

The Cement Garden – Jack

Jack is the **I-narrator**.

His looks

When his father dies he is in his **fourteenth** year. (9)

Jack is in his **puberty**: he is in his “physical growth”. (9)

His “**pimples** [...] were just starting up at that time” (15).

“At some point during the same period my spots were so thoroughly established across my face that I **abandoned all the rituals of personal hygiene**. I no longer washed my face or hair or cut my nails or took baths. I gave up brushing my teeth.” (21)

“In the early morning my mother came into my bedroom and exchanged my dirty clothes for clean ones.” (21)

“Your pupils are very large [...] And there are bags under your eyes even though you’ve just woken up.” (28)

“‘It’s your birthday soon.’ [...] ‘Are you excited about being **fifteen?**’” (34)

His character

Jack imitates his father saying: “‘out of the question’, [...] through an imaginary pipe. ‘That’s the end of it.’” (12)

Jack is **egoistic and selfish**: when he and father rearrange the cement bags he makes sure father “took as much weight as [he] did” (13), even though his father has suffered from a heart attack and is not allowed this sort of work. While his father is breathing “heavily”, he is deliberately breathing “lightly” (14).

Jack is an **outsider**: “At weekends I lay in bed till the afternoon and then took long solitary walks.” (21)

“I had no close friends at school.” (21)

Jack is very **sensitive**. (Consider him observing his mother in the kitchen. pp. 25-26)

He dreams about rather frightening things. (27) Often he is **day-dreaming**. (37)

His habits

Before the cement is delivered he is reading a “comic”. (9)

He often **masturbates**. (12, 18)

He seems **disoriented**: He often stares at himself in mirrors for a very long time. (21, 37)

Jack and Julie

Together they rehearse their cracks to perform them during supper. (15-16)

Julie “preferred not to be seen with [Jack]” (22) on their way to school.

“In the dinner queue at school I once overheard her refer to me as her ‘kid brother’ and I was stung.” (29-30)

Jack feels attracted by Julie

“Jack longs “to examine [Julie] but the game did not allow for that”. (11)

One night Julie and Jack lock themselves in her bedroom to think of jokes and put them down.” (15)

While playfully struggling with Julie, Jack suddenly “felt hot liquid spreading over [his] knee. [...] The room smelled only faintly of urine.” (31) It seems he feels very excited and sexually aroused by the power he has over Julie during the “game”.

Jack excitedly watched Julie doing a handstand: “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.” (38)

Julie says ““Do me a favour, will you, and rub some lotion on my back.’ [...] I knelt between her open legs and squirted from the tube a pale, creamy fluid on to my palm. [...] If I moved a little to one side I could just make out her breasts, obscure in the deep shade of her body. [...] I felt hot and sick in the stomach.” (44)

Jack does not like Julie to be in authority

Julie starts telling Jack what to do: “Empty the rubbish bucket, will you.” (32)

“We argued all afternoon. [...] Finally, bored and exasperated, we became sulky and left each other alone.” (33)

He does not accept Julie as the one in charge of the children: “I wish you’d stop telling people what to do.” (38)

“You’re not to do that.” (41) She says to Jack when he smashes the cement path with the sledge hammer.

“‘It’s about time you cleaned up your room,’ she said to me one weekend.” (42)

“‘I’m in charge too,’ I said and began to cry because I felt cheated.” (53)