

The Ethics of Otherness in Ian McEwan's *Saturday**

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Since the 1980s, Ian McEwan's literary oeuvre has displayed a growing concern with the relation between literature and ethics, becoming progressively more involved with public and historical issues, and turning attention to the moral possibilities of the novel itself.¹ When discussing McEwan's literary ethics, critics generally base themselves on a common humanist conception that sees in literature an important exploration of human nature with potential to enrich the readers' knowledge of themselves and of others.² The author's own comments on the ethics of fiction have contributed to this understanding, as he describes his writings in terms of an inquiry into the human mind that is achieved by stepping "inside the consciousness of others" (Ridley vii). However, I believe that *Saturday* (2005) represents a moral turn that goes against McEwan's own declared liberal-humanist views and diverges from the common critical interpretation of his literary ethics. Instead, the novel seems to resonate with Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of Otherness, with its emphasis on the self as infinitely responsible toward the ever-strange and incomprehensible Other.

McEwan has often asserted that "showing the possibility of what it is like to be someone else" is the main achievement of fiction, as it elicits our empathy for other human beings and so makes us aware that "other people are as alive as [we] are" (Kellaway). In a conversation with David Lynn, McEwan similarly stated that the importance of the novel lies in its "mapping out of other minds and the invitation to the reader to step into those other minds" (51).³ These ideas, which are

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in accordance with liberal-humanist ethics, or else express a version of Martha Nussbaum's literary ethics,⁴ focus on the moral aspect of the novel in soliciting our imaginative understanding of other human beings.⁵ The ethical vision expressed in *Saturday*, by contrast, seems to be based on the impenetrability of the Other, on the *inability* to step into another's mind.

Set in London on Saturday, February 15, 2003, the day of the protest march against the invasion of Iraq, the largest in British history, *Saturday* follows neurosurgeon Henry Perowne as he moves through this one challenging and disturbing day. The seemingly episodic plot is defined by two violent encounters with Baxter, an aggressive criminal, narrated through Perowne's perspective in the present tense.

The critical reception of the novel was very mixed. Many readings condemned McEwan for producing a contemporary update of the common Western fable of the privileged male hero (Henry Perowne) faced with violent opponents (Baxter, the young thug, and his mates), threatened by them (first after the car accident and then in the violent break-in to Perowne's house), but at last overcoming his opponents, thus restoring order and stability (along with the hero's wealth and social supremacy).⁶ This kind of reading usually involves a denunciation of the novel's simplistic endorsement of Perowne's liberal-bourgeois perspective and of its affirmation of an oppressive Self-Other relation in which the socially inferior rival (Baxter) is violently defeated by the dominant, intellectually superior protagonist.⁷

By contrast, I contend that the novel actually sets out to challenge the oppositional scheme of Self-Other: the underprivileged antagonist is presented not as an affirming foil, but rather as a singular, enigmatic Other who has the power to shake the protagonist's indifferent subjectivity. This is, I believe, the ethical focus of the novel, which should be understood in light of Emmanuel Levinas's conception of the responsibility and obligation due to the most different and incomprehensible 'Other.' Indeed, the novel is permeated with shades of Levinas's post-World War II thinking, in which he posits a neo-humanism based on the "traumatism of astonishment" (*Totality* 73)—

on the experience of shock that arises from the encounter with “something absolutely foreign” (*Totality* 73) in the Other human being.⁸ *Saturday* reconfigures the horror of Levinas’s historical times in the political context of the twenty-first-century new horror of global terror attacks, and gives it intimate expression in Baxter’s menacing violence. What is more, it climaxes with Perowne’s experience of the Other’s “foreign[ess]” (*Totality* 73) and “absolute difference” (*Totality* 194) when he is faced with the mystery of Baxter’s interiority—an experience that catalyzes an ethical transformation.

One of the most characteristic features of McEwan’s narratives is a sudden crisis triggered by an abrupt, violent and arbitrary event within the life of the protagonist; in *Saturday*, however, the encounters between Perowne and Baxter unexpectedly—both for the protagonist and for the readers—challenge Perowne’s rational and self-contained subjectivity, along with his liberal-individualistic ideology. This change takes place as the novel articulates Perowne’s bond of obligation to his enemy, whose vulnerability makes a claim he cannot ignore. Perowne is suddenly forced to face Baxter’s hunger for living, “that hunger [that] is his claim on life, on a mental existence” (279), his terrible desire to survive his illness. This experience leads Perowne to admit, almost despite himself, that “[H]e’s responsible, after all” (279).

Yet Perowne’s responsibility towards Baxter is not based on the liberal faith in moral imagination—the ethos of “[thinking] oneself into the minds of others,” emphasized in McEwan’s post 9/11 article “Only Love Then Oblivion.” In that article, McEwan claimed that the ability to enter the mind of others “is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.” In *Saturday*, by contrast, Perowne’s moral responsibility towards Baxter emerges as he recognizes his *inability* to enter the other man’s mind, to imagine what it is like to be Baxter.⁹ Morality begins when Perowne witnesses Baxter’s elation upon hearing a recitation of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” and realizes that “Baxter heard what Henry never ha[d], and probably never will” (278).

Saturday gradually undermines the clear opposition initially set into place between Perowne's vision, rational thinking and medical skill, and Baxter's physical and mental disabilities. For Perowne is unable to decipher Baxter's individuality: Baxter becomes not his foil, but an autonomous, irreducible and singular addressee. In the climactic scene of the break-in, to be discussed in detail below, Perowne comes to realize that, despite his social standing, respectable profession, expertise and intelligence, he does not have the ability to inspect his respective Other's interiority. Yes, Perowne does have the power to diagnose Baxter's illness (though his diagnosis may be wrong) and can triumph over him physically (with some help). He can even treat him surgically, literally opening up Baxter's brain and almost peering into it (cf. *Saturday* 254-55). Yet all these literalized metaphors for "knowing" the other from the inside only accentuates Perowne's failure to truly know or understand what goes on inside his opponent's head.

Perowne's failure to penetrate Baxter's inner world and to empathetically understand him has been condemned by some critics as indicative of the ideological narrowness of the novel (cf. Ross 87). Against this reading, I argue that leaving Baxter, the social Other, as an ambiguous lacuna both to Perowne and to the readers constitutes the ethical stance of *Saturday*: this non-penetrability is the key to the consequent effects of the novel on the readers. In obvious deviation from the humanist liberal ethos of recognition and empathy for the Other (suggested not only by McEwan but also by his protagonist),¹⁰ *Saturday* draws attention to Baxter's abstruse quality that can neither be represented nor empathetically understood—as is highlighted in the episode of the recitation. Baxter, with his unknown identity—no first name, no origin, no identifying details—with his confusing temperament and inexplicable reactions, becomes the stumbling block of the narrative. His unknown quality is emphasized as soon as he is introduced, when Perowne is unable to draw him into revelation:

He [Perowne] puts out his own hand.
"Henry Perowne."

"Baxter."

"Mr Baxter?"

"Baxter." (87)

Perowne later tries to resume the interrogation, and yet again he fails:

"Is your real name Baxter?"

"That's my business." (96)

Baxter's character comes to pose an impenetrable barrier: it is neither open to Perowne's rational knowledge nor to an aesthetic literary rendition, only to a sketchy, external, and mainly visual description. Nevertheless, Baxter's enigmatic individuality is revealed as having the power to set into motion the ethical awakening of the subject, making Perowne respond (at the end) to its cry for help.

In Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy, the concept of the absolute Other is carefully distinguished from the negative other derived from the Hegelian philosophical tradition, which is a relational "other" that functions as an essential constituent of self-consciousness (cf. *Totality* 203).¹¹ Levinas, by contrast, insists that the other person, *Autrui* or "the other absolutely other—the Other" (*Totality* 197), is not an oppositional concept that is relative to the Self. Rather, human Otherness signifies a special uniqueness that cannot be conceptualized, thematized or comprehended, that can never be summed up or reduced to any one general structure or set of attributes. As an absolute Other, or "a Stranger" (*Totality* 39), every person is irreplaceable, original, unparalleled, and incomparable to any other human being. Every person is indeed "absolutely foreign to me" (*Totality* 73).

For Levinas, it is this positive difference, this human quality of singularity, that ethically affects the subject, disturbing "the being at home with oneself" (*Totality* 39), while demanding answerability and producing responsibility for the Other:

The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. (*Totality* 43)

In this ethical approach, the subject is not the autonomous free-thinking individual invested in his own existence and fearing his own death that is often assumed in modern philosophy.¹² Instead, Levinas suggests a passive subject that is always already bound up with an "Other" for whom he is eternally responsible, and towards whom he is totally obligated; an infinite responsibility that is not the product of his free consciousness, nor dependent upon his will and rationality.¹³ Levinas describes this responsibility as an answer "for a debt contracted before any freedom and before any consciousness" (*Otherwise* 12). Thus in the relations between the self and the Other "I am obliged without this obligation having begun in me" (*Otherwise* 13), compelled to offer responsiveness to the needs of the stranger who "overflows absolutely every *idea* I can have of him" (*Totality* 87; italics in the original).¹⁴

Perowne, the renowned doctor, a healthy and wealthy gifted man, rational, reflexive, self-assured and aware of his own power (cf. *Saturday* 20-21), seems quite estranged from Levinas's ethics of subordination and infinite obligation. At forty-eight years of age, Perowne appears to have it all: he is happily married to his equally successful wife (Rosalind, the lawyer), and enjoying their talented grown-up children (Theo, the musician, and Daisy, the poet). Perowne is also very successful professionally, a true medical enthusiast who believes in the importance of scientific knowledge (and the insignificance of literary fiction), and who is always ready for hard work (even on Saturdays). Living in a huge and beautiful house, set in a "perfect square" (5), and driving a brand new Mercedes, Perowne represents an extreme case of a too-perfect and blessed middle-class life, one that is enviable but also ideologically annoying.

As apparent right from the opening, Perowne's success in the various aspects of his life is accompanied by his self-confidence and by what the critics disapprovingly describe as his "smugness" (Childs

146) and as his “inherently imperious (and imperialist) cast of mind” (Wells 116). Thus, thinking about the political crisis of post September 11, Perowne believes “that reason, being a powerful tool” is the weapon by which to exorcise the enemies that threaten the progress of Western culture (32). However, much like the burning plane that Perowne witnessed earlier in the morning from his bedroom window (a visual scene echoing the horrendous spectacle of 9/11), so too the invasion of Iraq has the power to weigh upon Perowne’s mood, leaving the usually confident doctor somewhat confused (cf. 62, 72-73). There is an anxious awareness of threatening “forces of evil that are not susceptible to his [Perowne’s] rational calculus” (Versluys, “9/11” 76), a collective sense “that has established itself in the culture after 9/11” (Versluys, “9/11” 76). There remains something in the relation to Otherness which has the power to undermine the doctor’s confident identity.

Indeed, in the emphasized context of political threats from unknown Others and the debate about the war with Iraq, it is remarkable that Perowne avoids taking sides; his reaction is that of an ambivalent observer, not of an active political agent or a Levinasian committed subject. Upon hearing that many people have gathered to protest against the war, Perowne goes off to play his usual game of squash. Thinking about the war, he lets himself “hedge [his] bets” (188), as his daughter reproaches him.¹⁵ Perowne avoids committing himself to one political position and escapes making a clear moral decision, preferring to turn to his material possessions like his “silver Mercedes S500 with cream upholstery” (75), which seem to have the ability to calm him and help restore his good mood and self-confidence. Childs notes the disturbing parallel between Perowne and the West, seeing in the former “a metonym for the material West’s indifference to world affairs” (146).¹⁶ Perowne’s material prosperity allows him to close himself off (in his car, in his house), without ever becoming really involved in the moral and political decision-making.

Nevertheless, as Perowne is driving through the barricaded streets of London just before the protest march begins, he experiences a deep-

seated sense of anxiety about the impending doom that may befall the world and his own family:

The world probably has changed fundamentally and the matter is being clumsily handled, particularly by the Americans. There are people around the planet, well-connected and organized, who would like to kill him and his family and friends, to make a point. (80-81)

In a matter of minutes the faceless bullies that Perowne fears will destroy Western culture become embodied by living breathing creatures: three thugs who crash their red BMW into Perowne's car—and into his life: "His car will never be the same again. It's ruinously altered, and so is his Saturday" (82). This collision will, in a very real way, change the course of his day, and, more importantly, change his world, forcing him to the confrontation with Otherness that he has so assiduously avoided.

The opposition between Perowne, who believes his vehicle to have been unreasonably damaged, and the men in the red car is established immediately when he associates the BMW "with criminality, drug dealing" (83) and then equates the men with animals.¹⁷ This contrast reaches its peak when Baxter formally enters the scene. Functioning as Perowne's antagonist, Baxter is a hotheaded youngster, short, stocky and suffering from a "persistent tremor" in his hands (87), greatly differing in physique from the tall, mature Perowne, whose surgeon's hands are known for their stability and precision (cf. 19). It is clear that McEwan places Baxter in the position of Perowne's negative other—he is suffering the onset of Huntington's disease, as the doctor will diagnose, limited in movement, emotionally disturbed, violent and volatile, all which stand in stark opposition to Perowne's charmed life.

From this point onward, the scene develops along what seems to be a Hegelian structure of oppositional Self-Other relations: Baxter becomes Perowne's ultimate opponent, an embodiment of the latter's deepest fears—of wildness and ignorance, illness and disability, aggression and lack of self-control—all the elements from which Pe-

rowne tries to distance himself. He therefore sees in Baxter's physique a "simian air" (88) and "destructive energy waiting to be released" (88); later he reduces Baxter to his medical condition, thinking of him in terms of chromosomal deficiency and pathological symptoms (cf. 91, 93). Perowne's thoughts in the aftermath of the accident are particularly illuminating, as he sees himself "cast in a role" in an "urban drama" (86) that presents a microcosm of the primal struggle between Self and Other, a battle in which "someone is going to have to impose his will and win and the other is going to give way" (86). Perowne's perception of the interaction is essentially Hegelian in its oppositional tension and explicit urge "to impose [the Self's] will"; it makes Baxter the embodiment of "the other" who must be defeated in order for Perowne's mastership to be recognized. Perowne therefore uses all the social weapons at his disposal, stressing his linguistic superiority (cf. 89), and then his professional supremacy, as he observes Baxter's physiological symptoms and introduces himself as a doctor (see 93-94). When Baxter pounds on the doctor's chest and asserts his animal-like aggression, Perowne decides to make use of "shameless blackmail" (95) to defeat his assailant. Employing his authoritative tone, Perowne falsely promises Baxter that he will use his position within the medical community to help him manage his illness (95-97). By exposing Baxter's weakness to his friends, who quickly abandon him, Perowne manages to get back in his car and hastily retreats from the scene. Then he continues on to the squash court and finds himself another front, where he mercilessly attempts to beat his partner.¹⁸

The initial confrontation between Perowne and Baxter, conveyed through Perowne's condescending point of view, creates an ambivalent impression of the arrogant doctor. It is true that the aggressiveness of Baxter and his gang causes Perowne to panic, but the text emphasizes his self-righteousness and pomposity in handling the situation. Even the guilt that he soon feels as he recalls his behavior towards the sickly Baxter (cf. 102) seems just another easy coping mechanism, helping him restore his self-image as a moral and conscientious being. It is apparent that for Perowne, liberal and reasona-

ble man, self-reflection is all that is required for proper interaction with the world—he examines his thoughts and feelings, and sometimes feels guilt, shame or compassion, and that is quite enough. Or so he wants to think.

In contrast to the close narrative attention given to Perowne's mind, mood, and sentiments, Baxter is never portrayed from within, but only represented from Perowne's perspective. He remains totally incomprehensible throughout the book, seeming nearly mute, as though devoid of meaningful consciousness, almost sub-human. This dull, one-dimensional picture of Perowne's opponent is often cited as the main flaw of *Saturday*.¹⁹ As critics have observed, not only is Baxter constructed as Perowne's obvious inferior, he is also never given the opportunity for self-examination or self-explanation, thus indeed becoming one-dimensional, as if driven only by his genetic illness (cf. Ross 88).

This literary reduction of Baxter gains prominence in the climactic scene where Daisy recites "Dover Beach," upon which Baxter undergoes a sudden, miraculous, and totally inexplicable change of heart. The reading of the poem by the naked Daisy under a pending threat of rape serves as the crescendo of the break-in scene which takes place on that same Saturday evening, when the Perownes are gathering to celebrate Daisy's new book of poems. This part of the story, with its surprising literary glorification and consequent improbable salvation, has been loudly condemned by many reviewers.²⁰ Hadley has argued that in this scene McEwan presents an unlikely and rather grotesque Victorian-styled fantasy of redemption. Arnold's period poem, read aloud, is intended to transform Baxter, to "fix" him, and "humanize the Baxters of our day" (93). Wells, accordingly, criticizes "the fact that Baxter is so easily subdued by the blandishments of the English literary tradition" (121).

These critical condemnations stem mainly from the inexplicable effect of the poem on Baxter's mood and behavior, which seems to change abruptly from aggression to bliss. Certainly, it is hard to believe that a literary piece by a Victorian poet, so remote from Baxter's

life and language, could influence him so greatly, could play upon his emotions and make him renounce his violent plans. It seems contrary to any reasonable expectation. But why should we adhere to reason?

The disapproving readings of this scene all seem prone to certain presuppositions. First, they all make an effort to explain away the implausibility of the text and elucidate Baxter; second, they tend to lay Baxter's elation on the greatness of Arnold's poem; and last, there is an interpretive propensity to isolate Baxter's sudden change of temperament from the continuation of the novel. All these underlying critical tendencies ignore crucial aspects of the text and thereby miss the ethics of *Saturday*. It is specifically at this point, after Daisy's literary performance, that *Saturday* develops beyond the Hegelian Self-Other relation: Baxter's inexplicable elation unsettles the negative opposition initially set into place. Instead, he becomes a unique individual, whose singularity cannot be reduced to Perowne's imaginative interpretations.

The critical attempts to elucidate Baxter's literary euphoria fall into the trap of blindly following Perowne's rationality, while disregarding that way it has been subverted in McEwan's narrative. As readers we are not granted any reasonable entry into the mystery of Baxter's sudden literary enthusiasm, nor any real insight into what is truly going on in his mind.²¹ The only serious claim we can make is that Baxter's response to the poem remains an enigma; we can then try to explain the function or effect of this enigma, without pretending to solve it.²² Bradley and Tate argue that "*Saturday* is, in many ways, a novel *about* prejudice, misunderstanding and over-interpretation in an increasingly paranoid London" (30; emphasis in the original), and it is here that I find the ethical challenge that the novel presents to its readers: to resist the temptation of over-interpreting Baxter's Otherness, and instead accept the limits of our rational knowledge of the Other's singularity, which is not reducible to comprehension and appropriation.

The critics' tendency to credit Arnold's poem with Baxter's transformation leads directly to discussions of McEwan's supposed belief

in cultural (and political) conservatism and in absurd and even ridiculous realism. It is important to note, however, that it is not Matthew Arnold's poem to which Baxter is introduced in this scene, but rather to Daisy's appropriation of Arnold in her naked performance of "Dover Beach." The feminine, corporeal quality of the spectacle must be taken into account, as it does not suggest a glorification of the English literary male tradition but rather its subversion.

Finally, readings which disconnect Baxter's sudden change of temperament from the subsequent change in Perowne's mindset are bound to miss the ethical point, which is to be found not in Baxter's rebirth but rather in the relationship that the literary episode creates between Perowne and Baxter. My contention is that the break-in, combined with Daisy's reading and Baxter's unexpected exhilaration, work together to shake up Perowne's subjectivity, opening him to experience the wonders of the Other's enigmatic singularity and so, finally, to acknowledge his involuntary debt to Baxter.

The scene begins when Baxter forces Daisy to take off her clothes. She does so in quiet panic, exposing a hitherto unknown pregnancy. Whereas Nigel, Baxter's partner in crime, immediately reacts with obvious discomfort—"She's all yours, mate" (219)—Baxter's response is less clear. He seems to ignore Daisy's body, instead focusing his entire attention on her book, suddenly discovered on the coffee table. Perowne wonders if this is a sign of embarrassment "at the sight of a pregnant woman" (219), or perhaps a way of further humiliating Daisy. The reader is left in the dark. More important is the implicit link established between Daisy's pregnant body and her book of poetry: Baxter's words "Well, well. Look at that!" (219) seem at first to refer to his discovery of Daisy's being "in the club" (as Nigel terms it, 219), but are then revealed as referring to her book. Daisy's body of flesh and blood and her body of words and rhymes become interconnected and are placed at the focus of everyone's attention. They become the catalyst that alters the chain of events in a surprising way.

It is not Daisy herself, however, who determines the course of action, but rather Baxter, whose intense interest in her poetry is revealed in his command: "Read out your best poem" (219). It is important to note that the introduction of literature into the events is the result of a request by the supposed brute, Baxter, who surprisingly asks to engage in the arts. It is Baxter who initiates the literary moment, which becomes an unexpected break from the otherwise violent scene. McEwan stresses the whimsicality of the event by a change in narrative style: Perowne's internal focalization is interrupted by a short, unmediated dialogue between Baxter and Daisy that seems completely free of Perowne's thoughts:

"You didn't tell me you wrote poems. All your own work, is it?"

"Yes."

"Very clever you must be." (219)

Indeed, while none of the events that have taken place thus far have halted or even slowed Perowne's ponderings, Baxter's peculiar wish to hear Daisy's poetry seems to stun Perowne so deeply that his consciousness falls silent. This may be the result of Perowne's lack of literary responsiveness, highlighted when he admits that "he hasn't been reading closely enough" (220), even his own daughter's poetry. It is obviously a surprise for him to encounter Baxter's interest in Daisy's writing.

At this point, Daisy's grandfather makes a silent suggestion to recite somebody else's poem rather than one of her own (220). Daisy does so. This serves as a clear refusal to allow Baxter (and Nigel) into her private literary life. It is also a defensive measure: Daisy is aware of the sexual undertone of her poetry and is trying to avoid adding further sexual content to an already dangerously charged situation. Her recital is her mode of female self-defense, not letting the male attackers get inside her own body of literature and distancing them from her body of flesh and blood.

The decision, however, remains below the level of focalization. When Daisy starts the recital, neither Perowne nor the readers know

that the poem is in fact Arnold's "Dover Beach." McEwan's narrative strategies position even the most literary of his readers alongside Henry Perowne and Baxter as "illiterates" left in the dark. The text does not quote the poem, instead adhering to Perowne's wandering thoughts when hearing it, narrated in the usual present tense. Perowne himself is not only blind to Daisy and his father-in-law's silent agreement to trick Baxter, but also has "read no poetry in adult life" (128); he therefore does not recognize the famous words of Arnold's poem. For him—and so for the readers—it is Daisy's poem, one in which "[s]he's thrown herself back into another century" (220). In addition, Perowne's point of view reflects his confusion and dread in this menacing situation. Consequently he misses the exact words of the poem and lets his thoughts fluctuate and interlink paraphrases of what he hears ("the sea is still and at high tide" [220]) with impressions of his pregnant daughter, staged as the poem's expressive author ("She calls to her lover, surely the man who will one day father her child" [220]). This rendition radically changes Arnold's poem. What we get is a feminized version of Arnold, which is taken out of its nineteenth-century context and associated, instead, with the presence of its speaker, her naked body and her feminine sexuality.

Only gradually is the poem identified, the disclosure of the first line when Daisy begins to recite it again serving as a confirming hint directed at the more literary of McEwan's readers. In a lone case of dramatic irony within the novel, Perowne remains ignorant. An added twist is the parallel that is drawn between the two opposing characters: Baxter and Perowne are joined, if only for a moment, in their shared lack of knowledge. The glaring difference between the two is reestablished only at the end of the recitation, in their completely different responses. During this brief, unified hiatus while the poem is being read a second time, Perowne's thoughts drift toward Baxter, who suddenly becomes for him a real participant in the poem, its actual speaker. Perowne imagines Baxter looking through the window at the calm sea, listening to its waves, hearing their sadness (see 221). For a moment, Perowne goes beyond thinking about Baxter, and feels

himself *being* Baxter: "Then once again, it's through Baxter's ears that he hears the sea's 'melancholy, long withdrawing roar [...].'" (221-22); Baxter's imagined misery makes the poem seem depressing and pessimistic (cf. 221-22).

This supposedly compassionate moment, when Perowne steps into his adversary's mind, could become, in McEwan's humanist terms, an ethical occasion of empathetic understanding, with important consequences for both Perowne and Baxter. However, this is not how it unfolds. Notably, the next line of the story—"but Baxter appears suddenly elated" (222)—emphasizes how remote Perowne really is from Baxter's life and state of mind. In contrast to Perowne's gloomy pessimism, which he attaches to Baxter's feelings, Baxter himself responds with sudden elation and even joy, which Perowne does not understand. Here I contest Kathleen Wall's analysis of the passage and her argument that Arnold's poem "allows Perowne to see the world through the eyes of the other" (786). Rather, Perowne's experience of imagining himself in Baxter's place is exposed as another instance of his self-centered reflexivity, with no actual bearing on the lived reality of his surroundings.

The ironic juxtaposition of Perowne's imagined version of Baxter with Baxter himself resonates with the opening of the break-in scene, where Perowne attempts to take on Baxter's point of view: "Perowne tries to see the room through his [Baxter's] eyes, as if that might help predict the degree of trouble ahead" (207). It is clear, however, that what is revealed is merely Perowne's bourgeois gaze, encompassing "the Bridget Riley prints flanking the Hodgkin," and his intellectual snobbish self-opinion reflected in "the careless piles of serious books." Perowne's gaze, even when trying to take on another's perspective, is of course indicative of his own concerns rather than those of Baxter's. As Ross sums up this episode, "Perowne's musings betoken no genuine fellow feeling" (89). This introductory episode undermines the supposed empathy of the second attempt to imagine Baxter.

The distance between Perowne and Baxter is accentuated when the doctor is faced with his opponent's sudden enthusiasm for the poem

and his changed behavior after the second reading. When the inspired Baxter addresses Daisy “‘It’s beautiful. And you wrote it. [...] It makes me think about where I grew up’” (222), Perowne’s hostility is clear and understandable: “Henry doesn’t remember or care where that was” (222). As usual when puzzled or threatened, Perowne retreats to a “simple” physiological explanation and concludes that Baxter’s metamorphosis is due to his faulty genes and indicative, of course, of his chronic illness (cf. 223-24). Unable to solve the mystery of the Other, Perowne interprets it as “manic” (223) and then resorts to a pathological explanation. This echoes the initial confrontation with Baxter, when Perowne used his scientific knowledge to shield himself from the threat of the other.

Nonetheless, there is a hint that Perowne is changing, transformed, though unwittingly, by the extraordinary ethical effects of Daisy’s performance. The change is bound up with the image of the “child,” which appears several times in the break-in scene, relating first to Daisy and then, surprisingly, to Baxter. Initially, the image of the “child” obviously stems from Perowne’s parental feelings towards his threatened family. Thus he sees in Daisy’s loveable nude body “the vulnerable child” that he remembers from early “bath-times” (218). The image may also arise from Perowne’s discovery of his daughter’s pregnancy: confronted with Daisy’s changing body, he becomes aware of her unborn child.

However, as Daisy begins her second reading, the image of the child takes on an intriguing and unusual twist, becoming attached to Baxter—a strange transformation, considering the very real threat that Baxter presents to Perowne and his family at this moment:

She turns back a page, and with more confidence, attempting the seductive, varied tone of a storyteller entrancing a child, begins again. (221)

In Perowne’s confused thoughts, Daisy seems to be addressing Baxter as a child. Her voice and tone are trying to distract Baxter, not aggressively, but in a motherly way, lulling him with stories.

Once introduced, the metaphor remains consistent. When the second reading is over and Perowne encounters Baxter's extraordinary transformation "from lord of terror to amazed admirer," he thinks of him as an "excited child" (223). It seems as if Daisy's storytelling has really converted Baxter from a violent attacker into an innocent child, and on the next page, Baxter is again compared to a child: having taken Daisy's book, "[h]e clutches [it] like a greedy child fearing the withdrawal of a treat" (224). Perowne's fatherly emotions towards his loving family have been somehow extended—in his bewildered thoughts—and amazingly now include Baxter the thug within this intimate circle, if only for a brief moment.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that the paternal relationship between a father and his child (what he terms "filiality") is the paradigm for the ethical relation between Self and Other, "a relation of transcendence" (279) that makes the father infinitely responsible for his son.²³ The image of the child comes to designate the uniqueness of the Other who, although being very close to me, familiar and intimate, is also a singular individual, totally new and original, escaping my control and determination, as "neither the categories of power nor those of knowledge describe my relation with the child" (277). It is important to indicate in this context that Levinas's emphasis on the father-son relation, combined with his discussion of fecundity and Eros and indeed his overall negative treatment of femininity in *Totality and Infinity*,²⁴ has aroused feminist criticism regarding his declared androcentrism.²⁵ Yet in the later *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas turns to the notion of "maternity" to signify ethical subjectivity. This change is considered by some of his critics to be an important revision of his early exclusion of the feminine from the ethical sphere.²⁶

In this, McEwan seems more in tune with Levinas's late thinking: in *Saturday*, the feminine (or the maternal) factor—Daisy's speech (and body) act—is clearly an essential element in constituting the image of the child, allowing it to enter the text and change the course of action. Indeed, considering the threatening series of events, it seems rather odd that the violent intruder, Baxter, could become, in Perowne's

thoughts, a child. If we ask ourselves what it is, then, that transforms Perowne's conception of Baxter from wild and dangerous animal and lunatic trespasser, into a childish, vulnerable, greedy and excited admirer of literature and of Daisy, the answer is to be found in Daisy's literary spectacle. This pageant combines Daisy's voice, the words written by Arnold, and Daisy's speaking bare body, which signals the feminine promise of new life in its pregnant visibility. All these together succeed in transforming the frightening event into an enchanted moment, in which Baxter's face—as a child, as a singular Other—suddenly makes its appearance in McEwan's narrative: "his smile is wet and beatific, his eyes are bright. The voice is warm, and trembles with exalted feeling" (224). Consequently, even as Baxter waves his knife, Perowne sees that "his eagerness and trust is child-like" (226).

It is Daisy who creates this opening, in her appeal to Baxter as she recites the poem twice and escorts him into her (and Arnold's) literary world. For a moment, he becomes the poem's beloved addressee. Though the text does not appear in McEwan's novel, these are the words that are said by Daisy, as we come to understand:

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.
 ("Dover Beach," final verse)

The address to Baxter with Arnold's words "Ah love," combined with the inclusive "us" and "we," declare Baxter's humanness and humanity for the first time in the novel. In her literary act, Daisy actually embraces Baxter as a precious partner in a world "which seems / [t]o lie before us like a land of dreams, [...] [s]wept with confused alarms of struggle and flight." The context of Arnold's reference to times of

war, his allusion to Thucydides's account of the Epipolae battlefield,²⁷ change within Daisy's narration, and come to allude to both the impending war (the invasion of Iraq) and Baxter's own violent threats. In this time of political confusion and personal brutality, Daisy's recital alludes to the importance of love between the Self and the Other. It is not romantic love she calls for, however, not a love that assumes intimate knowledge of the Other and the possibility of harmonious union—a humanist conception that has historical alliance with Western imperialism, as Dawn Rae Davis reminds us (145-57). Rather it is love that engages the Self with the unknown singularity of the Other, love devoid of empathetic understanding but also of the violence of possession, "love pried loose from humanist tradition" (Davis 157).

Daisy's literary performance is not a reincarnation of the Victorian past, nor a yearning for a neo-Victorian present (cf. De Waard 151-53; cf. Hadley 95), but rather a very up-to-date singular combination of Arnold's words (as Perowne and the readers gradually recognize) with a new historical context (Perowne's internal paraphrase, "when there's no peace or certainty" [221], is applied to his own times), and a particular feminine act of language (the poem is perceived as "she calls to her lover" [220]). In Perowne's thoughts, the poem narrates "*this evening*" (221; my emphasis), and its content is dynamic, changing from Daisy's first reading to the second ("Now it appears there's no terrace, but an open window" [221]). As such, Daisy's performance points to what Derek Attridge terms the "unusual forcefulness" of the literary text (16), which becomes new and singular each time it is reread and rewritten.

This special quality of Daisy's intertextual recital genuinely "performs and produces the social relations in which the other *becomes* irreducible to an object or a mere thing" (Perpich, "Levinas" 31). Instead of a wild animal or a superficial stereotype of a criminal, Baxter at last becomes an addressee; Daisy's loving speech is an appeal to him, suggesting through Arnold's poetics, as well as by her own "varied tone" and exposed and confessing body, the promise of life, of faithfulness and honesty. This effect is achieved through the

prism of Perowne's perspective, as he first imagines Daisy's words as addressing her lover: "She turns to him, and before they kiss she tells him that they must love each other and be faithful, especially now they're having a child" (221). Then, Daisy's lover is replaced with Baxter: "there's no young man, father of the child. Instead he sees Baxter" (221). Thus, Baxter enters the place of Daisy's lover, to whom she promises love and faithfulness in her poetic language. Daisy's promise arises from her literary exhibition, devoid of her intent, and does not suggest the existence of any affectionate empathy between the real participants. Nonetheless, it is a turning point that gives Baxter—first through Daisy's speech-act and then through his own miraculously changed behavior—a human face, unique and meaningful.

Daisy's communicative recitation of Arnold carries out that dimension of language that Levinas terms "saying" (*"dire"*). In Levinas's late thinking, developed in *Otherwise than Being*, he distinguishes between the content of speech, its meanings and themes—what Levinas terms the "said" (*"dit"*)—and the performative dimension of the linguistic address to another—the "saying" (*"dire"*). The "saying," interwoven as it is into the "said," amounts to a special register of language; it is a modality of responsiveness and of contact, created through speech without any conscious intention on the part of the speaking subject (*Otherwise* 48-49). It is that dimension of appeal to the Other that emerges from Daisy's poetic recital. Bare and exposed, she is declaring "here I am," alluding to that obligation of the Self to the Other.²⁸ Stripped of the defense of clothing, of the complex symbols of her highly developed representational and thematic poetry, Daisy is centered in corporeal presence, in physical voice, in the modality of saying rather than in Arnold's "said." In her performance, Daisy invites Baxter to look together at the world ("come to the window") and without conscious intent opens herself up to connection with him.

Indeed, for Levinas, as feminists readings have shown (Brody 69), the linguistic proximity to the Other is intrinsically linked to the maternal sensibility, to the vulnerability and infinite responsiveness that

are embodied in the maternal flesh and blood engagement with the Other, in being “one-for-the-other” (*Otherwise* 67, 77). In *Saturday*, Daisy’s pregnant body, exposed and vulnerable, together with her telling voice, appeal to Baxter by words, sounds and sights, speaking the ethical saying to him. Her reading, combining the poetics of Arnold with her corporeal declaration of the growing life inside her, constitutes what Levinas calls “the contact of saying” (*Otherwise* 85) and lays open “the immediacy of proximity” (84), acknowledging Baxter’s human face.

This said, I do not venture to interpret Baxter’s psyche or to offer suppositions as to his sudden literary excitement and altered behavior, as doing so would tamper with the void that McEwan so carefully constructs around this matter. All I argue is that within the world of the novel and the framed world of the poem, Daisy’s literary feminine address to Baxter asserts his singularity as a human being who deserves to live and to enjoy (in Arnold’s terms) the world’s joy, love and light. And this poetic and loving appeal to Baxter, rendered through Perowne’s agitated perspective, makes Baxter appear, in Perowne’s eyes, as an “excited child” (223), who “inhabits the confining bright spotlight of the present” (224), “elated as well as desperate” (225).

It is this, I believe, that catalyzes Perowne’s own ethical transformation later in the narrative. The closing of the novel presents a different Perowne. Despite his real victory over Baxter and the successful brain surgery he has performed on his erstwhile opponent—all which should prove his skill and power, his justified superiority as a generous and benevolent man—Perowne surprisingly feels that “[h]e’s weak and ignorant” (277). This stands in complete contrast to his portrayal at the opening of the novel as “inexplicably elated” (3), and his earlier high, when he feels like “a king” (269). As the long *Saturday* drags to its close, Perowne finds himself thinking again about Baxter’s vulnerability, of how he “has a diminishing slice of life worth living” (278). This leads Perowne to “more brotherly interest” (278) in Baxter’s sad future and to his practical resolution to try to convince

the Crown Prosecution Service that Baxter is unfit to stand trial. Then, thinking about his decision to forgive Baxter, Perowne goes on to ponder his position as a pardoner, finally admitting that "he's not the one to be granting it [pardon] anyway" (278). These thoughts are followed by the honest and subversive question: "or is he [Perowne] the one seeking forgiveness?" and then comes his climactic realization: "He's responsible, after all" (278).

This complete change can happen because, for the first time since encountering Baxter, Perowne is able to acknowledge the difference between himself and his aggressor as a difference between two distinct human beings: he recognizes that Baxter is a *real* person, not a cardboard cutout—a stereotype—of a common criminal as he had thought. Baxter is a unique person, and therefore cannot be reduced to medical explanations or to social ideas. As a consequence of the literary (singular) event and its inexplicable effect on Baxter, Perowne is faced with the Other's unfathomable interiority:

But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will, despite all Daisy's attempts to educate him. Some nineteenth-century poet—Henry has yet to find out whether this Arnold is famous or obscure—touched off in Baxter a yearning he could barely begin to define. (278-79)

Through Daisy's literary performance, Perowne comes to admit Baxter's specific singularity as an individual human being, accepting his extraordinary (and unreasonable) poetic reaction without giving it a pathological explanation or criminalizing it. Furthermore, this leads him to acknowledge Baxter's legitimate claim to an autonomous, dignified life. It is specifically in the inexplicable and irrational, in that which cannot be understood or explained away—Baxter's poetic enthusiasm—that Perowne finally hears his antagonist's cry for help, "that hunger [that] is his claim on life, on a mental existence" (279). It is this that leads the doctor to assert his obligation to truly assist Baxter for the first time, to "do what he can to make the patient comfortable, somehow" (278), to help improve Baxter's life.

Ironically, as part of this transformation, literature—so decisively dismissed by Perowne—is now awarded the title of “magic” (278). This literary magic, however, is not that of the supernatural stories that infuriated Perowne (cf. 67-68), but rather the ethical magic of Daisy’s feminine spectacle, which succeeds in reminding Perowne of Baxter’s vulnerability and “how much he [Baxter] wanted to live” (278). Thus, for Perowne, Daisy’s performance carries with it Baxter’s childish face and human voice, aspiring to overcome illness, to prevail, to have a good life, and asking Perowne to help him to do so. Welcoming the Other’s difference—noticing Baxter’s singularity—forces Perowne to accept responsibility for him and to care for him for the rest of their lives.

Read through the prism of Levinas’s ethics, this turning point in Perowne’s subjectivity has broad implications. The metonymy constructed between *Saturday*’s events and world affairs,²⁹ draws attention to the political importance of the literary scene, and we are encouraged to relate the intersubjective experience of Perowne, Daisy and Baxter to the broader political challenges of contemporary Western society. Thus, the ethical relation as implied by *Saturday* does not mean seeing things from the viewpoint of others and reaching an empathetic understanding of our fellow humans; this is a naïve, perhaps even manipulative and oppressive idea, as post-colonial critics have argued (Davis 145-57). On the contrary, the novel suggests that ethics is all about hearing the cry for help expressed by the villain whom I truly do not like, do not understand, and with whom I do not identify. In other words, ethics means responding to and taking care of that Other who seems the most strange, threatening, incomprehensible, illogical, and absolutely different to me, never to be understood or accepted. This horrible alien, this terrorist from whom I mostly want to distance myself, in whose place I can never imagine myself, whose perspective I cannot share and whose motives I cannot understand, is the Other who makes me responsible for him, demanding my help, asking for my maternal care.

This is not meant to imply that Henry Perowne is a model of altruism who achieves Levinas's radical giving. Rather, I suggest that, as represented by McEwan's aesthetic means, Perowne's accidental encounter with Baxter points toward the basic ethical duty of the subject to the Other in ways that have political implications which reach far beyond the private story and the specific Saturday of the Perownes. Are we able to listen to our worst enemy and hear his "claim on life" (279)? Can we comply with our ethical obligation towards our defiant aggressor? These are the hard questions that *Saturday* poses through its protagonist's disturbing encounter with Otherness—questions that are perhaps meant to leave us, like Perowne, feeling weak and ignorant, and "responsible, after all."

The Open University of Israel

NOTES

¹David Malcolm emphasizes McEwan's ethical evolvment in his mature fiction (15), and Claudia Schemberg describes this evolvment as McEwan's "ethical turn" (28). See also Dominic Head's praise of McEwan, who "resuscitated the link between morality and the novel" (1). Other critics join this view (Wells 15; Brown 80; Bradley and Tate 21-22).

²For a brief overview of this topic, see Daniel R. Schwarz's "Humanist Ethics of Reading" in *Mapping the Ethical Turn* (3-15). Martha Nussbaum provides a fascinating and comprehensive account of the ancient roots of humanist ethical conceptualization of literature; see her chapter "The Ancient Quarrel" in *Love's Knowledge* (10-29). Nussbaum's exploration of the relationship between literature and ethical theory (see, for example, *The Fragility of Goodness*, *Love's Knowledge*, and *Poetic Justice*) is a sophisticated and more precise elaboration and redefinition of this humanist tradition. Nussbaum argues that literature offers a distinctive contribution to our understanding of other human beings, developing the ability to empathize. Matt Ridley's introductory presentation of McEwan's fiction seems to be in line with these ethical ideas (see Ridley vii-viii). See also Dominic Head, who stresses that "the ability to empathize" (9) is essential to McEwan's writing.

³In a talk with Zadie Smith, McEwan expands on this idea: "At least since the early 80's, it's [the ethical idea that 'cruelty is a failure of imagination' that has] begun to fill out for me as an idea in fiction, that there's something very entwined about imagination and morals. That one of the great values of fiction was exactly this process of being able to enter other people's minds" (Smith 111, 112).

⁴Through her detailed analysis of particular literary texts (mainly from Greek tragedy and the realist novel in her books *Love's Knowledge* and *Poetic Justice*), Nussbaum demonstrates how literature cultivates the reader's emphatic imagination, allowing him to enter the thoughts and feelings of fictional others whose lives may be radically different than his own. See Claudia Schemberg, 83-86, on McEwan's debt to Nussbaum's ethics.

⁵On McEwan's liberal humanism see Head 180; De Waard 145-46; Bradley and Tate 22-23.

⁶John Banville, bluntly accusing *Saturday* of being "a dismayingly bad book," reads it as a middle-class banal fairy tale: "Henry has everything, and, as in all good fairy tales, he gets to keep it, after getting rid of the troll who had sought to challenge his right of ownership" (9).

⁷Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace reads these aspects of *Saturday* in light of post-colonial theory, interpreting the novel as a melancholic response to the imperial history with which England cannot yet cope critically. Hadley criticizes *Saturday* for restoring "the Victorian fantasy of liberal agency" (93). Ross reads *Saturday* as a liberal hymn to the British elite, confined to an oppressive ideology. He compares it to E. M. Forster's *Howards End* and sees *Saturday* as indicating a "narrowing and hardening of the liberal vision that had once energized the condition of England novel" (93). Other interpretations, on the contrary, applaud the novel's sharp and critical investigation of contemporary Western urban life at the beginning of the new millennium, with all its challenges and faults. See Michiko Kakutani in *The New York Times*; Hillard; Rorty; and Brown.

⁸Surprisingly few critics relate Levinas's philosophy to McEwan's writings in general, and to *Saturday* in particular. While in her recent book on McEwan (2010), Lynn Wells suggests reading the dramatic scenarios of confrontation in McEwan's fiction "as internal mirrors of the basic ethical relationship as framed by Levinas in his philosophy" (15), Levinas is not mentioned in her chapter on *Saturday*. In the epilogue to his book *Out of the Blue*, Kristiaan Versluys does refer to the possibility of reading *Saturday*'s response to the 9/11 tragedy in terms of "a concern for the Other" (*Out* 191). However, Versluys's interpretation of the conception of responsibility in the novel is actually closer to the non-Levinas, humanist ethos of imaginative identification and empathetic understanding—a view which I argue is actually subverted in *Saturday*. Versluys's important contribution to my reading of the novel is found in his contention that it expresses "an intrusion of something utterly horrible and incomprehensible into the banal and the everyday" ("9/11" 76). In what follows, I will relate this notion of "horrible and incomprehensible" to Levinas's concept of "singularity" and its ethical effects.

⁹It is here that I diverge from Versluys's interpretation of *Saturday*. Although he, too, declares the novel's "emphasis on responsibility" toward the Other (*Out* 188), he understands this responsibility along the liberal-humanistic terms of "the exercise of imaginative identification" (151) and "moral sympathy" (191). My claim is that *Saturday* undermines such notions of morality in favor of a much

more radical concept of responsibility to an Other who refutes imaginative identification and sympathetic understanding.

¹⁰For Perowne's thoughts about "moral sympathy" see *Saturday* 127.

¹¹For a comparative reading of Levinas and Hegel see Adriaan Perpezak 205-16, Silvia Benso 307-30.

¹²On modern subjectivity and its deconstruction, see Critchley, "Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity" 51-70.

¹³See, for example, Levinas's "Freedom Called into Question," *Totality* 82-84.

¹⁴For an excellent discussion of Levinas's idea of this infinite responsibility, see Perpich, "Responsibility" 78-123.

¹⁵As he observes the protesters, Perowne ponders Daisy's words to him: "You're an educated person living in what we like to call a mature democracy, and our government's taking us to war. If you think that's a good idea, fine, say so, make the argument, but don't hedge your bets. Are we sending the troops in or not? It's happening now" (*Saturday* 188).

¹⁶See also Wells 113. Versluys, in a more sympathetic interpretation of Perowne, analyzes his political position as "that of the hesitant intellectual, whose ability to see the two sides of a question induces indecision" ("9/11" 77).

¹⁷See *Saturday* 84: "One of the others, a tall young man with the long mournful face of a horse [...]; "[...] they turn their faces towards Perowne simultaneously, with abrupt curiosity, like deer disturbed in a forest." This goes on: "The horse-faced fellow" (85). See Wells for a discussion of the animalistic terms in which Perowne perceives Baxter and his partners (117).

¹⁸The construction of a battleground is very apparent in Perowne's use of combative terminology (see 59, 86, 102, 107, 187), and in his rationalization of the urge to win as a simple biological drive (cf. 113). It thus seems that, behind the pacifist facade, Perowne's mind is in fact quite belligerent, reflecting the hidden aggressions of England "on the edge of war" (141). Perowne's combative behavior has been taken to be "a synecdoche for the history of his homeland" (Wallace 474), an embodiment of authorial violence and of British nationalism (see Wells 113).

¹⁹See Wells 112, quoting Wallace 476, and agreeing with her criticism.

²⁰In a review in the *New York Times*, for example, Zoe Heller concludes by saying: "This, it is safe to say, is a faintly preposterous episode." See also Ross 87; Wells 120-21; De Waard 151-53.

²¹Hadley, for example, explicitly acknowledges the absence of Baxter's point of view (95, 100n2). Nevertheless, she does not refrain from interpreting Baxter's sudden change in behavior by getting inside his soul (although only in an endnote), suggesting that "he yearns for the fantasy [of Victorian liberalism] even so" (101n2). Thus, Hadley projects the liberal vision of individual agency (the one that she finds in Perowne's thoughts and in McEwan's narrative) onto Baxter's missing interiority. This is the common liberal error of making the Other, here Baxter, mirror the privileged subject's point of view.

²²Those critics who praise the novel tend to explain what goes on in Baxter's mind and ignore the importance of this void in the narrative. See, for example, Kathleen Wall, who marvels at *Saturday's* exploration of "beauty's role in society" (757), and then goes on to interpret the literary effect of the reading scene on Baxter's inner world (785).

²³See in Levinas's *Totality* the sub-chapter "Filiality and Fraternity" (278-80). These ideas previously appear in his *Time and the Other* (91).

²⁴See in *Totality* Levinas's discussion of the Dwelling (152-58), and his chapters on love, Eros and fecundity (256-80).

²⁵On the androcentrism of Levinas in *Totality*, see Tina Chanter 16-17; Perpich, "From the Caress"; Luce Irigaray; Sonia Sikka 101-05; Critchley, "Five Problems" 43. For a more elaborate analysis of Levinas's treatment of the feminine, see Sandford, *Metaphysics of Love*.

²⁶On Levinas's turn from the paternal to the maternal in *Otherwise than Being*, see Sandford, "Masculine Mothers" 180-199; Brody 53-74.

²⁷See Molly Clark Hillard on this reference to Thucydides as well as on other intertextual layers in "Dover Beach" and their importance for *Saturday*.

²⁸On the important expression "me voici" (here I am) in Levinas's ethics, see *Otherwise* 64-67, 142, 228-32.

²⁹This metonymy is established through Perowne's point of view, which, as Versluys says, "demonstrates the extent to which September 11 has penetrated deep into the European psyche" ("9/11" 68). The plot also sets it into place as it juxtaposes Perowne's fears about fanatical terrorists with a violent encounter with domestic intruders. As Head explains, referring to the many interpretations of this metonymy, "the threat to the security of the Perownes parallels the broader insecurity of the West in the face of Islamic extremism" (181).

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Complete summary of Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. eNotes plot summaries cover all the significant action of *Saturday*. *Saturday* takes place on a single day—Saturday, February 15, 2003. Before dawn, Henry Perowne, a prominent neurosurgeon, watches a plane crashing toward London, possibly a terrorist attack. The plane foreshadows how Perowne's day of playing squash with a colleague, shopping for a family dinner, and visiting his widowed mother will be interrupted by an automobile collision with Baxter, who is driving with two other young thugs. Perowne escapes being beaten to death by quickly diagnosing Baxter as having Huntington's disease and offering help. Download *Saturday* Study Guide. Subscribe Now. *Saturday* (2005) is a novel by Ian McEwan. It is set in Fitzrovia, London, on Saturday, 15 February 2003, as a large demonstration is taking place against the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq. The protagonist, Henry Perowne, a 48-year-old neurosurgeon, has planned a series of chores and pleasures culminating in a family dinner in the evening. As he goes about his day, he ponders the meaning of the protest and the problems that inspired it; however, the day is disrupted by an encounter with a

Since the 1980s, Ian McEwan's literary oeuvre has displayed a growing concern with the relation between literature and ethics, becoming progressively more involved with public and historical issues, and turning attention to the moral possibilities of the novel itself. 1) When discussing McEwan's literary ethics, critics generally base themselves on a common humanist conception that sees in literature an important. Instead, the novel seems to resonate with Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of Otherness, with its emphasis on the self as infinitely responsible toward the ever-strange and incomprehensible Other. *Amsterdam*, as distinguished from Ian McEwan's other novels, stands out for its highlight of temporality and the implied urgency to tackle one's moral identity. Namely, the novel is concerned with waiting: McEwan shows Clive consistently pressurized by the deadlines of submitting his symphony for rehearsal and Vernon rather obsessed with the day of exposing Garmony's pictures. Such waiting forces them to make decisions, and the decisions invariably suggest applications of values and attitudes.

- Ian McEwan, *Saturday*. 49 likes. Like. "The luxury of being half-asleep, exploring the fringes of psychosis in safety."
- Ian McEwan, *Saturday*. tags: dreams. 35 likes. Like. "When there are no consequences, being wrong is simply a diversion."
- Ian McEwan, *Saturday*. 34 likes. Like. "He never believed in fate or providence, or the future being made by someone in the sky. Instead, at every instant, a trillion trillion possible futures; the pickiness of pure chance and physical laws seemed like freedom from the scheming of a gloomy god."
- Ian McEwan, *Saturday*. 34 likes. Like. "And who will ever find a morality, an ethics down among the enzymes and amino acids when the general taste is for looking in the other direction?"
- Ian McEwan, *Saturday*. 21 likes.