psychological growth. As Andrew Birkin said, the father's death serves as a reminder that the family is now less stable and more vulnerable to outside forces (35). Hence, Jack lacks correct moral direction as well as superego which blocks off the unconscious pleasure principle. Once in Jack's dream, he is masturbating in front of his mother, and then his mother asks him what his father would think of if he keeps masturbating, whereas Jack replies that both of his parents have already died. The example indicates that Jack resists the rules since his parents have passed away. Besides Jack's father, Jack holds a hostile attitude towards Julie's boyfriend Derek. Derek enters the household, which breaks the normal structure in the family (Ambler 4). Moreover, he tends to play the role of a surrogate father thereby gaining power and authority (Mitra and Shrivastava 167). Jack does not want a father to set moral principles and to compete with Julie's love. By contrast, Jack is longing to show his own masculine in the family.

In conclusion, the sexual awareness of adolescence, the unconscious desire to gain mother's love and the loss of ethical guidelines all contributed to Jack's distorted psychology. The novel portrays the growth and the change of Jack which can be explained through Freudian psychological theory. Relying on Freud's sex theory, as Jack grows through puberty, the sex awareness is rising and the desire to be a masculine is reinforced. As for the Oedipus complex, Jack hates his father but loves his mother, although the status is substituted by Julie gradually. Related to three psychic zones of Freud, superego should suppress id so Oedipal complex should be repressed by social principles which have disappeared along with the death of Jack's

father. The story begins with Jack's unrestrained masturbation and ends up with incest between Jack and Julie. It is not the traditional progressive process from childhood to maturity but a sense of regression (Chalupsky 54).

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