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Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Aesthetics of Prose

PEGGY A. KNAPP

I worry about images. Images are what things mean. Take the word image. It connotes soft, sheer flesh shimmering on the air, like the rainbowed slick of a bubble. Image connotes images, the multiplicity being an image. Images break with a small ping, their destruction is as wonderful as their being, they are essentially instruments of torture exploding through the individual's calloused capacity to feel powerful undifferentiated emotions full of longing and dissatisfaction and monumentality. They serve no social purpose.

Daniel in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*

First, then, the sentence is the primary unit of understanding.

Richard Ohmann, "Literature as Sentences"

The Old Testament Book of Daniel is about interpreting images. Some episodes are memorably didactic, like the fiery furnace and the lion's den, but others, including Daniel's own visions, are disturbing to him and resistant to analysis. E. L. Doctorow's protagonist, Daniel, notes his likeness to his biblical progenitor, in that his narrative, too, consists of troubling interpretations of the imagery of real life and of dreams. Daniel also ponders the nature of images, as in the passage above. Fragile and elusive as they appear in his account, they also represent a driving force; their shimmering and pinging penetrates emotional defenses—as does beauty. The images of prose narratives are presented in sentences, and the sentence is the primary unit of understanding. This essay is an attempt to acknowledge both the conceptual nature of sentences (and the plots to which they contribute) and the Kantian notion of beauty's irreducibility to concepts. I will explore this seeming paradox in terms of Ian McEwan's impressive novel *Saturday* (2005).

Beauty (including Kant's formulations about it) has made its way back into literary studies over the last twenty years or so, after a longish period of neglect or disdain.¹ Ideology critique took up arms against universalized claims for

I am grateful to James A. Knapp, James F. Knapp, Andreea Ritivoi, Jonathan Scott, and the editors of *Novel* for their responses to this essay and to members of my departmental colloquium for helpful discussions of *Saturday* and aesthetics.

¹ Harpham writes, in his contribution to *Aesthetics and Ideology* (ed. Levine), that current debates concede "'the shaping power of art,' and often the shaping power of Kant as well" (126). In

aesthetic value and set out to unveil the real-world interests disguised by fiction's hypothetical nature and its formal impressiveness. Such analyses have greatly enriched our appreciation of the subtlety of language by attending to the linguistic traces and discursive tactics of many admired texts, and I do not write in dismissal of those achievements. There are good reasons for "turning away," as Raymond Williams puts it, from readings that limit their attention to "the beauty of language or form" (155).² We turn away because such attention seems to deny the urgency of the engagement of texts with "real world" problems and attitudes and the critical contextualization that attends to changing historical meanings and perspectives. While there is little in the *Critique of Judgement* to reveal Kant's stance toward verbal (rather than natural or visual) beauty, his answer to this objection may be inferred from his assertion that aesthetic enjoyment is a moment of free play for imagination and understanding that by no means precludes other kinds of judgments of the same object from being made as well (58).

What I do object to about ideology critique is its often-implied conclusion that its analysis has fully accounted for its object, that aesthetic delight plays no part, or only a socially misleading part, in the effects a work produces. In such commentary, delight, apart from interest—Kant's "first moment"—must be passed over, since interest, either private or political, is the object of the hunt. And interest is graspable through concepts, so the "second moment"—delight apart from concepts—is also off limits.³ Alan Singer confronts the charge that a Kantian "aesthetic autonomy" would seem to cordon off art, preserving its "timeless beauty," while atrophying its connection with life, insulating it from rational inquiry and moral reflection. His rebuttal is that treating the artwork "as structurally, rather than just thematically, integral to the project of self-realization" is to regard it "substantially (rather than metaphorically) as new knowledge" and therefore as connected with ongoing life at another level (7-8; 16). Singer's emphasis on "new knowledge" and its addressee, the "learning subject," posits a *détente* between knowledge and aesthetic force for art generally.

Antonio Damasio considers the relation between images and sentences from a neurologist's perspective. He approaches the "new knowledge" issue by

addition to Levine's collection, recent examples of the academic attention paid to aesthetic concerns include a *boundary 2* issue devoted to aesthetics (1988), Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999), Armstrong's *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000), Donoghue's *Speaking of Beauty* (2003), and Nehamas's *Only a Promise of Happiness* (2007).

² The fuller passage in which Williams describes long-standing and still recognizable stand-off between ideology and aesthetics reads:

If we are asked to believe that all literature is 'ideology', in the crude sense that its dominant intention (and then our only response) is the communication or imposition of 'social' or 'political' meanings and values, we can only, in the end, turn away. If we are asked to believe that all literature is 'aesthetic' in the crude sense that its dominant intention (and then our only response) is the beauty of language or form, we may stay a little longer but will still in the end turn away.

³ De Man, in his famous aloofness from aesthetic effects, implies that the pleasures of the text lie mainly in resisting it; see especially "The Resistance to Theory." Delight sounds quaint as well as undesirable in such a context.

asserting the mutual implication of symbols (like words) and images: "If [symbols] did not become images ... they would not be anything we could know," and consecutive thought requires structuring images as "phrases" continually becoming "sentential," although not necessarily those of ordinary language (106, 198-99). (Damasio's position is especially appropriate for a discussion of *Saturday* because its protagonist is a neurosurgeon.) Taken together, Doctorow's and Damasio's accounts define a problematic especially relevant for the novel: images produce knowledge, but not the direct knowledge of assertion. Kant describes this pleasurable experience as "the quickening of both faculties (imagination and understanding) to an indefinite, but yet, *thanks to the given representation, harmonious activity*" (*Critique of Judgment* 60, emphasis added), though he sheds very little light on how prose narrative might do that.⁴ I will therefore call on the vocabulary of Emmanuel Levinas.⁵

In "Reality and Its Shadow," Levinas insists on the "saturation" of the work of art (completion, but not sequestration) that "does not give itself out as ... dialogue," identifying art objects, even verbal ones, with images rather than concepts (131, 132).⁶ It then becomes the task of criticism to interpret art's images, returning them to time and to human concerns: "Philosophy discovers, beyond the enchanted rock on which it stands, all its possibles swarming about it. It grasps them by interpretation" (142). But Levinas does not underwrite all critical activity. Rather than an abstraction from lived life or a "higher truth" about it, the image embodies life's "hither side," which I take to be the "side" nearer experience, as yet unorganized under concepts, "a symbol in reverse" (136). The reader's confrontation with aesthetic force involves images structured rhythmically: "a mode of being where nothing is unconscious, but where consciousness, paralyzed in its freedom, plays, totally absorbed in this playing" (133), a mode "involved, among things" in the novel and "disinterested" in its practical uses. The sentence—the home of propositional thought—seems a good site for posing the problem of aesthetic knowledge, and Levinas's figure of the immobile artwork among swarming philosophical possibles opens the space for doing so. By regarding some sentences from Ian McEwan's *Saturday* as images structured rhythmically, rather than solely as propositions to be mined for their lurking ideology, I want to suggest their claims to the particular kind of knowledge experienced as beauty.⁷ Levinas has a trenchant phrase for such images: they

⁴ In the *Critique of Judgment*, delight independent of the existence of the object is called aesthetic (43), and Kant refers to the non-conceptual nature of aesthetic understanding (58). These issues are invoked repeatedly throughout the *Critique*.

⁵ I was introduced to the explanatory usefulness of Levinas's "Reality and its Shadow" by James A. Knapp's "Visual and Ethical Truth in *The Winter's Tale*."

⁶ Kant does not offer objective ("universal") perfection either. Perfection predicates that a concept has been entirely fulfilled (70).

⁷ To claim, as I will, that a particular sentence is beautiful, is to regard it as placing understanding and imagination in coherent play—but that claim might be mistaken. Kant admits that it is difficult to know with certainty when disinterested judgments are being rendered (64-65 and *passim*). We still reject aesthetic claims when we call something "mere propaganda," but the distinction is not ironclad and can change with time.

"fill up thought."⁸

The first section of this essay focuses on sentences as images of the mind of the protagonist, Henry Perowne. The second concentrates on images of time as both Perowne and McEwan's readers may be said to experience it in the novel; in this section, the swarming possibles inhere in a long logic that reaches from Augustine to Bergson and Ricoeur. But the sentences of *Saturday* are simultaneously self-contained images and constituent parts of the larger novelistic whole. The English word "sentence" did not always mean just "the primary unit of understanding." In medieval discourse, sentence had two additional denotations: philosophical/theological substance, as opposed to accident, and legal verdict, a surviving, though somewhat altered, usage. The overarching standard by which the storytelling contest of the *Canterbury Tales* is to be judged, for example, is the one that exhibits "the best sentence and moost solaaas" (798), "solaaas" being the pleasure induced by surface detail. The pleasurable coherence (Kant's "purposiveness") of beauty is formal wholeness ("saturation") not tied to an externally verifiable concept; Levinas refers to it as the magic spell of "closed wholes whose elements call for one another" (132). But the formal completeness of a sentence as "substantial claim" must also be addressed by critical interpretation that returns it to a world of "rational inquiry and moral concern," and it proceeds by focusing on the way the parts "call" to one another and to the structure of the plot. Stretching Levinas's terms a bit, I will regard this structural analysis as the "shadow of an argument" (in fact an argument about beauty) in the last section of this essay, "Speaking of *Saturday*."

Sentences in *Saturday*

Saturday offers an image of the mind of the neurosurgeon Henry Perowne experiencing his Saturday. The day will include his weekly squash game, a visit to his mother and to his son's band rehearsal, and his preparations for a family dinner with his daughter Daisy, just arrived from Italy. But on the way to the squash game, Perowne is involved in a minor traffic accident, only escaping a serious beating by diagnosing the signs of Huntington's Disease in Baxter, the ringleader of his three young attackers, and offering him a ray of medical hope. That evening, the three invade his home, hold his wife at knifepoint, and order his daughter to undress, at which point her previously unannounced pregnancy becomes apparent. With various forms of help from his family, Perowne once more counters Baxter's violence.

The richly invoked "world of the novel" is represented almost entirely through Perowne; he is, like Emma Woodhouse in Jane Austen's *Emma*, its central intelligence, but in the intensified manner of a contemporary awareness of cognitive science.⁹ Much of this image is presented as Perowne's inner speech,

⁸ In this passage, Levinas is referring specifically to animal fables and—by extension—to allegory (135), but the rest of the essay makes it clear that it is no misreading to use the phrase for broader reference.

⁹ McEwan called *Atonement* his "Jane Austen novel"; Reynolds and Noakes discuss McEwan's debt to Austen as a reworking of the theme of bookish imagination misleading the young as

his words themselves a nested series of images: current intuitions, recollections, predications, and musings. Readers are asked to become involved with a protagonist who thinks about thinking, who is identified right away as someone for whom the boundaries between dreams and waking life are "the essence of sanity" (2), someone who thinks about essences and sanity all the time. Perowne ponders the mind/brain (body) problem and so too does the novel formed around him in a somewhat wider circle of implication. *Saturday* induces much of the reader's state of imaginative absorption, the "paralysis" described by Levinas (133), in the aesthetic force of its sentences, which simultaneously trace conceptual movement. Because so many facets of consciousness are at work simultaneously, but must be conveyed by prose sequentially, the sentence can be granted a particular foregrounding power to both encode meaning and create an image that "fill[s] up thought."

McEwan's sentences are often syntactically elaborate and distinctive; their claim is to beauty rather than to perfection. I am pressing Kant's case that perfection can only be predicated of objects that complete their conceptual ends and that objects considered aesthetically are not limited by such ends (purposiveness, not purpose). The remarkable sentences of *Saturday* seem to me images of thought, as fragile, shimmering, and yet penetrating as Doctorow's Daniel claimed images to be (as worrying too). Not unlike Austen, especially in *Emma*, McEwan presents the protagonist's restless, interrogative rationality at work in the novel—knowledge, logic, and affect compressed into compellingly busy, layered mental states. McEwan adds somatic awareness to the mix ("the movement is easy, and pleasurable in his limbs" [1]), as well as a much richer evocation of the material world, although always through Perowne's distinctive consciousness and shifting moods. For example:

The overfull litter baskets suggest abundance rather than squalor; the vacant benches set around the circular gardens look benignly expectant of their daily traffic—cheerful lunchtime office crowds, the solemn, studious boys from the Indian hostel, lovers in quiet rapture or crisis, the crepuscular drug dealers, the ruined old lady with her wild, haunting calls. (3)

Passages like this one give the novel a curious and vivid hyperrealism I will refer to as over-specification. Here, as often, both the scene and Perowne's consciousness are over-specified, so low on the ladder of abstraction as to qualify for Levinas's "hither side." I agree with Alexander Nehamas that even the most detailed elaboration of an aesthetic feature of an object cannot "prove" its beauty, since in another object the same feature—symmetry, for example—might fail to impress (92-94). I can merely assert that McEwan's over-specified details and the rhythms they evoke are worth attention.

with Catherine in *Northanger Abbey* (20). In *Saturday*, Austen's influence may be felt in his extrapolation from her use of narrative voice as conveying inner experience, especially in *Emma*. I will return to this parallel from time to time in this essay.

If the novel as a whole represents Perowne's mind, one can expect its surface to participate in a surgeon's materialist bias. He describes this bias with a debater's explicitness:

A man who attempts to ease the miseries of failing minds by repairing brains is bound to respect the material world, its limits, and what it can sustain—consciousness, no less. It isn't an article of faith with him, he knows it for a quotidian fact, the mind is what the brain, mere matter, performs. (66)

Musing on the reading lists his Oxford-educated poet-daughter has drawn up for him, Perowne regards as "a childish evasion of the difficulties and wonders of the real, of the demanding re-enactment of the plausible," anything smacking of the supernatural (66). Like Emma, he "sets up for rationality," and like *Emma*, *Saturday* displays its protagonist's intellectual lapses as well as triumphs. In spite of its quick, unexpected turns and aura of suspense, the book shows Perowne's relentless loyalty to the demand for plausibility, as he often reflects on the "reasonableness" of the bizarre events of this particular Saturday. The narrative as a whole sets the determined rationalism of its protagonist at a slight angle to the mind/body problem.¹⁰

In this matter, McEwan has laid out a particular challenge for his readers: the semantic domains of the novel are consistently over-specified—the techniques of neurosurgery, particular London streets and squares, shots on the squash court, ingredients for Perowne's special fish stew, technical terms for Bach's keyboard pieces and for his son Theo's guitar riffs, and many more. Perowne interprets and reinterprets his experience in the mode of the hermeneutic circle, modifying both whole and parts as experience accumulates. I imagine that few will be at home in all the knowledge domains that turn up in *Saturday*. And since we see almost entirely from Perowne's vantage point, these semantic domains are not explicated. The novel's free indirect style captures Perowne addressing himself, and he knows what all the terms mean. The capaciousness of this image of mind in all its ruthless specificity risks looking clinical and unmelodic, but its hard-edged over-specificity shimmers in rainbow colors, to produce a super-real image hurtling through time. Although the fiction often foregrounds Perowne's conceptual, occasionally ideological, assertions, it does not let them settle into the thematic wisdom of the novel.

As in *Emma*, there is a calibrated distance between Perowne's vantage point and the reader's. This space is opened up through the continual self-reflexivity of the text. Perowne does argue with himself and question his own motives—he strives to live the examined life—but the novel unobtrusively introduces an additional hermeneutic of suspicion: some issues escape even his clear-sighted probing. For example, he replays a long-running argument with his daughter Daisy about the value of storytelling, recalling that the time and effort he had invested in reading nineteenth-century classics left him with the impression of

¹⁰ Damasio's position underwrites Perowne's belief that "the mind is what the brain ... performs," but stresses a stronger element of feedback from the body, in the form of feeling, as content for normal mental operations (226). The novel will, too, as its plot unfolds.

"steady, workmanlike accumulation" (66) rather than genius (here McEwan is surely alluding directly to the Kantian tradition that links art and genius). Perowne claims that "he is living proof" that people can live without stories (67). Yet the very next sentence, "[b]y the front door he picks up the post and the newspapers" (67), slyly marks his avidness for the story behind the plane crash he witnessed earlier, and this avidness accompanies him throughout his long Saturday. He is not as impervious to tales as he claims; he just wants them not to announce their fictionality.

I want to be clear that *Saturday* does not seem to me to represent its images of mind because of a surplus of metaphoric language—the language we customarily call imaginative (Austen, too, is reserved in this matter). Perowne's account of his long day is given in his own complex, but non-metaphoric, inner voice, except when he confronts the paperwork required at the end of a demanding week. His unusual awkwardness in "accumulating prose" late in his Friday workday seems to force him to describe his thoughts in the mode of metaphor: "Individual words brought to mind unwieldy objects—bicycles, deckchairs, coat hangers—strewn across his path" (11). In this striking metaphor, normally useful objects become impediments, revealing the way Perowne thinks about his mind: there is a path already, and inappropriate words simply impede his progress toward its end-point. Normally, he is a logical and literal, though nuanced, thinker, led from observations to conclusions in ways he can explain to himself. His thoughts interrupt each other, but we can see either an internal causal chain or an external reason for the interruption.

Perowne rejects Daisy's claim that literary genius inheres in detail, but (in another hint of hermeneutic suspicion) his own thoughts are represented as richly detailed and imaginatively over-specified. As he watches a young couple in the square outside his window, he diagnoses the girl with "amphetamine-driven fornication—the phantom ants crawling through her arteries and veins, the itch that can never be reached. Or an exogenous opioid-induced histamine reaction, common among new users" (58). He briefly considers running after her with a prescription, but his hopes of helping her are stymied by a consideration of the larger systems at work in her life and then are interrupted by the story of a former patient, an Iraqi professor tortured by Saddam's regime, which comes to mind because a peace march is convening in his square. Here is the sentence that concludes his meditation on the girl:

It troubles him to consider the powerful currents and fine-tuning that alter fates, the close and distant influences, the accidents of character and circumstance that cause one young woman in Paris [Daisy] to be packing her weekend bag with the bound proof of her first volume of poems before catching the train to a welcoming home in London, and another young woman of the same age to be led away by a wheedling boy to a moment's chemical bliss that will bind her as tightly to her misery as an opiate to its mu receptors. (63-64)

The sentence alludes to the detailed diagnosis of the earlier pages, moves to cosmic generalizations about causality and determinism, and returns to the

smallest particulars imaginable shaped as formal analogy: “chemical bliss” is bound to “her misery” as an opiate to its “mu [millimicron] receptors.”¹¹ Formal analogies are the stuff of logical thought, and the chemical bonds linking opiates to microscopic biological structures are the findings of recent medical science. Yet the sentence seems neither detached nor academic. Some of its intelligent compassion arises from Perowne’s immediate comparison of the state of this nameless girl with that of his own daughter; and here again, the tiniest details count, especially that Daisy’s proofs are “bound.” “Bound” proofs are those actually headed for public presentation, marking his daughter’s success as a published poet, but in describing the girl in the square, another form of the word is echoed in the phrase “bind her ... to her misery,” with an analogy to the inexorable bonds that define human biochemistry.

His thinking of the girl and his daughter in the same sentence suggests Perowne’s capacity for empathy. He could easily have taken Daisy’s case as being so different that it would not occur to him in the same universe of thought. Or, had he thought of Daisy, he could have attributed her relative safety to her genetic inheritance or to his own careful parenting, but these are both associated with “accidents” as he locates his musings in a cosmic frame. (And any self-congratulation that might inhere in his estimate of Daisy’s safety is severely tested later in the novel.) My point is that such a purposive sentence as this must be held in contemplative suspension rather than seen to model a perfected concept. Its effect is achieved through its movement from intimate to cosmic, its repetition that is also paronomasia (bound as a trajectory for Daisy’s proofs, as shackles for the girl), and its yoking together of thought and feeling.

The life trajectories of the two young women prompt the overarching questions he asks—questions unanswerable in general terms. But he ponders them by returning, on the one hand, to his field of expertise, and, on the other, to the “accidents of character and circumstance” that still puzzle him (Tolstoy and Flaubert got him no closer). “It troubles him” could, I suppose, be dismissed as a merely pious nod toward the reader’s liking the protagonist, but I take the phrase literally. From a grammatical standpoint, the verb “troubles” governs the rest of the sentence, and the whole book demonstrates how seriously troubling Perowne finds suffering and injustice once they have entered his line of vision. His professional life is spent alleviating suffering as far as his training and talent allow, and he scratches, like the girl scratching at the phantom ants, at the problem of causality through several of the novel’s crises. As he examines and reexamines his choices, he even mocks himself for this trait: “There has to be more to life than merely saving lives” (28).

Another mode of Perowne’s cognitive style is caught in a sentence that makes multiple references to concepts but can be captured by none of them. He is driving through the peace march, aware that he is not quite “thinking” but entertaining a “matrix of shifting patterns, consolidating and compressing meaning in fractions of a second, and blending it inseparably with its distinctive emotional

¹¹ The reference to “mu receptors” links my argument with Hofstadter’s in *Godel, Escher, Bach*. The “mu-puzzle” is his introduction to formal mental systems in general.

hue, which itself is rather like a color" (81). The whole process, he knows, is called "mentalese":

So that when a flash of red streaks in across his left peripheral vision, like a shape on his retina in a bout of insomnia, it already has the quality of an idea, a new idea, unexpected and dangerous, but entirely his, and not of the world beyond himself.
(81)

This sentence is, in a couple of logical ways, "imperfect." It is not technically an independent clause, but a clause dependent on the analysis of his earlier "pre-verbal" musings. But it is not even appended grammatically to the (complete) sentence just before it: "Even with a poet's gift of compression, it could take hundreds of words and many minutes to describe" (81). The force of "So" relies on the manner of thought ("mentalese") described still earlier. In having Perowne recall the term "mentalese" here, McEwan comes close to announcing one facet of the narrative mode of the novel, which resembles Damasio's "concerted operation of multiple systems" (15). Perowne thinks of his musings as "blending inseparably with its distinctive emotional hue.... A sickly yellow" (81) also bears a striking resemblance to Henri Bergson's description of the quality of thought: "The intensity of a psychic state" has a qualitative, not a geometric quality, "its shade, its characteristic colouring" (186). A further sleight of hand, not ungrammatical, but still subversive to grammar, is the fully assertive "entirely his and not of the world beyond himself." It isn't until two more sentences in the next paragraph that the assertion is undone—Perowne's Mercedes has collided with a red BMW. The red spot is not a retinal illusion or an idea, but a car.

The aesthetic effect of this sentence, therefore, may be both linked with and differentiated from its contribution to the plot. It literally suspends situational meaning, making it difficult to bring the exterior scene into focus. Nor is it the efficient carrier of a concept like *Perowne was surprised by the collision*. It rather distracts from the immediacy of the cars, fixing attention on what thinking feels like before it becomes language. Part of the rhythm of the novel inheres in its repetition of mental movements with variation (like the Goldberg Variations Perowne admires); as with the red spot, his first perception of the doomed airplane "smeared across his peripheral vision" (12), and "local excitement on his retina" caused "ghostly swarms of purple and iridescent green ... migrating across his view" (38). Such repetitions (and there are many in *Saturday*) contribute to the novel's sense of density, compression, and formal coherence—one part calling to another, as Levinas puts it—but they also demand a tightrope act for McEwan, since his medium is that of prose. The whole paragraph calls up a persistent problem for fiction: it uses language to give imagistic form to experience, including experience that is not processed, even internally, as language. Damasio's description of the commerce between words, images, and the phrases of orderly, consecutive thought (198-99) provides a neurological confirmation of the central tenet of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*: "Being that can be understood is language" (474 and *passim*). The "red spot" sentence from *Saturday*

offers a vivid moment of being that is not (or at least not yet) understood. It presents the shadow, Levinas's "hither side," of reality.

Images of Time

The density of implications crowded into the instant of Perowne's experience of the collision points to the distinctiveness of McEwan's handling of time in *Saturday*. On the one hand, calling the book *Saturday* and restricting its external actions to a twenty-four hour period would seem a straightforward way of producing unity and coherence along chronological lines, in keeping with its "realistic" surface. On the other hand, time and its representation, though limited to the span of a single day, inheres in Perowne's *experience* of temporality—"concrete duration" as Bergson calls it, as opposed to abstract ("spatialized") clock time. Much of the "realism" that prose fiction exhibits involves juggling the two kinds of time, but *Saturday* provides both a heightened tension between them and an explicit meditation on them by the protagonist. Past, present, and future are intricately tied together in his mental life, marking McEwan's distinctive way of fictionalizing the neurosurgeon's attention to the world. The pace of the plot oscillates between the quiet unfolding of memory and reflection and the sudden intrusion of external events, one mode interrupting and superimposing itself on the other. Perowne seems caught, surprised by this (as the passage about the collision suggests), and so are readers. It is the rhythm of the novel.

In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur writes: "The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world.... [T]ime becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative" (1: 3). *Saturday* is saturated with references to time, beginning with its first words: "Some hours before dawn," and ending with "this day's over." Much of the book's self-reflection on temporality occurs in Perowne's represented voice. He wonders whether at fifty he will have to give up squash, whether he ought to continue taking the stairs two at a time, how long it will be before his children have to put him in a home as he did his mother, and when world conflict will wipe out modern civilization and perhaps erase all memory thereof. He explicitly refers to time and timing in terms of his own duties, but also in terms of the enormous corridor of evolutionary time that has produced his much-loved London, his life-saving skills, his remarkable family, and that might destroy all of this in an imaginable future. He wants to understand the order and grandeur of the evolutionary history of life (emplotment as inexorable material process, scientifically observed and considered), even while events call attention to the radical openness of the future from any particular human perspective. This expansive mental horizon is a vivid image of Augustine's paradox: all time is present—the past as memory, the present as intuition, the future as expectation—and the present itself is fleeting, hardly graspable. The temporal world of this novel, then, encompasses the richness of Perowne's associations bumping into the unpredictable events of the world around him.

Perowne returns to the vantage point overlooking the square in which his day—his story—began, reflecting that "[i]f he counts on sleep rather than the

clock to divide the days, then this is still his Saturday" (282). Calling the events of the novel "his Saturday" suggests both the temporal unity present in contiguous events and the logical unity of Aristotelian emplotment, in which each event impels the next, making, as Ricoeur puts it, "the intelligible spring from the accidental" (1: 41). Perowne's whole project is to produce intelligibility from the intractable events of his day, his memories, and his predictions; he wants his day to appear as a narrative. This kind of intelligibility, according to Bergson, can only be achieved in retrospect, by "spatializing" time, thinking of one's own experience in the impersonal way that allows nuance to escape. He asks if time can be represented as space: "Yes, if you are dealing with time flown; No if you speak of time flowing" (221). In "time flowing," the "Pure Duration" of lived time, "the melting of states of consciousness into one another" takes on a melodic quality unlike the quantity of a time line (107), only in "time flown" reducing these internal states to language and measurement. Bergson even posits a novelist who can image the "thousand different impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named" (133). This novelist's medium—language—will not perfectly convey that simultaneity, but he can impress us with the contradiction between time lived and time accounted for (134). Bergson's description seems apt for McEwan's presentation of Perowne in *Saturday* and consonant with Levinas's description of a reader's first intuiting a saturated image (on its "enchanted rock") and then submitting it to a discursive analysis of its possibles.

For the reader, the combination of suspense and irony impels us forward at breakneck speed, producing the novel's sense of urgency. We read to learn what new turn external events will take, but equally to see how Perowne's capacious and still somewhat unpredictable mind will register them. In other words, the novel treats conflict, contingency, and intention gone awry without the ethical thematization that Singer worries would produce mere platitudes.¹² *Saturday* makes us wait to see how the over-specified details of the early scenes will figure in the various crises to come. How the girl's being "led away by a wheedling boy" (64) ultimately figures in, what the minutely detailed squash game contributes, why it comes to light that Perowne parks his car on the street when he comes home—must be held in (increasingly dense) suspension. We see quite early that everything will come somehow into the "matrix of shifting patterns" that the novel will summon up, but as we read we are continually forced to reassess how that will happen. Each reader is meeting another mind, constructing an image of what life is like for another, but the novel's form organizes the construal. Henry James described life as "all inclusion and confusion" and art as "all discrimination and selection" (120). Through the novel's art of emplotment, an intelligible shape will emerge from this Saturday's welter of detail.

Although Perowne often refers to sequentiality, many moments in his Saturday suspend it from clock time: in sex he is "freed from thought, from memory, from the passing seconds" (52); in the long instant in which he intuits Baxter's affliction with Huntington's, and in the interval in which Baxter's knife

¹² Singer asserts that his sense of "new knowledge" puts art potentially at odds with any abiding "universalistic rationales" (16).

is held against Rosalind's throat, "no time, not in time" (277). Among the most striking of these moments out of time is the "absorption" he feels in the operating theater, the "pure present" "that dissolves all sense of time," even when he is operating on Baxter, who has just threatened his family (266). This state looks like Bergson's "pure duration" and also the arrested present and boundedness of the "waking dream" that, in Levinas's analysis, characterizes art. While doing surgery, Perowne experiences "the pleasure of knowing precisely what he is doing" and connects it with the "closed fascination of a board game" from his childhood (258). The analogy between the intuition of clarity, compression, and pleasure in his domain and that of involvement in a work of art brings the issue of aesthetic force into the novel in yet another way.

Perowne's visit to his mother Lily, whose dementia leaves her unable to recognize her son or the room she has just left, contrasts the intricate connectedness of his sentences with her enigmatic ones, serving to destabilize the category of time. Past, present, and future are no longer distinct for her—time flown is not spatialized—but her sentences exhibit perfectly articulated syntax:

Out here it only looks like a garden, Auntie [Perowne doesn't know why she calls him "Auntie"], but it's the countryside really and you can go for miles. When you walk here you feel lifted up, right high across the counter. I can't manage all them plates without a brush, but God will take care of you and see what you're going to get because it's a swimming race. You'll squeeze through somehow. (171-72)

For Lily, earlier in her life a mother and an expert swimmer, time no longer makes the demands it does on her son, who must leave her to hear his son's new song and make the fish stew for his family's reunion. Perowne thinks of her state as the result of "small-vessel clotting" in the brain, but the reader can also link it to the meditation on human time the novel keeps demonstrating. Perowne registers a Bergsonian duration in a thoroughly aesthetic mode when he hears his son Theo play a "difficult, circular riff" with his combo, taking him to a world "in which you give everything you have to others, but lose nothing of yourself" (176). He echoes Lily then, considering himself "lifted up, right high across the counter" (177). Perowne's experience of the beauty of music is not so much out of body as it is out of measurable time.

Another instant that defies measured temporality occurs near the end of the novel. Perowne and his son have managed to push Baxter, still threateningly holding his knife, down the stairs:

There's a moment, which seems to unfold and luxuriously expand, when all goes silent and still, when Baxter is entirely airborne, suspended in time, looking directly at Henry with an expression, not so much of terror, as dismay. (236)

This instance is not the result of anyone's small vessels clotting. Perowne's point of view is fully animated; the moment is surreal, but not pathological. In certain crises, a split second seems overlong and permanently memorable. Yet, the

phrase "suspended in time" throws its light backward, not only to Lily, but also to Perowne's earlier crisis with Baxter and his cohorts.

In this earlier scene, three men are poised to give Perowne a "thorough beating," but he has noted a symptom in their leader that only a neurological specialist would be able to spot; at that moment, time (certainly for the reader, and seemingly for Perowne as well) is suspended while a detailed diagnosis of Baxter's condition and his own predicament is conducted. Again, we have a grammatically "imperfect" sentence—this one connected to that which follows it:

Between ten and twenty years to complete the course [of the disease], from the first small alterations of character, tremors in the hands and face, emotional disturbance, including—most notably—sudden, uncontrollable alterations of mood, to the helpless jerky dance-like movements, intellectual dilapidation, memory failure, agnosia, apraxia, dementia, total loss of muscular control, rigidity sometimes, nightmarish hallucinations and a meaningless end. This is how the brilliant machinery of being is undone by the tiniest of faulty cogs, the insidious whisper of ruin, a single bad idea lodged in every cell, on every chromosome four. (94)

Perowne's "Your father had it. Now you've got it too" (95) deflects the imminent attack on his person. In this case, the diagnosis may be imagined as actually taking place in the few seconds Perowne has at his disposal; his thought as a specialist moves quickly and decisively. But time is suspended for the reader who is trying to grasp both the disease and the way Perowne's mind has identified it. McEwan's technique, in this passage especially, marks another of his debts to Jane Austen. In this case, the debt concerns their handling of time—McEwan, in the sentence just quoted, and Austen, near the end of *Emma*.

Perowne and Emma both face a crisis and have to think fast. Emma comes to understand her love for Knightley when she fears competition from her protégé Harriet, and then, suddenly, Knightley declares his love for her; in this long sentence, we are given an image of Emma's mind at work:

While he spoke, Emma's mind was most busy, and, with all the wonderful velocity of thought, had been able—and yet without losing a word—to catch and comprehend the exact truth of the whole; to see that Harriet's hopes had been entirely groundless, a mistake, a delusion, as complete a delusion as any of her own—that Harriet was nothing; that she was everything herself; that what she had been saying relative to Harriet had been all taken as the language of her own feelings; that her agitation, her doubts, her reluctance, her discouragement, had been all received as discouragement from herself;—and not only was there time for these convictions, with all their glow of attendant happiness; there was time also to rejoice that Harriet's secret had not escaped her, and to resolve that it need not and should not. (3: 282-83)

This sentence represents a rational account of mistakes and their correctives, a reprise of past "facts" and their misinterpretations in an orderly chronology. But that is not its shape as an image. Its breathless movement suggests the long built-

up tension in a spring suddenly released, expressed in brief (for Austen) independent clauses linked by semicolons. (This breathlessness is acknowledged to begin with in “velocity of thought”). It is the image of a mind at work on at least three levels—she hears Knightley’s every word, responds emotionally, and simultaneously reassesses her own understanding of a long train of events. The sentence is bracketed by acknowledgements of time (“velocities of thought,” time to register conviction, and “time also” to rejoice and resolve). The “real time” of the plot is far less than the sentence takes to convey it. The image this sentence holds is an image of Emma’s mind achieving a sudden coherence; its over-specificity looks to both past and future. There is too much in it for reduction to concept.

This abundance of implication matches many of the sentences of McEwan’s novel—the sentence cited above, in particular. Its structure is that of a very detailed (and once more, over-specified) list; there is much more here than the reader needs in order to take in the concept that Baxter suffers from a genetic abnormality, progressive and untreatable. The excess invites the reader’s imagination to participate in the degeneration of this “being,” now only in his mid-twenties. Small clues also mark out Perowne’s imagination compassionately seeing the effects of the disease from the sufferer’s vantage point: “uncontrollable,” “nightmarish,” “meaningless.” The sentence that follows characterizes Perowne still more fully: he turns once more from the over-specified to the universalized—“the brilliant machinery of being”—and back to the tiny, almost silent factor that ruins it. Like the “overfull litter baskets [that] suggest abundance rather than squalor” that Perowne sees from his window (3), these sentences overflow their potentially containing concepts, not through their disarray, but through their fullness.¹³

And the word “being” (“the brilliant machinery of being”) seems to suggest more than Baxter’s existence, glancingly evoking the book’s meditation on suffering, healing, and inexorable physical processes. It also suggests the state of “continuing to be.” Later, Perowne will ponder the progress of Baxter’s congenital disease over a yet longer time span: “*It is written....* It’s spelled out in fragile proteins, but it could be carved in stone, or tempered steel” (217). This formulation draws on genetics directly and on biblical discourse obliquely to produce a prediction, “an image that already exists ... [but] precedes the event” (Ricoeur 2: 11); the claim of the future to being is as its image in someone’s present (Augustine 11:26). Part of the aesthetic force of sentences like these is registered within their individual syntax, but it can also be seen in terms of their contributions to the image of being and time created by the whole novel.

A concern with past time is also a current running continually under Perowne’s thoughts. According to Augustine, the past is a present image in

¹³ I am arguing that these sentences are aesthetically powerful as an image of mind. That power might be seen as resulting from a fit between their over-specified complexity and the descriptions given by Damasio and other neuroscientists of the way the mind builds knowledge from perceptual, recalled, and proposed images (“images of a possible future” [96-97]). In passages like these, the narrator tells Perowne’s story from a perspective on mental activity he shares with his protagonist.

memory, counter-balanced with prediction, a present image of the future. His vision of history, however, is both personal (as in his memories of his mother as a young swimmer) and cultural, even cosmic. It sometimes takes on the immense scale of Darwinian evolution, which Perowne thinks of as the true, and truly inspiring, creation story:

An unimaginable sweep of time, numberless generations spawning by infinitesimal steps complex living beauty out of inert matter, driven on by the blind furies of random mutation, natural selection and environmental change, with the tragedy of forms continually dying, and lately the wonder of minds emerging and with them morality, love, art, cities—and the unprecedented bonus of this story happening to be demonstrably true. (McEwan 54)

It might be argued that this sentence crosses from Kant's category of beauty into the sublime, in company with George Eliot's tribute to plenitude in *Middlemarch*:

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we would die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. (194)

Denis Donoghue calls this sentence sublime because "'die' and 'roar' and 'other' and 'silence' are evidently unequal to whatever it is they are called upon to say. Yet the sentence recovers itself in its syntax" (75). One might say the same of the phrases "numberless generations," "infinitesimal steps," "blind furies of random mutation," and "wonder of minds emerging." This sentence asks more of imagination than imagination can formulate, producing a dizzying state Kant calls "negative pleasure" (91).¹⁴

McEwan's sentence does not, however, "recover itself in syntax" by being a grammatically perfect specimen. Instead, it represents the protagonist's own awe at the immensity of the vision he is "called on" to explain. Ironically, it is Lily who retains her ability to produce syntactically ordered sentences, even though the logic (especially the temporal logic) of her thoughts is disordered and nearly unfathomable. Lily's syntax demonstrates her hold on the linguistic form of connected discourse when her assertions lack coherence. Her sentences take the form we use to speak to others; Perowne often speaks (or is reported to speak) to himself, before that formal orderliness is needed to communicate, but with an impressive connectedness of assertion. There is, indeed, grandeur in Darwin's view of life and an almost summary quality in the way Perowne deploys it to consider the many-faceted events of his Saturday. In keeping with "the tragedy of forms continually dying," he ponders the conflict about to begin in Iraq, the potential for a long global war, and the likelihood of the destruction of London and what it represents. The passage fills out the picture of Perowne's mind at

¹⁴ "Negative pleasure" is explained thus: "The feeling of the sublime is ... at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from the very judgement of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason" (106).

work, seeking a vantage point, even on this vast scale, from which “the intelligible [may] spring from the accidental” (Ricoeur’s test for emplotment), infused with the aesthetic quality of “wonder” (Ricoeur 1: 41).

Speaking of *Saturday*

By the end of the novel, its image of Perowne’s mind is complete, shaped, without being confined by a fixed concept, formally “purposive” in Kant’s analysis and radically particular in Nehamas’s. This intuition of purposiveness arises from the relations between individual images and the plotted shape of the whole.¹⁵ Levinas refers to this shape as “saturated”; it leaves nothing to be added or subtracted. It doesn’t “resemble” reality in the usual way, offering itself in comparison to a state of affairs known by other means. Instead, it is the “shadow” of reality, the mysterious “hither side,” of the real world (131, 135). The image in *Saturday* shimmers before its reader, who becomes involved in a minutely rendered web of detail “among things”—the things of Perowne’s *Saturday*. The narrative does this by over-specifying each episode: the streets on the way to his squash match and the shots he makes and fails to make during the game are rendered in a kind of intensified version of stream-of-consciousness, almost in “real time.”¹⁶ We are not seeing behind or above these details, but becoming involved in them, in Perowne’s style of thought, “fixed in a rhythm” that shapes the narrated time (Levinas 139). But like Austen in *Emma*, who invites us to take on Emma’s estimate of her world and gradually drives a wedge between our reading of her world and hers, McEwan creates the image of a world larger than Perowne’s mind. And McEwan’s reader, like Austen’s, understands certain issues raised by that imagined world a little better than the central intelligence through which it is represented.

Such an image, intricate and rhythmic, is by its nature seductive, conducive to the enchantment that associates beauty with magic, enjoyed “in silence and in peace” (Levinas 141). But this state of paralysis (“where nothing is unconscious, but where consciousness, paralyzed in its freedom, plays, totally absorbed in this playing” [133]) is counteracted by another feature of beauty: our compulsion to share it, to speak of it, to return it to the human life-world of which it is the shadow. To do this is to surround *Saturday* with the concepts that its created image has evoked but is not reducible to. This is the work of interpretation and

¹⁵ At least since the work of Gadamer, the logic of the hermeneutic circle has been called upon to show how the pre-conceptions of a text are recursively revised in the light of its parts, which in turn are read in relation to the whole. I take the hermeneutic circle as an instance of the way mental activity recursively works on experience to turn it into knowledge.

¹⁶ I checked an old London A to Z for the route Perowne took, and it is entirely plausible. I have played enough squash to appreciate the plausibility of the match with Strauss, and I experienced an immediate jolt of recognition about Lily’s waiting for the bus and the seamlessness of her syntax. On the other hand, I have very little acquaintance with the surgical procedures that appear with similar over-specification. What is so remarkable about these passages is that they produce an engrossing lucidity that will mesh differently the experience of different readers. This feature of the novel is congruent with Kant’s stress on imaginative freedom and play as purposive in its coherence without being tied to any particular purpose.

criticism: to "integrate[] the inhuman work of the artist [inhuman because not subject to time] into the human world," reintroducing the "hither side of the world fixed in art" to the intelligible world of conceptual thought (Levinas 142). Singer makes a similar point in positing the "translatability" of art through deliberation (12). The trick is to allow the image the "disinterestedness" that distinguishes linguistic art from other forms of discourse and yet renders it available to ethical and political thought, acknowledging its potential for commitments in the intelligible world. I will conclude with a brief "deliberative" account of the image I see in *Saturday*—an account that returns us to the issue of aesthetic attention by another route.

So far, I have attempted to discuss *Saturday* as an image of Perowne's mind and its temporal implications; here, my argument will be that it is an image of coming to terms with aesthetic intuition, both Perowne's and that of the fiction itself. In other words, I am proposing that *Saturday* is "about" aesthetics and its relation to the problem-solving function of conceptual reason. Some evidence for this struggle with concepts is available on the literal surface, which is to say that Perowne thinks about it himself. Another strand, though, takes us again to issues of time and timing. This fictional image is immobilized in the "enchanted" time of art, available for disinterested contemplation, but critical attention returns it to the reader's ongoing life-world, rendering argument about ideas appropriate to it. The rhythm of the whole consists of the oscillation between temporal compression—events and intuitions crowding in on each other too fast—and instants that expand into reverie. There is also, however, a structural claim that aesthetic experience inflects the "real world" inside the novel and that its evocation of the two kinds of time is a vehicle for that insight. At this point, some of the weight of medieval *sententia* as philosophical substance and/or verdict becomes apparent.

Although he is a materialist on the mind/brain problem, Perowne is not the Gradgrind his daughter accuses him of being (67); he is fully capable of aesthetic pleasure. He believes in the genius of Bach, Coltrane, and Einstein, whom he credits with "a ruthless, nearly inhuman element of self-enclosed perfection" (67). He describes the emotional rhythms of Bach's Goldberg Variations as he conducts difficult surgical operations, and his son's new jazz composition "lift[s] him up, right high across the counter" (177); he knows that joy and freedom inhere in Theo's music-making (28). It is not that he lacks empathy either. He is deeply touched by the story his Iraqi patient, the professor Miri Taleb, tells him of his torture under Saddam—a story he regards as a substantial truth, like the progress of Baxter's disease. Nor does he lack the capacity for awe: even when the brain's "fundamental secret"—how matter becomes conscious—has been disclosed,

the wonder will remain, that mere wet stuff can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound and touch bound into a vivid illusion of an

instantaneous present, with a self, another brightly wrought illusion, hovering like a ghost at its center. (262)¹⁷

The novel itself might be described as just such a “vivid illusion of an instantaneous present.” His conclusion, “There’s grandeur in this view of life” (263), echoes his recollection of that phrase from Darwin earlier in the day—another instance of the intricate rhythm of this fiction’s prose.¹⁸

What Perowne cannot see, though, is the literary image as other than a literal reference to reality, the domain of “motivated” behaviors better understood through science (particularly, evolutionary biology). Sentences are carriers of conceptual thought. Period. Tolstoy and Flaubert’s long novels only add up to “lessons” he already knew: “Adultery is understandable, but wrong” (65) and the like. He often reminds himself of his own deafness, even opposition, to the transformative power of verbal art. He associates that power with his father-in-law, John Grammaticus, the now drunken, once influential, poet who had paid Daisy for learning large chunks of poetry by heart, and whom Perowne generally disapproves of.¹⁹ Although he thinks himself “living proof” that one can live without stories, he does not actually do so; he pays close attention throughout the day to the narrative built around the downed plane, which he regards as “his own story” (68). He sees Baxter’s invasion of his house as plotted coherence: “It makes sense. Nearly all the elements of his day are assembled” (213), as if he is already making a shapely tale out of his own raw experience.

His definition of genius as “self-enclosed perfection” makes him the spokesman for the position Singer opposes. As a result of this mindset, the sentence that predicts Baxter’s degeneration seems to Perowne a more or less complete account of the man. In part, he is proven right, since his diagnosis early in the day allows his escape from the almost inevitable beating. The scene detailing Baxter’s second threat, though, challenges that conclusion. When Daisy recites “Dover Beach” as if it were her own, in response to Baxter’s “Let’s have a poem” (227), Perowne thinks that in it Daisy is recalling a night with her lover. After briefly responding to its somewhat archaic tone and language, he sees “through the words into the things they describe” (228) to a transcription of

¹⁷ Dennett’s *Consciousness Explained* contains a similar passage: “When we understand consciousness [in this way]—when there is no more mystery—consciousness will be different, but there will still be beauty, and more room than ever for awe” (25). Damasio agrees: “Neither anguish nor the elation that love or art can bring about are devalued by understanding some of the myriad biological processes that make them what they are. Precisely the opposite should be true: Our sense of wonder should increase before the intricate mechanisms that make such magic possible” (xvi).

¹⁸ The words are from the last paragraph of *The Origin of Species*: “There is grandeur in this view of life ... from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved,” but Perowne, waking up, thinks at first he is hearing a repeated refrain on the radio (53).

¹⁹ A *grammaticus* instructed the sons and sometimes the daughters of cultivated eighteenth-century families in Latin and Greek poetry (noted recently in Nehamas’s *Promise of Happiness* [14]). Daisy’s grandfather instructs her in the English canon and rewards her for the rote memorization that will, almost magically, avert violence during the crisis of the novel.

real-world events linked to his daughter's newly revealed pregnancy. Clearly (though understandably), he cannot regard the poem as a disinterested image, cannot hear it as rhythmic incantation, the way he hears the Goldberg Variations. On second reading, he corrects some of his mis-hearings, but this time he assesses the mood of the poem; its "melodiousness, he decides, is at odds with its pessimism" (230). Both the judgment of literal representation and that of philosophical wisdom are intelligent responses, but he is not "lifted up" as he had been by his son's music.

Baxter is. Perowne is astonished by the man he thought he had diagnosed completely: "Could it happen, is it within the bounds of the real, that a mere poem of Daisy's could precipitate a mood swing?" (229). Baxter's response to "Dover Beach" is aesthetic in Kant's sense. Although the poem does not speak to Baxter's "interest" in any way, he responds: "It's beautiful. You know that, don't you. It's beautiful. And you wrote it" (231). He seems suddenly elated, so engrossed in the image and rhythm of the poetry that he pockets the knife with which he was threatening Rosalind. Perowne sees this lessening threat as an effect of Baxter's "degenerating mind," his loss of "all sense of a continuous self," a stage on the way to Lily's lack of connectedness. And so it is, of course, but the occasion for his abrupt loss of intent is, nonetheless, the power of "Dover Beach." Perowne's convinced, morally "responsible" literalness anchors his very centered selfhood. His presence of mind and deductive agility have saved him from the beating, but it is the spell cast by "Dover Beach" that stops Baxter's threat during the second physical crisis—the one that might have cost Rosalind her life. The poem has its effect through detail (Daisy's answer to her father's objection to fiction): the image of the watchers of the beach, the rhythm of its syllables, its lines, and its long look backward to ancient and medieval watchers and forward to the disappointment of youthful hopes. Baxter seems to have been excited, not by its "message"—which is as pessimistic about the world's future as Perowne is about Baxter's—but by its beauty. Enraptured by the poem, Baxter wants to live, wants to be a subject in a new medical trial.

In the world of the novel, the external effect of aesthetic experience seen here is that it engenders love of life, a wish to go on. As Kant says: "the beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, apart from any interest" (119)—even the beauty of tragedy, which brings the worst news about the realization of human projects; even the poem that offers neither "joy nor light / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain." This is not exactly conceptual knowledge, but it does have the effect of "arous[ing] realities" (Levinas 142) in the world of the plot. Perowne only half-sees this. He knows that Baxter suddenly wants to live, to rob them only of Daisy's book, to leave Daisy herself unharmed, and to let Rosalind live, but he finds it hard to credit the power of beauty to rearrange anyone's life-world so drastically.

In the end, two logics have worked together: the aesthetic, to enchant Baxter enough to allow Perowne to get him upstairs, and the instrumental, to offer the promise of a medical trial that might mitigate his symptoms. The plotted crisis of Part Four has been resolved by entangling Enlightenment rationality with a version of aesthetic response that retains its independence while it spills over into

the intelligible world.²⁰ Perowne's science and Arnold's incantation have worked together to avert an immediate crisis.

Yet Baxter's elation is, in a sense, predicated on two untruths: that Daisy wrote the poem and that Perowne's American colleague is accepting subjects for a procedure and drug trial that might lead to an alleviation of Baxter's symptoms. The latter is Perowne's desperate lie, told to save his family from the looming threat of violence. The former, though, he is not even aware of; Perowne, too, does not realize that the poem Daisy recites is not her own. Grammaticus and Daisy have wordlessly decided between them that a "great" old poem would distract Baxter more readily than a new one of her own, or perhaps that Daisy, already naked and under apparent threat of rape, need not reveal even more of herself by reading her own words. The false ground underlying Baxter's hopeful excitement over the poem relies on a kind of "accident," but the beauty he hears in the poem as she recites it has little to do with its authorship. He is an "amazed admirer" (232). Delight, in Kant's argument, does not depend on the actual existence of the thing judged to be beautiful (in this case, the presence of this poem in the bound proofs Daisy is holding) but proceeds merely from the contemplation of its formal features.

Nonetheless, McEwan is pushing the issue of art that lies and art that is lied about toward an uncomfortable precipice, but not in the manner of ideology critique. Instead of implicating Arnold's poem in an attempt to "paper over" social inequities by fabricating awe-inspiring facades for them, he is displaying its power even within a web of deception. Little ethical distaste is aroused by the actions of the characters within the fiction; they are desperately trying to save each other from a very real threat of violence and violation. The reader, however, may see the very symmetry of the design of the novel—its fusion of scientific and aesthetic understanding to avert a crisis, its lesson to Perowne about the efficacy of textual brilliance—as somehow slick or question-begging. Such discomfort is a little like the unease felt at Portia's clever victory over Shylock in the Venetian courtroom: no one wants him to kill Antonio, but she displays an almost superhuman discursive command of the trial. The tension evoked seems to me in both cases deliberate and deliberately evasive of final conceptual closure.

The concluding pages of the novel link Baxter's moment of enchantment by beauty with the ethical gesture that closes Perowne's long day, invoking a pattern of (Jane Austen-like) crisis-induced awareness. Perowne saves Baxter's life by using his surgical skill and then resolves to alleviate his suffering by declining to press criminal charges. He has come face to face with Baxter, not by seeing how much alike they are, but by recognizing the alterity of the mysterious other. "Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will" (288). A link seems to have been forged between experience imaged on the "hither side" (aesthetic force) and Perowne's ethical response to Baxter's suffering. The "sequester[ed] artwork" (Singer 26) has barged into practical, consequential,

²⁰ Singer argues forcefully for the "entanglement" of Enlightenment logic with "the rationalistically deliberative resources of the aesthetic" (13).

interested life. Perowne now accepts a responsibility to (for) the other, as he had not earlier when he decided against his instinct to offer a prescription to help the young drug addict he sees from his window (63). Earlier in the day, through his son's new song, he glimpsed a state of grace "in which you give everything you have to others, but lose nothing of yourself" (176). In treating Baxter as he does, Perowne meets this standard of generosity, yet loses nothing by extending himself. His last thought as he finally falls asleep matches Arnold's "love let us be true to one another." He kisses Rosalind and thinks, "There's always this.... [T]here's only this" (289).

* * *

Saturday, in my view, produces aesthetic effects by creating images of Henry Perowne's thoughts for playful contemplation "on the hither side" of abstraction into concepts, both in the shapes and rhythms of sentences and the shape and rhythm of the novel. But in addition, critical attention can discern in *Saturday* the "shadow" of an argument *about* aesthetics and the world of action that embodies structurally how art can be fused with conceptual thought in the world of the novel. I began with the question of what pleasure in art can contribute to rational deliberation in the world outside the novel. Both science and philosophy often posit thought experiments (Daniel Dennett calls his "intuition pumps" [282 and *passim*]) to further rational understanding, but works of fictional art provide an added force in that they can occasion "disinterested" pleasure by uniting imagination with reflection, avoiding the contrivance that often attends managed "test cases." Many fictions might be described in this way, but *Saturday* offers an especially interesting case, since its image of Perowne's mind is so detailed and inclusive—it sits "among things" immediately recognizable in non-fictional terms—and it over-specifies them to create a hyperrealism that discloses the mysterious, but not opaque, "shadow of reality" of which Levinas writes.

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