

**The Poetry of Science Writing:  
the Panacea of the Third Culture in Ian McEwan's  
*Saturday***

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شاعرية الكتابة العلمية:

ترياق الثقافة الثالثة فى رواية إيان ماك إيوان يوم السبت

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ملخص

يتمركز هذا البحث حول العلاقة الشائكة بين العلوم والدراسات الإنسانية والفصل الجائر بينهما ومحاولة إيان ماك إيوان الكاتب البريطانى الشهير مع مجموعة من العلماء والأدباء التوصل لمقاربة بين هذين النسقين المعرفيين، تلك المقاربة التى من شأنها أن تعين إنسان القرن الواحد والعشرين على مواجهة شبح الأمراض والحروب والعنف بشتى أنواعه والإقسام النفسى والتشردم المجتمعى والسياسى وذلك من خلال نظرية الثقافة الثالثة التى تتمحور حول أهمية الإفادة من منجزات العلم وإضاءات الإنسانية بصفة عامة دون الانحياز لنسق عن نسق. ظهرت هذه النظرية فى النصف الثانى من القرن العشرين واكتسبت زخما كبيرا فى أحياته وأسهم ماك إيوان فى بلورتها وتطبيقها. تستكشف الدراسة أبعاد هذه النظرية وتجلياتها فى رواية يوم السبت التى تدور أحداثها فى يوم واحد فى لندن بعد أحداث ١١ سبتمبر ٢٠٠١ المريعة حيث يتمكن البطل الذى يعمل جراحا للمخ من اتقاء أزمات ومشكلات عدة فرديا وأسريا ومجتمعيا من خلال تبنيه لتلك النظرة التكاملية التى تضم العلم والمنجز الأدبى الإنسانى فى نسيج واحد.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

إيان ماك إيوان؛ الثقافة الثالثة؛ شاعرية الكتابة العلمية؛ العلوم؛ الدراسات الإنسانية؛ يوم السبت؛ ١١ سبتمبر؛ النظرة التكاملية؛ لندن؛ رواية القرن الواحد والعشرين.

## Abstract

This paper deals with the theory of the third culture as put forward by Ian McEwan and diverse other thinkers who stress the importance of the interdisciplinarity of science and the humanities as the only panacea they envisage for man's salvation in the contemporary "macabre" age. Having adamantly precluded the role of religion in any cultural or civilizational enterprise, McEwan has been keen on drawing on the integration of science and the humanities to achieve a consummate third culture that can heal the fissures of our world and provide a healthy, propitious environment for the fruitful coexistence of disparate forces. It is the objective of this paper to explore McEwan's problematization of this belief in the ability of the third culture to effect harmony in people's lives, as manifested in his *Saturday*. The paper starts with an account of the third culture as explicated by C. P. Snow, John Brockman, and Ian McEwan and then highlights the aversion of the proponents of this concept to religion as a possible panacea to the ills of the contemporary world. McEwan's *Saturday* will finally be investigated as a cogent substantiation of the professed ability of the third culture to initiate such a positive transformation into man's life.

### Key Words:

The poetry of science writing; the third culture; Ian McEwan; *Saturday*; interdisciplinarity; the integration of science and the humanities; C. P. Snow; John Brockman.

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On the opening and concluding pages of *Saturday* (2006), Ian McEwan quotes from Saul Bellow's *Hertzog* and Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" respectively to foreground his aversion to the macabre violence visited upon the contemporary world and to call for some panacea for the maladies of the twenty-first century. The "savagery and barbarism" (Epigraph from *Hertzog*) bemoaned by Hertzog in 1964 echo the same maladies that used to beset the speaker in Arnold's poem in 1867, almost a century earlier as the world was "swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,/ Where ignorant armies clash by night" ("Dover Beach"). Towards the end of the novel, McEwan draws a similar comparison between London in 2003, immediately before the invasion of Iraq and two years after the tragedy of 9/11, "waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities" (276), and the same metropolis a hundred years ago whereby an "Edwardian gent" would lose his young boys "within a dozen years, at the Somme. And what was their body count, Hitler, Stalin, Mao?" (276).

The panacea to these maladies put forward by McEwan resides in what is known as the third culture. Having adamantly precluded the role of religion in any cultural or civilizational enterprise, the novelist has been keen on

drawing on the integration of science and the humanities to achieve a consummate third culture that can heal the fissures of our world and provide a healthy, propitious environment for the fruitful coexistence of disparate forces. It is the objective of this paper to explore McEwan's problematisation of this belief in the ability of the third culture to effect harmony in people's lives, as manifested in his *Saturday*. The paper starts with an account of the third culture as explicated by C. P. Snow, John Brockman, and Ian McEwan and then highlights the aversion of the proponents of this concept to religion as a possible panacea to the ills of the contemporary world. McEwan's *Saturday* will finally be investigated as a cogent substantiation of the professed ability of the third culture to initiate such a positive transformation into man's life.

In his *The Two Cultures*, 1959, the English novelist and physicist C. P. Snow bemoaned the schism between literary intellectuals and scientists: "The clashing point of two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures— of two galaxies...— ought to produce creative chances. In the history of mental activity that has been where some of the break-throughs came" (17). The clash envisioned by Snow, which was deemed fruitful and promising, was soon followed by the call for integration and interpollination. In the 1963 edition of the book, Snow predicted the possible emergence of a third culture which favoured the incorporation of the disciplines of science and the humanities: "But I am now convinced that this is coming. When it comes, some of the difficulties of communication will at last be softened: for such a culture has ... to be on speaking terms with the scientific one" (71). In the words of John

Brockman, “unlike previous intellectual pursuits, ... the achievements of the third culture ... will affect the lives of everybody on the planet” (*The Third Culture*).

The call for this integration of scientific sensibility into critical theory and creative works of art has been taken on in the third millennium by [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org), the creditable American website to which McEwan contributed numerous pieces. In a 2006 conversation on the website, Brockman states that the third culture “consists of those scientists and other thinkers ... who ... are taking the place of the traditional intellectual in rendering visible the deeper meanings of our lives, redefining who and what we are” (“The Third Culture”). Brockman observes also that scholars in favour of the third culture are far from being reductionists who would glorify one discipline at the expense of the other: “They are not reducing the humanities to biological and physical principles, but they do believe that art, literature, history, politics ... need to take the sciences into account” (“The Expanding Third Culture”). Gloria Origgi equally underscores the multidisciplinary, “pluralistic” nature of the third culture by stating that it “can be seen as a multidimensional culture, where explanations originating in different disciplines combine together without cancelling one another” (Origgi).

At the heart of the third culture, then, lies the orchestrated call for the scientific study of human nature, blending science and literature, the prose and poetry of life. As Brockman says, “this is not a one-way street. Just as the science-based humanities scholars are learning from, and are influenced by

science, scientists are gaining a broader understanding about the import of their own work through interactions with artists” (“The Expanding Third Culture”). Hong-Shu Teng argues that the third culture essentially calls for an underlying liason between humanism and scientifism; he calls upon "a new generation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century literary scholars to embrace science-wise knowledge in order to lead the humanities into participation in cross-boundary dialogues in the third culture" (Teng). Brockman’s explicit exposition of the major benefits of the third culture to our contemporary sensibility is worth quoting in full as it can well be regarded as the manifesto of the theory:

New technology equals new perceptions. As we create tools, we re-create ourselves in their image..... We now have arrived at a new intersection of the empirical and the epistemological. Recent technological breakthroughs in the realm of massively parallel computers and their associated algorithms are having a major impact on the images we have of ourselves and our place in the universe. (*The Third Culture*)

According to McEwan, the third culture still “awaits its inspired synthesiser, its poet, its Milton” (“End of the World” 360). He tells the *Paris Review* that reconciliation of the scientific and emotional constituents of man’s existence has always inspired his writings: “I wanted to do more than simply raid science for interesting metaphors”; his major objective has always been “to rub the emotional against the scientific ..... It’s riper; it’s on a human scale” (“The Art of Fiction”). One interesting remark in this context is McEwan’s

intriguing correlation between the “emotional” and the “scientific” in his vision of the third culture, as if the emotional for him were the objective correlative for all the things that humanities stands for. Meanwhile, within the same framework postulated by McEwan, benefitting by their assimilation of the procedures and insights of science, creative writers could contribute to a better understanding and dissection of human nature. McEwan similarly tells Alec Ash that his novelistic enterprise consists in "the grand enlightenment dream of unified knowledge", one "in which the humanities and sciences were fluid, or lay along a spectrum of enquiry" (“Ian McEwan”). For McEwan, the interpollination of these two apparently dissimilar disciplines could yield miraculous fruits when they are properly treated as integrable rather than as adversarial: “Just as we treasure beauty in our music and literature, so there’s beauty to be found in the exuberant invention of science”(“Ian McEwan”). Speaking to David Lynn in 2006, he comes closest to the formula appropriated in the title of this paper:

I think there’s this hidden literature which really needs to be bought, molded, talked into a canon that lives alongside our literary canon. And I hope one day a philosopher will make a science library that is about the literature, the poetry of science writing, because it’s certainly there and is a marvelous tradition.  
(“A Conversation ”)

In other words, McEwan does not call for pure scientific theorizing in the actual writing of literature or even for sheer “poetic” writing. Instead, he is

mainly interested in the intersection of both disciplines and in the multiple fruitful outcomes that could result from this hybrid marriage between science and the “literary canon”. Therefore, Dominic Head regards McEwan as "the pioneering literary figure of the ‘third culture’”(201); he highlights the novelist’s “unsettling art” through which the modernist equilibrium between knowledge and experience gives way to a postmodernist claim to a dynamic transformation “in the thirst for knowledge”(207).

Brockman finds fault with traditional culture whose major drawback is its one-sidedness and insularity; because it “dismisses science”, it “is often nonempirical. It uses its own jargon and washes its own laundry” (“The Emerging ”). In *What is your Dangerous Idea*, he observes a growing change in this direction necessitating a long-awaited fusion of the achievements of traditional culture and contemporary science: “Emerging out of the third culture is a new natural philosophy, new ways of understanding physical systems, new ways of thinking that call into question many of our basic assumptions of who we are, of what it means to be human”(xviii). It has become more of a philosophy encompassing the realms of science and the humanities, making of them the cornerstone of man’s quest for a better understanding of himself and of the universe at large. As McEwan lucidly says: “The boundaries between different specialized subjects begin to break down when scientists find they need to draw on insights or procedures in fields of study adjacent or useful to their own” (“What We believe ” XV).

Thus, to be able to critique the failings of postmodernist culture, some contemporary writers have chosen to be corrective rather than subversive, enlivening rather than blackening. Implementation of the third culture comes in as a potential panacea for many of those failings. Towards that end, these writers have also opted for the exclusion of religion in the rage for order and meaning. In his *Holy Terror*, Terry Eagleton maintains that religion is antagonistic to civilization and that it is "near neighbor" to barbarism and savagery, thus holding it responsible for the atrocities and chaos that have beset the world all over the ages (11). McEwan's steadfast antagonism to religion is no less severe. He not only condemns it for the foregoing reasons but also guards against any reliance on it for moral or civilizational illumination: Religions and sacred texts are not good guides to moral behavior..... So, what is the basis of the moral decisions we make? Secular law is a higher moral force than any religion. But I am fascinated by this clash between faith, sincere and devoted, and the law. ("Interview with Pablo Guimón").

McEwan associates religion with utopia; for him, both mislead man into believing in the abstract, the delusive, and the devastating; they also drive man, in his view, towards nihilism and manslaughter "because the consequence is that it doesn't matter if you've killed a million people along the way: the objective is perfection, and that excuses any crime" ("Utopia"). As Bradley and Tate put it, McEwan's work rests on perennial skeptical questioning of religiosity and valorization of "secular transcendence: what fills the place of

belief in God in his own fictional world is ... belief in family, love, scientific progress and, most importantly, art"(16).

The most tragic terror envisaged by Eagleton and other diverse writers was ostensibly sparked off by the 9/11 homicidal, brutal attacks. According to Kristiaan Versluys, the attacks were "an event so traumatic that it shatters the symbolic resources of the individual and escapes the normal processes of meaning-making and cognition" (980). The disastrous repercussions they spawned were variously fictionalized worldwide. They inform McEwan's *Saturday* in which religion is wholeheartedly condemned as the major cause behind world-wide terror while the third culture is proffered as the only panacea available to mankind. Linda S. Kauffman argues that there is a fine demarcation line between religiosity and sheer politicizing; for her, "those who politicize religion" produce a "single totalizing narrative" which is mainly responsible for the brutality exercised against them (355). McEwan unwaveringly subscribes to this resolute aversion to the linearity of totalizing narratives in favour of a more all-inclusive vision of the universe, one in which the emotional is perennially rubbed against the scientific.

Contrary to David Malcolm's claim that McEwan's "whole atheistic worldview is based on the authority of the traditional sciences and the sufficiency of the material world" (176), this paper argues that the writer is very much interested in counterbalancing the purely scientific with the finely

sensible and softer parts of man's existence. Like many of McEwan's novels<sup>1</sup>, *Saturday* sets scientific achievements against cultural and ethical values in an attempt to balance the prosaic and the poetic, the mundane and the vibrant, the astute and the refined. In the words of Sebastian Groes, the novel "raises fundamental questions about ... the role of the arts and literature in culture and society [and] the limits of scientific materialism as a means of understanding the world..."(114).

Henry Perowne's interdisciplinary predilection towards blurring the boundaries between the physical and the emotional worlds charts out the narrative structure of the novel whereby "science and literature are represented as complementary forms of knowledge ... which develop a significant dynamic

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Children Act* (2014), the rationality and precision of a high court judge are subtly played against the religious short-sightedness of devout parents whose seventeen-year old son, throbbing with life yet afflicted with a fatal disease, must be deprived of blood transfusion on the understanding that it runs counter to their religious beliefs. It is the discretion of Fiona Maye the judge, resting on a fine balance of the poetry and prose of her profession, that could settle such a dispute: "She was praised ... for crisp prose, almost ironic, almost warm, and for the compact terms in which she laid out a dispute" (13). Similar hard choices can be traced in many other novels like *Atonement* (2001), *The Cement Garden* (1978), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), *The Child in Time* (1987), *Enduring Love* (1997), *Amsterdam* (1998), and *On Chesil Beach* (2007).

prerequisite for an understanding of the postmodern metropolis” (Pleßke 300). By foregrounding the story of Henry as a celebrated neurosurgeon with an inherent infatuation with the softer, more poetic aspects of man’s existence, the underlying fabric of *Saturday* “unfolds a parallelism between the intellectualisation of neurosurgery and the legibility of fiction” (Pleßke 301). As Dominic Head says, “the culture to which Perowne contributes, and to which a novel like *Saturday* belongs, embodies consolations that ... outweigh the doubts occasioned by such ethical paradoxes” (184).

One of the novels that significantly influenced Ian McEwan in his formative years was *The Go-Between* (1953) by L. P. Hartley (“Q & A / Ian McEwan”) in which Leo the central consciousness acts as a mediator and later on as a translator, bridging gaps and negotiating harmony between the cindery life of the past and the rejuvenating one of old-age. Likewise, McEwan’s penchant for reconciliation of contrarities and dualities is particularly noticeable in *Saturday* which “explores the tension between fundamental human polarities, ...: immediacy vs. mediation; freedom vs. necessity; spontaneity vs. care and craft; ... right- vs. left-brain” (Fertel 53). Perhaps McEwan’s age-long preoccupation with the prevalence of the macabre in our world has orientated him towards a quest for some panacea for these ills. Kiernan Ryan regards him as “a writer obsessed with the perverse, the grotesque, the macabre” (2). McEwan arduously condemns the highly divisive nature of man in the twenty-first century which has been necessitated by myriad catastrophes and crises and calls for a midway passage that would heal

his fissures and synthesize his disparities. According to Laura Marcus, McEwan's *Saturday* “would appear to be committed to a new way of aligning narrative and mental processes, and the forms of knowledge and enquiry associated with both literature and science” (97). [Christopher](#) Hitchens has equally confirmed that “with this novel the soft and the hard McEwan come into an exquisite balance” (Hitchens).

*Saturday* ends the cycle of novels in which McEwan’s far-from-positive account of the postmodern world had “won him the soubriquet of ‘Ian Macabre’” (Walsh) due to his incessant depiction of the gruesome and repugnant nature of the postmodern world. Henry Perowne, the central consciousness of the novel, converses with his son in the kitchen at dawn about his security foreboding and they are both perturbed at the possible devastation of their “whole way of life<sup>2</sup>” at the hands of Jihadists (35), the very first

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that Perowne got to know Rosalind for the first time at hospital when she had a brain tumour, and it is the resolution of this calamity involving strict medication and refined personal human relationships— “certainly an attack on *her* whole way of life—that brought Rosalind into his life”(McEwan 40).

concern that McEwan pointed out in the piece he wrote to *The Guardian* on the second day of the apocalyptic 9/11 attacks: “Our way of life, centralised and machine-dependent, has made us frail. Our civilisation, it suddenly seemed, our way of life, is easy to wreck when there are sufficient resources and cruel intent” (“Beyond Beleief”).

The novel covers twenty-four hours in the life of Perowne, a well-known neurosurgeon, with numerous surgical operations deftly and graphically portrayed which highlight his quasi-artistic mastery of his medical profession. It is paperwork (conference abstracts, emails, and official correspondence), devoid of that magical mixture of practicality and creativity, that gets on his nerves (12). Perowne is reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s *Ulysses* who, dazzled at the tantalising intricacies of his world, can conceive of a world of his own in which mythology is played against science and culture against physics. Back home after nine consecutive operations, Perowne is mesmerised at the sound and fury around his house, imagining meteors, comets, or plane crashes (he lives fairly close to London Heathrow Airport) (14-15). This sinister build-up of action is obliquely reminiscent of the disastrous collapse of the twin towers by jet crashes: It’s already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette

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of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed. (*Saturday* 16)

Perowne is steeped into myriad hallucinatory visions of bloodshed and carnage, yet even these hallucinations are characteristically presented as the end product of the marriage of a scientific mind and a notable, caring, sophisticated soul: “Watching death on a large scale, but seeing no one die. No blood, no screams, no human figures at all, and into this emptiness, the obliging imagination set free”(16). He sets his own delusive perception of impending disaster against two possible propositions: if he “were inclined to religious feeling, to supernatural explanations”, he “should acknowledge a hidden order, an external intelligence which wants to show or tell him something of significance” (17). However, in view of his scientific, irreligious mindset, he is much more relieved at the idea that some anthropological or academic interpretation could be more credible. He finds that the “primitive thinking of the supernaturally inclined” results mainly from “a problem, or an idea, of reference”(17) which is divorced altogether from the realm of logical reasoning and objective investigation; “in Henry’s view such reasoning belongs on a spectrum at whose far end, rearing like an abandoned temple, lies physics”(17).

The perennial struggle against the primordial absolutism of religion in favour of a viable harmony between science and culture serves as one of the major frames of reference throughout the narrative. All the terror unleashed upon the world post 9/11, according to McEwan, stems from that absolutism whereby “a man of sound faith with a bomb in the heel of his shoe” (17) could

be driven by his belief in “the very god who ordained” these atrocities to bring about havoc and atrocities:

Perowne regards this as a matter for wonder, a human complication beyond the reach of morals. From it there spring, alongside the unreason and slaughter, decent people and good deeds, beautiful cathedrals, mosques, cantatas, poetry. Even the denial of God ... is a spiritual exercise, a form of prayer: it's not easy to escape from the clutches of the believers. The best hope for the plane is that it's suffered simple, secular mechanical failure. (18)

Perowne clutches hard at these scientific, ‘secular’ possibilities which depart diametrically from the closure of religiosity to the spacious horizons of intellectual contemplation: “As he wonders, he also wishes it, or wills it”(18). Writing few days after the 9/11 disaster, McEwan calls for that sort of wisdom contained perhaps in his understanding of the third culture: “Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality" (“Only Love Then Oblivion”). In other words, possessing the faculty of reaching out to others, grasping and appreciating the pains and suffering they might be exposed to, is an essential prerequisite of a civilized life, of a third-culture practitioner who can evade disaster by leaning on its spacious horizons of understanding and forgiving.

At the inception of their relationship, Perowne deals with the cancerous “acute visual field impairment”(41) his prospective wife Rosalind suffers from in sheer professional impartiality that characteristically verges, still, on the sentimental, an odd admixture peculiar to McEwan: “his mouth was dry and his knees weak as he moved the trolley nearer to the wall. He had yet to learn clinical detachment. This may have been the time ... when he began to fall in love”(43). He would marvel later on at “how benignly their lives had been shaped by this catastrophe”(43), a contrapuntal image combining medical precision with mundane reality. It is this subtle attempt to fuse science and literature that drives him also to reread with pleasure the works of Charles Darwin and to be grateful that his daughter Daisy could help him to “refine his sensibilities” (58) through exposure to literature. That is why he is constantly presented, even in the middle of a surgical operation, as the synthesis of scientific skills and a dreamy constitution: “Like a car-radio traffic alert, a shadowy mental narrative can break in ... even during a consultation. He’s adept at covering his tracks, continuing to nod or frown or firmly close his mouth around a half-smile”(20). In other words, Perowne arrives at the summit of his clinical achievements when he is inwardly ruminating over something aesthetically pleasuring or soothing such as music or poetry, thus rubbing the medical against the literary and blending the poetry and prose of his peculiar constitution as a third culture citizen. In the words of Head, *Saturday* underscores the belief that “there is an appeal to a universal set of values that might transcend the new global ideological stand-off”(185).

While reading Darwin's autobiography, Perowne listens to a voice on the radio repeating the phrase: "There is grandeur in this view of life" (55). This spiritual outpouring is immediately balanced by Perowne's conviction that the real, "exalted" grandeur resides somewhere else, possibly yielding "endless and beautiful forms of life":

An unimaginable sweep of time, numberless generations spawning by infinitesimal steps complex living beauty out of inert matter, driven on by the blind furies of random mutation, natural selection and environmental change, with the tragedy of forms continually dying, and lately the wonder of minds emerging and with them morality, love, art, cities - and the unprecedented bonus of this story happening to be demonstrably true. (*Saturday* 56)

On top of this hierarchical structure of values comes science and technology while morality and art form the basis, a concoction that is quintessentially McEwanesque. As Smith puts it to the novelist in an interview, "the burst of the irrational into the rational" was McEwan's "*modus operandi*" (110).

The ability of surgeons to remove Roalind's brain tumour and to restore the clarity of her vision is seen by the narrative voice as one of the magical fruits of the third culture whereby the marriage of science and human sensibility yields indescribable results: "The procedure was humane and daring—the spirit of benevolence enlivened by the boldness of a high-wire circus act" (44-45). The transforming effect of this upon Perowne is one of

instantaneous satiation within and without: “He was falling in love with a life. He was also, of course, falling in love. The two were inseparable” (45). The professional and the emotional are now one and the same thing. Hitchens valorizes this “healing power” of the interfusion between the hybrid powers of science and “the prosaic” which “have their moment of honor and glory in turn. With this novel the soft and the hard McEwan come into an exquisite balance, just as the thin and objective blade pares away at the spongy, vulnerable tissue of the cerebellum”(Hitchens). As McEwan asserts to Alec Ash, “there could exist a mental realm in which we could blend sciences and the humanities in the joys of creativity” (Ash).

Driving his Mercedes to a squash game in central London, Perowne is diverted from the main road by an approaching march against the war to be waged against Iraq. The chaos accompanying the demonstrations results in a car accident followed by an impending savage attack against him by three street thugs. On the spot, Perowne, the veteran physician newly initiated into the realm of the artistic, could succinctly reminisce over the tenability of the marriage between science and human sensibility. He is convinced that “clinical experience is, among all else, an abrasive, toughening process, bound to wear away at his sensitivities”(85) yet he hastens to have recourse to the invigorating power of science (combined with “a fundamental human exchange, as elemental in its way as love” (86) since it is capable, in his view, of granting him an exceptional ability to surmount mundane obstacles and to counteract insuperable setbacks: “What lie in the background, glowing faintly, are the

issues of medical science, the wonders it performs, the faith it inspires...” in its practitioners (85). He inwardly rejoices at this balanced vantage-point which instantly eases the fractures within him and creates a prop against impending danger, in and out of hospital. That is why he enjoys a great measure of self-composure as the assailants dart upon him in the wake of the accident, demanding undeserved compensation. Perowne’s narrow escape therein results from his spontaneous ability to observe in Baxter, the leader of the trio, some symptoms of a degenerative illness called Huntington's disease, a fact which has, at least temporarily, postponed a bloody confrontation with the antagonistic trimuvrate. By conquering the rigid boundaries of medicine and making them subservient to the broader spectrum of personal human relationships, Perowne averts the onset of a personal crisis and precipitates the early diagnosis of the culprit’s disease. As the narrative voice says: “They are together, [Baxter] and Perowne, in a world not of the medical, but of the magical” (95).

Back home, the family reunion Perowne presides over is yet violently shattered by the fierce attacks once again of Baxter and his gang. Among other things, they force his daughter Daisy to strip naked and to recite a poem while knives are held at her mother’s throat. Herself a promising poet, Daisy chooses to read Arnold’s “Dover Beach”— a poem that sets love and sympathy against the armies of ignorance and injustice— which is followed by her father confronting the culprit with the news of his degenerative disease. In other words, recitation of the poem alleviates the terror ahead and allows room for

the intervention of medical science. In the words of Bradley and Tate, this “miraculous, impossible metamorphosis from devil to angel” (33) has been the fruit of McEwan’s “faith” in the ability of art to counteract terror. As Rosalind tells Perowne a few hours later, “But it was Daisy who delivered you. She swung his mood with that poem. Arnold someone?” (269). It is no wonder then that McEwan has appended the whole text of the poem to the end of the novel, an “artful choice”, in the words of Head, “that might be said to constitute an object lesson in the need for rationalism to be tempered with imagination” (190). The grandeur contained in this sublimation informs the moral stature of the novel and of Perowne, its central consciousness.

Immediately collapsing upon being confronted with the fact about his illness, Baxter has to be taken to hospital to undergo a prompt brain surgery completely overseen by Perowne. Towards the end of the novel, Perowne ruminates over this scene, prizing Baxter’s immediate response to that poem: “Baxter fell for the magic, he was transfixed by it, and he was reminded how much he wanted to live” (*Saturday* 278). In fact, the transfixation is not only Baxter’s. It is also Perowne’s. He is unimpeachably reminded of the necessity of being re-initiated into that realm of poetry (278). As Zoe Heller says, “at the very moment of crisis, the recitation of a poem effects a miraculous transformation. Disaster is averted by the unlikely *deus ex machina* of a Victorian poet” (Heller).

In line with McEwan’s propensity towards foregrounding the importance of the creative blending of scientific knowledge and philanthropic

exploits, Perowne undertakes Baxter's critical surgery with utmost jubilation at his own ability to merge the medical and the humanitarian, utterly forgetting the patient's criminal attack on his car and against his family. The narrative voice dwells upon Perowne's perception of his own prompt response to Baxter's case in what can be regarded as the gist of the whole novel, the crux also of McEwan's *Weltanschauung*: For the past two hours he's been in a dream of absorption that has dissolved all sense of time, and all awareness of the other parts of his life. Even his awareness of his own existence has vanished..... In retrospect, ... it feels like profound happiness..... He feels calm, and spacious, fully qualified to exist. It's a feeling of clarified emptiness, of deep, muted joy. (*Saturday* 258)

Commenting to Smith on this passage, McEwan states that out of his exploration of the real life and work of neurosurgeons before writing *Saturday*, he always felt that they must be using a paintbrush rather than forceps to enhance that "moment of artistic engagement" with their subjects/patients ("Conversations" 122). When she asks him if this paragraph was meant to be one about writing rather than about surgery, he duly says: "Oh, well done" (121). In other words, creative writing and surgery are viewed as not only interchangeable but as also complementary, at once healing man's physical maladies and answering as well to his or her own deep desire for harmony and beauty. As Head aptly argues, "In *Saturday*, McEwan responds deeply to this brand of humanism, rooted in scientific advancement"(188).

Therefore, Perowne the renowned down-to-earth neurosurgeon responds to his daughter's extra-marital pregnancy in the same light: rational enough yet distinctly accommodating and all-embracing: "He feels his body, the size of a continent, stretching away from him down the bed - he's a king, he's vast, accommodating, immune, he'll say yes to any plan that has kindness and warmth at its heart" (*Saturday* 269). In a tone very much reminiscent of E. M. Forster's assimilative undertone in *A Passage to India* in which even wasps are admitted to God's kingdom— ("the mercy of God, being infinite, may well embrace all mammals" (58)— Perowne stresses the importance of encompassing the apparently irreconcilable constituents of man's experience: "This is the growing complication of the modern condition, the expanding circle of moral sympathy. Not only distant peoples are our brothers and sisters, but foxes too, and laboratory mice, and now the fish" (127). It could be argued, then, that Perowne's development from being a mere linear neurosurgeon skilled in the science of brain surgeries into a cosmopolitan man-of-the-world can be attributed essentially to his openness to the intricacies of the humanistic and the poetic aspects in what he has termed "the third culture". Sebastian Groes has rightly noted that "the trajectory of Perowne's growing self-knowledge is tied to his engagement with, and changing perception of" these intricacies (102).

As he listens to his patient the Iraqi exiled professor in the first part of the novel telling him of the vulgar atrocities of Saddam Hussein's despotic regime (62-64), the panacea Perowne contemplates for his tragedy is not purely

medical but also humanitarian and philanthropic. Taleb tells him that “it’s only terror that holds the nation together, the whole system runs on fear, and no one knows how to stop it”; however, much to Perowne’s admiration, he reassures him that one day soon they will be dining together at a restaurant in London (64). Well before the end of the novel, when superpowers have already decided to invade Iraq, Perowne defies those superpowers as “totalitarians in different form,... “growing, and angry, and thirsty for another mass killing”(277); he is sure of the advent of a golden time based on harmony and reconciliation, “as sure as his mother's death, he'll be dining with Professor Taleb in an Iraqi restaurant near Hoxton”(277) despite the distressing news about the approaching war in Iraq. In the same manner he has responded with understanding, care, and love to the sheer vulgarity and toughness of Baxter his assailant, he prizes those values so much in the battle against terror and bloodshed: He can't begin to imagine a satisfactory account, but he knows it will come, the secret will be revealed— over decades, as long as the scientists and the institutions remain in place, the explanations will refine themselves into an irrefutable truth .....[T]he journey will be completed, Henry's certain of it. That's the only kind of faith he has. There's grandeur in this view of life. (255)

The grandeur Perowne envisions is evidently based on the miraculous fruits of scientific progress but it is also enveloped in the inevitability of the marriage between science and the humanities. Once the secret liason between both realms is revealed and consummated, the grandeur Perowne and McEwan are certain of will ultimately be achieved.

The centrality of the third culture, that “ongoing and thrilling colloquium that is open to all” (“What we Believe” XV) has held the narrative of *Saturday* together in terms of form and content. While converging with the spirit of postmodernism that underrates the role of religion in man’s quest for salvation, the novel strands apart from other contemporary works of art in its plea for reconciliation of contraries by fusing arts and science in a unique concoction that is purely McEwanesque. This clear-cut formula has propelled the action of the narrative and has, meanwhile, pointed to the possibility of fighting the violence and ugliness of our macabre world through investing in the potentialities of the third culture. In conclusion, it should be noted that there could be no packaged, ready-made recipe for all the ills of our turbulent world. What the third culture, or any formula, can ultimately do, is simply offer a panacea, a soothing outlet for our agonies and fissures in addition to the possibility of coming to terms with the challenges and the complexities confronting us.

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