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THE REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA IN IAN MCEWAN'S NOVELS "ATONEMENT" AND "SATURDAY"

A Research Report for the Partial Fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts (English)

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ABSTRACT:

Since Freud's early work, the representation and assessment of trauma, more specifically hysteria, has given rise to numerous, albeit diverse, theories. The common factor, however, in most of these is the hypothesis that trauma in any form disrupts, at least temporarily, the growth of the individual. Through an analysis of Ian McEwan's novels *Atonement* (London: Vintage Press, 2001) and *Saturday* (London: Vintage Press, 2006), I aim to explore how trauma within these texts is represented, viewed and engaged. In its broadest terms, trauma as explored within these texts will encompass national, historical and personal trauma. The research paper will assess the works of fiction against the background of contemporary literary thematic trends which debate the manner in which trauma and anxiety are represented. Drawing on Dominic La Capra's studies, I hope to illustrate, or even problematise, the broader concerns of trauma as represented in the texts. The choice to address La Capra will assist in the debate of tracing and assessing the form of trauma in La Capra's theory of denying, acting out or working through the trauma – in particular his notions of "absence" and "loss". Cathy Caruth argues convincingly that trauma should be considered as a possibility of experience and I hope to draw on this assumption to show how this affects a close reading of the McEwan texts. My discussions will also draw on the arguments made by Maurice Blanchot's theories on disaster detachment. Using the theories of La Capra and Blanchot as a starting point, I propose to present a close textual reading of *Atonement* and *Saturday.* I explore whether the characters in each text accommodate violent and traumatic personal episodes by reflecting on their actions and embracing a greater awareness of self and society. By positioning his protagonists in acts of trauma, McEwan provides the scope for moral growth with a view that a morally questioned existence, through self-investigation and self-determination, is a possibility of experience. My analyses will draw on the novels as examples of the psyche of contemporary thought.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The novels *Atonement* (London: Vintage Press, 2001) and *Saturday* (London: Vintage Press, 2006) offer the reader a platform to explore the manner in which trauma is represented. The texts demonstrate how traumatic episodes disrupt attachment between the self and others, by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships in a complex, postmodern world. Engaging with McEwan's texts and the manner in which he represents violence, contemporary literary thought and philosophy has opened a pathway of possible interrogation and evaluation in the novels.

It is Cathy Caruth's startling image of the anguished voice of trauma emerging from the wound itself that encapsulates the horror and aftermath of acts of violence. Trauma in my analysis refers to a character's emotional response to an overwhelming personal event that disrupts previous notions of the sense of "self" and the standards by which the character evaluates the "self" and the "self" in changing society. In its broadest context, trauma as explored in this research paper will encompass national, historical or social forces such as World War Two in *Atonement* and the bombing of the World Trade Centre in *Saturday.* Large scale devastation and global military conflict during World War Two was marked by the astoundingly high number of casualties not only from combat but also disease, starvation, massacres and genocide, among others, to such an extent that it left few families unaffected. The socio-political, economic and psychological damage impacted the lives of many for years to come opening up the need for extensive studies on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The attack on the Twin Towers in 2001 shattered the West's complacency about safety and security and initiated a "War on Terror". Apart from the demise of many innocent victims, loss of income, global financial insecurity, health risk factors from the toxic gases from the debris collapse, the world watched in horror as tragedy in apocalyptic, Hollywood proportions was broadcast in real-time through extensive media coverage. The psychological impact of the threat of attack from an unrecognisable enemy marked a shift in feelings of vulnerability and safety.

Since Freud's early work, the representation and assessment of trauma, more specifically hysteria, has given rise to numerous, albeit diverse, theories.[1] The common factor, however, in most of these is the hypothesis that trauma in any form disrupts, at least temporarily, the psychological growth of the individual. Trauma by definition requires accommodation of what has been witnessed or experienced and in turn implies a modification of behaviour. Individuals, however, often avoid accommodation of the traumatic episode owing to its disruptive, jarring impact. The power of trauma, either consciously or unconsciously, may distort previous images of human nature. Understanding and accepting the nature of "self" in a world that appears transformed by the trauma may become a difficult journey for trauma victims. The process of moving from a traumatic, disruptive event to a potential process of healing and transformation becomes the core inner quest for some of the major characters in both *Atonement* and *Saturday.* Certainly, trauma disruption necessitates the need to reflect on and recreate information in a new way as part of its transformation. Adaptation and assimilation in McEwan's characters becomes a possibility with an awakening of moral consciousness. The desire for communal responsibilities outweighs the traumatic episode itself. Rendered with nuance to create vivid and life-like characters, the novels open up an opportunity to grapple with historical and personal trauma.

In an interview with James Wood, Ian McEwan comments that "if you write novels you're going to find yourself writing about – at some level – conflict between people*".* [2] As with much great literature, the novels of Ian McEwan are explorations of diverse human conflict, an implicit intermediary for social and cultural study. In particular, *Atonement* and *Saturday* afford us the opportunity to draw on the world that we know, or possibly even fear. We observe the responses to and vulnerabilities of its inhabitants. It is Henry Perowne, the protagonist of *Saturday* who reflects that conflict, specifically manifested as trauma and anxiety, is interwoven in modern existence as *"*a condition of the time, this compulsion to hear how

[1] Charles Figley, *Trauma and its Wake* offers an overview of trauma theory from Freud to contemporary trauma theory, asserting that trauma creates a speechlessness that divides and even possibly destroys identity. This serves as a basis for a larger argument suggesting that identity is reformed by the integrational transmission of trauma.

[2] James Wood, "On a Darkling Plain", *The New Republic,* p. 4.

it stands with the world and to be joined to the generality, to a community of anxiety"[3]. The suggestion here of an awakening global consciousness to the constant threat of violence, is not unique to McEwan. Philip Tew refers to it as "traumatological culture" where, rather than trauma having an empathetic identification, it actuates social engagement to draw on and share global trauma on a personal level.[4] What McEwan suggests through his later, more mature fiction is a shared awareness of the vulnerability of modern existence which is threatened by acts of violence. Interestingly, *Atonement* was published the same year as the traumatic events of the bombing of the World Trade Centre. While still magnetised to these events, McEwan was drawn into the controversy of the anti-war demonstrations (February 2003), against the impending war on Iraq. Within this "condition of the time" in a "community of anxiety" he responded by writing *Saturday,* a novel which deals primarily with these very forces that threaten to reduce a state of happiness.

In his early writing career, McEwan found himself enticed into writing sensationalist fiction, fascinated with themes that explored taboos and evil. Creating shocking and macabre scenarios his formulaic motifs resulted in being labelled "Ian Macabre" and "Clapham Shocker". One thinks of his early short stories *First Love Last Rites* (*1975)* and his subsequent short story collection *In Between the Sheets and Other Stories (1978)* where ostensibly ordinary experiences become perverted and dark in a world pervaded by dysfunctional families, loneliness and a vacuous existence culminating in violence and obsessive sexuality. His writing repertoire includes a play for television, *The Imitation Game* (1981), as well as an oratorio entitled *Or Shall We Die* (1983), a film script, *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983) and most recently an operetta libretto, *For You (2006).* His novels *The Cement Garden* (1979) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) show a movement to a more mature awareness of broader social and environmental concerns such as nuclear threat and the oppression of women. Since then, his growing body of literature develops a new common thematic concern, in particular, the force of anxiety and trauma on individuals in seemingly innocuous quotidian situations. His later fiction such as: *A Child in Time (* 1997*), The Innocent* (1990), *Black Dogs* (1992), *Enduring Love* (1998) and *Amsterdam* (1999) develop this theme with subtle sophistication

[3] Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, p. 180. All subsequent page references to the text will be indicated in brackets.

[4] Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel*.

through psychological insight into the characters' minds and actions, tracing the manner in which extreme situations impact on ordinary existence. War, disease and psychological vulnerabilities permeate his novels with McEwanesque force to create a contradictory impulse for the writer to balance disjunctured violence with potential humanism.[5] McEwan's comment that the linking strand of his fiction and short stories is "an involvement in a long-term investigation of human nature" takes on a specific focus of moral consciousness in both *Atonement* and *Saturday*.[6] As discussed in subsequent chapters of this research report, the protagonists in both novels evolve an awareness of the fragility of happiness and a greater acknowledgement of moral responsibility. The humanistic recognition that moral values are founded not only on human nature but also on human experience becomes the character's means of coping with trauma and violence. The coda of *Atonement* and the concluding paragraphs of *Saturday* for example, as discussed in later chapters of this report, close with the protagonists reflecting how greater empathy can result in a meaningful existence even if that existence is short-lived, as in the case with Briony who is a victim of vascular dementia.

McEwan's growing popularity has resulted in a substantial and wide-ranging body of critical responses to his novels, primarily in the form of interviews and reviews in the press and popular media. McEwan was thus for a time widely regarded as a writer of "popular" rather than "serious" fiction. Despite public acknowledgement of his literary prowess he has won the Mann-Booker Prize twice. A body of academic or scholarly criticism has been slow to emerge. Peter Childs (2005) confirms McEwan's emergence as a serious writer in his sensitivity to exploring issues facing contemporary humanism and liberalism such as the challenges of living in a changing world, the ability to create a balance between individual freedom and moral responsibility. Dominic Head (2007) concurs with this and regards him as one of the key figures of contemporary English fiction. Andrew Foley echoes this view by considering McEwan's *Saturday* as being "undoubtedly one of the most vitally important political novels of the new century".[7]

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[5] McEwan has long supported principles and philosophy of liberalism and humanism and echoes of this are prevalent in his texts. He is a member of the British Humanist Association and the International Humanist and Ethical Union. For a discussion see Andrew Foley, *The Imagination of Freedom* p. 205.

[6] Dave Weich, "Ian McEwan, Reinventing Himself Still", *Powell's Author Interviews*,p.2.

[7] Op.cit p. 240.

McEwan, when asked to comment on the purpose of a novel, responded:

> I think, of all literary forms, and perhaps of all artistic forms, it is the most adept at showing us what it is like to be someone else. The novel is famously good at revealing, through various literary conventions, a train of thought, or a state of mind. You can live inside somebody else's head. Within one novel you can live inside many different people's heads, in a way that you of course cannot do in normal life. I think that quality of penetration into other consciousnesses lies at the heart of its moral quest. Knowing, or sensing what it's like to be someone else I think is at the foundations of morality. I don't think the novel is particularly good or interesting when it instructs us how to live, so I don't think of it as moral in that sense. But certainly when it shows us intimately, from the inside, other people, it then does extend our sensibilities. It is also, as form, very good at marking out that relationship between the individual and a society, or the working out of a relationship – the interpersonal is very much its subject.[8]

Recently assessments of McEwan's later novels have begun to focus on his ability to rekindle the relationship between morality and fiction, and to turn an investigation of weighty philosophical and psychological issues, such as the impact of trauma, into compelling literature.[9] His recognition of the value and importance of his fiction in both popular and critical quarters, in popular media and from a growing number of academics and literary scholars – indicates the extent to which McEwan is able to combine "high culture" with "popular culture" in his writing, to reach a broad audience.[10] In addition, this may also be an indication of an increasing interest and awareness of trauma in our lives as "a condition of our time", to

[8] An interview with W. H. Smith, n.p.

[9] Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan*, discusses how McEwan "has helped to reinvigorate thinking about the novel within and without academia". (p.2).

[10] McEwan's literary accolades as described on his homepage indicate that he has won critical acclaim: ''He won the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976 for his first collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites*; the Whitbread Novel Award (1987) and the Prix Fémina Etranger (1993) for *The Child in Time*; and Germany's Shakespeare Prize in 1999. He has been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction numerous times, winning the award for *Amsterdam* in 1998. His novel *Atonement* received the WH Smith Literary Award (2002), National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award (2003), Los Angeles Times Prize for Fiction (2003), and the Santiago Prize for the European Novel (2004). He was awarded a CBE in 2000. In 2006, he won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his novel *Saturday* and his novel *On Chesil Beach* was named Galaxy Book of the Year at the 2008 British Book Awards where McEwan was also named Reader's Digest Author of the Year". n.p.

return to Perowne's words quoted earlier. There are an increasing number of critical commentaries, some of which have been referred to in this study, that demonstrate the range of McEwan's talent, particularly in his later, more mature fiction to move away from the disturbing and disruptive, sensationalised themes which typified his early writings. Critical evaluations of his later work concur that his fiction has become a discussion point for social and cultural commentary. One thinks, for example, of Ray Bradbury's comment that McEwan "opens the novel to a psychological realm in which the sense of crisis was felt". [11] John Banville (2005) and David Malcolm (2000) focus on a detailed discussion on the binary of Darwinism and literature in *Atonement* and in particular *Saturday*. Critics like Robert McCrum (2005) succinctly draw parallels between historical accuracy in representations of World War II and the events of 9/11 in both McEwan texts drawing comparisons to other historical texts and news media clippings. A more interesting question is explored by Dominic Head (2007). He convincingly shows how Ian McEwan reflects Iris Murdoch's philosophythat "human consciousness is so structured to generate for us a mode of moral being in which we seek to find unity out of randomness, order out of chaos, and to pursue 'truth' in the process". [12] For Murdoch, the novel should emulate this dynamic moral thought.

Using some of the ideas of critics alluded to above as a starting point, this research report argues that the luminal experience of trauma and anxiety within the minds of McEwan's characters in *Atonement* and *Saturday* develops the possibility of creating unity out of a world which is chaotic and potentially destructive.

The novels offer interesting insights into protagonists who are threatened by psychological paralysis induced by traumatic events. Thus *Atonement* offers a study of self-imposed trauma resulting from a personal betrayal – a "lie" at the outbreak of World War Two, while *Saturday* develops from trauma pertaining to both personal and global events in post 9/11 London.

[11] Ray Bradbury as quoted by Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan*, p.27.

[12] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p.46.

Acclaimed as "his most complete and compassionate work" at the time it was written, *Atonement* is set in 1935 and charts the moral awakening of its protagonist, Briony Tallis. [13] The novel opens when Briony is a thirteen year old girl on the cusp of womanhood. Based on events she sees but does not quite understand at the fountain and in the library of the family manor, she becomes the reason an innocent man, (Robbie, her older sister's Cecilia's lover) is convicted of a rape that supposedly occurred on her family's estate. The self-imposed trauma caused by feelings of remorse for her false incriminations, impacts on Briony and all who are associated with her. Against the backdrop of a global trauma of World War Two, Briony tries to atone for her guilt by working as a nurse tending to the traumatised, wounded soldiers who have arrived from Dunkirk, where Robbie himself is fighting. In the coda of the novel, the reader learns that Briony's trauma has been internalised in an attempt to accommodate her guilt. The reader learns that Cecilia and Robbie have died leaving Briony with a trauma which cannot be atoned in real terms. Further, we learn that she is a victim of vascular dementia, an additional personal trauma for her to endure. However, her yearning to offer Cecilia and Robbie happiness drives her to admit to us, the readers that we have been privy to the internal fictional machinations of a writer where a possibility of atonement can be achieved only in the fictional world she has designed.

Global allusions to violence frame the narrative of *Saturday*. Set in a post 9/11 London and on a day marked by massive anti-war demonstrations (15 February 2003), we encounter Henry Perowne, a successful neurosurgeon who, from his privileged social perspective disengages himself from these events. He feels content and comments that his work and his family render his happiness. He admits that he is content in his marriage to Rosalind and is proud of his son, Theo, and his daughter, Daisy. The novel maps a day which is marked for Perowne with a promise of domestic harmony and reconciliation between Daisy and her cantankerous Grandfather, Grammaticus. However, Perowne's process in the first half of the novel of coping in a world as doppelganger to traumatic global events, results in a conscious survival strategy. He wilfully isolates himself from macrocosmic experiences which he perceives threaten the happiness and security of himself and his family. He wakes up at 03h40, looks out at the night sky while reflecting on his present state of bliss and sees a burning

[13] *New York Times* Podcast Interview with Ian McEwan.

plane cross the sky behind the BT tower. At first he believes it to be a meteor and then later a terrorist attack. It is, however, a Russian cargo plane which safely lands at Heathrow Airport. He makes the association with global violence experienced at the World Trade Centre attacks and feels "baffled and fearful" (4). Violence impacts on his personal life when Baxter, a thug suffering from a degenerative disease, orchestrates a car accident. Later the physically traumatised villain invades what Perowne holds most sacred – his home and family. In this assault, Grammaticus's nose is broken, Rosalind is held at knifepoint and Daisy is forced to strip naked, facing humiliation and family's anguish as they believe that she will be raped. The destructive bearing of 9/11 on his private life affords Perowne the opportunity to reflect and re-evaluate his philosophical approach to life which moves towards moral empathy. As he becomes aware that he has "work, money, status, the home, above all, the family" (227), he realises that "he has done nothing to Baxter who has so little that is not wrecked by his defective gene, and who is soon to have even less" (228). Rather than offering a nihilistic vision of violence (as stated by McEwan himself in *The Guardian* newspaper on 12 September 2001 that the "world would never be the same [...but] worse"), he offers a possible shift where, through moral empathy and responsibility, we can make the world a tenable place. [14]

In Chapters 3 (*Atonement)* and 4 (*Saturday)* discusses how both texts offer the space in which the reader may grapple with the complexities of understanding the intricacies surrounding trauma including the interplay that occurs between language, experience, memory and place. Witnessing and memory are key concepts and form a central focus in both works. They are useful in defining and understanding the manifestation of each trauma. In *Atonement* the traumatic rupture begins with the visual encounter, as interpreted by Briony, of Robbie and Cecilia at the fountain; while in *Saturday,* the starting point is Perowne's witnessing a cargo plane in flames hurtling through the London sky. In subtle interplay, these specific events are echoed in various forms and recollections in each text. Witnessing as a category of trauma, and its representation as memory, will be briefly defined, explored and assessed in light of the two works of fiction. Central to this discussion, will be an evaluation about whether the trauma as perceived by McEwan is merely "sensationalist" and sustains a fantasy of contemporary victimhood or whether it attempts in more complex, technically

[14] Ian McEwan, "Beyond Belief", *The Guardian,*n.p.

innovative and sophisticated "literary" terms, to interrogate and represent the "community of anxiety" of a contemporary world.

Both *Atonement* and *Saturday* are porous texts which expound numerous conflicts in a world punctuated by violence and trauma, what Lee Siegel refers to as "a terror that all our peace and comfort will be swept away by a bad life-changing moment - where our accustomed world is about to fall to pieces."[15] The characters in both novels initially gravitate towards past stabilities typified by feelings of security resultant from traditional structure and routine. I consider how, once there is a breach of these, resulting conflict ensues and the characters, both main and secondary, find themselves face to face with social and interpersonal trauma, what Henry Perowne refers as a "nightmare existence" (67). Numerous issues form an interesting focus of assessment within the novels: does the "disturbance of our accustomed world" isolate characters to experience trauma or, does the trauma itself force characters into solitary internal conflicts? Does the personal trauma prompt the protagonists to confront the larger social, historical trauma? If so, how?

Within this framework, I comment how the media, as represented in *Saturday,* conditions society to maintain a passive "community of anxiety" so that it feels constantly under threat. In particular, I discuss how the novel critiques the viewpoint that global responses to 9/11 have created a victimhood of trauma. Converse to conventional beliefs, McEwan offers the reader the vision that trauma rather than being perceived as debilitating, legitimises a particular course of action. *Saturday,* for example, generates debate about what response is legitimate and correct, in the face of threat and trauma. Thus Perowne critiques "the culture of violent solution" (123) sparked by the global responses to 9/11, while his traumatic encounters with Baxter and witnessing his family under attack make him reconsider his stance on violence and war, challenging fundamental assumptions about ethics.

In the case of Briony in *Atonement*, it is her ability to fictionalise a series of events where trauma is moulded melodramatically as a means of sustaining identity and seeking atonement. The trajectory towards this debate by the protagonists (Briony Tallis and Henry Perowne) moves towards a greater self-awareness, through a process of introspection and

[15] Lee Siegel, "The Imagination of Disaster",n.p.

acceptance of a new, vulnerable world. The disruption and challenge of ethics connected to the original event, causes an emotional re-evaluation of Briony's and Perowne's "self".

McEwan's representation of trauma moves to a position of empowerment rather than stasis. As explained earlier, the texts offer a view how human nature and the experience of trauma does not leave one at the end feeling debilitated and complacent but rather offers the platform to re-evaluate ethics leading to an awakening of a moral consciousness. McEwan's philosophical view of trauma and its potential transformation of moral ethics is suggested through his narration: full closure of the traumatic episodes is not suggested in either of the novels. Refusal of consolation remains a continued presence in *Atonement.* In *Saturday*, the inevitable cycle of trauma as continuum of our post-modern existence, is suggested.[16] In each instance, the world is construed as something "baffling" to use Perowne's words quoted earlier, posing new challenges and demands.

Narrative and morality are interwoven with subtlety in most of McEwan's engaging fiction - trauma and the moral dilemma facing the characters render the cutting edge quality of his novels. His concern in part, is to create a set of circumstances which affords the characters the capacity to confront their own dangerous impulses and fears, whether this is a freak ballooning accident (*Enduring Love*) or a thug in the streets of London (*Saturday*) or an egotistical recreation of a scene at a fountain (*Atonement*). His characters are confronted by a moral quandary in the face of trauma, recreated so vividly in the graphic descriptions of twentieth and twenty first century horrors.[17]

In the course of this research project, I will interrogate McEwan's vision as either apocalyptic or rather empowering in the face of rupturing experiences which the author views to be quotidian junctures within a "community of anxiety". Rather than being a fictional treatise on trauma, McEwan's novels become the conduit for moral exploration in an environment of trauma. Our engagement with each of the novels goes beyond their texts, sharing the characters' quest to come to terms with the rupturing aftermath of their personal trauma, inten-

[16] This concurs with Dominic La Capra's theory where he advocates that trauma can never be mastered, but merely understood. (Dominic La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*).

[17] Iris Murdoch states that "through literature we can rediscover a sense of the density of our lives". Ibid. p. 13.

sified by the backdrop of a larger national trauma. We identify with Briony, Henry Perowne and Baxter, experience empathy for their suffering and trace their moral development. We understand as Arundhati Roy states in *God of Small Things (*1998), a novel which also deals with trauma and violence, that "change is one thing. Acceptance is another"[18]. We witness in the McEwan texts how change and acceptance become overwhelming challenges to assimilate and resolve.

In turn, as readers, we must be sensitive to our own ideologies which may colour our reading of *Atonement* and *Saturday.* What remains important is the manner in which we engage with the characters so that we can deduce and witness their means of a quest for an identity in an environment that is curtailed by prolific violence on both historical and interpersonal levels.

Any meaningful discussion of the richly woven fictions *Atonement* and *Saturday* requires consideration of its broader historical context. Thematically, the choice of using World War Two (*Atonement)* and 9/11 (*Saturday)* to underpin the personal traumas confronting Briony Tallis and Henry Perowne suggests that reviewing broad concepts of trauma theory might assist us in understanding how each of the characters, and McEwan himself, conceptualises and represents trauma. Chapter 2 will briefly frame the theoretical parameters of trauma which will assist in the ensuing discussions in this research report. My choice is to draw on the philosophy of four specific theorists whom I feel will help explore the vision of trauma as presented in each novel. The notions of "absence" and "loss" as expounded by Dominic La Capra, will be reviewed with an understanding how the concepts may assist the reader in grappling with the complexities of trauma. In the same chapter, I will briefly refer to "mimetic" and "antimimetic" theories as explained by Ruth Leys, as a means to discuss the process of accommodation and transformation in both *Atonement* and Saturday. This will lead me to consider Maurice Blanchot's pertinent observations about the capacity (or incapacity) of language to articulate trauma; that language does not have the sufficient means

[18] Roy Arundhati, *The God of Small Things* is a novel where traumatic conflict exists at interpersonal and societal levels. The novel graphically shows how people are helpless to resolve these levels of friction.

and lexicon to describe the intensity of traumatic episodes. This, in turn, contributes further to the disjunctured and confused feelings associated with the trauma itself.

Even though there is a continuing body of theoretical work on trauma, cognisance must be taken that we are dealing, in this research report, with a fictional dramatic creation of trauma which uses historical events intertextually. The approach thus is to use theory as a reference and background to the artistic developments in *Atonement* and *Saturday.* Trauma as intertext, as developed by Julia Kristeva, supports the representation of trauma within the two selected texts. Both novels were published within an era that is permeated and framed by violence. Chapter 2 outlines how deconstructing the intertext assists the reader to reflect on the vision created by McEwan and his perceptions of trauma in a postmodern world. Brian Finney comments that McEwan "would appear to share with Edward Said the belief that works of literature are not just texts but participate in "wordliness". [19]

Both McEwan texts discussed in this report are strongly character-based. Drawing on the richness of his characters' psyches, McEwan develops his characters so that they assume the voice of his society and that of the writer. For McEwan, the creation of character in the nineteenth century novel is "unsurpassed". [20] For him, the character of Briony Tallis is "the most complete person [he] had ever conjured". [21] In an interview with Zadie Smith (2005), McEwan admits that the character of Henry Perowne is a mimetic representation of the author's own life and vision of humanism. In the same interview, McEwan explains how Briony and Perowne are, to him, developmental characters confronting the challenge that life brings in the face of contemporary traumatic circumstances. This report considers these ideas by tracing the challenges facing each character.

Briony Tallis and Henry Perowne question notions of existence and the choices that confront them. In each instance, both protagonists, in the face of rupturing trauma, are required to delve into their subconscious and engage trauma as either catharsis or exorcis in

[19] Brian Finney, "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion; the Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", p. 68 which explores how McEwan uses war and narrative as a means to critique the socio-political values within contemporary society.

[20] Ian McEwan in an interview with Zadie Smith ("Zadie Smith talks with Ian McEwan"), n.p.

[21] Ibid.

order to valorise their existence in a changing world. In *Atonement*, the aftermath of an event birthed at the fountain (when Briony's imagination draws inferences from what she witnesses), has tragic consequences for most of the characters, erupting as further trauma for those affected by the original incident. Chapter 3 will explore how the fictional recreation in the imagined scenarios of World War II, as symbols and intertext, function to reflect the psychological need to erase the original betrayal construed by Briony. Cecilia and Robbie, the visible victims of Briony's malice are reconstructed, reshaped and given life in an attempt for the adult Briony to seek atonement. The ensuing chapters of this report further elaborate how the protagonist of *Atonement* becomes the catalyst for the creation of her self-imposed trauma. I will show how atonement and resolution of one trauma cannot result in total redemption, but is replaced by yet another trauma suggested by Briony's realisation that she is a victim of vascular dementia. Within this discussion, I will pose the possibility that in *Atonement*, McEwan's representation of trauma is more cynical than that presented in *Saturday.*

The catalyst in *Saturday*, as discussed in Chapter 4 of this report, is not the protagonist but rather the perpetrator Baxter, who threatens what Perowne holds most sacred: the safety and security of his family. I engage in a discussion to evaluate McEwan's reason for building into the narrative additional palimpsestic physical trauma, evident in Baxter's fatal degenerative disease, Huntington's disease, which threatens his existence.

The final chapter of this report will further interrogate McEwan's view that the effects of trauma often evolve into a new conflict within the characters so that the "accustomed world" dies, leaving the characters confronted by isolation and a continual feeling of vulnerability. The actuality and journey towards this truth does not result in complete closure but an acceptance that modern-postmodern existence continues to be fragile, fluid and ever-changing. The journey becomes an unresolved journey, what David Malcolm in his work *Understanding Ian McEwan* refers to as the act of "opening the wrong door, turning down the wrong street, losing attention for a moment and stepping into a nightmare". [22]Even though each novel has its diverse set of traumatic incidents within different time frames and settings

[22] David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan,* p.32.

and transformations, the central motif of trauma is developed in similar structural modes allowing it to be seen as a *leitmotif* for the reality of contemporary life-style.[23]

[23] The *leitmotif* here could be seen to encompass an obsessive behavioural trend of social affluence. One might in fact consider whether the trauma as reflected in Perowne's fear and apprehension, or Briony's obsession with creating fictional trauma to resolve her own inadequacy, is augmented or bound by social class.

CHAPTER TWO: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF TRAUMA

The etymology of the word "trauma", according to the Oxford English Dictionary, derives from the Greek "τραυμα" (meaning "wound") and dates from the seventeenth century. It was not until Freud's psychoanalytic theories in the nineteenth century that the word came to be applied to psychological injury suggestive of its affective state. In broad terms, trauma has been defined to involve:

1. physical trauma: resulting from a serious injury or shock to the body such as war, physical injury, rape, disease or illness.
2. emotional or psychological trauma: resulting from an emotional wound or shock that creates an emotional injury to the psychological well-being of the individual.

In both instances, the event causes great distress, or disruption, of individual psychological, emotional or physical welfare.[24] It is generally non-normative and exceeds the individual's capability to meet its demands. Subsequently it disrupts the individual's security and sense of self which colours the individual's present and future perceptions.[25]

Our experience with trauma rests in not only what we observe and witness firsthand, but what we glean and are fed by the media, by what we imagine and read in fiction, view in films and see represented on stage:

> Representations of trauma allow the audience to experience their fears vicariously. However, if representations are too safe and over mediated, they lose their authenticity and deprive the audience of the experiential link to trauma. To avoid this

[24] The trauma is not the event itself – the "stressor" (such as Briony's admission to what she believed occurred at the fountain, or Baxter invading Henry Perowne's home) but rather the individualised, emotional response to the "stressor". Krystal(1978) describes trauma "as a paralyzed overwhelmed state with immobilization, withdrawal, possible depersonalization, evidence of disorganization." (as quoted by Richard Ullman, *The Shattered Self*, p. 10)

[25] Trauma is a highly focused thematic concern in contemporary literature and its literary potential has impetus provided by Holocaust literature. Although neither *Atonement* nor *Saturday* are Holocaust texts, I believe that polemics raised in Holocaust literature have been rearticulated in understanding global and personal trauma of much modern and postmodern literature exploring this theme.

> trauma should create what La Capra terms as 'empathetic unsettlement […] or performative engagement with unsettling events'.[26]

Trauma narratives in realistic fiction afford the reader the opportunity to engage with contentious macrocosmic issues of violence.

The non-normative quality of trauma in fiction (whether it be natural, human or holocaust-inspired fiction) presupposes that the reader views the "stressor" (or traumatic incident) to be an exception to normal experience. One thinks of novels such as *The Book of Not* (Tsitsi Dagaremba), *Anil's Ghost* (Michael Ondaantje), *Disgrace* (J.M. Coetzee) or even fragmented time-framed narratives like *Time's Arrow* (Martin Amis) or *White Hotel* (D.M. Thomas) among a large body of texts. By contrast, one could argue that McEwan presents a view that the fragmentation of a postmodern existence is tenuous and frequent, resulting in trauma being associated with an aspect of "normality", something that we need to accept and further learn to transform from a moment of fear to a moment of empowerment. Similarly, Cathy Caruth argues convincingly that trauma must be understood as neither an exceptional experience, nor a rule of experience, but rather a possibility of experience.[27]

This possibility of experience forms the framework of both McEwan texts and becomes the experience for all its readers. In essence, McEwan shows that a life-changing episode – the trauma - becomes a catalyst for self-reflexivity, responsibility in moral choice and defines ontological awareness. We understand that Briony and Perowne at the end of the novels perceive the world and their individual actions differently. Detailed analysis of this will be made in chapters 4 and 5 where identifying the connections (and disconnections) between selected trauma theory and Ian McEwan's novels will be considered.

If we question further the possibilities of fiction assuming the role of the reader's own emotional journey, reflexivity and realisation, then trauma need not be seen as an exception but an opportunity – albeit painful – for a greater humanistic awareness and a changed perspective within a world that is ruptured from its past. The central concern here is to trace how McEwan engages in such a process. In this regard and for the purpose of my analysis

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[26] Laurie Vickroy, Laurie, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction, p*. 124.

[27] Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p.76.

and research, I have found pertinent the writings of four theorists who have written extensively about trauma, namely: Dominic La Capra, Ruth Leys, Maurice Blanchot and Julia Kristeva. Their work merits brief discussion before an in-depth analysis of each novel.

In his insightful *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), La Capra examines historiographic testament literature as well as fictional representations of the Holocaust in terms of a group of categories derived from Freud's work. In particular:

1. texts that deny trauma
2. texts that act out trauma
3. texts that work through trauma

La Capra draws on the dichotomy between history (or historiography) and literature but suggests that the two may weave together to create texts that deny, act out or work through trauma. In this regard, he distinguishes between "writing trauma" and writing "about trauma" and the impact these have on trauma texts. [28] According to him, texts that write "about trauma", form the broad study of historiography relying on testimony of survivors or witnesses of trauma to present first-hand accounts of experiences from either recorded material or from memory in an attempt to show what "really happened" in the past. One recalls Cathy Caruth offering the image of the anguished voice of trauma emerging from the wound itself as alluded to earlier in this study. "Writing trauma", as opposed to writing "about trauma" according to La Capra, centres more on literature – on the metaphorical impact of violence so that writing creates a sense of distance from the event itself. The focus in "writing trauma" is on the aesthetic, philosophical and/or political factors that construct the narrative. The novelist and writer who "writes trauma" does so from a particular perspective: he recreates historical events (or alludes to them) and positions the reader to feel particular emotions. In this equation, even though both *Atonement* and *Saturday* are placed contextually within specific historical settings, we must assume that both texts are not "about trauma" but rather have issues and conflicts of trauma, creating a specific historical

[28] Dominick La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* and History *and Memory after Auschwitz*. La Capra explores in depth the focus and shift in the relation of traumatic events within these two categories.

setting ("writing trauma") in order to develop the conflict for the development of the narrative and the development of its characters.

Attesting to La Capra's categories then, the reader's reaction in this instance becomes a response to McEwan's artistic merits rather than to the raw, historical facts of the traumatic episode itself. If one is to consider La Capra's categories further, then one can assume that the role of fictional trauma, like that narrated in *Atonement* and *Saturday,* is controlled, constructed and moulded. One cannot dispute the fact that in reading fiction that is "writing trauma", the impact of the trauma is perceived purely as vicarious or a literary device, with the focus perhaps on other aspects of style and literary critique rather than the victim and the incident. In this instant, the role of the novelist and historian, is markedly different in the way they represent trauma. Authors engage readers narratively and stylistically by rendering a moment in the fiction for character identification. By so doing, readers are engaged to help construct, or even reconstruct experience as writers present them. Readers are witness to, at times, the complex individual choices facing the fictional parallel intentions offering a platform for trauma discourse pertaining to real-life scenarios.

La Capra argues convincingly that the power and effect of both historical and fictional forms of texts, is attributed to the fact that they represent tragedy in all its immediate horror. He explores the power and tragedy of historical traumatic episodes being recalled as if they were being experienced for the first time. Trauma in these instances is represented as irresolvable with the suggestion that once such a traumatic event occurs, the survivor is trapped in a constant state of anguish.[29] Working through trauma, however, the person can gain "critical distance on a problem" and even though, for La Capra this is never totally complete, it does empower the individual (as victim or observer) to separate the traumatic violent episode from his/her present life. [30] Such a person then is never entirely trapped in the past. One thinks of Perowne here, for example, who, at the end of the novel is able, as I will

[29] Trauma then, according to La Capra, is a persistent condition of incomprehensible pain which is experienced with equal intensity and rawness as if it were inflicted for the first time. Within this emotion, La Capra argues, that the victim focuses on the end result of the pain and suffering of the trauma rather than on the reasons, albeit illogical, prejudiced ones that initiated the traumatic event. The eternal torment of the trauma precludes the possibility of gaining any distance on the events, which is necessary, according to La Capra, before the healing process can begin.

[30] Ibid. pp.143 – 144.

show in later chapters of this research, to work through his trauma with Baxter. This is contrary to his heightened feelings of anxiety in the opening pages when he identifies with the victims of the plane crashing in the World Trade Centre while observing the burning cargo plane fly through the sky - unable to separate the two experiences.

For La Capra, trauma can never be fully mastered but only partially mastered in its recognition. In evaluating this, La Capra discusses how victims never move beyond their specific trauma. He offers a reason for this. Simply put, he contrasts two different forms of trauma: "structural trauma" and "historical trauma". He hypothesises that "structural trauma" is "an anxiety-producing condition", misconceiving violence as transhistorical. [31] It is removed from one specific historical scenario in so far as "it does not imply tenses (past, present or future)".[32] In this way, the traumatic episode affects the individual's life in totality; it remains indefinable, leaving the person unable to differentiate the specific circumstances of the trauma.[33] However, there is a possibility of gaining perspective on trauma to a large measure. "The conversion from absence to loss", explains La Capra, "gives anxiety an identifiable object – the lost object – and generates the hope that anxiety may be eliminated or overcome". [34] By converting "structural trauma" ("absence") to "historical trauma" ("loss"), a fixed historical event may be "reactivated, reconfigured and transformed in the present or the future".[35]

An example cited by La Capra to clarify his theorising draws him to consider Becket's play *Waiting for Godot* where Godot, the concept, is transhistorical – something which never existed and never will exist. Thus one can deduce that nothing happens in the play – the inces-

[31] Ibid. p. 57.

[32] Op. cit. p.57.

[33] La Capra explains how the Holocaust is closely linked to a historical event and is not metaphysical in nature as was previously suggested by Theodor Adorno's famous dictum that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." Theodor Adorno's implication is that the horror of the Holocaust does not lend itself to language: "The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today", (published in "An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society," in "*Prisms"*, p.34).

[34] Ibid. p. 58.

[35] Ibid. p. 61

sant void and numbness of waiting can never be resolved and the characters in Becket's play continue to experience trauma as angst in the face of its irresolution, leaving them feeling nostalgic and hopeless ad infinitum. On the other hand, "loss" as described by La Capra, is represented through a specific historical event (like, for the purpose of this study, World War Two in *Atonement* or 9/11 in *Saturday*).

La Capra contends that trauma is remembered by either acting out or working through trauma but that there is, in truth, no clear distinction between the two. As attested by La Capra, if you act out the trauma you continue to relive the event of the past in the present and the cycle of anguish associated with the trauma never ceases. Conversely, if you work through the trauma, La Capra asserts, you can gain a critical distance which in itself is never complete. However, it is in this distance that you are empowered to distinguish the experiences that overwhelm you and create your present *modus vivendi*. Such a person is not trapped in the past but gains a greater awareness of his anguish. In addition, he concludes, anxiety can be allayed by locating a specific object so that the victim is empowered to control these objects that have come to symbolise trauma. Conversion from "absence" to "loss" gives anxiety an identifiable object of fear and generates, but does not remove, the awareness of that anxiety.

In Chapter 3, I will trace how Briony converts her emotions of guilt and remorse intensified by Cecilia's death, from "absence" (her inability to have perceived her actions as tragic betrayal) to "loss" (her allusion to a historical context where, in the fictional realm, a sense of atonement is attempted). Similarly, in Chapter 4, I will explore how, in *Saturday,* "absence" for Henry Perowne is marked by the destruction of the World Trade Centre: symbols of power, hope and faith in the West. It shatters previous notions of security and safety. Through a chance occurrence, Perowne is given an opportunity to transform "absence" and the nihilism attached to it, to a specific object (Baxter). By converting absence to "loss", he confronts his feelings and attempts to resolve them through personal interaction.

The central and all-important claim made by La Capra serves as a basis for a larger discussion by James Wood in his excellent article entitled "On a Darkling Plain" (2005) where he weighs

the perception of McEwan as historian and McEwan as novelist. He begins his debate by alluding to Friederich Schelegel's maxim: [36]

> In Schlegel's famous aphorism, the historian is a prophet facing backward. We could describe, in the same spirit, the novelist as a historian facing inward. This inward historian, or historian of inwardness, holds up no clear mirror but rather the mind's mirror -- cloudy perhaps, stained, and losing some of its backing -- to the world;... this historian watches how his or her fallible characters interpret reality, how they inhabit it, how they distort it and force it to accommodate to their mental cosmos. Novelists, then, are consumed by the question of representation twice over. They themselves see the world and describe or redescribe it; and they must describe their characters' own descriptions, too. Thus we often have a sense, in fiction, of two different time signatures: the world is living in 6/8, as it were, and the novel's hero or heroine is thinking in 3/4. Most fictional characters think more slowly than reality passes; they are internal expansionists. The naive hero of Chekhov's story "The Kiss" finally tells his cynical fellow soldiers about the moment when a glamorous woman kissed him, and he is disappointed because he had thought the story would "take all morning to tell but it had taken only a minute." The private story has swollen like bread in his warm mind.
>
> Great historical events, such as wars and revolutions, refine this division between characters and history -- between history and inwardness -- by concentrating it to a point of irony: the gap between the public event and a fictional character's experience of that event may become comically or tragically acute. The novelist can disrupt the accepted record of a great public event by inserting his hero into it, and letting his hero distort that public record. [37]

Like La Capra, Wood differentiates the role of novelist (who "writes trauma" in history) or "writes about" trauma as a backdrop to more personal developments of fictional character. Using a discussion of *Saturday* as focus, Wood offers a convincing argument to show how the dramatic creation of realistic scenarios within texts of fiction (like McEwan's decision for his novel to be set in London on 15 February on the day of the largest global anti-war demonstration) serves as a platform for engagement in and evaluations of contemporary daily trauma and anxiety. Literature intersects with history and can offer an excellent opportunity to explore issues similar to historical, autobiographical and testamental representations of

[36] The reference here is to Friedrich Schlegel (1772 – 1829) German writer, critic and philosopher.

[37] James Wood, "On a Darkling Plain", *The New Republic*, p. 4 debates and comments on the role of McEwan as historian and novelist as well as the author's fictional recreations in *Saturday* of historical events of 9/11. This point will be discussed at length when I explore intertexuality of McEwan's *Atonement* and in particular *Saturday*.

trauma. McEwan's novels can thus be seen to reflect the collective consciousness of modern and postmodern society, reinforcing the idea that trauma in its differing forms remains a constant threat, one that can neither be avoided nor forgotten but merely learnt about and acknowledged.

In her books *Trauma: a Genealogy* (2000) and *From Guilt to Shame* (2007), Ruth Leys presents an overview of trauma studies and theories.[38] When considering the theories developed by Leys, two concepts prove to be useful in this analysis of *Atonement* and *Saturday.* Leys confirms an argument where, she attests, the concept of trauma has been, and continues to be pivoting between two juxtaposed theoretical stances: "mimetic" theory and "antimimetic" theory.

According to Leys, "mimetic" theory purports that trauma, or the experience of trauma, involves "a kind of hypnotic imitation" so that the traumatised victim has a regressive identification with the original traumatised event.[39] There is a tendency, as Leys argues, for a compulsive repetition of violence in the form of nightmares, actions and imitation which disables the victim to gain distance from the original moment of horror. Violence and horror subsequently become normative codes of behaviour replacing any former pre-traumatic behaviour. One thinks perhaps of Briony's incessant need to recreate events through the fictional narration of war, bombings and devastation. At first, it appears as if Briony can only attempt to gain atonement through the hypnotic re-enactment of violence even if the violent circumstances are transcribed and recreated purely within her fictional realm. To read Briony's actions as merely "mimetic", is limiting and simplistic as our view of her is not one dimensional, but complex and multi-dimensional. On closer understanding of Briony, we see that

[38]Leys traces the perceptions to and theories governing the concept and understanding of trauma. She begins her treatise, as La Capra does, on the premise that the Holocaust is the undisputed major and defining trauma of the twentieth century. She traces the attitudes and emotions associated with the events surrounding Holocaust testimony. She explores in great depth the notions and attitudes towards trauma from accounts by Primo Levi to notions of shame and guilt of survivors of major traumatic apocalyptic events.

[39] Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy,* p. 40. Citing numerous examples Leys shows how the "mimetic" theory hypothesises terrorised identification with the aggressor so that prisoners are imagined to incorporate and mimic the self same behavioural trends that caused them such anxiety and terror in the first place. Through the discussions with examples from Nazi war camps and survivors she explores the possibility that this theory purports that mimesis ascribes to feelings of guilt for survivors.

her actions are not pure mimesis but subscribe more to what Leys refers to an "anti-memitis".

As defined by Leys, "antimimetic" theory, while still subscribing to imitative identification to trauma, perceives imitation differently to the "mimetic" theory. Where the blind "hypnotic imitation" of the "mimetic" theory suggests that the victim is totally immersed in his experience, the "antimimetic" theory suggests the victim feels emotive numbing, or distancing in the process of imitation, leaving the subject feeling aloof from the traumatic experience. The victim becomes a spectator to the repetitive acts of violence which he embodies to represent himself. Trauma then is perceived as an external event and the subject perceived as passive observer of himself one might say, in that he does not see himself as collusive with the violence which is directed against him. By assuming the role of novelist and considering Mr Connolly's remarks on the art of Briony's writing (*294*), Briony is forced to move from "mimesis". As novelist she becomes an active observer of events which she recreates, thus moving to "antimimesis".

In a 2005 interview with Harriett Gilbert, McEwan discusses how the core of his fiction rests heavily on creating a narrative which explores the random quality of life "which is shocking... the transformation by chance – that randomness which both appals and amazes." [40] His characters' personal journeys towards an "examined life" occurs as a consequence of an intersection with violence in an environment which is framed by historical events which in themselves are violent and traumatic, namely World War Two and the bombing of the World Trade Centre.[41] His preoccupation with war – on both the literal and metaphorical level grew, he suggests, partly from the military upbringing of his father, and listening to his narrative war stories which left McEwan with:

> a guilty sense of not having been there to help [...] we weren't there and yet we sort of feel we were because our childhoods were so shaped by those stories [...] the emotional horrors.[42]

[40] Interview with Harriett Gilbert on World Book Club.BBC World Service.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.n.p.

Trauma as depicted by McEwan does not necessarily represent only trauma of historical magnitude (as in the descriptions of the horror of the retreat at Dunkirk (*Atonement*) or the sense of helplessness of the victims on the plane as they were crashing into the World Trade Centre (*Saturday*). It is also the personal, random ordinariness of a chance occurrence which is life transforming in its ontological impact. One thinks of McEwan's body of work and how chance occurrence manifests as a McEwanesque trademark: whether it is a stalker in *Enduring Love* or a chance lapse of concentration at a supermarket in *The Child of Time* or even a bizarre meeting in the canals in Venice in *The Comfort of Strangers.* Maurice Blanchot refers to this as the "invisible trauma of the everyday" which is both inextricable in its expression and assimilation and outside of indigenous experience.[43]

Expressing and representing trauma in linguistic terms has sparked a contentious debate. For Blanchot (1996), human disaster defies representation: it mimics death which, while at the same time rendering meaning, it also takes it away. When the disaster "speaks" through a victim or one who witnesses, it gives meaning to something which is beyond representation; the phenomenon cannot be expressed yet demands and defines expression. In this way language, according to Blanchot, moves from the representation - the "being" – to meaning. [44] Ethan Kleinberg (2002) similarly notes that:

> Language is the sphere of representation and speaks only in relation to death. It destroys that to which it gives meaning [...] reducing that which it names to the level of banality, a merely categorized object to be possessed and controlled.[45]

In a traumatic event, whether microcosmic or macrocosmic, language then is severed from "being" to "meaning" leaving trauma as the inexplicable void between the two, deconstructing time and security and leaving a sense of helplessness, a numbing – what Bessel Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart have referred to as a "speechless terror". Kolk states:

> Experience cannot be organised on a linguistic level and this failure to arrange memory in words and symbols leave it to be organised on a somatosensory or

[43] Maurice Blanchot in Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, *Trauma and the Visuality in Modernity*, p. 33. Between 1929 – 1945 trauma was considered to be a cataclysm of quotidian expectation.

[44] Ibid. The terms "being" and "meaning" as expressed by Blanchot and discussed by Lisa Saltzman, p. 10.

[45] Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, p. 301.

> iconic level: as somatic sensations, behavioural re-enactments, nightmares and flashbacks. [46]

Language thus, according to Blanchot, cannot adequately express the complex, psychological impact of a traumatic event and its consequences on the psyche. Where language constructs an experience, trauma deconstructs its representation in language.

Trauma in its chaotic temporal and affective rupture, disallows its narrative closure as a conscious experience because according to Freudian philosophy it lies within the subconscious. Trauma may be accessed however, by deconstructing the visual elements embedded in the subconscious and thus according to Blanchot, the traumatic hole can be partially healed as "being" is sacrificed to "meaning".

Studies in trauma lead scholars to reposition form within its traditional context, to understand how trauma may be represented. Knowledge of trauma wanes because of the disruption between the body (corporeal experience seen in the pain and shock of the physical trauma) and the intellect (linguistic experience of narrating the corporeal). This dichotomy is central to both McEwan texts in question. The linguistic representation of trauma through language and narration is evident as trauma is understood in both McEwan texts through literature. Briony's narrative is her attempt to reconstruct her trauma and the imagined atonement; Perowne and Baxter's responses to Arnold's "Dover Beach" foreground the way they grasp and legitimise the trauma that envelopes them.

Writing, narration and literary imaginativeness are intricately woven in both novels. They suggest the power and difficulty with language itself. As will be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent chapter, Briony's burning literary imaginativeness as a young girl, entices her to misconstrue what she finds incomprehensible. When she witnesses, from her upstairs bedroom window, Cecilia stripped to her underwear jumping into the fountain at the Tallis home while Robbie looks on, Briony reads the sexual tension between her sister and Robbie through the distorted lens of her own immaturity and febrile imagination. Her confusion in-

[46] Ibid. Bessel Van Der Kolk as quoted in Lisa Saltzman, p. 16. One thinks in this instance to the numerous references to somatosensory traumatic ruptures in *Atonement* and *Saturday*: vascular dementia of Briony, Huntington's disease of Baxter, Perowne's profession of a neurosurgeon healing complex and sensitive neurological ailments which become in itself a rupture of the deep-rooted traumatic consequence of living within a trauma of anxiety.

cites further imaginative fabrication when she reads a letter with an obscene suggestion written inadvertently by Robbie. She interrupts Cecilia and Robbie's lovemaking in the library sealing her constructed image of Robbie as a maniac. The conclusion to her convoluted imaginings leaves her convinced that she witnessed Robbie rape her cousin, Lola. Years later, the adult Briony, confronted by trauma uses narration to seek atonement and to make sense of her world. *Atonement* rests on the recreation of a fictional account, where the novelist, Briony, is seen to "displace, transmute, dissemble [...] with her absolute power of deciding outcomes" *(*370,371). Conversely, in *Saturday* we encounter the protagonist who admits that he is unable to appreciate literary imagination. We read that, while Perowne "pauses outside the library, the most imposing room in the house"*(* 65), it is an ongoing "ambition of his to spend whole weekends in there [...]reading some world-ranked masterpiece"*(*66) yet he finds fiction "too humanly flawed"*(*68). Later, it is poetry that renders the possibility for Perowne to acknowledge that the world "hath neither joy nor love [...] nor certitude" (281). The events rather than being seen as traumatic are now "transformed into a colourful adventure, a drama of strong wills, inner resources, new qualities of character revealed under pressure" (266). Ironically, it is a poem that in essence is able to move even the most unlikely Baxter. Poetry sparks a yearning for living in Baxter and affords Perowne the opportunity for self-reflexivity and the possibility of accepting moral responsibility on a humanistic level in the closing pages of the novel.

The palimpsestic nature of both novels allows them to be seen as rich mosaics of hypertexts. The intensity of the trauma is layered with intertextual framing of global catastrophes. The personal trauma facing the characters is echoed through these multi-layered intertextual links. In this way, history mingles with fiction. Both *Atonement* and *Saturday* are examples of historiographic metafiction, as briefly discussed in the previous chapter of this report. McEwan's explorations of trauma are framed and contextualised by tragic global events that appear as historical ruptures. Intertextuality assumes a means of assisting the reader to contextualise and express the legacy and intensity of violence where language has failed.

A term first coined by Julia Kristeva (1969), "intertextuality" appears in the context of her work on semiotics and develops from the premise that no text, is original and unique to it-

self, but rather is a multiplicity of texts and events which condition its meaning.[47] Influenced by the works of Bakhtin on the theory of dialogic fiction as well as Barthes's assertion that "any text is a new tissue of past citations [...] for there is always language before and around the text", Kristeva plots a three dimensional textual space with three essential co-ordinates: the writing subject, the addressee (ideal reader) and the exterior text or context.[48] Within this textual plane there are intersecting horizontal and vertical axes: the horizontal axis of the writing subject and addressee and the vertical axis of the text or context.

The fundamental concept of intertextuality is that the text becomes an intervention linking and making references to cultural systems. It is thus, according to Kristeva, a key means for literary study.[49] It becomes a means where a literary text is an intersection of literary references. In *Atonement* and *Saturday* it is an intersection of historical episodes, namely World War Two and 9/11 which epitomise in visual terms the horror inherent in the present. The limitation of language of trauma as espoused by Blanchot draws on a natural development towards using violence as intertext. In both *Atonement* and *Saturday*, the narrators narrate events in the present tense while their memories of the past haunt them so that they impede their ability to assimilate the present completely. In both instances, trauma results in remorse (in the case of Briony) and fear (in the case of Henry Perowne) impacting on the sense of self of each. Where language cannot reflect accurately or perhaps with sufficient intensity, the specific emotions of the characters, McEwan uses graphic visual details of World War Two and suggestive images of 9/11. Incidences are described through the lens of trauma which project intertextually onto present emotions and fears of the characters. Thus we find that pain through memory is described with sounds, smells and sensations of the intertextual drama of violent trauma.

Understanding how McEwan uses trauma and violence as intertext, correlates with theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter. If trauma by its definition and manifestation breaks

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[47] Toril Moi (ed), *The Kristeva Reader.* Although the term was first used by Julia Kristeva in her 1969 essay "*Word, Dialogue and the Novel"* , Mikhail Bakhtin is considered to have been the first to have used the concept through his notions of the "polyphonic" novel; however, Kristeva popularised Bakhtin's ideas.

[48] Ibid. p. 63.

[49] Caution must be used in that intertextuality has often been misread as intentional allusion to a text and the term being perceived too narrowly .

down language, McEwan uses visual intertexts to express the angst of emotional dislocation. Witnessing of the "stressor" at the fountain in *Atonement* and memory of 9/11 in *Saturday* are called into play. Charles Figley states that trauma is "an emotional state of discomfort and stress resulting from memories of an extraordinary catastrophic experience which shattered the survivor's sense of invulnerability to harm". [50] If we consider the definitions of trauma as explained at the beginning of this chapter and take into account Charles Figley's definition of trauma, then McEwan's vision of trauma is evidenced. One of the features of post-traumatic syndrome, as explored by Paivo in 1986 is the premise that experience is encoded in the memory system and has associations with intense emotions and vivid recollections of what was witnessed. [51] The vivid recollections are visual representations in the individual's mind called on at different times either in part or in their totality. The impact of visual details lends itself to the use of visual intertext.

I will however offer an additional insight here to be developed in the subsequent chapters. In both *Atonement* and *Saturday*, intertext is used as a means to express an environment of trauma, fear and dislocation; however it is the language of literature that McEwan uses as a means to assimilate the trauma. Briony, as shown earlier in this chapter, uses fiction in an attempt to accommodate and transform the past, while Perowne identifies with the power of poetic language as he witnesses Baxter's response to it. In both novels, language is seen as a possible means of reconstructing a new environment – the here and now – that has been affected by the traumatic episodes of the past offering perhaps a further point to consider in Blanchot's theory on language.

[50] Charles Figley (ed), *Trauma and its Wake* Vol I, p. (xviii).

[51] For Paivo (as discussed in Lisa McCann, *Psychological Trauma and Adult Survivor)* memories are stored in both the verbal and image centred systems. In trauma these are recollected painfully and in turn disruptive. The verbal is less emotional according to Paivo than the visual because the visual is more accessible. This may also concur with Blanchot's notion that language is incapable of transmitting emotional impact of trauma.

CHAPTER THREE: ATONEMENT

Before encountering the events that unfold in *Atonement*, the reader is presented with two factors that suggest an interpretation of McEwan's thematic concerns in the novel. The first is the title itself. Intertextually underscored by its traditional religious connotations, the title suggests that whatever events are to unfold in the novel, there will be a central thematic focus on sin (or shame or guilt) and its aftermath- recognition, confession and atonement.[52] One might also presuppose, perhaps swayed by the bold authoritative tone suggested in the title, that the desired and necessitated atonement is granted. It is only when we read the coda of the novel, that the nuances and paradoxes inherent within secular atonement become apparent. In turn, the reader is ultimately left with the temptation to revisit the title and reconsider its multilayered innuendoes. Rather then than being conclusive, the title is purposefully misleading. It assumes the potential of being an introduction to the complex nature of atonement and McEwan's vision of pain, emotional suffering and trauma.

The second factor is the epigraph from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey,* an extract from the key conversation between Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland where Henry informs Catherine that her speculation about General Tilney has been based purely on conjecture. Enticed by her own imagination and fascination with Gothic literature Catherine, like Briony, cannot separate the world of reality from fiction. We are drawn into this significant passage and in particular to the question posed by Henry Tilney: "Does our education ever prepare us for such atrocities?" (2) This fundamental question leads to further interrogations: what type of act is so harsh that it requires atonement? If it is "atrocious", what makes it so appalling, ghastly and vicious? And what impact would such an act have? In speculating about the novel we are about to read, we may presuppose an act which is equally traumatic in its "atrocity", an act also that demands forgiveness and atonement. The epigraph, like the title, foregrounds perceptions and expectations in the representation of trauma yet is intentionally deceptive. The sophisticated narrative will, in the end, undermine those expectations engaging us to question other considerations. While *Northanger Abbey* subverts the Gothic tradition, McEwan's postmodern "twist" at the end of *Atonement* subverts the realist tradi-

[52] Atonement as understood and reflected in the novel refers to secular atonement.

tion. It is interesting to note that *Northanger Abbey* is also a satire and critique of Gothic fiction and may in turn also be considered possibly as a forerunner of "metafiction".

In an interview in *Newsweek* (2002), McEwan responds to his use of the epigraph. He explains to the interviewer, Jeff Giles, that in his notebooks he referred to *Atonement* as "my Jane Austen novel". He explains further:

> What are the distances between what is real and what is imagined? Catherine Morland, the heroine of Jane Austen's "Northanger Abbey", was a girl so full of delights of Gothic fiction that she causes havoc around her when she imagines a perfectly innocent man to be capable of the most terrible things. For many, many years, I've been thinking how I might devise a hero or heroine who could echo that process in Catherine Morland, but then go a step further and look at not the crime, but the process of atonement, and do it through writing – do it through storytelling.[53]

The connection to the epigraph may be taken one stage further. In quoting from Austen's novel, McEwan is making a subtle intertextual reference to the traditions and conventions of the English novel. It foregrounds the convention that in Austen's novels, the denouement is structured so that there is resolution and clarity. In *Northanger Abbey,* at the closure, truth is revealed, forgiveness is granted and our young heroine marries, learning that mistakes may be rectified and ensuring that she will never repeat her error. The conflict and trauma it caused has been resolved. The intertextual allusion to *Northanger Abbey* much like the title of McEwan's novel, directs us into assuming then, that atonement is certain and that it is a natural consequence to a recognisable error. The ending of *Atonement* however does not fulfil those expectations. The inherent irony in the epigraph, like the title itself, becomes clear. The inchoate conclusion mystifies us, in a sense dislocates us and directs us to the complexity of moral responsibility, trauma and atonement.

If we consider as we have in Chapters 1 and 2 of this report, that conflict and trauma, as La Capra contests, can never be mastered but only understood, then the narrative that McEwan devises certainly echoes and asserts this. *Atonement* traces the consciousness of the protagonist who is grappling with her guilt and remorse. The novel is divided into four sections: Parts One to Three and a short yet decisively important coda entitled "London 1999". The dislocation we experience from the perceptions that are foregrounded are partly due to

[53] Jeff Giles, "A Novel of [Bad] Manners", *Newsweek,* n.p.

point of view. Part One, shared by four characters is set in the Tallis country house (Surrey) in the summer of 1935. It opens with "leisurely expansiveness unexpected from Ian McEwan".[54] The house, renamed at the end of the novel as Tilney Hotel (the name of Northanger Abbey's occupants), is an ironic reference to *Northanger Abbey.* We trace Briony's "feverish literary ambition" as she plans *The Trials of Arabella* where she is author and actor of both a family production and a grimmer tragic drama of a rape outside a mock Greek temple in the lavish grounds of Tallis' estate. This part of the novel is written realistically and with evocative conviction. Mc Ewan in an interview with Harriett Gilbert commented that he wanted Part One to be "a slow psychological unfolding".[55] The intricate detail of the house and estate is in keeping with the literary style of Virginia Woolf. The narrative flows in and out of differing consciousness as we move through the slow and suffocating tension towards the climax. Avoiding the typical McEwanesque opening of a traumatic episode such as the ballooning accident in *Enduring Love*, McEwan here draws us through subtle, leisurely style. Moving from the violent episodes of domestic violence in Part One, Part Two (five years later) is viewed through the traumatic lens of Robbie Turner at the retreat to Dunkirk. War and devastation form the central focus here as we share, in intricate detail, the horror of the retreat. In a concurrent time frame to Part Two, we enter Part Three which graphically narrates the events which culminate in the preparations of receiving the wounded at the hospital where Briony is a nurse. Briony, guilt-ridden, witnesses the aftermath of traumatic violence. "Both sections are immeasurably the most powerful that McEwan, already a master of narrative suspense and horror, has ever written".[56] Lastly, the coda is told from first person narration (Briony) where Briony is 77 years old. It is at this junction where we are called on to review all that we have read in Parts One to Three. Written from a realistic perspective, we are drawn to a "pivot" in the narrative which forces a new and unexpected interpretation of a seemingly "realist" account accentuated by the stylistic shift of narrative. A familiar technique of McEwan to provide a "twist" at the end, we need to reconfigure our understanding and interpretation of the text. It is in the "coda" of the novel (perhaps for the first time) that the postmodernist qualities are revealed.

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[54] Peter Kemp, "Atonement by Ian McEwan", *Times Online,* n.p.

[55] Interview with Harriett Gilbert on World Book Club.BBC World Service n.p.

[56] Ibid.

When we begin our journey through *Atonement,* we are emotionally encumbered by palimpsestic traumatic events: personal, social and national. At each turn we witness trauma, observe suffering on global and personal level and acknowledge the disruption of the individual's frame of reference. Accommodation and transformation of these events become the unfolding scenarios of the novel. However, McEwan draws us to the title of *Atonement* and the intertextual reference to *Northanger Abbey.* In a sense, we expect there to be a resolution, a reparation of trauma through atonement and the expected process of healing and transformation.

Regarded as "his greatest achievement to date"[57], I concur with Hermione Lee who comments that in *Atonement* "historical layers of English fiction are invoked and rewritten".[58] The rewriting of the narration is an important aspect when we consider trauma and its tentative possibility of resolution. The suggestion is that trauma is transformative in its disruptive qualities. It is in its rupture (gestured by the disruption or rewriting of English fiction) that McEwan positions his response to trauma. The process of healing and transformation result in a renewed vision through the writing process of the fiction Briony has been labouring over the majority of her life, meticulously editing and redrafting the details as she wants them to be. She balances her psychological needs with real events of the trauma. She conceptualises the action, often readjusting it to incorporate a reparation to ease her guilt. Her narrative engages with the moral responsibility she lacks in her earlier reckless actions in Part One which culminates in Robbie's arrest and severing ties between Robbie and Cecilia.

In his interview with Harriett Gilbert, McEwan confirms this when he explains that the strength of his novel, in his perception, lies in the premise that there is no happy ending, that we see "merely an attempt to live an examined life, to live a life aware of moral choices even if the journey in terms of its outcome is not happy". [59] As the novel progresses through Part Three, we are hopeful that atonement and forgiveness will occur but the strength of the ending lies in the surprise that forgiveness will never happen, as McEwan states "not in real-

[57] Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan*, p. 156. This attests to the reviews on the novel. Frank Kermode (L*ondon Review of Books,* 23:19) stated that it was "his finest" (p.8) as explained in Chapter 1 of this study.

[58] Hermione Lee, "Review of *Atonement* by Ian McEwan", *Observer,* n.p.

[59] Op. cit

istic terms anyway".[60] At the end of Part Three, we are encouraged to believe that Briony's forgiveness by Robbie and Cecilia is a possibility, provided she clears Robbie of his deed through a letter. There is an intentional false sense of optimism:

> She spoke slowly. 'I'm very very sorry. I've caused you such terrible distress.' They continued to stare at her, and she repeated herself. 'I'm very very sorry.'
>
> It sounded so foolish and inadequate, as though she had knocked over a favourite houseplant, or forgotten a birthday […].
>
> She was calm and she considered what to do. Together, the note to her parents and the formal statement would take no time at all. Then she would be free for the rest of the day. She knew what was required of her. Not simply a letter, but a new draft, atonement, and she was ready to begin. (*348 – 349)*

In the coda, we are invited to go beyond the text and the event itself. We soon realise that the story we have read is a fabrication of the protagonist and at the closure we understand that not only have Robbie and Cecilia never reunited, but they have been victims of war and were killed before Briony succeeded in gaining atonement from them. Further, at the close, she realises that she is suffering from dementia. Paradoxically, in McEwan's view, the reader should feel some form of upliftment even if the outcome is not as has been foregrounded and suggested. The importance is that in trying to cope with her guilt and trauma, Briony has made a journey and has lived an examined life, to have a moral consciousness that allows her to question and reflect not only on the traumatic stressor but also on the consequences that resulted for herself and for those around her. There is, ultimately, no atonement but an attempt at atonement in her final new draft to which we have been privy. The deed remains, but Briony has made an effort in order to accommodate her error.

The journey in accepting and dealing with the trauma becomes the focus of the narrative and not necessarily the specific trauma itself. Exploring the potentiality and limitation of narrative fiction in representation of war trauma is not the central aim of this research report, but it does merit some comments at this juncture. In researching material for Part Two of *Atonement*, McEwan read a vast number of historical documents in the Imperial War Mu-

[60] Ibid.

seum to search for what he refers to as "the emotional truth of the thing […] the particular details" which offer an entry "into the emotional horror".[61] He refers in part to reading details unpublished historical material like letters, diaries which drew him to feel in touch with the horror of war. The minutiae of soldiers having to shoot their horses, or bibles being burnt have been alluded to in *Atonement* and these records have been included as a backdrop into the emotional horror that represents symbolically the chaos and terror within Briony's mind. [62]

McEwan discusses in the same interview with Harriett Gilbert that any way into an emotively charged scene begins with metonymy where precise and often small details of real events stand for something larger. For McEwan, who "grew up in the shadow of the war", the proximity and verisimilitude of these unpublished historical documents he accessed and read in the Imperial War Museum in London, afforded him the opportunity to grapple with the records and "traces" of trauma in an authentic mode. [63] His narrative draws on the chaotic terrifying moments read in the raw, historical facts and documentation of the archives. Within the latter half of twentieth century and the twenty first century, trauma has become a popular backdrop and theme in writing to the extent of sensationalising either real or imagined traumatic events. McEwan does not use trauma as a formulaic motif so prevalent in populist fiction and Hollywood disaster films, but rather as a backdrop to reflect on the fragmented and turmoiled mind of current generations.[64]

If we reflect on the way that violence impacts on the lives of McEwan's characters in *Atonement* and *Saturday,* then the notions of "absence" and "loss" as explained in Chapter 2 of this study, will assist us in this regard. Briony is an indulged thirteen year old who is obsessed with order and structure. We are told in the early pages, that while her room "was a stew of unclosed books, unfolded clothes, unmade bed, unemptied ashtrays, Briony's was a shrine to her controlling demon"(5). Her yearning is, we are told "for a harmonious, organised world that denied her the reckless possibilities of wrongdoing. Mayhem and destruction

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ian Mc Ewan,*Atonement* pages 219, 242 – 243 where these events have been described.

[63] Op.cit.

[64] In Chapter 2 of this study the vicarious experience of trauma, as explained by Laurie Vickroy is explained. (Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction).*

were too chaotic for her tastes, and she did not have it in her to be cruel"*(*5). Her desire for and need to order her life and those around her becomes a way for her to establish identity, understand a world that is complex and mysterious and a way for her to enforce her values. We are told that for Briony "a love of order also shaped the principles of justice" *(*7).

In her eyes, the order assimilates a simple structure of cause and effect. The reader finds her both intolerant in choosing to live in the realm of imagination and fiction, and intolerant to responding empathetically to people's needs. She regards the domestic suffering of her cousins Lola and the nine-year old twins, Jackson and Pierrot, as belonging to "the realm of disorder [...] divorce [...] an affliction [...] she did [...] not regard a proper subject" (8*,9*). Yet, we learn soon enough that Briony is surrounded by things that are not ordered: her parents' marriage a dismal failure, an absent father, a life of seclusion on the estate cut off from the outside world. Cecilia too we learn notices how her environment which was once so "familiar was transformed into delicious strangeness" (20)once she returns from study in Part One, suggesting perhaps that the secluded and shrouded estate seems to rob those in it of experiences from the outer world. It is a secluded and cloistered environment, we are lead to believe, where many do not truthfully care about one other – a world perhaps where people acknowledge each other's existence but not each other's value.

Genuine empathy for others appears lacking and rather than engaging with difficulties that confront her, Briony escapes in the realm of fantasy where she can structure a narrative (beginning with *The Trials of Arabella*) to establish order and control to her disordered world. When not in control, we witness Briony becoming anxious and insecure. Her need to manipulate and see things from her perspective is her only mantra and safeguard in a world that is cloistered and at times confusing.

She finds the passionate scene between Briony and Robbie in the library and the seductiveness that she witnesses at the fountain to be disturbing, mystical and "illogical" (23). It is an infringement and violation of her created ordered world. In her myopic and infantile world there are no consequences for creating inflexible order and structure, only consequences for the lack of these gestured towards her disparaging comments about Lola, Jackson and Pierot.

It is thus not surprising that she construes an imaginary episode at what she believes she witnesses or should witness at the fountain. Truth at this stage is mysterious, chaotic and unstructured - perhaps even romanticised - thus she opts for a means of transforming the inexplicable to a created structure of imagined events which she believes to be true. The dangers of this are not visible to her young and immature mind, so for Briony the misconception which leads to deceit and betrayal which follows, when naming Robbie as the "maniac" (26) at the supposed rape of Lola, becomes yet another way of creating a world which is monitored through her control:

> Her eyes confirmed the sum of all she knew and had recently experienced. The truth was in the symmetry, which was to say, it was founded in common sense. The truth instructed her eyes. So when she said, over and over again, I saw him, she meant it, and was perfectly honest, as well as passionate (169).

Brian Finney, in his excellent assessment of narration and fiction in *Atonement* , explains that narration as an act of interpretation, may also paradoxically open up the feasibility of misinterpretation.[65] It is what Lacan calls *mèconnaissance*. He explains how Briony perceives the world through the eyes of fiction as her means of establishing control. Her imagination results in her interpretation of Robbie and Cecilia at the fountain as misinterpretation of events. This imagination confuses her, threatens her logic and need for order and thus all subsequent images of Robbie are tainted by what she has misinterpreted. "The truth", we read in *Atonement*, "was in the symmetry […] truth instructed her eyes" (59). If we consider her fiction as her need for order then we can deduce that this and her over-active imagination is the stressor of trauma which finds its symbolic image at the fountain. This is recalled to memory and clouds Briony's judgement for the events that culminate in her construed lie. "The Two Figures at the Fountain" becomes an emotional, symbolic need for "atonement".

Ironically, her quest of establishing a logical composition for an event, what she refers to as "symmetry" (36) concludes in tragedy and chaos: the deaths of Cecilia and Robbie on the one hand, and Briony's mourning and shame which become a life quest for atonement for her misjudgement on the other hand.

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[65] Brian Finney, "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion; the Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*" *Journal of Modern Literature*.

The adult Briony remembers the past, lives through the trauma that it has caused and attempts to work through the shame by seeking forgiveness from Cecilia and Robbie – her atonement through her fiction. More importantly, she aims to seek forgiveness from herself. She relives and acts out imagined scenarios that the consequences of her actions have caused as a means of reparation. She blends her angst with the anguish and pain of war by creating a traumatic historical context in shaping a logical series of ordered and imagined violent scenarios in her novel: she rewrites and reconstructs the past so that she can attempt to achieve fictional atonement. In La Capran terms, she converts her emotions from "absence" (her inability to have perceived her actions as tragic betrayal) to "loss" by locating a specific scene of events, albeit fictional, where her weaknesses are acted out and resolved. This does not totally remove the awareness of that anxiety or the pain associated with it but supplies it with an identifiable object which affords her the possibility of self-reflection:

> The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute powers of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all. *(*371)

Giving her sister and Robbie life in her novel is a stand against "oblivion and despair" and her closest attempt at achieving atonement. (372)

An interesting point to consider in terms of Ruth Leys's theories is whether the response and reaction to trauma by the protagonists in *Atonement* and *Saturday* is driven by guilt or shame. In *From Guilt to Shame* (Princeton, PUP, 2007), Leys develops a convincing discussion which shows that the emotions of guilt and shame should not be considered totally exclusive with shame perceived as a variant of guilt. Linked to "mimetic" and "antimimetic" theories explained in Chapter 2 of this report, Leys privileges shame over guilt and theorises that the nuances of both may be understood in terms of "mimesis" and "anitimimesis". The hypnotic identification of violence through re-enactment of events, as we discussed as "mimesis" in chapter 2, is then an act of guilt and does not allow the victim to feel any sense of reprieve. The survivor feels trapped in the recreation of the same events that caused him/her trauma

with feelings of self reproach of "I live, therefore I am guilty".[66] One could, therefore assume that Briony's motives and need for atonement are driven by guilt.On a deeper understanding of Leys discussions on the difference between guilt and shame, however, we realise that Briony's reactions are driven from the shame of her actions and not the guilt of her actions. According to Leys, guilt results in the subject unconsciously identifying with the violent "other", while shame is a consciousness of "self" in an action. In Briony's case, she is the violent other who feels shame for her actions.

If we consider the definition of trauma, as explored in Chapter 2, to suggest an emotional wound that creates distress and disruption to consciousness, then McEwan's use of intertextuality in his graphic war scenes in both the retreat (Part 2) and the reception of the wounded in the hospital (Part 3) becomes a metaphorical representation of Briony's trauma.[67] The distress of Briony's error draws her to recreate a series of scenes where there are both intense physical as well as emotional wounds echoing the angst she experiences throughout her adult life. The obvious symbolism of Briony attempting to tend the wounded and being in large measure unsuccessful at that renders a concrete image for her plight at seeking atonement and transforming her trauma through forgiveness. Contrasting the rich leisurely style of Part One, images in Parts Two and Three are described through the eyes of Robbie Turner with an emphasis on bodies in pain, destroyed objects and painful sensations of dehydration, starvation, fear and paralyzed numbing of the horror of the environment. Sentences are generally short and stark drawing impetus of the horror of the experience. The sensations of the horror are described in precise, visceral language. The focus in both these parts is recognising emotion through the visual:

> Turner had seen them hunt down a sprinting man for the sport of it. With a free hand he was pulling on the woman's arm. The boy was wetting his pants and screaming in Turner's ear. The mother seemed incapable of run-

[66] Quoted by Giorgio Ambgden as cited in Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame* p.14.

[67] *Atonement* is a novel with rich intertextuality e.g. Robbie quotes lines of Shakespeare's Malvolio and later from Auden's "In Memory of W.B.Yeats". There are also Intertextual references to Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* and *Clarissa*. For the purpose of this research report, these Intertextual references have not been discussed as they pertain to drawing on the echo that the novel is dealing with the art of fiction. See Brian Finney (Op.Cit).

> ning. She was stretching out her hand and shouting. She wanted her son back. The child was wriggling towards her, across his shoulder. Now came the screech of the falling bomb. They said if you heard the noise stop before the explosion, your time was up. As he dropped to the grass he pulled the woman with him and shoved her head down. He was half lying across the child as the ground shook to the unbelievable roar. (236)

Images of the mutilated body are further foregrounded in Part Three. The events surrounding Briony's experiences are described with equal terror and startling precision. Subtext becomes evident on subsequent close readings. Part Three opens with a general statement suggesting the metaphorical impact of what is to follow: "The unease was not confined to the hospital." (269). Later, after having tended Corporal McIntyre we read:

> Every secret of the body was rendered up - bone risen through flesh, sacrilegious glimpses of an intestine or an optic nerve. From this new and intimate perspective, she learned a simple, obvious thing she had always known, and everyone knew: that a person is, among all else, a material thing, easily torn, not easily mended. *(*304).

The implicit horror and paralysed trauma which dominates Parts Two and Three are, as we have seen, in large measure explored through the senses. This alludes to the comments made by Maurice Blanchot as explored in Chapter 2 of my report, which suggests that language is incapable of describing the emotional intensity and magnitude of trauma. The suggestion in the sections indicated from *Atonement* alludes to this. Where the scenes enact horror, these are done in visual terms, almost filmic, suggesting what we should feel. In so doing, McEwan draws on the fact that language of trauma cannot describe emotions accurately as Blanchot explains, but only on those visual, auditory and tactile details that punctuate the scenes of violence and create intense emotions associated with trauma and distress.

If we are to consider Blanchot's theory that trauma is inaccessible through language, we need at this stage to draw on the fact that the events which we read in Parts One to Three, are in fact recreated fictional events. Fiction-making is language-based and Briony utilises language as a means to create meaning from her traumatic episodes surrounding her life. However as discussed her atonement is never fully actualised and her moral failure of her lie in accusing Robbie can never be revoked. She attempts, we read and deduce from the coda, that she reconstructs a reality which in turn can never be achieved. She suggests in the final

draft of her fiction, that novel writing is uneasy and has a shifting relationship with morality. Dominic Head offers an interesting and detailed evaluation of the manner in which her metafiction is in essence a constructed morality and removes Briony from total responsibility of her injudiciousness as a young girl. He meticulously observes that "the empathetic creativity of complex fiction-making underpinned by atonement and kindness, and signalled through metafictional device is what *Atonement* pits against the horrors of the twentieth century".[68]

Briony does not resolve her trauma, as accommodation may only be achieved through atonement. She certainly does achieve in measure a greater awareness of human frailties especially her own. She has a degree of self acceptance but certainly not self forgiveness. Her atonement becomes a reconciliation of self being "at-one" with herself as McEwan explains in an interview with Kate Kellaway.[69] For Briony, her created fiction becomes a partially unsuccessful catharsis and not an exorcis of trauma asserting La Capra's notion that trauma in large measure can only be understood and never mastered. It is through her fiction that Briony gains a greater understanding of her trauma, only to know that in turn she is to face yet another traumatic outcome as a victim of dementia.

In summary, McEwan's representation of trauma incorporates the vision that the focus should not be on the trauma itself but the process and journey towards a feasible, yet in all probability, impossible healing. One cannot sense and share in McEwan's vision that, as readers, we should feel uplifted at the close of the novel. There is a feeling of senselessness in morality which can be rewritten to ease the pain. It leaves us feeling uneasy particularly in the suggestion that reparation of trauma, morality may be created. The reader ends the novel feeling that the trauma is non redemptive and can never be mastered, erased and repaired. What empowers Briony is the fact that she has gained a greater knowledge of her own self that that through literature Cecilia and Robbie, even though they have never forgiven her even in the realm of fiction, live for eternity in the happiness of which she had deprived them. In his next novel, *Saturday*, McEwan offers us an empowering view of dealing

[68] Op.cit. p. 174

[69] In an interview with Kate Kellaway ("At Home with his Worries: An Interview with Ian McEwan", *Observer*, McEwan explains how atonement is really atoning towards an image of self and is not always a success.

with trauma so that in the final pages of that novel, we do not experience the same sense of loss that we feel at the close of *Atonement.*

CHAPTER FOUR: SATURDAY

In this research report, I have explored, as hypothesised by La Capra, how trauma, its experience and its recollections is transformative and disruptive, yet incapable of being fully mastered. The experience of trauma is encoded in memory. As stated by Paivo, as explored in the previous chapter, it is most powerfully recollected in visual details. [70] Like *Atonement*, *Saturday* explores the consciousness of its protagonist, Henry Perowne in a world which is replete with multilayered incidents of violence. It is a novel which responds to a world that recalls the visual impact of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, so globally relayed with cinematic plenitude in the media.

Saturday, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this research report, is not a 9/11 novel. It engages in exploring how people situate themselves in a world that has been transfigured by global terrorism. In an interview with Jeffrey Brown on "Online News Hour" (2005), McEwan reflects his setting and time frame of the novel:

> I wanted to explore a flavour of the present. I hadn't really expected the present to be quite so fascinating as it had become or quite so horribly fascinating. I hoped to sort of get a flavour of the city, not also deny the pleasures involved in being in a city, and to mix anxieties with pleasure. This is a novel that is set not about the event but its shadow, and it casts a very long shadow, not only over international affairs, but in the very small print of our lives. [71]

McEwan shares Edward Said's "belief that works of literature are not just texts but participate in 'worldliness'- they become interpretations of their place in a global setting."[72] The duality of post 9/11 existence, with its paradoxical emotions of potential joy and subliminal fear, "this happiness cut with aggression"(79), is personified in the characters governing their relationships not only with each other, but to the world at large.

Security and unremitting fulfilment is merely an illusion, but McEwan presents a narrative which relates the possibility of creating potentially serene existence, albeit fragile, against the backdrop of a world that is no longer the same. As the novel opens, satisfaction and suc-

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[70] Op.Cit.

[71] Jeffrey Brown, " Author Ian McEwan Discusses his Latest Novel", *Online News Hour*, n.p.

[72] Op.Cit Finney p.8

cess is foregrounded, while the terror is the dark and irksome backdrop to a world which confronts a symbolic battle to continue to live a life as unaffected as possible by the horror of 9/11. Within the first few pages Henry Perowne positions himself in a world that is permeated with violence, haunted by the memories of global horrors.

He looks out from his bedroom window with mixed emotions: on the one hand he echoes the familiar line from Darwin's *Origins of Species* by stating that "there is a grandeur in this view of life"(55) looking out over London with admiration and wonder while regarding the city a "success, a brilliant invention, a biological masterpiece*"*(5). On the other hand, he "wonders about this sustained, distorting euphoria*"(*5), experiencing an overwhelming sense of anxiety, triggered by the sight of a cargo plane crashing. Perowne's view of the world since 9/11 has changed as he admits *"*everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed.*"(*16) The underlying trauma is not in this instance caused by personal loss but by a global threat viewed from the comfort of a television lounge:

> It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association [...] Watching death on a large scale , but seeing no one die. No blood, no screams, no human figures at all, and into this emptiness, the obliging imagination set free. *(*16)

Perowne's life in the present, is fractured and influenced by flashbacks of the media splurge of 9/11. It clouds his judgement; his rationality becomes his weakness and anxiety intensefies. He questions about the probability – if at all:

> To enjoy an hour's recreation without this invasion, this infection from the public domain [...] He has a right now and then – everyone has it – not to be disturbed by world events, or even street events [...] It seems to Perowne that to forget, to obliterate a whole universe of public phenomena in order to concentrate is a fundamental liberty. Freedom of thought. (108)

Where news and the "morbid fixation" (127) of watching television coverage of 9/11 offers an interpretation of chaos, the same empirical logic leans towards generalisation leading to misinterpretation of what is not, in reality a threat, but a cargo plane in need of an emergency landing. His empirical mind creates order out of chaos but paradoxically construes chaos, as a means to rationalise his terror, when it is not there. Where in *Atonement*

Briony's imagination at first is the destruction of truth in the construed lie and then, in turn, becomes the desperate attempt at reparation to seek atonement, in *Saturday*, Henry Perowne's scientific imagination has the potential of disengaged destruction while it feeds his anxiety. His mind creates the *"*catastrophe observed from the safe distance...the other familiar element – the horror of what he can't see*"(*16).

Lisa McCann reviews post-traumatic stress syndrome explaining that one of the manifestations of post-traumatic experience is the overt denial of painful traumatic recollections, first described as denial by Freud. [73] Individuals often avoid accommodation of traumatic visual memories, or make superficial adjustments (as is the case with Perowne's misjudgement of the cargo plane) because transformation and acceptance of the original trauma is too chaotic and disruptive for the individual.

The event of seeing a plane in distress in the sky immediately evokes images of cataclysmic proportions as Perowne relives the past anguish even to the extent of imaging details of the victim's last moments on board. Such trauma, for Perowne contributes to a "community of anxiety*"(*180) a schism in world view which marks both exuberance in an existence that appears successful, safe and secure and the impending threat of the unknown terrorists who can end it all:

> a result, a consequence, exists separately in the world, independent of himself, known to others, awaiting his discovery *(*19).

It is a world which is confusing, fragmented, yet equally beautiful in its paradox.

If we consider the opening emotions of the novel in exploring La Capra's notions of "absence" and "loss", as defined in the Introduction of this research project, we gain greater insight of McEwan's cogent depiction of trauma. The World Trade Centre attack comes to represent for Perowne "loss" of a world that cannot ever be what it was; a world where insecurity is definitive and safety an illusion. This is subtly portrayed in an early description in *Saturday* in an intertextual allusion to Schrödinger's Cat:

[73] Op. cit.

> […]hidden from view in a covered box, is either still alive, or has just been killed by a randomly activated hammer hitting a vial of poison. Until the observer lifts the cover from the box, both possibilities, alive cat and dead cat, exist side by side.(18).

Yet, we find Perowne reflecting often about the "grand achievements of the living"(77) mindful that some academics like "to dramatise modern life as a sequence of calamities" (77) because progress is "old-fashioned and ridiculous" (77). He believes that by and large there has been an amelioration of the lives of many:

> The street is fine, and the city, grand achievement of the living and all the dead who've ever lived here, is fine too, and robust. It won't easily allow itself to be destroyed. It's too good to let go. Life in it has steadily improved over the centuries for most people, despite the junkies and beggars now. The air is better, and the salmon are leaping in the Thames, and otters are returning. At every level, material, medical, intellectual, sensual, for most people it has improved. (77)

By and large though, he feels "alert" and "inexplicably elated"(3) acknowledging that he is happy. He becomes complacent about feeling a false sense of security for having taken every measure possible to safeguard his life and that of his family. However, violence intersects Perowne's life in the public domain with his attack by Baxter nudging an awareness that "nothing can be predicted, but everything, as soon as it happens, will seem to fit" (87). The attack feeds his subconscious insecurity and apprehension exposing his vulnerability. After having played a game of squash, Perowne, fragile from the accident with Baxter, attempts initially to resolve his encounter by adopting what he knows has secured him thus far – disengaging himself from his action, and not morally examining his reaction:

> It's been a tough week, a disturbed night, a hard game. Without looking, he finds the button that secures the car. The door locks are activated in rapid sequence, little resonating clunks, four semiquavers that lull him further. An ancient evolutionary dilemma: the need to sleep, the fear of being eaten. Resolved at last by central locking. (121)

It is only when Perowne is able to create a tangible object around his feelings of anxiety in the form of Baxter, when he consciously experiences first-hand his family under threat that he is able to negate his denial and respond to violence and trauma in a more positive manner by reaching out and offering Baxter a form of temporary reprieve. In La Capran terms Perowne transforms "absence" (in the absence of faith symbolised by the destruction of the World Trade Centre in a metaphorical manner) to "loss" in the realistic encounter with

Baxter.[74] The transition from an abstract metaphorical fear to a tangible, realistic one is generally regarded as a means of coping with a traumatic episode. Kierkegaard and Heideigger claim if we locate a specific object that could be feared then we can find ways of eliminating that fear so that the fear of "something" soon becomes a fear of "nothing".[75] La Capra, however hypothesises that fear can never be totally eliminated – it cannot become a "nothing"; however, a greater consciousness of the trauma equips us to understand the traumatic episode and its consequences.

Perowne in the final outcome learns that threat, and its panacea security, will continue to be a way of life in a postmodern world – a world with the potential of beauty and compassion but continually fragile and vulnerable. Life in this world then, is no different to Schrödinger's Cat as he describes it in the early pages, with the possibility of establishing meaning out of binaries such as life and death, peace and war, survival and death . These events should be considered as a part of life, not an extraordinary experience. These occurrences cannot be denied or feared but should be engaged with a possibility of moving beyond the angst to a new level of understanding.

Let us consider how Perowne's experiences position McEwans's representation of violence using Ruth Leys's theory of "mimesis" and "antimimesis" as explained in Chapter 1. Even

[74] In an interview with Giovanna Borradori, Jacques Derrida reflects on the events of 9/11 on the lives of all who have witnessed the catastrophe through the media. He explains that 9/11 in its inexplicable horror which "to a large extent conditioned, constituted, if not actually constructed, circulated at any rate through the media by means of a prodigious techno-socio-political machine... the fact that we perhaps have no concept and no meaning available to us to name in any other way this 'thing' that has just happened, this supposed 'event'." The fear requires becoming tangible and concrete in order to be negotiated. This concurs with the ideas postulated by La Capra. Derrida continues to discuss notions which are similar to Blanchot about the incapability of language to label such an intense emotion, thus requiring a physical object to concretise the anxiety associated with the trauma. He states: "But this very 'thing', the place and meaning of this 'event' remains ineffable, like an intuition without a concept, like a unicity with no generality on the horizon or with no horizon at all, out of range for language that admits its powerlessness and so is reduced to pronouncing mechanically a date, repeating it endlessly, as a kind of ritual incantation, a conjuring poem, a journalistic litany or rhetorical refrain that admits to not knowing what it's talking about…The telegram of this metonymy – a name, a number – points out the unqualifiable by recognizing that we do not recognize or even cognisize that we do not yet know how to qualify, that we do not know what we are talking about." (Giovanna Borradori, *9/11 and Global Terrorism: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida*, p.1).

[75] See S. J. McGrath, *Heidegger: A (Very)Critical Introduction*.

though he feels "baffled and fearful"(4) when reflecting "and now, what days are these?" (*S,* 4), Perowne, we have explained, feels insulated and distanced from the violence that permeates the world beyond his window. His aloofness is represented from his god-like distance as he looks down on the square noticing with surgeon's precision the anxieties of different people who *"*often drift into the square to act out their dramas"(60). Perowne sees the events of 9/11 as external traumas ("antimimesis"*)* from which temporarily he can insulate himself and his family by believing that he can shield them from further disaster. [76] He observes too the mimetic cycle of violence which was initiated with the event of 9/11 so that a burning cargo plane immediately evokes apocalyptic visions which forewarns perhaps the personal attack on his life and the security of his family – violence sparks violence with the understanding that violence perpetrates yet more violence. When in the final stages of the novel, McEwan offers a solution, he is offering the possibility of breaking the mimesis of violence - this incessant obsession of man's attempt to control violence with another act of violence. Trauma in *Saturday* does not become a debilitating experience that ends all, a mimesis of violence, but rather a liminal experience of transition which empowers a new vision of life.

As with *Atonement*, *Saturday* has an intertextual epigraph, an extract, in this instance, from Saul Bellow's *Hertzog (1964*) which preambles the novel itself. Confused by a world that is no longer identifiable, Hertzog discovers the futility of ideas which no longer have meaning. Unlike Perowne, Hertzog faces a series of personal and domestic failures. His thoughts about life in a city in the mid-twentieth century in America echo similar dilemmas facing Perowne in London. Yet, the capacity to act consequentially on reality, his ability to attempt reparation of human conflict is the deciding difference between the two protagonists. The parallel draws us to notice how, in both novels, it is minor car accident that results in the epiphany of knowledge and changed perspective. The extract in the epigraph, like the events in *Saturday*, situates the protagonists in relation to current ideas which are framed by trauma.

[76] See Introduction of this report where the theory of "mimesis" and "antimimesis" as hypothesised by Ruth Leys is discussed.

The rich intertextual echoes of literary texts in *Saturday* have been discussed and documented by many critics such as Lee Segal, Brian Finney and Dominic Head.[77] Intertextuality, as described by Kristeva and explained in Chapter 1, transmutes beyond the intersection of texts. In *Saturday* it incorporates historical environment catapulted by 9/11. The backdrop of 9/11 weaves the fabric of trauma in all the episodes and thoughts in the novel. Andrew Foley (2009) succinctly encapsulates how world vision changed with the destruction of the Twin Towers:

> It seemed clear by the end of the [twentieth] century that liberal democracy had established itself as a stable form of government in many of the world's countries [...] The attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre, and the global media coverage which it received, shook the Western world out of whatever complacency it may have enjoyed in the 1990s and changed fundamentally how people thought of themselves and their countries [...] trauma on a global scale has become part of the modern collective consciousness [...] *Saturday* is undoubtedly one of the most vitally important political novels of the new century.[78]

Trauma caused by social injustice manifested as intolerance and prejudice is introduced intermittently in *Saturday* projecting the continual multilayered conflict in society. Political intolerance is suggested with the discussion of the persecution of the Falun Gong symbolised by the protesting couple who "keep vigil across the road from the Chinese embassy [...for] beatings, torture, disappearances and murder"(123) while "you see Mainland Chinese in Harrods, soaking up the luxury goods"(123). [79] Hypocrisy and discrimination against Islamic women symbolised by "three figures in black burkhas [...who have] a farcical appearance, like kids larking about at Halloween" (124) who appear to "walk around so entirely obliterated" (124) while their husbands sport "baggy shorts and Rolexes and are entirely charming and worldly" (124). A satirical observation on western consumerism and double standards is intimated when Perowne mentions that recent scientific research has shown that fish have the same pain receptors as humans. Perowne glibly concludes that he too is part of the dou-

[77] Op. cit.

[78] Andrew Foley, *The Imagination of Freedom*, pp. 238 – 240.

[79] In 1999 the Chinese Communist Party disbanded the practice of the Falun Gong and began to victimise its practioners in a ruthless manner.

ble standards as he confesses he would hesitate killing lobster for his fish stew, yet would willingly order one in a restaurant. These observations are minutely detailed by Perowne who, sensitive to injustices and double standards, ironically disengages from the rich multi-cultural and cosmopolitan society for which London is known.[80]

We are aware that Perowne's privileged social standing influences the way he dismissively treats Baxter, a man of a lower social class by intentionally lying to him - what Perowne refers to as "a shameless blackmail" (95). At first, conscious that he "knows himself not to be a man of pity" (98) he manipulates events and medical information when he has an accident with Baxter because "when you are diseased [as Baxter is] it is unwise to abuse the shaman" (95). Perowne's reaction reflects a disregard for social responsibility towards Baxter who, in his eyes, is a genetically flawed thug disadvantaged by his meagre and lowly social status. Baxter is a victim of social inequality relying on deceit and violence in order to make a living. Perowne views him disparagingly and as an outcast. This and fear of being attacked prompts him to deceive Baxter in their first encounter offering him hope for Huntington's disease. It raises questions of ethical standing particularly considering Perowne's profession, but the moral implications of this are reflected only at the end of the novel – it is a journey of an examined life that Perowne is to undertake.

Part of Perowne's journey entails coming to terms with a changed world. Twenty-first century London – the "capital of cool" as it was known circa 2000 - faced a drastic change forced on it by the events of 9/11. Frank Furedi (2006) comments that:

> Catastrophes, wars and major historical events have important material, geopolitical and economic consequences. They also challenge a society's capacity to make sense of the unexpected, and its belief in its own way of life. In material terms, 9/11 was a minor incident: economic disruption soon gave way to an upturn, and in terms of daily routine people showed that they possessed the resilience to carry on. For most of us, it was business as usual. However, 9/11 exposed and brought to the surface the difficulty Western society has in giving meaning to its way of life. Ever since the end of the Cold War, this problem was bound to force the West to account for itself in positive

[80] Perowne's condescending attitudes are not limited to those who are socially inferior to him but also to those who are not English. One recalls his stereotype images he conjures up at first of Daisy's Italian companion and father of her child. It is only at the end of the novel, that this perception changes.

> terms; it took 9/11 to force Western elites to acknowledge that they regard their futures as an 'unknown unknown'. As a result, little today can be taken for granted. That is probably what people really mean when they claim that 9/11 changed everything.[81]

These subtle socio-political changes depict London as a society replete with inequalities contributing even further to fear, anxiety and terror on political and domestic level. One is drawn back to the definitions of trauma which point at it being an overwhelming state of feelings of depersonalisation, fragmentation and disjuncture; in short, what McEwan's refers to as a "community of anxiety".[82]

Even though the novel is not a political novel with overt significance to 9/11 as previously explained, one needs to consider how the intertextual reference to 9/11 is used as metaphor to explore public consciousness, in particular that of the protagonist. The novel unfolds in a twenty four hour period on Saturday 15 February 2003, the day of the largest anti-war demonstration held in London and globally situating the novel in the problematisation of violence. [83] The background of global conflict against which the narrative should be read, opens up a debate about war, violence, the refusal of or resistance to violence since this is an anti-war demonstration. It is a Saturday but a day that will result in an epiphany and a transformation and accommodation. We are told as Perowne recalls an expression from his mother that this day "is bound to be marked out from all the rest"(51). Lee Siegel draws an interesting analogy about the palimpsest of war and personal conflict and explains how

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[81] Frank Furedi, "The Search for Meaning Goes On".

[82] Op. cit.

[83] The 15 February 2003 anti-war protest was a coordinated day of global protests against the imminent invasion of Iraq. The war was justified on the pretext of alleged weapons of mass destruction and protestors questioned the ethics surrounding war as a disarmament strategy. Millions of people protested in approximately 800 cities around the world. According to BBC News, between six and ten million people took part in protests in up to sixty countries over the weekend of the 15th and 16th; other estimates range from eight million to thirty million. The biggest protests took place in Europe. The protest in Rome involved around 3 million people and is listed in the 2004 Guinness Book of World Records as the largest anti-war rally in history. In London, the STOP THE WAR COALITION organised the demonstration which proved to be larger than expected. *The Guardian* newspaper (16 February 2003) reports that the organisers split the departure point of the demonstration into two locations: the Thames Embankment and Gower Street to merge at Piccadilly Circus to move onto Hyde Park. There is factual correlation and detail to the historical events and those referred to in *Saturday* (cf. *Saturday* pp. 78 – 81).

Perowne's confusion and inability to make sense of 9/11 renders him incapable of making any clear-sighted judgement about his stand on the war. He holds no strong opinion about it and after a heated debate with Daisy who is vehemently opposed to the war on Iraq, Perowne admits that he would agree to the war based on his understanding of the atrocities Saddam Hussein committed in his own country, as reported by an Iraqi patient of his, Professor Taleb. Siegel concludes that Perowne in the early stages of the novel, needs to revisit his position in relation to the political ideologies of the war, but finds it difficult to commit to an opinion as he is "wedged in traffic alongside the multiple faces [...experiencing] his own ambivalence as a form of vertigo, of dizzy indecision"(141). In his state of denial he is still grappling with the chaotic world that is, to him, incomprehensible.

Trauma is precipitated in the intertextual debate of the anti war demonstration. The reference points to the issues discussed by the characters, in particular Perowne's musings on violence and war. It also offers a crucial background to the day in question and alludes to events that will unfold, reverberating through the rest of the text. Not only is society threatened by the possibility of further violence from the perpetrators of terrorism but also by the responses of western powers on the "war on terror". It calls us to revisit the moral standpoint on the war: how can Western powers wage a war to stop a war? It is, as Daisy points out to her father that the imminent invasion is "completely barbaric" (*189)*and is ethically questionable. When her father states:

> The hidden weapons, whether they exist or not, they're irrelevant. The invasion's going to happen, and militarily it's bound to succeed. It'll be the end of Saddam and one of the most odious regimes ever known, and I'll be glad.(*189)*

Daisy's response is pivotal in pointing out the moral double standards in his argument:

> So ordinary Iraqis get it from Saddam, and now they have to take it from American missiles, but it's all fine because you'll be glad. (*189).*

This is further in evidence by a personal recount of Professor Taleb, mentioned earlier, who informs Perowne about the circumstances resulting in his detention and torture for undisclosed reasons. Perowne is moved by the fact that victims were the Iraqi citizens as well as the authorities as both were tortured and abused in similar circumstances for undisclosed reasons. The details are relayed in strong visual terms with minutiae of the horror through

sensory images in a similar technique used by McEwan in the graphic details of the war scenario in *Atonement.* Perowne learns from Taleb's accounts how:

> That torture was routine – Miri and his companions heard the screaming from their cells, and waited to be called. Beatings, electrocution, anal rape, near-drowning, thrashing the soles of the feet. Everyone from top officials to street sweepers, lived in a state of anxiety, constant fear. Henry saw the scars on Taleb's buttocks and thighs where he was beaten with what he thought was a branch of some kind of thorn bush. (65)

The visual details of the torture may lay further claim, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this research report, to Blanchot's pertinent theory about language's incapacity to describe the emotions of trauma. Rather than focusing on the trauma the intensity of the emotions are inferred through stark visual imagery. Interesting to note that Derrida's comments pertaining to acts of terrorism and torture, such as those described in the text, centre on diction and add impetus to Blanchot's views:

> The word 'anarchy'[or terrorism] risks making us abandon too quickly the analysis and interpretation of what indeed *looks like* pure chaos. We must do all that we can to account for this appearance. We must do everything possible to make this new 'disorder' as intelligible as possible.[84]

For Perowne the intelligible response is driven by Professor's Taleb's account so that "it seemed clear, Saddam's organising principle was terror"(73).

If the image of a postmodern and post 9/11 society is for Perowne a quagmire of chaos and suffering, the only faith that Perowne has is the security of scientific progress. The intertext of science and its corollary literature is used in paradoxical interplay to show the transformation and accommodation Perowne makes by the close of the novel. Perowne tries to create order out of the chaos caused by fear and insecurity by relying on scientific explanations. He views the world in scientific terms. We notice earlier how he describes the girls in the square in medical terms as having "exogeneous opioid-induced histamine reaction"(60). Science is a grand metanarrative holding answers to many questions, potentially holding solutions to many of our problems. Perowne uses his rational imagination in construing images even

[84] Op. cit. p.2.

when they are not there, relying on his scientific knowledge and skills to make sense out of chaos presented in an attempt to minimise his fear and apprehension. We recall how the cargo plane is a conundrum for him as "he doesn't immediately understand what he sees, though he thinks he does"(13). He uses his rational imagination and construes it to be a meteor then a comet as:

> he revises his perspective outward to the scale of the solar system: this object is not hundreds but millions of miles distant, far out in space swinging in timeless orbit around the sun. It's a comet, tinged with yellow, with the familiar bright core trailing its fiery envelope. (13)

His esteemed reputation in the medical field stands tribute to this. The metaphor of healing and surgery even in the fact that Perowne is a successful neurosurgeon, is suggestive of a world that is suffering from a terminal malady which needs to be cured. The implication is that the solution lies in the consciousness of its characters symbolised in thenumrous references to the brain as seat of cognition, of thinking and reasoning. Yet science cannot guarantee success. McEwan's mastery and precise descriptions of his superior skill in surgery is suggestive of the power of science in curing, explaining or ameliorating illness and disease. He meets Rosalind, who represents love and compassion, through surgery; however, his mother suffers from multi-infarct dementia which gradually disintegrates cognition, while Baxter's Huntington's disease is a neurological disease that is only offered a short reprieve through surgery. Science cannot transform in its entirety and cannot hold all the answers. Like many of the binaries presented in the novel, surgery is seen to be both invasive and an attempt at reparation.

As events lead inexorably towards the invasion of Perowne's personal life by Baxter, we recall how the conflicts in Perowne's personal life have been resolved through careful logic. This rational, scientific approach has partially been successful. We remember in particular, that the burning plane is not an apocalyptic threat but a cargo plane in distress; that the car accident with Baxter did not turn out, as yet, to be as vicious as expected – Perowne has allayed his victim's intentions, at first, through a lie; the squash game, meticulously described in terms of gladiatorial combat is just a game which, as Strauss admits "could have been anyone's game" (116) and the personal feud between Daisy and Grammaticus over a supposedly plagiarised poem is resolved with old ties being harnessed again. However, the superfi-

cial contentment and complacency that all can be resolved through logic is threatened by Perowne himself. This is made clear when, seeing Baxter in his home threatening the safety of his family, Perowne admits to himself:

> It is, of course, logical that Baxter is here. For a few seconds, Perowne's only though is stupidly that: of course. It makes sense. Nearly all the elements of his day are assembled. (206)

It is not at this point that Perowne acknowledges that he should have "lived an examined life, to live aware" to borrow McEwan's words as discussed earlier in this research report. The transformation cannot as yet be complete and will only be complete when Perowne experiences and witnesses an assault on his family. We are told early in the novel that Perowne "knows himself to be incapable of pity" (98) and that he thought it to be a clinical strength. Now as he faces threat, he hopes that Baxter will be moved to pity. It is only when everything that Perowne holds precious, his family which is on the brink of being taken away from him, that Perowne realises the impact of his actions.

Perowne achieves a greater awareness of self when he realises and witnesses Baxter's unexpected response to the didacticism inherent in Arnold's lines moved by the poem "Dover Beach":

> Daisy recited a poem that cast a spell on one man. Perhaps any poem would have done the trick, and thrown the switch on a sudden mood change. [...] But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will, despite all Daisy's attempts to educate him. *(*278)

Unexpectedly, Baxter responds to the virtue of love to which the poem appeals. Having lived a life of trauma brought on primarily through physical illness and social injustices, Baxter is moved in the poem to yearn for a better life. It alters his state of mind and "unlike his fellow street thugs, a part of Baxter clearly longs to leave behind 'vulgarity, hideousness, ignorance, violence' and to enlarge a range of his consciousness by giving it free play." [85] Trauma and violence are replaced by a yearning to live which is not limited only to Baxter, but awakens in Perowne awareness too: that to live an examined life means to show empathy and love especially to those in need. It is important that Perowne gains insight into the poem by witnessing Baxter's response: in turn he too moves from responding to the work in the absolute

[85] Andrew Foley, *The Imagination of Freedom*, p. 267.

of science from the privileged stance, to the imagination of literature. The words of Arnold's "Dover Beach" call out to Baxter and Perowne for moral compassion and ethical conduct in all aspects of violent living because:

> For the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help from pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Both victim and villain are traumatised and both resolve these emotions by reflection and gaining a morally compassionate approach to life. This moves Perowne to make a decision to operate on Baxter and to abolish pressing charges because as Perowne notes "Baxter has a diminishing slice of life worth living, before his descent into nightmare hallucination begins." (278). He reaches out to him to offer a slice of life that shares a greater dignity than dying alone and frightened. Perowne has accommodated his vision breaking the cycle of violence ("mimesis"*)* based on what he has witnessed and experienced in his personal affront reflecting a response of moral responsibility. The experience of trauma becomes for Perowne luminal as there is a shift from "mimesis" to "antimimesis".

Reflecting on this new, compassionate approach to living, Perowne acknowledges the responsibility of having initiated a string of events that could have been calamitous for all involved:

> Is this forgiveness? Probably not, he doesn't know, and he's not the one granting it anyway. Or is he the one seeking forgiveness? He's responsible, after all; twenty hours ago he drove across a road officially closed to traffic, and set in train a sequence of events[...]
>
> Daisy recited a poem that cast a spell on one man. Perhaps any poem would have done the trick, and thrown the switch on a sudden mood change. Still, Baxter fell for the magic, he was transfixed by it, and he was reminded how much he wanted to live. No one can forgive him the use of the knife. But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will...Some nineteenth century poet [...] touched off in

> Baxter a yearning he could barely begin to define. That hunger is his claim on life. (278-279)

Where *Atonement* offers a view that atonement from trauma remains only in the realm of fiction and that rather than atonement there is self-exculpation, the transformation and accommodation of trauma in *Saturday* is consoling. In an article McEwan wrote for *The Guardian* newspaper seven days after the 9/11 attack, McEwan reflects on the impact of global terrorism.[86] This offers substantial insight into his representation of fear and trauma. He opens his article by stating that "Emotions have their narrative" and explores how in his belief there are different stages of trauma and shock in particular:

1. the initial "visual impact" of the trauma results in "fevered astonishment" (One thinks of Perowne's disbelief as he looks at the plane in flames in the sky) [87]

2. "a mood of exhaustion and despair" which leads to depression and withdrawal. (the first encounter with Baxter creates a fear which at first Perowne does not acknowledge to anyone except to Theo) [88]

3. the transformation of the trauma from global to personal (the personal affront and physical intrusion on Perowne's family)

4. The transformation to "empathy, to think oneself in the minds of others. These are the mechanics of compassion"(the decision to embrace Baxter as victim and to operate on him transforms Perowne's vision of the world). For McEwan "All else is pointless".[89] In this transformation there is an accommodation where love offers consolation.

McEwan's *Saturday* closes with a parallel scene to the opening with Perowne staring out of his window; yet Perowne's view of his changing world is now different. We also traced La Capra's belief that trauma cannot be eliminated in its totality, but merely understood

[86] Ian McEwan, "Only Love then Oblivion. Love was all they had set against their Murderers", *The Guardian*, n.p.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

better in a new and altered form. Perowne feels shaky and vulnerable – the world is a challenge as it poses so many new risks, a world where "perhaps a bomb in the cause of jihad will drive them out with all the other faint-hearts into the suburbs, or deeper into the country, or to the chateau - their Saturday will become a Sunday"(276). On closer examination, we are alerted that his new world contains optimistic images, unlike the threatening plane in the opening. "Sleep is no longer a concept […] a softly moving belt conveying him to Sunday" *(*279) and "from the top of his day, this is a future that's harder to read, a horizon indistinct with possibilities"(276) and a future where "Daisy will publish her poems and produce a baby and bring Giulio"(275). The final scene offers consolation as Perowne makes love to his wife, admitting " [a]nd then: there is only this" (279) feeling comfort and compassion in love.[90]

The transformation from anxiety and chaos to transformative consolation is visibly presented through an intertextual reference to Cornelia Parker's installation "Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View" at the Tate Modern Gallery which Perowne admires as it is a "humorous construction, like a brilliant idea bursting out of mind" *(*142). This brief intertextual reference invites us into the ideas pertaining to this art work. This reference is underexplored by critics, yet I feel holds a pivotal understanding of McEwan's representation of trauma and its accommodation and transformation. We have followed a discussion that McEwan, like Iris Murdoch, imposes order out of chaos. The installation admired by Perowne represents such an outcome. Ruth Everson's poem "God's Dark Shed" encapsulates Parker's art, of which Everson comments:

> I knew that I had encountered something extraordinary. I spent a long time watching people as they drifted in and out of the room; the visitors were the movement around the stillness of the suspended explosion and became part of Cornelia Parker's work. The work itself is made from old garden shed which Parker had filled with random objects given to her by friends. She placed all of the objects into the shed and then persuaded explosives experts from the British army to blow up the shed and its contents. She then reconstructed the shed by suspending all the pieces on the gut. Each piece was hanging in its own space; some were quite close

[90] Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*. Paul Gillroy offers a darker reading of the novel suggesting that the conclusion is not optimistic but reminiscent of postcolnial melancholia.

> together, but none touched. I was struck by a sense of isolation. The people who came circled the work but remained separate from it. What is it that holds us together? Is it ever possible to really be of someone else's experience? As a writer I am always frustrated by these questions. What I saw in her work was almost a deconstructed view of the Universe. The world is so randomly constructed and yet it all hangs in place and each part forms part of the total 'sum' of the Universe.[91]

Borne out of chaos and violence, the artwork draws on the chaos and transforms it into a new form:



Cornelia Parker's artwork echoes the transformative nature of chaos suggested in McEwan's *Saturday.* Her work epitomises the potential recreation after destruction as Parker herself comments:

> I resurrect things that have been killed off [...] My work is all about the potential of materials - even when it looks like they've lost all possibilities...It's a modern condition: the threat of bomb scares, and the fear it symbolises. From seeing explosions on the news and all the time in films you sort of think you know what they are, but really your

[91] Ruth Everson, in www.wikipedia.org, n.p.

> firsthand knowledge of it is very limited. I realized I'd never walked through the detritus of a bombed-out building.[92]

The installation establishes cohesion by creating a new aesthetic form. What is particularly suggestive is that Parker's installation pieces are held together, with fragility, by gut. In *Saturday,* in the face of rupturing trauma, Perowne needs to assemble what is disjunctured, chaotic and emotionally punctured. Through a trajectory which is challenging, Perowne requires to piece the emotional fragments of his experiences, to accommodate them to form a cohesive whole which, in its outcome, is different to its original, yet has elements of it. For Perowne, his new vision of compassion and love differs from his earlier fear and apprehension. It has a potential in a world where threat of violence is ever present. The transformation to love, empathy and compassion empowers him to make meaning out of chaos. The process and final analysis is fragile, as the gut is, but still has the potential of holding the installation as a whole rendering beauty because "there is grandeur in this view of life."[93]

In summary, if we trace Perowne's transformation from complacency and negation of trauma to acceptance of trauma, we can see the progression he makes towards an "examined life", as discussed earlier. His transformation occurs in five stages – each stage marking a shift in his understanding of the world:

1. Aware that the cataclysmic attack on the Twin Towers has left a void in security in a post 9/11 London, Perowne feels that he has taken logical measures to secure the safety of his family. He feels content admitting that his family and his work are important to him. He feels by and large unaffected by the global trauma and the changes that it has brought.

2. The cargo plane alerts him that a threat can happen. Apprehension and confusion around this event are short-lived and he soon feels reassured once the media has deconstructed the event and explained the strange occurrence with a logical explanation.

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[92] www. Wikipedia.org

[93] As quoted by Ian McEwan(*S*, 55) from Darwin's *Origins of Species.*

3. Trauma invades Perowne's life when he engages with the people of London in his car journey to his squash game. No longer in the privileged security of his home he becomes vulnerable and is susceptible to an attack by Baxter. His medical expertise allows him to notice that Baxter – a thug – suffers from a degenerative disease. At this point it is the choice of Perowne's actions at this chance encounter that sets a series of traumatic events in motion. Unmoved by the suffering and social need of Baxter, Perowne selects to beguile him into believing that he has a cure. By the end of the encounter, Perowne feels confident that he has resolved the attack. His calmness has been irked and he feels fear and insecurity,

4. This is compounded further when he notices that Baxter is following him. The feeling of insecurity increases yet he feels safe within his home – his sanctuary.

5. The assault in his home leaves him and his family totally exposed. He is forced to confront his approach to those less fortunate than himself and realises the impact and consequences of his actions. He engages with change and like Arnold in "Dover Beach" he looks out of the window, not with fear and trepidation but with empathetic imagination knowing that the world is one that will be threatened by violence. He accepts the challenge of living a life "examined".

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I have suggested that both *Atonement* and *Saturday* are novels of their time – novels implicated in "worldliness', to reiterate Said's term - reflecting on trauma in its different forms, suggesting too that trauma has become an aspect of ordinary existence. For McEwan, novels "are not about teaching people how to live but showing the possibility of what it is like to be someone else".[94] The "shadow of atrocity" alluded to in *Saturday* is, in McEwan's words, "permanent". The utopian promise of a world which is free from trauma, from injustices, from pain and from suffering is not suggested; however, what is suggested is the need for self-reflection, self-transformation and a rewriting of present disjuncture in order to afford the possibility of enhanced knowledge of a world which will continually be punctuated by violence.

The *zeitgeist* mood of McEwan's "clean, sharp and watchful" prose echoes the binaries of life he reflects namely, the order and the chaos that marks postmodern quotidian existence. [95] McEwan suggests, through his texts, that the trajectory towards order creates a greater consciousness of self, in turn rendering a more humane society driven by an enhanced knowledge of imploding chaos.

Within this scope of thought, we witness how Briony and Perowne, for example, abandon their old vision of dwelling on the threshold in a state of ambiguity: Briony incessantly trying to rewrite her story as a cathartic attempt for atonement; Perowne moved by Baxter's suffering, offering him a life of possible reduced suffering through a medical procedure. On a humanistic level, both protagonists come to understand the fragility of humanity in the face of their respective traumas. These occur in separate moments of epiphany suggesting the belief that there is dignity and worth in all people. [96] Perowne, in *Saturday*, reaches out to Baxter, a symbol of a man who in turn is a victim of unprivileged existence. In *Atonement*,

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[94] Kate Kellaway, "At Home with his Worries: An Interview with Ian McEwan", *Observer*.

[95] Theo Tait ,"A Rational Diagnosis", *Times Literary Supplement,* lauds McEwans's writing by suggesting that his melodious sentences and visual nuances have a disturbing undercurrent moving towards a "permanent shadow of atrocity".

[96] In previous chapters I have suggested that Baxter's response to "Dover Beach" and Briony's realisation that Robbie and Cecilia have died and cannot offer her atonement, become the catalysts for introspection and moral growth.

Briony attempts to attain dignity and worth through her fiction, establishing dignity for Robbie and Cecilia which she denied. Consequently, the protagonists of each novel re-evaluate personal experiences and develop a changed view. Testament to this is Briony's final sentence that:

> If I had the power to conjure them at my birthday celebration [...] Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at *The Trials of Arabella*? It's not impossible. But now I must sleep.(372)

and Perowne's valorising the acquiescence of life which is always frail and vulnerable :

> He closes his eyes. This time there'll be no trouble falling towards oblivion, there's nothing can stop him now. Sleep's no longer a concept, it's a material thing, an ancient means of transport, a softly moving belt, conveying him into Sunday[...]this day's over. *(*279)

By positioning his protagonists in acts of trauma, McEwan provides the scope for moral growth with a view that a morally questioned existence, through self-investigation and self-determination, is a possibility. In *Saturday*, this results in the commonality of a human condition, determining a life stance of ethics and justice. As explored in previous chapters, intertextual motifs of World War Two and the events of 9/11 become a visual metaphor of the rupturing internal anguish – a metaphor for the moral reconstruction required for an accommodation of the trauma.

The two novels were written within close time frames (*Atonement* in 2001 and *Saturday*, 2005), but what separates them in terms of McEwan's representation of trauma is the experience in real terms of global terror attacks on the World Trade Centre propelling McEwan's thoughts on trauma. Even though there are points of similarity in the affect and effect of trauma in both works of fiction, it is the development of self reflection in *Saturday* that marginally differentiates it to *Atonement.* Let us consider this further.

On one level one could suggest that personal trauma in *Atonement* is birthed at the fountain when Briony misinterprets the motives of Cecilia removing her clothes. It moves "outwards" to encapsulate a vision of Briony's world, symbolised intertextually by the visceral realistic descriptions of war and devastation in Parts Two and Three. Conversely, *Saturday* begins from a globalised trauma living in the "shadow of 9/11", and moves "inwards" to a

personal trauma propelled by Baxter. [97] Neither protagonist is capable to integrate his/her trauma into his/her reality. For each of them, trauma becomes a debilitating force enhanced by disorientation and chaos which threatens the fundamental purpose of everyday existence.[98]

The shame of the trauma in *Atonement* and the guilt of social irresponsibility in *Saturday,* become so untenable that they can be accommodated and experienced only through experiences associated with fiction. In *Atonement* Briony's meticulous redrafting of a text becomes her way to rewrite a tragic past as an attempt at self-exculpation. In *Saturday,* the fiction assumes a metaphorical level as Perowne rewrites a future of reimagining and reinventing a world which offers an alternative way of coping with violence. As explored in earlier chapters, it is through literature, both denotatively and as intertext, that McEwan suggests the feasibility of mediation of horror.

9/11 as a philosophical need for re-evaluating postmodern existence, has been the core of writing by a number of authors who have reflected on the impact of global terrorism, some of which include Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Martin Amis and Zadie Smith.[99] They have commented, how 9/11 has forced them to focus on a means to establish meaning out of confusion, that 9/11 forces us to rekindle the need to move from depersonalisation to the plea "Let's Get Back to Life".[100] Alex Houen (2004) in "Novel Spaces and Taking Place/s in the Wake of 9/11" echoes the philosophy encompassed by McEwan in showing

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[97] Op. cit.

[98] Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulations*, towards an understanding of trauma argues that simulacral metaphoriacal and real images of violence are so dominant that the "real is no longer possible"(p. 197). All subsequent images echo what was originally witnessed as trauma and thus, he ascertains that these become the hyper-real as simulations of the real resulting in derealisation. If we consider McEwan's texts, we acknowledge the derealisation of his protagonists. Briony attempts to recreate the real through the graphic details of the war as Intertextual references for her inner anguish and guilt. Her trauma becomes the hyper-real created in her fiction. One also recalls Perowne's experience at seeing the cargo plane through the sky as simulacrum of 9/11 sparking a response as if it were the beginning of yet another attack.

[99] See Roy Arundhati, "The Algebra of Infinite Justice", (*Guardian*, 29 September 2001); Martin Amis, "Fear and Loathing", (*Guardian*, 18 September 2001); Salman Rushdie, "Let's Get Back to Life", (*Guardian*, 6 October 2001); Zadie Smith, "How It Feels to Me", (*Guardian*, 13 October 2001). Even though their responses to 9/11 are diverse they have a commonality of commenting that this has drawn them to reconsider how they would represent trauma in their writings.

[100] Ibid.

how trauma positions the contemporary writer into a jolted awareness of Western ideology.[101] If we reflect on the scenarios of the selected McEwan texts, we see the characters moving beyond the angst prevalent in 19th century writing. McEwan's later literature shows a means in which a bearable and socially responsible existence may be effected. Theo Tait (2005) in the *Times Literary Supplement* pertinently observes how McEwan's earlier works of fiction refer to the irruption of nightmare precipitating traumatic affects, such as the loss of a child or a horrific ballooning accident. McEwan, he attests, interrogates these nightmares but these seldom yield a greater understanding and awareness to give them wider significance.[102] If we consider Tait's evaluation, we can add credence to this in McEwan's later fiction. In *Atonement*, one witness the inner emotional machinations of a turmoiled mind driven by shame; in *Saturday* a possible new *modus vivendi* is suggested through enhanced understanding.

This, I would like to suggest, becomes the difference in exploring trauma as represented by McEwan. In *Atonement,* Briony's cathartic journey through solipsistic fiction writing becomes subtly defeated when we consider her awaiting fate as a victim of vascular dementia removing her from writing, the only joy she has left in life. Even though her attempt at atonement is honourable and brave, McEwan leaves us with a vision that it serves limited scope other than in the world of imagination and fiction.

In *Saturday*, there is still no guaranteed solution the removal of trauma. Trauma will continue to inhabit a space within Perowne's life much like the theme of Cornelia Parker's installation. He becomes sensitive to the limitation of his privileged bias in understanding the wider multicultural society. His view is contested and results in a new understanding. McEwan suggests that trauma calls on a new type of solidarity which is non-exclusive in its support, embracing all.[103] This humanistic approach may only be actualised with sensitised awareness of self and the relationship with violence in a global community. Rather than being limiting in its outcome, trauma becomes a means to heighten the character's own limita-

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[101] Alex Houen, "Novel Spaces and Taking Place/s in the Wake of 9/11", *Studies in the Novel*.

[102] Theo Tait, "A Rational Diagnosis", *Times Literary Supplement,* as discussed by Dominic Head (Op.cit).

[103] This is advocated by Slavoj Žižek Slavoj in "Welcome to the Desert of the Real!" in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, pp. 385-389.

tions. Where in *Atonement* embracing violence yields temporary accommodation, it is in *Saturday* where empowerment yields a greater optimism as a way forward.

Derek Attridge in his two works *Peculiar Language* (1988) and *The Singularity of Literature* (2004) encourages us to view literature as distinctive: what he refers to as "singularity". [104] His justification for this rests that we should not pre-empt that literature instils into the political struggle in the name of humanism, postmodernism, global terrorism and so on. Rather, literature must be seen to intersect change and resonate the complexity of change within an environment. We therefore should not evaluate literature with pre-existent labelling of any form as it will be judged according to the label and not to its uniqueness. "Good writers take ideas, cultural values, emotions and press them to the limit[…] and extend their capacities until a startling newness emerges."[105] Literary texts viewed in this manner assume their distinctiveness as they are seen to be a "reformulation of norms."[106] The reader experiences this reformulation as an event which becomes a series of possibilities of meaning.

If we consider that culture is an intricate web of meaning, it encourages us to consider texts in their distinctiveness using whatever the writer deems necessary "to please, to move, to teach, to change". [107]

The world that is presented by McEwan is a world where structure and order is threatened and often broken down. When this disjuncture occurs, man feels anxious and confused. His fear might awaken a dark side, to construe a lie to fit into a schema or order as in *Atonement*, or view the world from a privileged stance of detachment as in *Saturday.* Trauma, for

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[104] Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language* and *The Singularity of Literature* offers the reader a starting point which defies the temptation to define and categorise literature and rather to explore the singularity of literature. The reflection of Western art and aesthetics draws him to find a link with particular issues which include : innovation, the distinctiveness or *singularity* of the artwork and, underlying these, the concept of *otherness* or alterity. He calls for a type of reading that sees literature an as event retheorising its place in its ethic field. Definition and categorisation, he attests, then becomes impossible and rather suggests that we "live through" the literary seeing it as a mimesis of life's experiences, in its diversity and aesthetics. An approach of viewing McEwan is distinctive in the approach to his subject matter is echoed by Dominic Head and Lee Segal.

[105] Ibid. *The Singualrity of Literataure,* p.81.

[106] Ibid. p.59.

[107] Ibid. p.96.

McEwan, drives a compulsive quest for knowledge. It creates a dynamism in which traumatic experience is transformed into an insatiable desire for knowledge. The reading of *Atonement* and *Saturday as* an event encapsulating a singularity allows the reader to engage in the challenge of a quotidian existence which will remain constantly threatened by either personal or globalised trauma.

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