



The Legacy of Thatcherism: Educational Inequalities and Family Capital in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*

Jingxuan Hu¹, Xiaohui Liang²

Abstract

In Ian McEwan's acclaimed science fiction novel *Machines Like Me*, most critics focus on the ethical anxieties surrounding human characters and artificial intelligence interactions. However, these studies often overlook the novel's potential as a compelling work of BrexLit, particularly in its deep exploration of the lasting impact of Thatcherism on British social life. This includes its focus on family structures and the ethical challenges of child development, factors that contributed to the conditions leading to Brexit. The central issue explored is the generational reproduction of educational inequalities exacerbated by Thatcher's policies. This study aims to analyze the disadvantaged position of Mark, a young boy growing up in a family facing economic hardship, fragmented social networks, and limited educational opportunities. Using Pierre Bourdieu's three-dimensional framework of cultural capital theory—economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital—the paper examines how deficiencies in these forms of capital contribute to the reproduction of inequalities in Mark's life. These challenges are reflected in the lives of three adult characters: Charlie, Mariam, and Miranda. The findings reveal that Mark's psychological trauma and practical dilemmas are direct consequences of insufficient family support in terms of these three forms of capital. This highlights how Thatcher-era policies intensified educational inequalities across generations. The study underscores the need for policies that address educational disparities and strengthen family capital to mitigate the long-term effects of inequality, particularly in the post-Brexit era.

Keywords: *BrexLit, Brexit, Child development, Ian McEwan, Machines Like Me.*

A. Introduction

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), numerous AI products flock into human society and even ordinary people's families. This intimate human-AI interaction has been reflected in numerous contemporary science fictions, such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021), Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* (2017), and Becky Chambers's *A Closed and Common Orbit* (2016), with figures of artificial intelligence frequently emerging in their text-world. However, among all the works, *Machines Like Me* has aroused intensive attention, as introducing an AI figure into everyday human family life creates serious ethical problems. Previous studies have focused on the interrelation between humans (Gulcu, 2020; Patra, 2020; Ferrari, 2022) and AI figures in *Machines Like Me* and its relevant ethnic anxieties (Schaffeld, 2020; Kopka & Schaffeld, 2020). The aforementioned studies mainly focus on the general topics under the impact of AI figures on human society; however, the most pressing issue regarding the ethnicity of child-raising and the underlying political background in the post-Thatcher era in this BrexLit has been ignored.

¹ University of Science and Technology Beijing, Beijing, China

² University of Science and Technology Beijing, Beijing, China, iangxiaohui@ustb.edu.cn

During Thatcher's reign, her policies emphasized "a monetarist or free market approach to the economy," which led to widespread concern about "children at risk" throughout the 1980s (Nunn, 2002). Moreover, many of the profound difficulties the UK currently has over Brexit may be traced back to the Thatcher era, as her policy legacy created an economic basis for Brexit and aggravated British social inequalities further (Sowels, 2019). All previous discussions concerning Brexit after Thatcherism examine changes in the role of family and the reconstituting of family ties in post-Thatcher Britain (Zambelli & Sigona, 2022; Davies & Carter, 2024; Davies, 2021). However, in *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan focuses on people facing the "pressure of their times" (Head, 2007), presenting a vivid picture of individuals' pressuring lives, especially children's dilemmas, due to Thatcher's economic policies. In this novel, Charlie, who suffers deficient family support, aspires to build a family with his girlfriend, Miranda. In this process, he meets Mark, a boy with serious family issues, and he and Miranda wish to establish a family by adopting Mark. It displays how children with limited support interact and form bonds with each other as a new generation in this new era.

Therefore, this paper examines the deficient family support for child development under the influence of Thatcherism in *Machines Like Me* with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. In Pierre's theory, three categories of capital, economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital, demonstrate different quandaries faced by generations of British children under the influence of Thatcher. This dynamic process of family support and limited capital these children experienced not only underlines Thatcherism's impact on family support but also illustrates how the subduing family support interacts and changes throughout generations.

The enduring legacy of Thatcherism, as reflected in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*, underscores how socio-political policies can have intergenerational consequences on educational inequalities. Thatcher-era policies prioritized economic liberalization and individualism, often at the expense of public welfare and equitable access to education. This created structural barriers for working-class families, as seen in the novel's depiction of Mark, who grows up in a household lacking economic, social, and cultural capital. Using Pierre Bourdieu's framework, it becomes evident that Mark's disadvantaged position stems from the systematic erosion of collective support systems, such as access to quality education and social mobility. The novel, thus, serves as a poignant critique of how such policies perpetuate cycles of inequality, limiting the opportunities available to children like Mark and exacerbating the psychological and practical challenges they face in adulthood. By situating *Machines Like Me* within the context of *BrexitLit*, this study highlights the connection between Thatcherism's socio-economic fallout and the socio-political conditions that ultimately led to Brexit.

Furthermore, McEwan's portrayal of Mark's struggles reveals how insufficient family capital—economic stability, social networks, and cultural exposure—can perpetuate educational inequalities across generations. The novel juxtaposes Mark's developmental challenges against the contrasting lives of adult characters, such as Charlie, Mariam, and Miranda, to illustrate the broader societal consequences of Thatcher-era policies. Each character embodies a response to these systemic disparities, reflecting the novel's nuanced critique of British society. Thatcherism's emphasis on privatization and self-reliance disregarded the crucial role of familial and community support in fostering child development, leaving many children from disadvantaged families unable to break free from the cycle of poverty. This study argues that by exploring these themes, *Machines Like Me* not only critiques the socio-economic inequalities of the past but also calls attention to the urgency of addressing similar disparities in the post-Brexit era, where inequality remains a pressing concern.

B. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design with a literary text analysis approach. This method facilitates an in-depth exploration of Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* narrative, characters, and themes. The focus is on identifying and analyzing representations of educational inequality and the impact of Thatcherism on family structures and child development. This approach aligns with the tradition of examining literature to reflect socio-political realities (Barry, 2009; Eagleton, 2008). The research begins with a close reading of *Machines Like Me* to identify narrative elements related to educational inequality, family dynamics, and the effects of Thatcherism. Key characters, including Mark, Charlie, Mariam, and Miranda, are analyzed in depth to explore how their lives reflect the reproduction of inequality through the three dimensions of capital—economic, social, and cultural—based on Pierre Bourdieu's framework (Bourdieu, 1986). In the final stage, findings are interpreted within the context of BrexLit, drawing on prior studies of literature examining Brexit's cultural and political underpinnings (Ganteau & Onega, 2021).

Data is collected through a primary analysis of the text *Machines Like Me*. Supplementary data includes journal articles, books, and essays discussing Thatcherism, BrexLit, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, and educational inequality. Following literary criticism methodologies, these sources ensure academic validity and thematic relevance (Rivkin & Ryan, 2017). The data analysis in this study employs thematic analysis guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. The analysis follows three main stages. First, key themes are identified within *Machines Like Me*, focusing on educational inequality, family dynamics, and the impact of Thatcherism as represented in the narrative. Next, the narrative elements are categorized according to Bourdieu's three forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—to examine how deficiencies in these areas contribute to the reproduction of inequality in Mark's life. Finally, the findings are interpreted within a broader socio-political context, connecting the novel's critique of Thatcher-era policies to the socio-economic conditions that shaped Brexit. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the text while situating its themes within relevant historical and cultural frameworks, highlighting how literary narratives can reflect and critique systemic inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; McGuigan, 2014).

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Deficient Economic Capital in the Post-Thatcher Era

In *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan explores the sense of insecurity brought by the deficiency of economic capital and how this insecurity shapes people's everyday lives throughout generations. This section will examine Mark's lack of economic capital in his own family, his consequent sense of insecurity, and Charlie as a grown-up version of Mark.

The shift in economic structures following the implementation of Thatcher's policies in the 1980s led to profound social changes. Central to the effects of these changes was the decline of economic capital for many families and, by extension, the negative impacts on child development. In the novel, the experiences of Mark, a young child living in dire circumstances, and Charlie, his adult counterpart, offer a lens through which to examine the long-term effects of limited economic capital on child development.

In the novel, Mark is depicted as "a small boy... dressed in baggy green shorts, plastic sandals and a stained white t-shirt." He is described as "bent over by a see-saw examining an object on the ground," "tried to dislodge it with his foot," and then "crouched down and got his fingers to it." This indicates Mark's economic stress, as he wears shabby clothes. Also, his monotonous play signals a life of deprivation, as he could only play with the see-saw and the object on the ground with his own body instead of playing with toys. Moreover, Mark's

childhood is marked by instability, as his mother is “in a psychiatric ward for the moment. Delusional. Paranoid. Possibly from years of amphetamine addiction. It’s not good. She can be violent. The father’s in prison.” Surrounded by neglect from his parents and his family’s scarce economic capital, Mark’s childhood is shaped by an absence of materials and parental company, which has an enduring impact on his emotional and social development. The lack of support, both at home and in his living environment, paves the way for his life, marked by emotional struggle and social isolation. This lack of economic capital, which is the root of all other types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), influences child development by limiting the cultural and material resources available within their family and social environment. The absence of Mark’s economic capital means he cannot access essential material resources such as food and stable housing. In addition, the lack of emotional support, represented by the absence of caregivers, further hinders Mark from fostering a supportive growth environment in his family. According to Bourdieu, the family, particularly its ability to provide material and emotional resources, is central to transmitting economic capital to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996). Mark’s limited access to these resources indicates his vulnerability in a society where children require economic capital from families to secure high-quality development.

This deficient family support worsens because of “the transformation of economic capital into other forms of capital” (Bourdieu, 1986). As his parents fail to provide Mark with the necessary company, he suffers more in this transformation process. His mother’s psychiatric illness and his father’s imprisonment hinder Mark from getting the most fundamental source of social and cultural capital, as he can hardly rely on anyone for support. Bourdieu argues that the different types of capital are the basis of strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital. Mark’s inability to form stable connections with his caregivers severely affects his development and acts as a reproduction of his parents’ situations. In the novel, the narrator, Charlie, expresses this helplessness: “I was being offered what some would say was the best that adult life could afford. Love, and a child. I had a sense of being borne helplessly away by events on the downstream flood.” This detail emphasizes the emotional breakdown of living in a vulnerable environment where even the potential for love and caring is diminished by structural social problems. The lack of consistent social support in Mark’s childhood contributes to feelings of insecurity and instability that affect his ability to form healthy personal relationships and integrate into the social environment in the future. Specifically, children from lower-income backgrounds are more likely to lack enough economic capital to invest in and accumulate the social networks, cultural experiences, and skills needed to climb the social ladder. Without the buffer of these capitals, children such as Mark will repeat the lives of their parents, struggling to cope with their challenges and experiencing anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues as they grow older. This can be predicted by his behavior when meeting Miranda, as he “shrugged her off and had never been taught the luxury of being comforted.” This emotional insecurity is not a coincidental phenomenon but part of a broader trend that affects children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Mark’s poverty and neglect reflect broader social dynamics in Britain after the Thatcher era. The rising inflation led by Thatcher’s economic policies (Backhouse, 2009) brought more significant struggles to families such as Mark’s, who were already impoverished. Children growing up in such environments face a range of adverse childhood challenges, including abuse, neglect, and inadequate education. The fragmentation of family support prevents children from receiving systematic support to mitigate these risks. This distribution of families’ economic, social, and cultural capital is a reproduction of inequality, and this inequality is perpetuated across generations (Bourdieu, 1990). In this context, Mark can be seen as a product of the more significant societal shift toward deepening inequality, where the absence of economic capital from the family limits a child’s ability to develop into a competent, confident adult.

Charlie, the adult counterpart to Mark, provides a view of the long-term consequences of limited economic capital during childhood. As an adult, Charlie's life is marked by financial instability, emotional insecurity, and a lack of direction, mirroring the challenges Mark is likely to face as he grows older. In the novel, Charlie reflects on his troubled youth: "My hundred hours of community service convinced me that I should never have a regular job again." This signifies Charlie's deep-seated disillusionment with formal employment, which probably stems from a childhood that lacked stability and guidance. Mark grew up in an environment where his mother, Jenny Friend, "community nurse for a large semi-rural area, had seemed during my childhood in constant exhaustion, and his father wore her down more than her job." In this case, the semi-rural environment reflects his family's lack of economic condition. Throughout his adult life, Charlie struggles to find meaningful work, resorting instead to unstable and speculative sources of income such as writing books, making property deals, and playing the stock market. Despite these efforts, he is lost to different schemes, and "sometimes he leaped ahead, sometimes he plunged, but on average through the year he made about as much as the postman."

The parallels between Mark's early neglect and Charlie's adult instability are evident, as they lack enough economic capital to support their development. In Charlie's case, his childhood of insecurity and lack of financial support contributes to his failure to pursue stable jobs and accumulate wealth after growing up. This phenomenon is not unique to Charlie; it reflects the broader social and economic climate in which many working-class children grow up after Thatcherism. Charlie's inability to secure a stable job also reflects the economic situation in the post-Thatcher era. The decline of manufacturing industries and the dismantling of welfare provisions all contributed to an environment in which stable, well-paid jobs were increasingly out of reach for those without supportive economic capital from the older generation. According to Bateman (2022), the unemployment level reached double digits, and inflation rose. Children such as Mark, who grow up in economically disadvantaged families, can hardly achieve upward social mobility, which reinforces the cycle of poverty and insecurity that can persist across generations.

The impact of limited economic capital is not limited to the vocational development of children; it also influences their education development. Mark's poor economic conditions limit his access to education resources, as the education system has ingrained inequalities, and those with more economic capital are more likely to accumulate better education resources. According to Barnett and Belfield (2006), children from disadvantaged backgrounds with economic issues, like Mark, are likelier to underperform in school. Mark's limited exposure to social and educational resources weakens his ability to compete with more privileged peers. In this case, the education system acts as an institution for the reproduction of social inequality, with those who lack the requisite economic capital often being marginalized in the current education system (Bourdieu, 1986). In a society where the government has limited impact in providing equal access to education, children such as Mark are more likely to be left behind, reinforcing their marginalization. This inequality, combined with the material deprivation Mark and Charlie experience, makes it increasingly difficult for them to escape their poverty and secure a stable life.

2. Deficient Social Capital in the Post-Thatcher Era

Suppose Charlie reflects Mark's possible future in lacking economic capital. In that case, Mariam serves as Mark's grown-up version, who, possessing sufficient economic capital, faces serious mental problems due to lacking social capital. In *Machines Like Me*, Mark, growing up in a broken home, and Mariam, his adult counterpart, demonstrate how this erosion of cultural capital—through the collapse of interpersonal and community ties—exacerbates the emotional and developmental challenges children from disadvantaged backgrounds face. The decline of social capital following Thatcher's policies had tremendous effects on child development and

mental health, particularly for those from working-class backgrounds. Social capital refers to the resources and benefits people can obtain from social networks, relationships, and community support systems (Bourdieu, 1986). The loss of social capital following Thatcher's policies of austerity and privatization weakened the web of working-class communities and left some individuals isolated without the necessary material, emotional, and social resources.

Mark's childhood is not only defined by a lack of economic capital but also by a lack of social capital, which is signified by his parents' inability to support his social networking. At a young age, he was neglected by his parents: the father had vanished, and the mother had drinking and drug problems. Living in this situation, the narrative suggests that Mark's future is not isolated, but closely connected with his stressed social environment. When Charlie thinks of Mark, he "thinks of him not as a child, but a person in the context of his entire life. His future was in the hands of bureaucrats." This sets the stage for a life marked by institutional control rather than familial or community support. His experience highlights the loss of social capital within working-class communities in the post-Thatcher and pre-Brexit era. Social capital—the networks of family, friends, and community ties—is essential to a child's development by its presupposed sociability (Bourdieu, 1986). A child without these resources, such as Mark, faces a future devoid of institutionalized support systems, which usually would buffer children from emotional and psychological distress. In the absence of family stability or community cohesion, Mark is subject to a system of bureaucratic decision-making, often making him feel alienated, overlooked, or misunderstood.

In post-Thatcher Britain, the breakdown of social structures, including the deficiency of public housing, community centers, and social services, compounded this sense of isolation. The neoliberal agenda promoted by Thatcher can be seen as a policy with two pillars: removing government overreach and introducing free trade (Schnurr, 2020). In this environment, individuals from poorer backgrounds became increasingly isolated as the transmission from economic capital to social capital is blocked. This economic instability after Thatcher's reign is marked by child poverty combined with the deficiency of public social structures, leading to increasing rates of neglect and emotional distress among children. According to a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024), children from lower-income families were disproportionately affected by the decline of public services and the erosion of the social safety net, leading to widespread emotional and developmental challenges.

In Mark's case, the lack of a robust family environment and community links makes him vulnerable to the adverse effects of social isolation. His situation demonstrates the impact of a child's lack of social capital on emotional and psychological growth. The absence of parental involvement and steady adult relationships heightens a sense of uncertainty and helplessness. Mark's trips to his mom symbolize this isolation: "She was keen to talk about him. He was much wounded by his mother's disappearance from his life, kept asking for her, and was sometimes withdrawn, sometimes happy. On two occasions, he was taken to see her in the hospital. On the second visit, she did not or would not recognize him." Without a reliable support system, particularly his family, Mark's emotional and psychological well-being is severely impacted despite having a certain degree of endurance. Children like Mark are deprived of the personal resources needed for growth, self-worth, and endurance without a group of caregivers, educators, and family members. This social atmosphere is crucial for forming what Bourdieu refers to as a child's "habitus," a set of attitudes, beliefs, and coping techniques that people acquire over time (Bourdieu, 1990). In Mark's case, his early life's loneliness and psychological deprivation shaped his habitus. A child prone to stress, anxiety, and emotional instability is a product of this absence of care, both in terms of love and guidance. Mark's knowledge is indicative of the growing mental health crises among children from disadvantaged backgrounds during the Thatcher period, as they lacked access to the social support that may protect them against these emotional burdens. Children's experiences in deprived places, where community relations have

been significantly strained, exemplify Mark's risk. According to the Child Poverty Action Group (2024), many children in low-income families experience similar feelings of loneliness and alienation, lacking the necessary emotional support to navigate school or family issues. Following the 1980s, working-class communities lost social capital directly related to this social isolation.

Mariam's case offers a view of the extended effects of growing up in an environment with limited social capital as a version of Mark's future. Mariam's inner struggles in the novel reflect the emotional strain of living without a sturdy social support program. Despite the enormous emotional stress she encounters, she is unable to tell her parents. "Neither her kids nor the officers were aware of her." Her mom would receive the message immediately from the dentist, as he was a close friend of the family. Her brothers had been informed of it and had acted foolishly and faced serious consequences for themselves. Mariam's entire family would suffer. Her unwillingness to reach home or seek outside aid underscores the heavy isolation from confined social capital. Mariam's family is religious and Muslim, with well-defined values and circles, so her social capital is constrained to heavy religious norms. These beliefs prevent her from telling the truth about her being raped. Mariam feels unable to find help because of this isolation of traditional support systems, whether as a result of social stigma, parental pressure, or public distrust of public institutions. She has no space to articulate her anxiety because of her lack of emotional and psychological support networks, which further aggravates her sense of helplessness and isolation. This leads to her suicide. Social capital, presented by supportive social networks, fails to provide sufficient support for her crises. Mariam must bear her mental burden solely because she lacks these social resources. As she "slit her wrists in the bath," this isolation causes significant psychological distress and her final suicide.

Mariam's inability to reach out for assistance results from the post-Thatcher era's broader social and economic changes. People represented by Mariam were exceedingly left to take their own lives as a result of the decline in state service and community-based support constructions. As a result, many individuals from marginalized backgrounds turned inside, avoiding aid-using habits due to fear of judgment or social exclusion. This reluctance to seek support exacerbates feelings of alienation and can lead to mental health crises, including depression, anxiety, and, in severe cases, suicide. The saying "children at risk" was associated with a wide range of social issues, particularly family breakdown, throughout the 1980s (Nunn, 2002). This social isolation has a significant impact on mental health, and it fits a broader pattern in post-Thatcher Britain. The Centre for Mental Health (2023) has documented the rise in mental health issues in the UK following the austerity and privatization measures of Thatcher, particularly among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. These individuals generally lacked the social and emotional resources needed to cope with their individual, social, and financial challenges of life, leading to an increase in suicide rates, self-harm, and mental health disorders.

Mariam's suicide represents a broader social issue that emerged in the aftermath of Thatcherism, as working-class communities became increasingly fragmented. The decline of social capital in these communities had far-reaching effects, particularly for children growing up in these households marked by isolation. The absence of strong community ties, family support, and emotional resources leaves many individuals to cope with life's challenges alone. The psychological and emotional consequences of social isolation, as seen in both Mark's childhood and Mariam's adulthood, have long-term consequences for mental health, social mobility, and overall well-being. The decline of social capital, in combination with the dismantling of the welfare state brought by Thatcher's policies, left many communities without the institutional support that once provided a safety net for those in need. As working-class families found themselves increasingly isolated and disconnected, the emotional and psychological challenges faced by these individuals became more pronounced, ultimately contributing to a decline in social trust and a rise in mental health issues. The emotional and psychological difficulties faced

by working-class people increased, eventually causing a decline in social trust and a fall in mental health issues, which impedes children from a well-rounded development and aggravates education inequalities.

3. Deficient Cultural Capital in the Post-Thatcher Era

As shown previously, Mark lacks sufficient economic and social capital resources. Moreover, he lacks the cultural capital to support his development, which resembles Miranda's case, which provides a grown-up prospect of Mark and struggles with her emotional issues and parenting mode. Through depicting Mark and Miranda, his adult counterpart, McEwan explores how the lack of cultural capital impacts children's emotional and social development. Cultural capital refers to the resources individuals gain through their cultural experiences and socialization, with three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital, like other forms of capital, is crucial for a child's development and ability in social, educational, and professional spheres. However, the deficiency of cultural capital following the policies of Thatcherism had far-reaching effects on child development. The erosion of social support networks, declining community resources, and dismantling of public services after Thatcherism left many families without the cultural and material support needed for healthy child development.

Mark's early life is described by a lack of cultural capital—embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. First, Mark suffers from scarce embodied cultural capital in his family. This is marked by his mother's violent language in the case when Charlie first tried to save him from his mother's smacking: "Who the fuck are you? It was the right question, and for that reason, I didn't answer it. He's too little to understand you. This conversation was proceeding over the child's screams." Second, he suffers from deficient objectified cultural capital. Mark's first encounter with Adam signifies this, as he tends to trust this artificial intelligence with no knowledge of it: "Adam stood still and upright, and the boy kept firm hold of the reassuring finger." Instead of fear towards this machine-human, Mark displays a natural trust, which indicates his ignorance of AI anxiety and the absence of AI in his family life, perceiving Adam as an actual human. Third, Mark, as a child, faces problems in gaining institutionalized cultural capital. When Miranda and Charlie planned to adopt Mark, they mentioned: "Assuming the process of fostering and adoption could be completed within nine months, a good local primary school in Ladbrooke Grove had a place for 'our son.'" This indicates that Mark would lack proper formal education resources before adoption and that a primary school is necessary for raising him. In this case, Mark likely has limited qualifications for entering schools before the adoption.

The consequences of this lack of cultural capital are evident in Mark's struggles to connect with others. When Mark's mother smacks him, he "forms the habit of chewing on his lower lip to the point of drawing blood," signaling a complex relationship of dependence and fear. This scenario mirrors the emotional disconnection that can arise when children lack healthy attachment and guidance. Mark's emotional isolation and inability to trust others or form secure attachments reflect the long-term consequences of growing up in a family environment where emotional needs are neglected and cultural capital is lacking. For example, when Miranda first approached him, Mark showed defense, as he shrugged at Miranda when she put her arms around his shoulders.

This lack of cultural capital could be interpreted as the consequence of living in poverty and isolation in the experience of children growing up in poverty-stricken or unstable households after Thatcherism. According to research by the Child Poverty Action Group (2023), children from disadvantaged families often experience emotional neglect, which has a profound effect on their social and emotional development. These children frequently lack the cultural resources essential for healthy emotional growth and social competence. For Mark, this absence of cultural

capital will likely hinder his ability to thrive in educational and social settings, leaving him more vulnerable to future struggles in life.

Miranda, as the adult version of Mark, exemplifies the long-term effects of a childhood marked by limited cultural resources. Miranda's experiences reflect how the absence of these cultural capitals in childhood can lead to isolation in adulthood. In the novel, Miranda reveals her struggles with this emotional isolation. When she discusses her experiences with Charlie, she reflects on the suffering of being a child with no care and her insecure sense of fear: "If I get a criminal record, we will not be allowed to adopt. That is the rule. Mark will be lost. You have no idea what it is to be a child in care. Different institutions, different foster parents, different social workers. No one close to him, no one loving him." Miranda's description of her experience highlights the profound impact that the absence of cultural capital can have on a child's sense of self-worth and emotional stability. Her struggle to find emotional support, even as an adult, is rooted in her early experiences of disconnection and lack of attachment. Miranda's reaction to her father's phone call also sheds light on the ongoing emotional scars left by her early life. "Her face had a greasy shine. She was doing her best to keep a level voice. 'That was my father on the phone. They let Gorringer out early.'" This passage illustrates Miranda's inability to cope with the scars of her past. Despite her outward composure, Miranda's internal struggles reflect the deep psychological problems caused by her childhood lack of cultural capital. Her childhood experiences contribute to her ongoing feelings of insecurity and fear. The inability to access cultural capital through family support contributes to her adult life's vulnerability. Without enough cultural capital, as is presented in Mark's and Miranda's lives, the consequences for emotional and psychological well-being can be severe.

Moreover, Mark and Miranda reflect on the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital and the reproduction of education inequality. Miranda's decision to adopt a child, despite her childhood sufferings, illustrates the challenges of parenting when one has been deprived of the cultural resources for caregiving. She explains to Charlie, "I am about to adopt a child... If necessary, Charlie can look after Mark. It will bring them close, which is what you want. Thousands of children suffer because they have a parent in prison." Miranda states the limitations imposed by her background, where the absence of cultural capital has hindered her ability to provide the nourishment that a child needs to grow up. According to Bourdieu (1996), family plays a decisive role in maintaining social order and reproducing social space and social relations. Miranda's desire to adopt Mark reflects her awareness of the enduring limitations of cultural capital. She recognizes that Mark, like herself, faces the challenge of growing up without supportive cultural resources that would help him develop healthy relationships. Despite her efforts, however, her lack of cultural capital limits her ability to support Mark. Miranda's difficulty in her own emotional life hinders her from offering Mark the support and guidance he desperately needs.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, within Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, this paper focuses on the deficient economic, social, and cultural capital for child development in post-Thatcher Britain. The analysis shows the deficient of economic capital in Mark's and Charlie's cases. Mark faces the lack of material resources in his family, which deprives him of the sense of security that would promote more stable and equal education opportunities. Charlie mirrors Mark's experience, struggling with financial instability and unemployment. They display how the decline of the economic capital influenced by Thatcherism exacerbated social inequalities, denying children the economic capital necessary for upward mobility. In the case of Mark and Mariam, the long-term impact of deficient social capital is demonstrated. Mark's childhood is marked by isolation, as his mother's neglect and his father's absence leave him without the supportive social networks

that are essential for his psychological well-being. Similarly, for Mariam, the absence of supportive relationships in her adulthood reflects the long-term consequences of growing up in this environment, as she faces emotional struggles and an inability to form trusting relationships, which causes her suicide. Mark and Mariam demonstrate how the breakdown of community support systems deprives children of the social resources necessary to cope with challenges. In the case of Mark and Miranda, the deficiency of cultural capital is exemplified. Above all, Mark lacks cultural resources and has no cultural nourishment from his parents. As an adult, Miranda's life, marked by a lack of cultural resources, struggles with emotional isolation. They represent how deficient cultural capital from their family leads to the reproduction of inequalities throughout generations.

Thatcher's neoliberal policies caused high inflation and laid the foundation for the future Brexit, contributing to the decline of Bourdieu's three forms of capital. In this case, children from working-class backgrounds, especially, lack enough accumulated capital to secure a stable life and a stable job when they grow up. Even when children possess sufficient economic capital, the disintegration of social networks after Thatcherism leads to the isolation that strangles children in the post-Thatcher and pre-Brexit era. Finally, the lack of cultural capital from children's families diminishes institutional social support, worsening education inequalities from generation to generation. The decline of these three forms of capital after Thatcher's neoliberal policies not only reinforces existing inequalities but also exacerbates cycles of poverty, isolation, and emotional distress that continue to affect education equality throughout generations.

References

- Backhouse, R. E. (2002). The macroeconomics of Margaret Thatcher. *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 24 (3) , 313 – 334 . <https://doi.org/10.1080/104277102200004767>
- Barnett, W. S., & Belfield, C. R. (2006). Early childhood development and social mobility. *The Future of Children*, 16(2), 73–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3844792>
- Barry, P. (2009). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press.
- Bateman, B. W. (2002). There are many alternatives: Margaret Thatcher in the history of economic thought. *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 24(3), 307–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/104277102200004758>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). "The Forms of Capital." In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074051789007001002>
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). On the family as a realized category. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 13(3), 19–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276396013003002>
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (R. Nice, Trans.). Sage Publications. (Original work published 1970)
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG). (n.d.). Poverty's threat to childhood revealed by new research. <https://cpag.org.uk/news/povertys-threat-childhood-revealed-new-research>
- Davies, K. (2021). Sticking together in 'divided Britain': Talking Brexit in everyday family relationships. *Sociology*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385211011569>

- Davies, K., & Carter, A. (2021). Living with Brexit: Families, relationships and the temporalities of everyday personal life in 'Brexit Britain'. *The Sociological Review*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261241260112>
- DiMaggio, P. (1979). Review: On Pierre Bourdieu. *American Journal of Sociology*, 84(6), 1460–1474. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2777906>
- Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Eich, S. (2023). "There is no alternative!"—The case for a co(n)temporary English fiction: Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* and Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*. *On_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2023.1360>
- Ergler, C. R., & Wood, B. E. (2018). Engaging with Bourdieu: A review of the utilization of Bourdieu within children and young people's geographies. In T. Skelton & S. Aitken (Eds.), *Establishing geographies of children and young people* (Vol. 1, pp. 147 – 169). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7082-3_10
- Ferrari, R. (2022). A plunge into otherness: Ethics and literature in *Machines Like Me* by Ian McEwan. *Between*, 12(24), 247–271. <https://doi.org/10.13125/2039-6597/5166>
- Ganteau, J.-M., & Onega, S. (Eds.). (2021). *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature*. Routledge.
- Gartman, D. (2002). Bourdieu's theory of cultural change: Explication, application, critique. *Sociological Theory*, 20(2), 255–277. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3108649>
- Gulcu, T. Z. (2020). What if robots surpass man morally? Dehumanising humans, humanising robots in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, 6(4), 177–182. <https://doi.org/10.18178/ijlll.2020.6.4.272>
- Head, Dominic. *Ian McEwan*. Manchester UP, 2007.
- Kilkey, M. (2017). Conditioning family-life at the intersection of migration and welfare: The implications for 'Brexit families'. *Journal of Social Policy*, 46(4), 797–814. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727941700037X>
- Kopka, K., & Schaffeld, N. (2020). Turing's missing algorithm: The brave new world of Ian McEwan's android novel *Machines Like Me*. *Journal of Literature and Science*, 13, 52–74.
- McEwan, I. (2019). *Machines Like Me*. Jonathan Cape.
- McGuigan, J. (2014). *Cool Capitalism*. Pluto Press.
- MIGZEN Research Brief, No. 3. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6834639>
- Monaghan, D. (2001). Margaret Thatcher, and the struggle for working-class identity. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 29(1), 2–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01956050109601004>
- Nunn, H. (2002). *Thatcher, politics and fantasy: The political culture of gender and nation*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Patra, I. (2020). Man with the machine: Analyzing the role of autopoietic machinic agency in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. *Psychology and Education*, 57(9), 610– 620. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348296982>
- Popular Culture*, 4(2), 123–137. https://doi.org/10.1386/jepc.4.2.123_1
- Rivkin, J., & Ryan, M. (2017). *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (3rd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Schnurr, M. (2020). Neoliberalism: The connection between Thatcher and Brexit. Tinwell, A. (2013). *The impact of Thatcherism in popular culture*. *Journal of European*
- Willetts, D. (2021). Thatcherism and Brexit as political projects. *The Political Quarterly*, 92(3), 428–435. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.13033>
- Zambelli, E., Benson, M., & Sigona, N. (2022). *British-European families after Brexit*.