

# Politics, the Domestic and the Uncanny Effects of the Everyday in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*

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McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) begins and ends in the edgy border zones between sleeping and waking, the public and the private, night and day.<sup>1</sup> The main plot action concerns a violent threat to the domestic security of its protagonist Henry Perowne, while its setting draws on contemporary political events. It is a novel which can be seen to develop aspects of earlier works, including *A Child in Time* (1987), *Black Dogs* (1992) and *Enduring Love* (1997).<sup>2</sup> As a novel set on a single day, it can be compared with a closely contemporary American work, Don de Lillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) and the modernist day novel such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).<sup>3</sup> *Saturday* communicates its political themes in terms of family life, celebrates the power of the novel to explore both pathological and political states of the mind and draws on uncanny politicising effects in representing the everyday.

McEwan's maturation into a political writer is a commonplace of reviews, early criticism,<sup>4</sup> and McEwan's own self-description. In the 1980s he memorably complained of having been 'labelled as the chronicler of comically exaggerated psychopathic states of mind or of adolescent anxiety, snot and pimples' and determined to be more political.<sup>5</sup> In the Preface to *A Move Abroad* (1989) he began to engage directly the alienating spirit of Margaret Thatcher's Britain of the 1980s in which: 'Something had been released in people, something that was both acquisitive and fearful. A fear perhaps of being left behind in the scramble.'<sup>6</sup>

He also redefined the political terrain, suggesting that novels can offer only 'frail testimony against the self-generating "truths" of politicians', that 'the successful or memorable novels we think of as "political" are always written *against* a politics' and that: 'The "political" novel at its best, just like any other good novel, remains an open-ended voyage of

exploration of experience; and not only the experience of the victim, but his oppressor too' (*A Move Abroad*, xvi, xi, xii).

That his work explores areas of personal and gender politics at least if not more than those of conventional politics is also by now well known. It seems especially appropriate to its mixture of political and family life that he began to write *A Child in Time* (1987) at the time when he 'was about to become a father' in 1983 (*A Move Abroad*, xxv). Since then, the much-publicised break-up of his first marriage, the ensuing custody battles and his subsequent second marriage have brought his own personal life still more into the public eye, though the novels evade reduction to biography.

The implication that his interest in psychopathic states of mind was somehow an immaturity which he abandoned in order to become political is surely an oversimplification. The uneasy state of mind itself *becomes* the political and the political is experienced as an uneasy state of mind in his work. His capture of uneasy feelings as the essence of the political fits also with a broader critique of the oversimplifications of rationality and its dangerous political dimensions in his work.

In the novels of the eighties and nineties, *The Child in Time* (1987) depicts a menacing dystopic new politics of educational managerialism set against the spontaneous or intuitive world of childhood and it includes a grotesque satiric portrait of a disturbingly authoritarian, gender-ambiguous Prime Minister. *Black Dogs* (1992) includes scenes from the reunification of Berlin in November 1989, treats the potential threat of a fascist revival, and has an extended historical retrospect to the Nazism of the Second World War in occupied France as well as its vital scene of a visit to the Majdanek concentration camp on the edges of the Polish city of Lublin in which the passion between the narrator and his wife is suddenly sparked. *Amsterdam* (1998) draws on the world of media sex scandals that contributed to the downfall of the John Major government in the Blair landslide election of 1997, arriving at a fully-fledged political novel just at the time when politics, as traditionally performed, was conspicuously unwrapping itself and John Major's 'Family Values' slogans gave way to a series of scandals in which, 'When Stephen Milligan was discovered ... hanging in women's stockings in his home, it seemed to many merely the tragic culmination of a farce.'<sup>7</sup>

In McEwan's version of them, the eighties and nineties of the last century were times of a precarious-seeming prosperity which barely

masked deep uncertainties in the political state.<sup>8</sup> Uncertainty recurs in these novels as a prime symptom of the malaise as well as a condition that may implicitly challenge the status quo. We can find it in *A Child in Time*, with its critique of rationality and chronological temporality and representative discussion of the intuitive new physics through the character of Thelma Darke, and through *Enduring Love*, with its gendered contrast and separation between the sceptical rationalism of the science journalist Joe Rose (especially hopeless to deal with the chaos of the events that overwhelm him) and his more emotional wife Clarissa, let alone between Joe and the obsessive pathological state of his homosexual stalker, Jed Parry. *Enduring Love* is a novel in which the rational Joe is suddenly forced to question if his 'rationality was a kind of innocence' (33).<sup>9</sup>

Jeremy, the narrator of *Black Dogs*, is arguably the most 'uncertain' McEwan character up to that time and one of his most symptomatic postmodern characters. Jeremy, curiously displaced from his own family life (and even denied a family surname), is writing a memoir of his wife's parents Bernard and June Tremaine that becomes a Lyotardian kind of fable concerning the 'incommensurability' of the two world views that they express on their supposedly shared life: 'Rationalist and mystic, commissar and yogi, joiner and abstainer, scientist and intuitionist' (19) as he distinguishes them. He charts their divergent memories even of intimate moments like their first love-making (she says it was brilliant; he says it was a disaster) and especially of what has become the central symbolic incident of June's life when she encountered the two nightmarish black dogs that seemed about to attack her on a lonely path in rural France just after the Second World War and their radically opposed senses of what this incident may mean.

Both characters may be said to be uncertain about something. June has had her moment of personal crisis in the incident with the dogs, which becomes for her a turning point in her discovery of belief. Bernard, a rationalist, is primarily uncertain about what he considers to be her over-interpretation of the events. Jeremy patiently oscillates between these increasingly divergent perspectives, at times admiring and understanding both partners but at another positively embarrassed by June (whose 'kind of talk makes me blush' (60)) and at another considering Bernard's 'rationalism' itself to be a 'blind faith' (117). Since he is a kind of historian we might say that his thoughtful, open and objective approach to the differences of their perspectives and his

refusal to choose between them is a refreshingly academic and indeed exemplary postmodern kind of position to adopt. However his mode of uncertainty goes beyond either of theirs to even include doubt about the validity of his own indeterminate position. As he says from the start: 'I am uncertain whether our civilisation at this turn of the millennium is cursed by too much or by too little belief, whether people like Bernard and June cause the trouble, or people like me' (20). This seems to take his pursuit of uncertainty a little too far and at key points (such as when he does 'something uncharacteristically brilliant' in kissing Jenny or lashes out against a father he sees beating a child) we warm to him when he acts spontaneously. On the whole though his 'uncertainty' is a positive value in the novel. It is the very opposite, for example, of the 'certainty of our next meal' in which Jeremy senses the danger of his own complacency on the tour of Majdanek, leading him on to ask his unnerving question about the neatness of the construction of the place that calls false optimisms about human motivations and complicity into question, asking 'How could one begin to call it a mistake?' (111).

The political in McEwan can be seen in these symptoms which are domestic and in the everyday, a feature clearly developed in the politics of the quotidian in *Saturday*. Once again here McEwan invokes the broad contrast between the 'neuroscientific' kinds of knowledge of the mind that can be achieved by the prodigious professional skills of its neurosurgeon protagonist, Henry Perowne, and the knowledge that can be found by means of the literary kind of surgery that is performed in turn on his mind by McEwan's narrative: the different ways that the brain surgeon and the novelist might be said to get inside our head. The action of the novel's single day is framed by Perowne's 'night-thoughts' which open and close it. These expose different kinds of anxiety that emerge in the mind of this otherwise remarkably confident and capable character who is, for the most part, a kind of paragon in both professional and private aspects of his life.

McEwan's chosen day is one that has explicitly named political significances, from the first glimpse of a burning aeroplane that raises memories of 11 September, to the London peace march of 15 February 2003 that fixes its date as that of a political event. A comic cameo encounter with the Prime Minister Tony Blair is included in one passage of retrospect, together with discussions about the war in Iraq which take place between Perowne and his daughter Daisy.

*Saturday* could hardly be more closely embedded in the political events and discussions of its time. It was published in England in January 2005 in the run up to Tony Blair's third election victory in May of that year and the London bombings that took place on 7 July. Its setting on the day of the peace march invokes the invasion of Iraq that took place shortly afterwards on 20 March 2003.

Yet it is also a novel with a strong family plot in which Perowne is seen for long periods at home on a weekend 'day off' with his wife Rosalind, his son Theo and his daughter Daisy. He finds himself in conflict with the aggressively violent and pathological outsider Baxter, first as a result of a car accident in the street and then when Baxter enters Perowne's house later in the day. As with the encounter between the domestic rationalist Joe and the pathological outsider Jed in *Enduring Love*, it is a chance incident that sparks off a chain of destructive chaos. Here the political context with its threats to domestic security opens a clear allegorical dimension for reading the attacks on Perowne's domestic security by Baxter and Perowne's detailed thought processes about how to control Baxter's threat and to attempt to restore the damage this does.

Most striking is the setting of the novel on a single day.<sup>10</sup> Large portions of the novel are composed of minutely detailed accounts of Perowne's work routines even at their most spectacularly specialist and also his leisure activities, which include the playing of a game of squash with his anaesthetist and the cooking of his speciality fish soup for the family dinner party in the evening. This focus on the familiar daily routine and everyday life allows McEwan to create a sense of the lived reality of his fiction and to generate an unsettling and uncanny effect, that is not so much a distraction from the novel's politics as it might be said to be the core of its powerful politicising effect.

There is a long tradition of single day novels which includes James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a book that McEwan says 'dazzled' him<sup>11</sup> and which, via George Orwell, he defines as having a 'political awareness' that consisted precisely in 'a vital preoccupation with the everyday, the common experience, the life of the "ordinary man" and with "sex and truthfulness about the inner life"' (*A Move Abroad*, xiii). Similarly Henri Lefèvre sees in Joyce's *Ulysses* 'the momentous eruption of everyday life into literature', a sudden new awareness of the value of the universalising and particularising effects of the quotidian with huge implications for politics, philosophy and language which through the work of Lefèvre and that of Michel de Certeau and others has

generated a radical social and political discourse of the everyday.<sup>12</sup> The focus on a single day has the powerful material and demystifying effect of comparability: of showing up the things we have in common and the things that may still separate us from each other.

*Saturday* could be said to contain a range of Anglicised connections with Don de Lillo's *Cosmopolis*. Both novels start before dawn on their single day. Both have main characters who are symbolic figures at the top of their respective societies and whose private consciousnesses are exposed to the reader. Both characters find themselves caught up with political demonstrations: in McEwan's case anti-war; in De Lillo's against globalism. Both come into violent confrontation with outsiders who are their opposites. Both have a fitness programme: Perowne his squash game and De Lillo's Eric Packer a session with his kick-boxing instructor Kendra Hayes. Though such details also show their differences. Perowne is a doctor whilst Packer is a capitalist. Power is defined as located in the Prime Minister in *Saturday* but in the global financiers and the money system in *Cosmopolis*. Where Perowne acts as physician, expertly diagnosing Baxter's abnormal neurodegenerative disorder Huntingdon's Chorea even whilst under threat from him; Packer is the one who is diseased, having his physician perform an examination of his abnormal prostate gland in the limousine. Perowne peruses London from his Mercedes in which he has his accident with Baxter. Packer drives around all day and virtually lives inside in his limousine. Although Packer has a range of more highly colourful sexual encounters with a number of partners both in and out of the limo, Perowne realistically and even somewhat uxoriously twice makes love with his wife Rosalind at home. Surprisingly, perhaps, Packer is the one who reads poetry (albeit a rather dark line from Zbigniew Herbert about when 'a rat became the unit of currency') whereas Perowne, as we shall see, has a significant blind spot for poetry even though his father-in-law John Grammaticus is a famous poet and his daughter Daisy is about to publish her first volume of poetry.

*Cosmopolis* is a much more extreme dystopian novel, a critique of a far stranger near-future world. By contrast *Saturday* is much more familiar and domestic in its setting and themes. Packer meets a number of assailants and is finally killed by his attacker; while Perowne finally beats off his assailant. Furthermore, after heroically expelling Packer from his house, Perowne returns even more heroically to perform surgery on Packer's damaged brain. Philip Tew has recently commented on McEwan's withdrawal from the urban

world to a sense of ‘melancholy loss.’<sup>13</sup> However, the threat to the relatively ‘normal’ if conspicuously upper-class domestic and familial space that this novel represents is not so much a withdrawal as it is at the centre of its uncanny political effect.

In Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) the main character is from the upper class set in London and the setting is political (since Clarissa Dalloway is the wife of a Member of Parliament and so has a personal contact with the Prime Minister, who attends her party). Both novels build towards a domestic social gathering in the evening. Here too a pathological outsider poses a threat to the upper-class domestic security of the main character in the novel. Septimus Warren Smith, the shell-shocked war veteran whom we see during the day, eventually commits suicide, much to Clarissa’s horror since the news threatens to disrupt the atmosphere of her party:

He had killed himself – but how? Always her body went through it first when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him blundering, bruising went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain and then a suffocation of blackness. She saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!<sup>14</sup>

Like Baxter, Smith is represented as being simultaneously socially disadvantaged and mentally defective. Woolf had first imagined the character of Septimus Smith as mounting an assassination threat against the Prime Minister.<sup>15</sup> Though in the event he is no real threat to anyone but himself, Smith is seen by Clarissa as a threat to her domestic space, and those surprisingly active, anti-gravitational ‘rusty spikes’ seem to represent uncrossable borderlines between the domestic and the urban space on which he is impaled. Smith nevertheless hovers on the borders of the society depicted in the novel, allowing Woolf a subtle alter-ego for the exploration of her own mental instabilities and also allowing her to mount a satirical critique of the novel’s two psychological doctors Holmes and Bradshaw, whose insensitivity and hyper-rationalism she exposes. It is the exclusion of Septimus Smith the damaged war veteran and his wife Rezia from the supposedly cultivated and civilised world of Clarissa Dalloway that undoubtedly provides a perspective in that novel from which the elitism and exclusivity of that world can be criticised.

Seen through these aspects of *Mrs Dalloway*, McEwan's novel is enriched and complicated as a modern English political novel and the possibility of seeing it as a potential critique of its main character rather than a celebration of his middle-class super-heroism is reinforced. Of course Perowne might be seen as exemplary in the way he deflects the provocation to his masculinity in the first encounter with Baxter and his two hooded accomplices Nark and Nigel by using his medical diagnostic expertise. His eventual attack on the intruders in his house is hardly unprovoked since they have already assaulted his father-in-law and forced his daughter to strip naked. For the most part there is little to cause us to question Perowne's defensive and, in the final stages of the novel, ethically mature and 'forgiving' perspective on his aggressive assailant. On the other hand if we reexamine the following passage it might be thought to parallel or even echo (in the 'iron banister posts') the passage from *Mrs Dalloway*:

He, Henry Perowne, possesses so much – the work, money, status, the house, above all, the family – the handsome healthy son with the strong guitarist's hands come to rescue him, the beautiful poet for a daughter, unattainable even in her nakedness, the famous father-in-law, the gifted, loving wife; and he has done nothing, given nothing to Baxter who has so little that is not wrecked by his defective gene, and who is soon to have even less. The run of stairs before the turn is long, the steps are hard stone. With a rippling, bell-like sound, Baxter's left foot glances along a row of iron banister posts, just before his head hits the floor of the half-landing and collides with the wall inches above the skirting boards. (227–28)

For all the sense of relief at a real danger to domestic security averted, there is something awkward and uneasy in the contrast between the powerful and the powerless here. Indeed the phrase 'he has done nothing given nothing' may perhaps echo the memorable phrase 'never done nothin' that occurs in Bob Dylan's social protest song 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' about the killing of a black maidservant by a rich white man that might then form another uncanny counter-narrative at this point to this scene.<sup>16</sup> *Saturday* might conceivably be read as a more questioning novel about the empowered and the powerless in the contemporary medicalized and professionalized world, which focuses on and highlights the uncanny effects of the return of what is repressed in its social, political and domestic forms.

The uncanny dimension might be also seen in the recurrent play of certainty and uncertainty in this novel. This may be found in the opening section where waking in the fresh light of a cold morning Perowne is said to be momentarily certain: 'And he's entirely himself, he's certain of it, and he knows that sleep is behind him: to know the difference between it and waking, to know the boundaries, is the essence of sanity' (4). It is this certainty that is shaken by his sight of the burning plane, leading him to a darker perception of the uneasiness of the contemporary world and of times that he mostly sees as 'baffled and fearful' (4), indeed as much more uncertain than the nineties, which in retrospect he labels as an 'innocent' decade, though adding 'who would have thought so at the time?' (32).

Perowne is certain too of the potentiality of a progressive rationalistic scientific form of knowledge to solve such key mysteries of life as how matter becomes conscious: 'He is certain of it', we are told at a moment of professional triumph when he has operated on Baxter's brain clot just as McEwan subtly undercuts the distinction between science and belief by adding, 'That's the only kind of faith he has' (255).

Perowne has what is perhaps a not untypical, educated, middle-aged, middle-class interest in the political concerns of the day, both national and international, and a sense of the expectation of war. In a way we see him 'uncertain' in the sense that he is rationally sceptical and detached but he certainly has his own strongly held views of the prospect of war in Iraq, for example, which are not the automatically pacifist ones he imputes to the marchers and which he believes are based on a more balanced judgement about the evils of Saddam's Iraqi regime that he has been able to achieve in part because his friendship with an Iraqi Professor has given him a first-hand witness account. Since we see his views in a relatively private and unguarded way in his reported thoughts, it might well be possible to imagine a well-known pacifist like McEwan expecting a reader to take a highly critical stance on his view but, interestingly enough, talking in television interview with Melvyn Bragg on the *South Bank Show*, McEwan himself claimed a kind of even-handed or balanced attitude not dissimilar to Perowne's, saying that he had not been on the march himself and that he was, he thought, about 55 per cent against the war.<sup>17</sup>

One moment in the novel relates to the inevitable possibility of error and the dangers of false certainty that fascinate in McEwan's fiction, in the scene of the chance meeting Perowne has had with Prime Minister Tony Blair himself. Here the Prime Minister

momentarily mistakes Perowne for a painter whose pictures are hanging in their dining room and refuses to acknowledge his mistake. In this everyday political scene Perowne tries to correct the Prime Minister, saying: ‘No I think you ...’ but Blair interrupts:

‘Honestly. They’re in the dining room.’

‘You’re making a mistake,’ Perowne said, and on that word there passed through the Prime Minister’s features for the briefest instant a look of sudden alarm, of fleeting self-doubt. No one else saw his expression freeze and his eyes bulge minimally. A hairline fracture had appeared in the assurance of power. Then he continued as before, no doubt making the rapid calculation that given all the people pushing in around then trying to listen, there could be no turning back. Not without a derisive press tomorrow.

‘Anyway. They are truly marvellous. Congratulations.’ (144)

Just like Perowne in his professional role, or at the moments of crisis in which we see him placed, the Prime Minister’s mental processes are shown to be limited by an inherent human fallibility but yet the public presentation of political credibility requires an appearance of conviction which seems indispensable to the mass media political world. McEwan is fascinated, though, by the moment of uncertainty. The ‘hairline fracture’ echoes later in the novel with the ‘hairline fracture in the maxillary processes’ that John suffers when hit by Baxter (229) and in the fractured skull that Baxter himself suffers, which Perowne has to use his professional skill to repair. In the continuation of the scene Perowne is said to subsequently scrutinise the image of the Prime Minister’s face on TV.

Whenever he sees him now on screen Henry looks out for an awareness of the abyss, for that hairline crack, the moment of facial immobility, the brief faltering he privately witnessed. But all he sees is certainty, or at worst a straining earnestness. (145)

There’s a play with narrative time here (the incident is recalled from May 2000) that seems to allow Perowne and, by implication, McEwan to do what the mass marchers of 15 February 2003 may not have been able to, directly confronting the Prime Minister as an individual with the uneasy accusation that he may have made a mistake – not just about whether Henry Perowne is a painter or a doctor but by implication also about his support for America in the Iraq war. This makes the moment an uneasily political one once again.

One further way in which this novel becomes political critique is in its setting up of a generational dialogue that is also a dialogue between scientific and artistic states of mind. It seems a witty and psychologically credible kind of subversion for a doctor's blues-guitarist son to have as a key part of his repertoire that suffering patient's complaint the 'St James Infirmary Blues' and for the poetry of his father-in-law and of his daughter Daisy, which he fails to understand, to eventually come to his defence and to be shown to have powers that he cannot exercise. Such moments provide the counter-play to the imbalance of empowerment that his medical authority suggests.

Though not the sexy poem Baxter requests from Saucy Daisy's *Saucy Bark* book, 'Dover Beach' is usually taken (and is taken by Perowne's first reading) to be a love poem: he imagines it spoken in the female voice and 'a smooth-skinned young man, naked to the waist, standing at Daisy's side'. Only on second reading does he see the poem's political dimension, as a poem about borders and the fear of the other across the channel from a defensively national point of view. At first he sees this dimension of the poem not through Daisy's but through Baxter's eyes and ears, but is it not possible to find an unnerving analogy between it and his own domestic anxieties about the threat of Baxter as well as the country's political anxieties about the dangers of the other that are voiced in the text through the image of a Prime Minister wrestling with questions such as 'Does Saddam possess weapons of terrifying potential?' (141)? On this second reading the poem reveals to Perowne its themes of the Victorian crisis of faith and doubt at which he briefly 'balks' and which recasts the play of certainty and uncertainty in yet another form.

That the poetry-blind Perowne has a nemesis called Baxter is also unsettling since he shares this name (and the familiar use of it as a surname without a personal or Christian name) with a well-known New Zealand poet James K. Baxter (1926–1972). James K. Baxter worked in various capacities both manual and literary and struggled both with religious faith and doubts and with alcoholism, his appearance distinctively bearded and dishevelled at times. He wrote over a dozen volumes of poetry, plays and criticism between 1944 and his death. His *Collected Poems*, edited by J.E. Weir, appeared in 1980.<sup>18</sup> He had many poetic enthusiasms and influences from English poetry, including Hopkins and Eliot and the poets emerging during the 1930s including Auden, MacNeice and Dylan Thomas.

Occasionally, though, his repeated use of coastal or beach settings, his meditative seriousness and religious themes and, not least, the somewhat Arnoldian title of his 1954 lecture 'The Criticism of Poetry' may suggest that he too might have had an enthusiasm for Matthew Arnold. As Frank McKay says in his book on Baxter's criticism, 'like Arnold, Eliot and Leavis, Baxter is a moralist.'<sup>19</sup>

Somewhat neglected by an Anglocentric critical establishment for its supposed primitivism, Baxter's poetry gained an increasing following among critics of New Zealand literature as one of its most important expressions. He is now regarded, according to Paul Millar's entry in the *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, as 'one of New Zealand's finest poets.'<sup>20</sup> Although I have found no direct evidence that McEwan wanted readers to identify his diseased and inarticulate thug with this leading antipodean poet it fits with Perowne's blind spot about poetry to suggest such a thing.

Perowne's blind spot would also, presumably, prevent him from being aware that he has his own poetic namesake in the minor and largely forgotten early twentieth-century poet Victor Tait Perowne, who contributed poems to the first of Edith Sitwell's annual poetry volumes *Wheels* in 1916.<sup>21</sup> V.T. Perowne was partly the kind of poet whom T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis endeavoured to attack for the conventionalism of their emotional range and language. Yet, just as connecting the character Baxter to the New Zealand poet may suggest an antipodean counter-voice to the novel's apparent defence of conventional domestic security, invoking the intense celebration of virginal feminine innocence in the first of Victor Perowne's three poems 'A Picture' (where an imprisoned virginal girl tends a dragon sleeping in her lap) may invite a connection with the picture of Daisy Perowne, whose poetic innocence magically staves off violent threats.

At any rate contemplating these and other potential poetic subtexts can support the idea of a more uneasily political counter-reading of *Saturday*. The dangers of a defensive over-reaction to a perceived threat of violence from the mysterious other and the difficulties of imaging the perspective of the other are allegorical themes that may emerge from the novel and they may be enhanced by entertaining such thoughts.

*Saturday* extends McEwan's unsettling treatment of political and psychopathological aspects of contemporary Britain, alongside an investigation of family life and an enquiry into the borderland zones between rationality and unreason, the self and its others, faith and

doubt. Its distinctive time setting on a single day in February in 2003 announces its political contexts and themes and invites comparisons with such precedents as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Don de Lillo's *Cosmopolis*. *Saturday* explores one of McEwan's recurrent concerns: the overlapping relation between certainty and uncertainty. Through this relation it can celebrate the mind's achievements but also explore feelings of insecurity and unease that have a political dimension, here even personally implicating a serving Prime Minister in a typically disturbing confrontation with the ambiguities of the contemporary everyday.

## Notes

1. Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).
2. Ian McEwan, *A Child in Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987); *Black Dogs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992); *Enduring Love* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997).
3. Don De Lillo, *Cosmopolis* (London: Picador, 2003; 2004).
4. Kiernan Ryan, *Ian McEwan* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994); Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction 1950–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). The official Ian McEwan website (IanMcEwan.com) maintained by Ryan Roberts currently (November 2006) lists over a hundred items on *Saturday* alone.
5. John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), 173.
6. Ian McEwan, *A Move Abroad* (London: Picador, 1989), xxiv.
7. Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).
8. Richard Brown, 'The Politics of Uncertainty in the Nineties Fictions of Ian McEwan', Unpublished paper delivered at 'Remembering the Nineties' Conference at Birkbeck College, London, 8 September 2000.
9. Patricia Waugh, *Harvest of the Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 191–92, gives a summary critique of instrumental rationalism in McEwan.
10. Jago Morrison, 'Unravelling Time in McEwan's Fiction' in *Contemporary Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2003) treats the time theme in *A Child in Time*.
11. John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), 174.
12. Henri Lefèvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, translated by Sacha Rabinovitz (London: Allen Lane, 1971), 2.
13. Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004), 98.
14. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 201–2.
15. Elaine Showalter, Introduction to *Mrs Dalloway*, xxvii. Showalter, not untypically for readings of the novel, also describes the doctors as 'patronising and obtuse.'
16. Bob Dylan, 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.' First released on *The Times They are A-Changing* (1964). Dylan's lyrics are conveniently searchable on the official website BobDylan.com.
17. Ian McEwan, Interview with Melvyn Bragg. BBC TV *South Bank Show* 2005.

18. James K. Baxter, *Collected Poems*, ed. J.E. Weir (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1980).
19. Frank McKay, *James K. Baxter as Critic* (London: Heinemann), xii.
20. Paul Millar, 'James K. Baxter' in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, ed. Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45–48.
21. Edith Sitwell (ed.), *Wheels: An Anthology of Verse* (Oxford: B.H. Blackwell, 1916). Perowne's three poems, 'A Picture', 'A Dirge', 'The Lady of Shallott', appear on pages 69–75 of this volume, which was the subject of an attack by Eliot, who, along with F.R. Leavis, was a consistent critic of the Sitwells and 'Sitwellism'.

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