

MANCHESTER
1824

Manchester University Press

Chapter Title: Saturday's Enlightenment

Chapter Author(s): David Alderson

Book Title: End of empire and the English novel since 1945

Book Editor(s): Rachael Gilmour, Bill Schwarz

Published by: Manchester University Press. (2011)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18mvkn0.16>

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Manchester University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *End of empire and the English novel since 1945*

Saturday's Enlightenment

David Alderson

The principal focus of this essay is on Ian McEwan's novel, *Saturday*. The motivation for writing it, however, is to engage with larger debates on the British left – including the liberal left to which McEwan in some sense belongs – about the US- and British-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and more generally about the continuing imperatives of empire. Set on 15 February, the day of the anti-invasion protests – though published in 2005, and written therefore in the knowledge of all that had transpired – *Saturday* explores the ambivalent, though mostly pro-invasion, attitudes of the central character, Henry Perowne.¹ It does not reflect, but rather may be read in the light of, a certain disorientation on the left in relation to contemporary imperialism, and a tendency for prominent members of it, socialists as well as liberals, to side with the US in contexts where it has militarily attacked obviously authoritarian regimes, even though those regimes – Taliban Afghanistan, Saddam's Iraq – have owed their existence to US support in the past. It has been extraordinary and frustrating to witness a figure like Christopher Hitchens, author of a brilliant book confirming the criminality of Henry Kissinger,² declare that the US really was now in the business of promoting freedom, and this at a time when old hands in forging US foreign policy – Bolton, Cheney, Perle, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz – were prominent in the Bush administration. But Hitchens was not alone in unrepentantly claiming that *he* is the one who has stuck to his Enlightenment principles: the Marxist academic, Norman Geras, and the journalists, David Aaronovitch and Nick Cohen, have consistently attacked the anti-war left for its supposed betrayal of rationalist principle. The short-lived Euston Manifesto launched in 2006 included among its signatories some who opposed the invasion of Iraq, but its defence of universal human rights and democracy was directed principally

against those who were perceived to have allied themselves with reactionary – and especially reactionary Islamic – forces.³

Saturday, though, seeks to avoid definitive political commitments, substituting a family crisis and its reconciliation for the consideration of global questions. My view is that this substitution is actually a means of pursuing those questions in different ways through its deployment of ideological tropes which have been integral to the overlapping histories of imperialism and the Enlightenment, whose relationship will be the central theoretical preoccupation of this chapter. I am concerned therefore with the complex ways in which the legacies of British colonialism have served to legitimate a quite different form of imperialism, that of the US. This requires some explanation in relation to the work of a writer who has at times been critical of both British imperialist nostalgia and US hegemony, and in order to understand how this has come about it is necessary first to consider McEwan's responses in a variety of works to shifting postwar and post-cold war geopolitical relations.

Gender, family, politics

No moment was more important symbolically in generating a sense of imperial decline in Britain than the Suez crisis of 1956, during which Britain and France were humiliated into retreat by their ostensible ally, the US. The son of a British army officer, McEwan was living in Libya at the time, and records that Suez generated so much popular anger there that British families had to be rounded up into armed camps for their own protection:

My mother happened to be in England at the time, and for some weeks I lived in a tent with other children not so very far from a machine-gun nest. My father was a remote, organizing figure with a service revolver strapped around his waist. Suddenly everyday routines belonged to a distant past and I understood for the first time that political events were real and affected people's lives – they were not just stories in the papers that grown-ups read.⁴

In casting himself in the role of that recurrent figure in his work, the vulnerable child, McEwan here strikingly recounts a moment of revelation and maturation in which politics were made 'real' to him through gendered social and familial roles, as well as through related forms of emotional, spatial and temporal alienation. That first sentence encourages us to view the machine-gun *nest* as an ironic, military and masculine, substitute for

the protection of his absent mother. But if we are expected to recognise certain phallic qualities in the various guns which populate this scene, we must surely note the contrast between those directed at the Libyans and the tidily British, holstered and attenuated weapon strapped to McEwan's father's waist. This was, after all, a retreat of sorts, and is here symbolic of the larger retreat from colonialism which would help to condition British masculine sensibilities more generally in the postwar period. The reality of politics is associated principally with the loss of the feminine and the disruption of an idealised familial balance, for which a 'distant' masculinity offers few attractive possibilities by way of compensatory identification. Writing fiction, for McEwan, will self-consciously become a means of maintaining a fidelity to the maternal.

There is a further separation which needs to be registered, though, between the moment being described and the time of McEwan's writing about it, since this memory is presented in the introduction to his screenplay for *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1982). This focuses on a Tory historian, James Penfield, who is writing a revisionist account of Suez at the time of Britain's attempts to reassert some degree of military independence on the international stage during the Falklands/Malvinas war. McEwan's account of his personal experience in 1956 are therefore also mediated by his relations to Thatcherism and to its attempts both to restore Britain to the 'glorious' imperial past from which it had been severed, and to effect a break with the postwar consensus.

The Ploughman's Lunch, though, reminds us of the continuing subordinate status of Britain through the relationship which was rarely so 'special' as when Thatcher was in power. Penfield is, above all, a careerist and opportunist, and the history he writes is carefully tailored to appeal to patriotic sensibilities without offending the main market for the book, US undergraduates (47). Hence the precision of the symbolism of Suez: Britain's decline was bound up with the rise of US power, just as the protectionism integral to colonialism was incompatible with US imperialism's imposition of 'free' markets. Elsewhere in his work, McEwan repeatedly draws our attention to the *ressentiment* integral to US–British relations as they are mediated by masculinity, and in *Saturday* it conditions the competitive relations between Henry and his brash US colleague and squash partner, Jay Strauss. In one of those asides through which the novel questions Henry's confidence in his own objectivity, we learn that 'Whenever he talks to Jay, Henry finds himself tending towards the anti-war camp'.⁵

Strategically central to the achievement of global US hegemony was the containment and ultimate defeat of the Soviet Union, and the cold war

has also been a recurrent preoccupation for McEwan. The renewed zeal with which it was prosecuted by the US and Britain in the 1980s provides the context for his libretto for the anti-nuclear oratorio, *Or Shall We Die?* (1982). Reagan invested unprecedented amounts in nuclear weaponry, and in trying to match him the Soviet Union ruined its economy, a factor crucial in precipitating its collapse. McEwan's words, though, cast a plague on both houses – 'Here one nation stands jailer to its people's minds, / here the other ransacks the globe, a freedom / sustained by greed' – and the work is determinedly non-partisan, liberal humanist in orientation (22). It expresses the hope that the proliferation of nuclear weapons might be reversed through an evolutionary development of human consciousness away from the Newtonian rationalism which had dominated the twentieth century, determining that sense of ourselves as standing 'separate from our world – and from ourselves and from each other – describing, measuring, shaping it like gods' (12). The Einsteinian revolution, by contrast, held the potential to teach us that subjective perceptions are bound up with the process of observing. McEwan notes that the struggle between objectivity and perspectivalism – and, by extension, between reason and feeling – has traditionally been seen as one between masculine and feminine qualities, and the oratorio consequently concludes that, if the human race is to survive, there must be 'womanly times' (23).

The defining characteristic of womanliness in the oratorio is nurture, though McEwan makes it clear that he does not regard this as a trait exclusive to women. Indeed, the genesis of the oratorio lay in 'private fears', including ones which strikingly prefigure those passages in *Saturday* in which Henry fears for his family's safety: 'Love of children generates a fierce ambition for the world to continue and be safe, and makes one painfully vulnerable to fantasies of loss. Like others, I experience the jolt of panic that wakes you before dawn, the daydreams of the mad rush of people and cars out of the city before it is destroyed, of losing a child in the confusion' (5). Fathers, too, can be womanly, and all of this helps to explain the absolute centrality of, and value placed on, the family in his novels. For McEwan the family functions as the source of an ethical investment in the other and as a commitment to a principle of futurity. However it is also inevitably the source of his conservatism, given the gendered and sexual norms which govern the family, as well as the conditions and limits it imposes on any extension of sympathy beyond the self, since the family has symbolically served to police all kinds of distinctions, extending outwards from public and private to those which define the communal or national, and even the human.⁶

Of course, families are not consistently idealised in McEwan's fiction, but that is because they are prone to perversities generated by the social and familial dominance of masculinity.⁷ Before discussing *Saturday*, I want to consider two novels in which the relations between abstraction and concretion, gender and the body, are especially revealing: *The Comfort of Strangers* and *The Innocent*. In the first, Venice functions both as a concrete labyrinth in which the central characters get lost and a symbolic site of psychic exploration. Within it, the characters of the novella more or less embody, more or less transgress, conventional correspondences between men and masculinity, and women and femininity. Robert asserts ideologically and physically the principle of necessary male dominance, not only over other women, but also over the feminised Colin. Mary's feminism challenges, and yet reproduces in certain respects, masculine impulses: she admires, if only as 'a tactic', the radicalism of Italian feminists who propose castration for rapists.⁸ This serves to draw our attention to the crucial issue within feminism about the precise relations between body and culture: Mary and the Italian feminists here suggest the problem and the solution might be biological. Robert, by contrast, grounds his patriarchalism in culture: "It is the world that shapes people's minds. It is men who have made the world. So women's minds are shaped by men. Now the women lie to themselves and there is confusion and unhappiness everywhere" (55). Colin's androgyny, residing in the beauty and vulnerability which make him the object of both Robert and Caroline's sadistic desires, is substantially biological and bound up with sexual desire. He explains to Mary during their renewed bout of lovemaking after visiting Robert and Caroline how 'he felt an aching emptiness, close to desire, between his scrotum and his anus; he thought this might be an approximation of womanly desire' (61). This establishes a contrast to Mary's masculine forcefulness: when she massages his shoulder, briefly causing Colin pain, it reminds us of Robert's earlier erotic gesture of intimacy with him (70).

It is a further measure of the abstraction of this narrative that it does not confirm male homosexual desires, still less identities, even while it relies heavily on homosocial ones. Colin's unrealisable longing to be filled is located, impossibly, somewhere *between* scrotum and anus, and Robert's suggestive massaging of Colin's shoulder is followed by a punch to the stomach which foreshadows Colin's murder. Even when Robert takes Colin for his last visit to Robert's bar 'along streets relatively free of tourist and souvenir shops, a quarter from which women too seemed to have been excluded', the emphasis is on a foreign authenticity and homosociality, not on a relative subcultural autonomy. McEwan may be exploiting our sense of

the relative weakness of gay identification in Italy, and the alleged casualness there of same-sex encounters, but this nonetheless conduces to the tale's juxtapositions and complications of (patriarchal) tradition with (feminist) modernity. After all, Robert and Colin do not finally have sex. Rather, in a kind of heterosexual snuff scene, the androgynous Colin is sacrificed to the lovemaking of Robert and Caroline, with Mary as viewer (further suggesting that her brand of castrating feminism is vaguely complicit with Robert and Caroline's impulses). Masculinity, in this novella, figures as an atavistic force: elemental, in some sense subconscious, it is the spectre which haunts the modern, more feminised, world.

Children are absent from all of this; they present no restraining influence, no demands to be nurtured. Mary's are being looked after by their 'womanly', biological father from her broken down marriage – he lives in a rural, vegetarian commune – while there is 'something wrong' with Robert's sperm, and Caroline's account of this fact leads into her description of the origins of their sado-masochism, as if the fact of Robert's impotence is sufficient to explain its evolution (86). By contrast, we are given no corresponding explanation for Caroline's submissiveness; it is as if there is no need for one, though there are obvious enough parallels to be drawn between nurture and masochism suggesting that the satisfaction she experiences results from her thwarted desire for children. Underpinning McEwan's exploration of perversion, as we might expect, are ultimately normative and heteronormative accounts of desire and the family.

The Innocent, by contrast, is more typical of McEwan's later, more historically specific work. Set in postwar Germany, it concerns the joint CIA–MI6 project, Operation Gold, to construct a spy tunnel across Berlin's West–East divisions. But this collaboration in fact turns out to be the means through which British–US tensions are explored, not least through the relationship between the central English character, Leonard, and his immediate boss from the CIA, Glass. The novel recognises that the British constitute the subordinate partner in the exercise, and the love affair between Leonard and his first girlfriend, the German, Maria, is set in the context of increasing US cultural influence, as suggested by the rock and roll played on the radio. Indeed, the affair itself is in part governed by the homosocial rivalry between Leonard and Glass over Maria, with Glass ultimately, and symbolically, victorious, though only as a result of a misperception on Leonard's part determined by the larger rivalry between them. Leonard resolves to correct things much later, on receiving a letter from Maria after the death of Glass in 1987, only two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. One interpretation of this ending is that Leonard and Maria's reconciliation

has been made possible by (an anticipated) political reconciliation – the fading of European tensions and the end of the cold war – but the other is that it is symbolic, indeed celebratory, of that reconciliation. In the first, love is that which struggles, and initially fails, to transcend politics; in the second, relationships generally are allegorical of politics. The earlier parts of the novel tend to confirm the former interpretation. Glass's death, by contrast, is key in suggesting the latter: it can only symbolise, given that it was not determined by, any weakening of the political hold of the US over Europe. The significance of this is that love, having been presented as that which may be defeated by history, finally comes to idealise history's supposed dissolution. McEwan's grasp and critique of the systemic nature of capitalism has weakened.

At one point, Leonard endangers his early relationship with Maria when he begins to act out rape fantasies which are bound up with relations between their respective nationalities. These fantasies also entail an acceptance, on Leonard's part, of 'the obvious truth that what happened in his head could not be sensed by Maria'.⁹ It is only when he grasps that her protests are genuine, rather than complicit with the fantasy, that some balance is restored to his perspective. Maria is reminded of other instances of masculine aggression: the rape she once witnessed committed by a victorious Soviet soldier, and the violence of her estranged husband, Otto, whom she will later kill while, in feminine fashion, protecting Leonard in a way she never protected herself. But, for all the novel's recognition of the pervasiveness of rape and the way in which it brutally mediates through sexual difference other forms of power, it should be stressed that Leonard's sudden departure from, and equally sudden return to, innocence is never truly explained. Thus while apparently determined by specific social relations, masculinity also seems somehow instinctual – just as it is in the dehistoricised context of *The Comfort of Strangers* – a threat to the love which is also contradictorily bound up with, yet 'above', history.

McEwan's preoccupation with gender, then, emerges out of an idealisation of the balanced family, since it is the family which symbolically reconciles our gendered outlooks on the world (objectivity and subjectivity) and our dispositions towards it (aggression and nurture). The ideological consequences of this are multiple. They are bound up, first, with his persistent reifications of masculinity and femininity; and, second, with the ways in which gender is deployed in the novels as the basis for interpreting social and political relations more generally. In *Saturday*, ambivalence represents the best approximation to balance achievable. But this fetishisation of indecision is also the product of an inability to see the world as radically contradictory. Indeed, the novel's

resolution achieves the symbolic expulsion of all that would be required to grasp it as such.

Enlightenment and its discontents

The fortuitous death of Glass in *The Innocent* suggests that McEwan had anticipated that the end of the cold war would bring about a reduction in US global influence. In fact, it paved the way for dreams of a New American Century. Central to this project was a now unrivalled military capability which underwrote a more flexible, because confident, imperialist strategy, characterised by an increasing disdain for the UN and even for NATO, and by a pursuit of *ad hoc* alliances in a commitment to 'war *without end*, either in purpose or time' because pre-emptive.¹⁰ 9/11 provided spectacular justification for this, most obviously through its deployment as the pretext for the US-led invasion of Iraq. Blair's Atlanticism had already cast Britain in 'a hyper-subalternist role without historical precedent',¹¹ a role to which he zealously held fast despite widespread European dissent.

McEwan claimed not to be an enthusiast for the invasion, though he was certainly resigned to it: 'the hawks have my head,' he wrote, 'the doves my heart. At a push, I count myself – just – in the camp of the latter. And yet my ambivalence remains. I defend it by reference to the fact that nothing any of us say will make a difference: ambivalence is no less effective than passionate conviction.'¹² The distinction this statement sets up between head and heart maps on to the divided logics which determine the characterisation in *Saturday*: Henry, who prides himself on his rationalism, mostly thinks the invasion would be a good thing; his daughter, Daisy, a poet and sceptic towards her father's scientific certitude, is the most outspoken in her opposition. A sequence of familiar overlapping oppositions therefore overlays the pro- and anti-war positions: objective/subjective, science/culture, masculine/feminine. In privileging Henry's perspective, the novel's use of indirect free discourse does enable subtle ironisations of it, but for the most part *Saturday* surely impresses on its presumed liberal audience – probably anti-war, cultured and sceptical of the claims of genetics to explain human behaviour – the value and integrity of Henry's rather different values.

Henry's attitudes towards the war are bound up with his perspective on London itself. His anxious day begins prematurely when he witnesses a burning plane on its descent towards Heathrow in the early hours of the morning. He believes he is witnessing a terrorist attack, and this prompts his protective reflections on what it is that he values about the city, not

merely as the place where he and his family live, but as the symbol of progress. At one point, he perceives that 'Life in it has steadily improved over the centuries for most people, despite the junkies and beggars now. ... At every level, material, medical, intellectual, sensual, for most people it has improved.' But this, he recalls, is not the view of Daisy's college lecturers who 'like to dramatise modern life as a sequence of calamities. It's their style, their way of being clever. It wouldn't be cool or professional to count the eradication of smallpox as part of the modern condition. Or the recent spread of democracies.' Henry even celebrates the 'consumerist and technological civilisation' he heard one of them traduce in a lecture (77). The implication is that their view is anti-Enlightenment, possibly postmodern. It is true that we shift from such unmediated thoughts to an appreciation of the subjective processes which in part determine them – Henry's antagonists are 'spectral entities ... figures of his own invention whom he can defeat' (78) – but the narrative on which his vision depends is not radically questioned by the text. The reference to 'the recent spread of democracies', for instance, is a fascinating piece of rhetoric. It alludes to the fall of the various authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe, while glossing over the nature of the brutally neoliberal and inegalitarian societies which have replaced them. But it also anticipates the particular 'spread of democracy' with which the novel is explicitly concerned, and thereby connects the triumphalist rhetoric of a resolved cold war with the idealist register of the war on terror. Its grammatical construction manages to avoid specifying the active or passive voice, and there is consequently an ambiguity about whether democracies augment more or less spontaneously and beneficently, or whether they are imposed by other nation-states. This helps to mask disturbing implications underpinning Henry's thought, as the city here is both a normative abstraction, symbol of progress in general, and the specific embodiment of that abstraction, London, the centre from which historically much of the self-conscious and self-congratulatory business of spreading progress has taken place. Progress is, or should be, universal – the world is, or should be, rather like London – and, if it is not, there may at times be reasons for making it so.

It is a distinguishing feature of Henry's particular kind of scientific sensibility that he cannot tolerate uncertainty, the counterfactual, fiction, and is even impatient with thought experiments such as Schrödinger's. One of the most obvious ways in which this intolerance is ironised is that it is itself fictional, an imagined reality, though this is no simple matter, since the novel is technically characterised by a painstaking realism¹³ and relates to the events of a specific, historic day; it carefully rehearses many of the

debates about the impending invasion; it relies for much of its description on McEwan's observations of the work of a real surgeon; and famously it uses McEwan's own home as the model for Henry's. Fact and fiction are therefore intimate with each other in ways which complement the purpose of the book in destabilising the various divisions it treats.

This is because the novel is in part concerned with the limits of perspectivalism, and Henry's distrust of narratives establishes a further contrast to Daisy. Her belief that 'people can't "live" without stories' (68) is allied to what Henry regards as her relativism, evident, for instance, in her – Foucauldian, we are to presume? – belief that madness is a kind of social construct serving power (92). Hers is a relativism, then, of a certain section of the left, instilled in her, as we have seen, by her university lecturers. When she recites Larkin's poem, 'Water', Henry's response is to invoke the awe-inducing potential of evolution as an alternative, and superior, basis for religion. "Now that's genuine old-time religion, when you say it happens to be demonstrably true", she responds (56). Scientific convictions are for her equivalent to superstition: their foundationalism unites them. Daisy's perspective is implicitly postmodern.

Nonetheless, the various positions juxtaposed and embodied in Henry and Daisy do not obviously represent any right/left political division – each is surprised by the position the other takes up in their argument about the war – and their different perspectives are suggestive of those splits on the left I identified at the start of the chapter. In these, too, questions of fidelity to Enlightenment principles and accusations of relativism have been important, and this is the context I want now to discuss. In doing so, my focus on Fred Halliday – as a representative of the pro-war, supposedly pro-Enlightenment camp – takes its cue from Henry's own citation of his claim that 9/11 had precipitated 'a global crisis which, if we are lucky, will take a hundred years to resolve'.¹⁴ I do not wish to suggest a detailed indebtedness to Halliday on McEwan's part, not least because Henry questions this assertion at various points. Rather, I intend to explore their common indebtedness to Enlightenment traditions which have a complex relation to contemporary political questions. In the process, I want to question the novel's suggestion that resistance to those traditions must direct us towards relativism or postmodernism.

Marxism, imperialism, temporality

Halliday's own account of his trajectory is revealing. Formerly an editor of *New Left Review*, he left that journal in 1983 after falling out with

other editors, Tariq Ali in particular, over the specific commitment to national self-determination which defined the journal's anti-imperialism. In explaining this moment, Halliday invokes a striking narrative: 'About 20 years ago I said to Tariq that God, Allah, called the two of us to His presence and said to us, "One of you is to go to the left, and one of you is to go to the right." The problem is, He didn't tell us which was which, and maybe He didn't know himself.'¹⁵ That sense of Halliday and Ali divided and disoriented through a shared origin which is incapable of correcting them goes to the heart of the problem that confronts us here.

One very powerful influence on Halliday's thinking was Bill Warren's book, *Imperialism: Pioneer of capitalism*, in which Warren argued positively the case often made negatively against Marxism within postcolonial theory: that Marx had supported imperialism as a progressive force globally. Both Warren and postcolonial theorists have claimed warrant for their cases in Marx's comments on India in a series of articles he wrote for *The New York Daily Tribune* in 1853. In these, Marx describes British rule as having been 'the unconscious tool of history' because it revolutionised the traditional village system of production that had 'restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass'.¹⁶ This authentic emphasis in Marx, Warren claims, was supplanted in *Marxism* by subsequent, and erroneous, theories of underdevelopment and neo-colonialism influenced Lenin. The result was an inversion of Marx's insight: 'It is now not the character of capitalism that determines the progressiveness (or otherwise) of imperialism, but the character of imperialism that determines the reactionary character of capitalism.'¹⁷ Warren died before he could advance the political conclusions he wished to draw from his analysis, but his arguments go to the heart of genuinely difficult issues in Marxist thought which have been addressed only inadequately by postcolonial theory.

Inadequately, for a specific reason: postcolonial theory tends to evade engagement with Marx's principal claim to radicalism, his materialist inversion of dialectical thought. Rather, insofar as it is a branch of poststructuralism, it treats Marxism merely as discourse, effectively bracketing off its claims to be describing a systemic reality. In a specific critique of Marxism, for instance, Robert Young once wrote that 'in recent years theorists have turned their attention back to the question of the historicity of historical understanding, to its status as interpretation, representation or narrative, and, more radically, to the problem of temporality as such', and there has been little sign of this abating.¹⁸ Central to the dialectical features of Marx's work, though, and determining his view of the situation in India, is the claim that capitalism is progressive in the very precise sense that it

expands the productive capacity of human societies and thereby generates qualitatively and quantitatively new kinds of freedom, while *at the very same time* introducing new forms of exploitation. The dynamic, expansive system of capitalism which revolutionises traditional societies is destructive and always spread by force through forms of 'primitive accumulation' which expropriate common land and resources. Aijaz Ahmad's account of Marx's writings on India, moreover, provides us with a corrective, implicitly, to Warren's complacency about them.¹⁹ It also explicitly corrects Edward Said's reductivism in assimilating them to that more general Orientalist outlook which he claims produces discursively the reality it claims to be describing.²⁰ While Ahmad acknowledges Marx's positivism, his Eurocentric rhetoric, and his failure thereby to live up to his own materialist methods of analysis, he points out that Marx both emphasised the violence of the colonial project, and supported indigenous anti-colonial movements which now had the opportunity to seize possession of the technological developments colonialism had introduced by force. Ahmad also contrasts Marx's progressivist view with the indigenous romanticism of a figure like Gandhi, who celebrated Indian primitivism and poverty in a tradition of nationalism which has still not disappeared. The point at issue is whether anti-imperialism should embrace a repudiation of 'development' as 'Western' because it is governed by the Enlightenment's supposedly imperialist prescriptions. As Young has written more recently, 'Marx forces contemporary readers to face up to the question of how much critiques of colonialism are driven by a form of longing for a pre-industrial way of life altogether.'²¹

The relevance of this to Halliday's position, and to McEwan's novel, resides precisely in the conviction of both that Western imperialism may still be acting as 'the unconscious tool of history' by bringing democracy to Iraq. This is effectively the view articulated by Perowne's Iraqi friend, Miri Taleb: "It's only terror that holds the nation together. ... Now the Americans are coming, perhaps for bad reasons. But Saddam and the Ba'athists will go" (64).²² Thus the invasion will bring progress even if, and perhaps because, it is determined by the priorities of US capital. One feature of the pro-war faction, indeed, has been to defend the US against what they claim is a crude 'anti-Americanism' pervasive on the left. This is Halliday: 'For all its faults, the USA is, to date, the most prosperous country in human history, the one to which many people, possibly half of the world, would like to emigrate and work, whose vitality in a range of fields, from music to medicine, outstrips all others. It must be doing something right.'²³ Similarly, the Euston manifesto is full of praise for this 'great country and nation' in spite

of its 'failings'.²⁴ What is striking about such defences, because surely obvious to socialist sensibilities, is their failure to recognise that what the US does 'right' is precisely bound up with all that it does wrong, both through the systemic, and largely racialised, immiseration it produces at home, and in the imperial power it exercises abroad. Henry's undialectical perspective on London compares with Halliday's on the US, but their correspondences go further than this.

Halliday has written that twentieth-century anti-imperialist forces had traditionally combined socialist and Marxist with nationalist impulses in a belief that capitalism could not fulfil the promise it generated, but that increasingly after the 1970s, 'ambivalence towards modernity that was always latent within nationalism came to the fore in movements of religious fundamentalism, a politics of national identity, valorisations of nature and other, irrational, forms', while 'an increasing part of the remaining traditional anti-imperialist movement came to be dominated by forms of authoritarian politics that represented the worst of the traditional left'.²⁵ Contemporary anti-imperialism has inherited this twin legacy, in his view, and this accounts for its reactionary qualities. Hence his comments on the protests against the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in 1999: given that

critique has to be linked both to the potential for improving on what already exists and on the identification of the forces capable of realising such a critique ... [o]ne shudders to think what the more hard-headed of the socialist traditions of the twentieth century would have thought if they had seen that the last great global mass event of the twentieth century would be the motley agglomeration on the streets of Seattle.²⁶

Provocative as they are, these comments demand to be taken seriously. One means of engaging critically with them is provided by David Harvey's crucial discussion of what he calls the New Imperialism of the Bush regime. Crucial, because it poses serious challenges, both to Halliday's position and to those various constituencies on the left which oppose it.

Harvey's case is that the 'primitive accumulation' which Marx saw as the fundamental motor that got capitalism going was not simply a feature of capitalism's origins; rather, it has persistently attended capitalism's development, providing one means by which problem of capital overaccumulation can be solved, not least through the specific 'spatio-temporal fix' of imperialism. Thus Harvey prefers the term 'accumulation

by dispossession' to 'primitive accumulation', and distinguishes this from the 'accumulation through expansion' which we have tended to regard as definitively capitalist.²⁷ The peculiarly rapacious quality of what we have become used to calling neoliberalism has, since its inception, been determined by its pursuit of accumulation by dispossession, according to Harvey, and it remained a fundamental determinant of the New Imperialism of the Bush administration, along with specifically neoconservative aims of maintaining US global supremacy through force if need be and restoring order at home.

Let us now turn to Harvey's views on resistance and the contrast they establish to Halliday:

the struggles within the field of expanded reproduction (that the traditional left [including Halliday's 'hard-headed' socialists] placed so much emphasis upon) have to be seen in a dialectical relation with the struggles against accumulation by dispossession that the social movements coalescing within the anti- and alternative globalization movements [Halliday's 'motley agglomeration'] are primarily focusing upon.²⁸

Harvey's dialectical grasp here refuses simply to privilege one tradition over the other, and retains a commitment to evaluating the social and political aims of anti-globalisation movements in relation to the continuing need for forms of development – for safe and adequate water supplies, let us say, or effective anti-HIV education, as well as social and political equality and democracy.

Harvey's overall argument also suggests a need to revise our understanding of temporal processes. If primitive accumulation should be understood not as 'primitive' at all but as persistent, contemporary, then resistance to such forms of accumulation should not simply be dismissed as 'primitive' either, destined merely to become obsolete in some progressive unfolding of the dialectic of capitalist advance. After all, neoliberalism was advanced as a project of accumulation by dispossession in the West too – the 'rolling back' of the state, the selling off of nationalised industries, and so on. If Thatcher wanted us to believe that she was a traditionalist, however, it largely fell to Blair to try to convince us instead of the progressive nature of neoliberalism, euphemised and inevitabilised as 'modernisation'.

Art and utopia

It has been necessary to take this detour in order to recognise the significance of the analogy we might draw between Halliday's 'motley agglomeration' and the marchers who help to ruin Henry's day in McEwan's novel, since one of their most striking features is their archaism and primitivism. Unthreateningly at first, the scene of the gathering marchers 'has an air of innocence and English dottiness' (62). This turns sinister, though. During Henry's first confrontation with Baxter after colliding with his car, the demonstrators file past the scene, and 'the unrelenting throb of drums' (85), of their 'tribal drums' (87), becomes the accompaniment to it.

This brings us to the figure of Baxter himself, the gangster who will later invade Henry's home in revenge for his humiliation over the car incident. Numerous critics have noted that he represents the coalescence of threat in the novel and is not just some random thug.²⁹ My sense, though, is that Baxter's symbolic properties are capable of subsuming various possibilities in a way that can only be fully understood once we realise that the novel comprises something other than a contingent set of events loosely strung together. Rather, its structure is overdetermined by various narrative logics. First the striking (fictitious) coincidence of the burning plane's appearance in the sky on the day of the anti-war protest facilitates the connection in our mind between 9/11, Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein repeatedly invoked, if increasingly subliminally – because evidently false – by the Bush and Blair administrations in the lead-up to the invasion. The connection is not made explicit, and Daisy will repudiate it in her argument with Henry, but the novel's ultimate reliance on this association is more revealing of the effectiveness of the US and British governments' insistence for all that.

This is complemented by a series of narrative shifts, and a symbolic logic of substitution and concretisation, through which the forces inimical to Enlightenment progress as perceived by Henry – terrorism, the marchers – come to be embodied in Baxter. 'Simian' in appearance and afflicted with Huntington's disease, he is a moral and physical degenerate of the sort which for long has haunted the racially inflected imperial imaginary. He appears here as the sign of a social system anxious about its own precariousness, as well as the vulnerability of the reason, virtue and order it sustains (88). The attack on reason and virtue is carefully registered as Baxter's revenge on Henry is exacted through the rape with which his daughter is threatened. When she undresses to reveal that she is pregnant, Baxter's elemental masculinity is directed malevolently against the condition which epitomises womanliness – against, that is, the very principles of sympathy and future hope.

Baxter is, of course, defeated and expelled, though in ways which preserve the civilisational superiority of the Perowne family over him. He is disarmed when Daisy recites 'Dover Beach' and is spontaneously transformed by his condition into an aesthete in a way that Max Nordau³⁰ would surely have understood. This confirms those qualities of unself-governability he shares with the fanatic, since 'he finds nothing extraordinary in the transformation of his role, from lord of terror to amazed admirer. Or excited child' (222). And it is perhaps this childishness which from their first encounter prompts in Henry a sympathy for Baxter, such that he will go on to save his life and resolve to drop criminal charges against him. The restoration of order entails a balance of force and compassion.

This is in keeping with the more general mood at the end of the novel. Henry's ambivalence remains. But now it is bound up with the equilibrium achieved in and through the family, and through the family's defeat of Baxter. When Henry first discovers that Daisy is pregnant, he thinks 'What perfect sense it makes; the variations of mood, her euphoria, that she should cry over a dedication' (218). At the end he considers that this fact endows her with a specific authority in relation to their differences over the invasion (277). The certainty that London will receive its terrorist bombs is therefore balanced by the certainty that Baghdad will shortly do so too, a rhetorical parallel which is both disproportionate – nothing the Islamists possess could match the forces about to be unleashed in Operation Shock and Awe – and renews the implication that there is a connection between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime. They are linked in a more abstract way too by Henry's sense of the Islamists as 'utopianists, zealous men certain of the path to the ideal social order ... totalitarians in different form', in a line stretching back through 'Hitler, Stalin, Mao' (276–7). And others, since we first encounter such sentiments while Henry is listening to his son's band:

Out in the real world there exist detailed plans, visionary projects for peaceable realms, all conflicts resolved, happiness for everyone, for ever – mirages for which people are prepared to die and kill. Christ's kingdom on earth, the workers' paradise, the ideal Islamic state. But only in music, and only on rare occasions, does the curtain actually lift on this dream of community, and it's tantalisingly conjured, before fading away with the last notes. (172)

So, art and reality should ultimately thrive on their separation; to confuse them, as visionaries do, is dangerous. *Saturday* will assert only this much and leave its final ideological work to character, form and sensibility. The

reality into which McEwan claims to have been pitched by Suez can only be redeemed momentarily by the art which aspires to humanise, not politicise, and in much the same way as the nurturing family, by making us understand the perspectives of others. Just as there is an ideal balance between art and reality, so there must be between the family and the society which both lies beyond and sustains it, such that the existing order of things is naturalised. In *Saturday* any such naturalisation must be grasped ironically. We smile in a superior kind of way at Henry in his car, thinking of 'An ancient evolutionary dilemma: the need to sleep, the fear of being eaten. Resolved at last, by central locking' (121). But then a real genetic loser invades his house and such thoughts no longer seem absurd.

And so, of course, this talk of 'utopianists' as always somewhere else precludes the possibility that they may actually, and right now, be in charge – indeed at the time of the invasion of Iraq, directing it. In 1944, the historian, Karl Polanyi, claimed as virtually inevitable the collapse of the nineteenth-century 'idea of a self-adjusting market [since it] implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness.'³¹ Polanyi's case was directed against a then minority of economists, such as Friedrich Hayek, whose time would nonetheless come with the neoliberal revolution of the 1970s and 1980s, and with consequences this paper has been in part concerned to trace.

So what did the market utopians bring to Iraq? Those of us who marched against the invasion will not feel any sense of satisfaction that the subsequent history of the occupation proved us, terribly, right. Our conviction was that any further extension of US power could not be beneficent. Even so, few of us could have anticipated the scale of the disaster which was to result from the uncompromising pursuit of accumulation through dispossession: the massive rolling back of the state, in part justified as de-Ba'athification which, in conjunction with the unprecedented levels of unemployment it assisted in creating, threw people back on the resources of their communities, and facilitated sectarian bloodshed; the decimation of an infrastructure already fragile as a result of sanctions, and the corrupt failure of the privatised 'reconstruction' which nonetheless lined the pockets of US companies;³² the everyday, random killing of ordinary Iraqis by trigger-happy or anxious, uncomprehending US and British troops and private security agents;³³ the murderous assaults on Fallujah and other towns and villages; the far from exceptional torture in Abu Ghraib; the lack of concern for the Iraqi dead evinced by the Allies' failure even to attempt to count them; and, more

generally, the warrant granted by the illegality of the war on terror to other terrorist states, from Russia to Israel to Sri Lanka and beyond, to pursue their various military campaigns in defiance of basic principles of justice and human rights, or international law and opinion. Now Iraq's oil is being sold off in what the *New York Times* has called 'the biggest oil field auction in history'.³⁴ It took some time, as the oil companies used the 'security situation' to bargain for a better deal, but we are reassured that private management will bring new efficiencies (we know what that means) and new investment in order to modernise an industry 'battered by years of war and sanctions'.³⁵ The ironies multiply bewilderingly, but one stands out. If the US and Britain have, in a sense, acted as 'the unconscious tool of history' in Iraq they have done so by demonstrating that any progressive side to capitalism has long since played itself out. It is time – way past time – for other narratives of progress: not new forms of idealism, but other ways of making history.

Notes

- 1 I do not here follow the practice of the book in reserving for Henry the authority of the family name.
- 2 Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London: Verso, 2001).
- 3 www.eustonmanifesto.org/the-euston-manifesto/ (accessed 7 January 2010).
- 4 Ian McEwan, *A Move Abroad: Or shall we die?* and *The Ploughman's Lunch* (London: Picador, 1989), p. 27. Future references included in the text.
- 5 Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), p. 100. Future references included the text.
- 6 Claire Colebrook, 'The *Innocent* as anti-oedipal critique of cultural pornography' in Sebastien Groes (ed.), *Ian McEwan* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 43–56, effectively makes an opposing case.
- 7 Kiernan Ryan stresses these dynamics in *Ian McEwan* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994).
- 8 Ian McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), p. 12. Future references included in the text.
- 9 Ian McEwan, *The Innocent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), p. 78. Future references in the text.
- 10 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 149.
- 11 Tony Wood, 'Good riddance to New Labour', *New Left Review* 62 (2010), p. 9.
- 12 Ian McEwan, 'Ambivalence on the brink of war', www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-2-114-882.jsp (accessed 12 January 2003).
- 13 The irony of Henry's fictitious mistrust of fiction informs Mark Currie's reflections in *About Time: Narrative, fiction and the philosophy of time* (Edinburgh:

- Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 124–32. Peggy A. Knapp considers the novel to be hyperrealist, characterised by ‘over-specification’: ‘Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* and the aesthetics of prose’, *Novel* 41: 1 (2007), pp. 122–43.
- 14 Fred Halliday, ‘September 11, 2001, and the Greater West Asian crisis’ in his *Two Hours That Shook the World. September 11, 2001: Causes and consequences* (London: Saqi, 2002), p. 24.
 - 15 Danny Postel, ‘Who is responsible? An interview with Fred Halliday’, *Salmagundi*, 150/1 (2006), p. 221.
 - 16 Karl Marx, ‘The British rule in India’ in Marx, *Surveys from Exile* (Harmondsworth and London: Penguin and New Left Review, 1973), pp. 306–7.
 - 17 Bill Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of capitalism*, ed. John Sender (London: Verso, 1980), p. 47.
 - 18 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing, history and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 22.
 - 19 Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Marx on India: a clarification’ in *In Theory: Classes, nations, literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 221–42.
 - 20 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 153–6.
 - 21 Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 109.
 - 22 Note too Halliday in Postel, ‘Who is responsible?’: ‘The key issue is not: Is the US intervening? Nor: What are the US’s motives? The key issue is will that intervention plausibly help those people or not’, p. 223.
 - 23 Halliday, ‘September 11’, p. 49.
 - 24 www.eustonmanifesto.org/the-euston-manifesto/ (accessed 7 January 2010).
 - 25 Fred Halliday, ‘The pertinence of imperialism’ in Mark Rupert and Hazel Smith (eds), *Historical Materialism and Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 85.
 - 26 Halliday, ‘The pertinence of imperialism’, p. 87.
 - 27 I am summarising Harvey’s general argument in *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), but on the terms ‘spatio-temporal fix’ and ‘accumulation by dispossession’, see pp. 43–4 and 139–40.
 - 28 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 176.
 - 29 See Rebecca Carpenter, “‘We’re not a friggin’ girl band’: September 11th, masculinity, and the British-American relationship in David Hare’s *Stuff Happens* and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*’ in Ann Keniston and Jeanne Quin (eds), *Literature After 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 151; Robert Eaglestone, “‘The age of reason is over ... an age of fury was dawning’”, *Wasafari* 22: 2 (2007), pp. 19–22; Michael L. Ross, ‘On a darkling planet: Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, and the condition of England’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 54: 1 (2008), pp. 90–1; Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, ‘Postcolonial melancholia in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*’, *Studies in the Novel* 39: 4 (2007), p. 476.
 - 30 Nordau, theorist of the nineteenth-century *fin-de-siecle* condition, believed

- that aestheticism was one sign of physical degeneration. See his *Degeneration* (New York: Appleton, 1895).
- 31 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), p. 3.
 - 32 Naomi Klein's account of the neoliberalisation of Iraq is unrivalled: *The Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 325–82.
 - 33 Accounts of such shootings permeate Patrick Cockburn's account of *The Occupation: War and resistance in Iraq*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2007).
 - 34 'Iraq's oil industry poised to re-enter world stage' *New York Times*, 15 February 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/02/15/business/energy-environment/15reniraq.html (accessed 7 January 2010).
 - 35 'Shell Signs Iraq Oil Field Deal', *BBC News Online*, 11 December 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8407274.stm> (accessed 7 January 2010).