METAFICTIONALITY, INTERTEXTUALITY, DISCURSIVITY: IAN MCEWAN'S POST-MILLENNIAL NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

In his twenty-first-century novels, *Atonement*, *Saturday*, *Solar* and *Sweet Tooth*, Ian McEwan makes ample use of narrative strategies characteristic of postmodernist writing, such as metafictionality, intertextuality and discursive multiplicity. This article discusses how this focus distinguishes his recent novels from earlier ones. Thus *Sweet Tooth* is read as a text which includes the author's attempt to revise his own shorter texts from the onset of his career in the mid-1970s. The use of parallelisms and allegory in McEwan's 1980s novels *The Child in Time* and *The Innocent* is then contrasted with more complex strategies in *Saturday* and *Solar*. Special attention is given to the thematization of the role of discourse in *Solar*; it is argued that the novel is not just a satire on modern science and its corruption by commercialization but also a reflection of "ontological relativism" as a product of prevailing contemporary discourse formations.

Keywords: contemporary British novel; Ian McEwan; discourse; Foucault; intertextuality; metafiction

Ian McEwan's recent novel, *Sweet Tooth* (2012), reveals the author's proclivity for the use of metafictional writing at its most entangled and transgressive best. After more than three successful decades on the British literary scene,[1] McEwan has here offered his

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[1] The outstanding position of Ian McEwan as one of the most successful contemporary English writers can be documented by the many literary awards his work has received across decades: His early collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) won the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976. Seven years later, when he began to produce more politically-conscious work, he was awarded *The Evening Standard* award for best screenplay for *The Ploughman's Lunch*. His novel *The Child in Time* was the winner of the 1987 Whitbread Novel Award and *Amsterdam* of the Booker Prize in 1998. Other works have been nominated for the Booker too: *The Comfort of Strangers* in 1981 (shortlisted), *Black Dogs* in 1992 (shortlisted), *Atonement* in 2001 (shortlisted), *Saturday* in 2005 (longlisted) and *On Chesil Beach* in 2007 (shortlisted). *Atonement* won the W. H. Smith Literary Award in 2001, *Saturday* the 2005 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction, and *Solar* the 2010 Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize for comic writing. His international prizes include the 1993 French Prix Fémina Étranger; the 1999 German Shakespeare Prize; the 2003 National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award (USA) for *Atonement*; the 2005 Harold and Ethel L. Stellfox Visiting Scholar and Writers Program Award (USA); and the 2010 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award (USA). In 2011 he received the Jeruzalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society, which he accepted despite controversy and pressure from the opponents of the Israeli government. In 2000, McEwan was awarded a CBE.

readers and fans a portrait of the artist as a young man, in the form of the character of a writer at the beginning of his career – Tom Haley. Perhaps the result could more accurately be termed a "self-portrait in a concave mirror,"[2] as the author's *alter ego* is involved in a spy-story that has little to do with McEwan's youth in the early 1970s, and the role it plays is largely intended as subversive of traditional modes of writing and reading a literary text. Not all reviewers and critics have been enamoured of this wilful conjunction of low-brow and high-brow with all its postmodern import. The immediate response to *Sweet Tooth* shows, among other things, a stark disagreement as to whether the novel is a masterpiece or a failure, with every gradation in between. Among a score of reviews I was able to retrieve from McEwan's personal website and other internet sources, some even fail to see how far-reaching the novelist's self-referential strategies are.[3]

While Mike Doherty correctly points out that "Haley has other parallels with his author: the stories he writes are subtly changed tales from McEwan's own 1978 collection, *In Between the Sheets*, and a post-apocalyptic novella is derived from an abandoned novel of McEwan's" (Doherty 2012) and Catherine Taylor notes in parentheses that "careful readers will notice a reworking of a story from McEwan's 1978 collection" (Taylor 2012), James Lasdun sounds more vague when pointing out that "[m]ost of Haley's stories turn out to be versions of the dazzling pieces that launched McEwan's own career in the 70s" (Lasdun 2012), and other reviewers prove to be even less certain about the character of authorial hindsight. Thus, according to Julie Myerson, "Haley's short stories […], with their insistent themes of sexual jealousy, obsession and betrayal, resemble McEwan's early oeuvre" (Myerson 2012), and according to Lucy Kellaway's bold but absolutely ungrounded statement, Tom Haley's short stories "are not in the same league" as McEwan's: "While McEwan wrote about incest, chopping up bodies, and burying people in cement, Tom writes a relatively wholesome story in which a man falls in love with a shop mannequin, takes her home, is sexually enthralled by her aloofness, but then breaks her into pieces and throws her out in a bin bag" (Kellaway 2012).

Yet the story of a man falling in love with a shop mannequin is exactly the one Mike Doherty speaks about: "Dead As They Come" from *In Between the Sheets*. What seems relevant in this case, however, is not the fact that McEwan quotes his own early text, in what he calls "a sort of gaminess" (Doherty 2012) (a trick inspired, perhaps, at least indirectly, by Italo Calvino's postmodernist novel *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller*, 1979) but that he revises it in a substantial way. The most important alteration in the story comes at its end: while in the original version the frustrated millionaire, unable to bear suspicions about his lover's unfaithfulness, destroys his precious collection of art objects in a fit of rage but leaves the dummy untouched, in Tom Haley's story it is the fashion mannequin that ends up dismembered and eventually discarded for ever; in other words, the eccentric hero of "Dead As They Come" is not able to get rid of his perverted sexual delusions, which he cherishes as a means of masochistic self-torture, while his mature "Tom Haley"

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2 McEwan himself characterizes the novel as "a muted and distorted autobiography" and adds, with a slight self-deprecatory gibe, "though unfortunately a beautiful woman never came into my room and offered me a stipend." See Cooke 2012.

3 Tom Haley shares a number of details with McEwan: they both commenced their brief academic career at the University of Sussex in the early 1970s; they both experienced public reading with Martin Amis; their first publisher was Tom Maschler from Jonathan Cape; their common mentor was Ian Hamilton; but most importantly, Haley produces altered versions of McEwan's own early stories.

double is (the scene also echoes, in a burlesque mode, the motif of the dissection of Otto Eckdorf's body in *The Innocent*).

There are two other early texts transplanted into *Sweet Tooth*: the above-mentioned project of a dystopian novel, which McEwan finally left unfinished, but from which he saved two fragments published in *In Between the Sheets*, and "Reflections of a Kept Ape," a story revolving around a psychologically disturbing situation of the writer Sally Klee, narrated by her ape, which turns out to be her lover and potential husband; here the *Sweet Tooth* version makes it clear that the ape is entirely the writer's idea, a projection of her frustrations and creative blocks. The revised versions of McEwan's early works, it seems, acquire significant new meanings in *Sweet Tooth*: from the original vignettes of bizarre circumstances in which contemporary (mid-seventies) urban Westerners find themselves inevitably steeped, they are transformed into accounts of the ways in which people are allowed to recognize that their lives are based on simulations – and are given a chance to cope with the fact. This is also supported by re-contextualization of the source texts; instead of being placed amongst the tales of sexual perversion from the original collection ("Pornography," "In Between the Sheets," "Psychopolis"), they are accompanied by an account of an extremely possessive love relationship resulting from a seemingly innocent interchange of roles between twin brothers, and a story about a young couple solving their financial problems in a somewhat unorthodox way. The fundamental difference is that Tom Haley's literary attempts display undeniably powerful ethical concerns and thus may be aligned with the fiction of McEwan's "mature" period.

I do not want to claim here that inserting one's own earlier texts into a later work and thus recontextualizing them should be regarded as a hallmark of McEwan's narrative strategies characterising this single novel, nor do I mean to suggest that quoting one's own text is an invention of postmodernity. We know that T. S. Eliot used, among a plethora of other sources, his own early poem "The Death of Saint Narcissus" to provide a few somewhat altered lines for the first part of his *Waste Land* (1922).[4] McEwan himself famously refers to his earlier novel, *The Child in Time* (1987), in *Saturday* (2005: 67), the point of which is, according to Dominic Head, to make a statement concerning the improper categorization of the novel as an example of magic realism in British fiction, while "the kind of quasi-plausibility [of the time slip]" it contains "is never attempted in magic realism proper" (Head 2007: 188). What I would like to propose instead is that McEwan uses intertextuality and metafiction to complicate the idea of ontological hegemony: reality is not what is nor even what seems to be, but what becomes. Reality in *Sweet Tooth* is the result of a creative process: when we learn on its final pages that the story of the protagonist, Serena Frome, has not been an authentic picture of her young life, as seen by herself over a gap of forty years from the vantage point of 2012, but actually Tom Haley's fantasy of his lover's past, spurred by the morally dubious basis of their affair, we find ourselves exactly in the centre of this process of becoming, where metafictionality,

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[4]   This fact is mentioned, for instance, by B. C. Southam in *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1968) 74. The lines in question are as follows: "(Come in under the shadow of this red rock), / And I will show you something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you." In "The Death of Saint Narcissus" the passage reads: "Come in under the shadow of this gray rock, / And I will show you something different from either / Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak, or / Your shadow leaping behind the fire against the red rock."

intertextuality and discursivity are the defining factors. McEwan's concave mirror thus plays a multiple role: on a metafictional plane, it enables readers to perceive how Tom Haley sees how Serena sees him (including how she sees how he sees her); and on an intertextual plane it reveals how McEwan sees his literary beginnings and, perhaps, how he would like to see them. Call it spying, if you will.

The following section will focus predominantly on McEwan's previous novel, *Solar* (2010), for the simple reason that the major critical works on McEwan, such as Claudia Schemberg's *Achieving "At-one-ment"* (2004), Dominic Head's *Ian McEwan* (2007) or Sebastian Groes's (ed.) *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2009), had all been published before the appearance of this text. At the same time, *Solar* will be viewed as a work firmly embedded in the latest phase of McEwan's career, which includes *Atonement*, *Saturday*, *Solar*, and *Sweet Tooth*, all published in the twenty-first century. These novels can be characterised as texts consisting of discourses of various kinds; the world of fiction they represent results, to a considerable extent, from the power struggle between these discourses.

This fact should not, however, be understood in terms of poststructuralist resignation to the serious ethical and other questions stemming from, and defining, a concrete historical period and the replacement of these by a reality conceived as pure linguistic construct. On the contrary, McEwan seems to be conscious of an imperative which Schemberg sums up in the following way: "We need a discourse that puts us back in touch with the ethical dimension of literary texts and offers us pragmatic solutions to the difficult (moral) choices we are faced with in life" (Schemberg 2004: 14–15). The same critic sees such anti-poststructuralist and anti-postmodernist reorientation of literature as the programme of the generation of English writers to which McEwan belongs:

> Dissatisfied with postmodernism as "a culture of pastiche, depthless intertextuality and hermeneutic break with the real," the "Brit Pack" of the 1980s and 1990s – including writers like Martin Amis, Graham Swift, Julian Barnes, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Ian McEwan – turned to innovative forms of plot-oriented storytelling that combined a pronounced interest in contemporary (British) culture and (recent) history with a concern for social and ethical questions. (Schemberg 2004: 25)

The paradox of McEwan's later works is that he uses narrative strategies typical of postmodernism, such as intertextuality, metafictionality or plurality of discourses, to complicate the perspective in which literature traditionally reflected ethical, social and other issues, while at the same time he indisputably approves of this role. This is perhaps the most prominent feature distinguishing McEwan's twenty-first-century novels from his fiction of the preceding phase (including *The Child in Time*, 1987, *The Innocent*, 1990, *Black Dogs*, 1992, and *Enduring Love*, 1997).[5]

The fact that in *Solar* McEwan wrote a kind of eco-satire, with a morally repulsive Nobel Prize-winning physicist as its protagonist, may have come as a surprise to a number of critics, especially those who believed that Ian McEwan was one of the few contem-

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5   I exclude *Amsterdam* (1998), *On Chesil Beach* (2007), and *The Children Act* (2014) on the basis of their length, which may qualify these texts as novellas rather than novels and thus put them closer to *The Cement Garden* (1978) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981).

porary writers able to incorporate science into his works with due seriousness. In his tribute to the "rationalist McEwan," published as the foreword to *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, Matt Ridley asserts that "there is no doubt that McEwan is a groupie of Enlightenment rationalism – so long as science subjects itself to the same rigorous scepticism that it does to myth" (Groes 2009: ix). *Solar*, indeed, offers a different picture of modern science and its handling of pressing global problems: while in *Saturday* the central character, Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon, does not hesitate to operate upon his potential killer, Baxter, shortly after an attempted assault, such noble, altruistic attitudes dictated by the "scientific" mind are alien to Michael Beard in *Solar*. This character is willing to come up with a partial solution to global warming only as part of his business project; his own scientific mind is not subject to a rigorous scepticism inherited from the Enlightenment, but rather to pure personal profit inspired by the period of *laissez-faire* capitalism. Instead of facing problems he is permanently running away from them.

As in some of his previous novels, the author shows his antihero in scenes that seem to be relatively isolated from the main narrative but which provide important interpretive clues. Such a method is characteristic of McEwan's writing even in his earlier period. These "independent" episodes have various functions, from a technical point of view. Thus, in *The Child in Time* the main character, Stephen Lewis, is involved in a car accident: a lorry, taking over, leaves the winding road and turns over. Stephen is trying to pull the driver out of the deformed cab, head first, through a hole in the floor; he then takes him to the nearest police station and continues on his way to visit his Sussex friend without much delay. The incident has no direct bearing on the story; Stephen is not asked to stay at the police station to be interrogated or to give evidence during further investigation. Isolated from other events in the book, the scene nevertheless sticks in the mind as an image symbolically foreshadowing the childbirth at the end of the novel where Stephen will assist with the same care. The function of such a scene is to create a *parallel* to the climax, a cryptic rehearsal of the inevitable (i.e. "that which comes in time") for the hero as well as for the reader, and thus achieve semantic intensity and density. In the following novel, *The Innocent*, the drastic scene in which Leonard and Maria dismember the dead body of her ex-Nazi husband, Otto, stands for an *allegorical* representation of the post-war political situation in central Europe: Germany and Berlin have been fragmented into sectors controlled by the former Allies, but in the Cold War atmosphere of the early 1950s this carving up of the body politic creates a problem, the same burden as the parts of Otto's human body in Leonard's luggage.[6] The scene also invites a more personal interpretation, being symbolically analogous to Leonard's loss of both political and sexual innocence, but this reading does not seem as convincing as the allegorical one. Here the parallelism creates an analogy between the personal and the political, between the private and the global, and in doing so underscores an opposition between innocence and brutality, which works on more than one semantic level.

This private-public binarism seems to characterize McEwan's politically-oriented novels of the late 1980s and early 1990s (including *Black Dogs*), as can be evidenced by the tension resulting from the two distinct types of discourse used in *The Child in Time*:

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[6] On the dissecting scene as political allegory, see e.g. Jack Slay, Jr., *Ian McEwan* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996) 136–7.

the impersonal, emotionally indifferent and bureaucratic language of social institutions (quoted in the chapter epigraphs) versus the engaging, emotional language of the narrative itself which reflects the uneasy, distressing situation of the protagonist. This model, however, has been gradually abandoned and the later novels seem to employ more complex strategies.

In *Solar*, an episode charged with crucial meanings appears quite early on: frustrated by the impending collapse of his fifth marriage, Beard accepts an offer to take part in a trip to the Norwegian Arctic with a group of artists and environmentalists to see the first large-scale effects of global warming. During the week which they have to spend together in the close quarters of a ship anchored at the Spitsbergen, whatever noble aims the expedition had turn into meaningless diversions and chaos, which manifests itself especially in the boot room. This is what critics find symbolic. As Bryan Walsh says in his review for *TIME* magazine: "The ship's boot room, where people load and unload their polar gear, and which steadily descends into chaos, becomes a symbol of humanity's problems with planetary management" (Walsh 2012). Though correct in principle, this symbolic reading rests on one of the most obvious aspects of Beard's polar experience, and thus puts the novel's antihero in a position from which he can deliver his rightful moralizing judgement: "How were they to save the earth – assuming it needed saving, which he doubted – when it was so much larger than the boot room?" (McEwan 2011: 109). At face value, Beard as a scientist knows better than a bunch of irresponsible artists, and his pragmatic, rational recipe depends not so much on humanity, the very source of both arts and sciences, but on laws and law-abiding citizens: "Leave nothing, Beard decided, to science or art, or idealism. Only good laws could save the boot room. And citizens who respected the law" (McEwan 2011: 111). A subversive, cynical aspect of this statement becomes the more obvious when we realize that Beard is a person who has never respected basic laws of moral behaviour, neither in his private nor his professional life, and never will.

For Beard, science and morality exist as two separate and exclusive concepts, which are mutually non-interpenetrative even by analogy. He demonstrates this view vociferously during the only evening that brings "an isolated discordant note" (McEwan 2011: 107). A "gangling novelist called Meredith" attempts to speculate on the application of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in the realm of ethics, saying that its basic idea "encapsulated for our time the loss of a 'moral compass,' the difficulty of absolute judgements" (McEwan 2011: 106). This spontaneous intrusion by an artist into the sacred territory of science offends Beard so much that after his eighth glass of Libyan wine, he brings his fist down hard on the table and shouts: "So come on. Tell me. Let's hear you apply Heisenberg to ethics. Right plus wrong over the square root of two. What the hell does it mean? Nothing!" (McEwan 2011: 106–7). This reaction perplexes Meredith as well as the rest of the group, and the implication is, of course, that Beard does not see it necessary to build any genuine moral system for himself in his professional career (not to mention his private life which consists of a string of extramarital love affairs) simply because this is irrelevant for his strictly rationalist views. But McEwan's feel for nuanced scene-construction goes even further here: the "gangling novelist Meredith" evokes the actual nineteenth-century novelist, George Meredith, famous for his scathing analyses of egoism. In his heated conflict with the ideas of the artist, Beard gives way to the folly of

egoism that seems to define his personality as its most essential feature, much in the way George Meredith exploits the term in the prelude to his tour de force novel, *The Egoist* (1879), as well as in his *Essay on Comedy* (1877). Beard's condescending view thus stems from his conviction that he should be respected for being "valiant, while sober, while socially valuable, nationally serviceable," (Meredith 1995: 6) irrespective of his actual moral standards, as the minute intertextual reference suggests.

On the satirical plane, parallel motifs operate on a minor scale: e.g. when Beard comes to confront his wife's lover, Rodney Tarpin, this sturdy man approaches him fresh from a hot tub with "a not very large red towel tucked around his considerable waist" (McEwan 2011: 58); after his return from the Arctic, Beard finds the rival, wet from the shower and wrapped in Beard's own dressing gown, taking a nap in the sitting room of Beard's house – only this time it is not Tarpin, but Tom Aldous, Beard's bright post-doctoral student. During a snowmobile excursion, Beard is nearly attacked and killed by a polar bear; in parallel, the humiliated student dies slipping and falling on a polar-bear rug. The role of such parallel scenes is refractive: what originally seemed a highly comic situation point-ing out the antihero's inadequacy (his attempt to be revenged on his wife's seducer ends up with him receiving an open-handed smack; the danger of his encounter with a polar bear pales before the comic detail that the Nobel laureate had been pressing the headlight switch instead of the ignition button) refracts into a presentation of an acute moral prob-lem, precisely in terms of Meredith's rationalist conception of the Comic. Such modifica-tion of parallel motifs serves to expose Beard's egoism in its most repulsive form – after getting into a bad fix, he does not repent but rather decides to profit from the situation and kill two birds with one stone. He arranges things in such a way that eventually Rod-ney Tarpin is accused of Aldous's murder and imprisoned for sixteen years; Beard also shamelessly appropriates the results of his dead student's research to launch a new phase of his academic (and business) career, increasing his personal renown. The egoist thus becomes a manipulator and a thief.

The tripartite composition of the novel (each part takes place in a different year – 2000, 2005 and 2009, respectively) enables us to see how the use of analogous motifs intensifies this defining characteristic. In the middle part, Beard finds himself in a train compart-ment seated opposite a young man in his thirties and helping himself voraciously to this traveller's salt and vinegar crisps, mistaking them for his own. The young man can be considered a reincarnation of Tom Aldous, or what Tom Aldous might have become in five years' time, his ponytail now transformed into a shaved head with ear piercings. The scene mirrors, externalizes, and also trivializes Beard's persistent, ethically problematic, instincts. Similarly, in the final section, situated in a New Mexico desert where a proto-type array of next-generation solar panels is about to be triumphantly switched on, Beard discovers with nightmarish horror that Tarpin, released from prison in the middle of his term, is after him; yet when it turns out that he does not intend to kill his one-time rival (unaware of Beard's role in his imprisonment) but to ask him for a job, Beard re-assumes his previous position of a large-scale manipulator and refuses to employ him. On the satirical level, Beard is thus portrayed as a man whose immoral, unscrupulous social climbing and machination in all spheres of life makes manifest the illusion of his unre-lenting powers, but at the same time threatens to betray a hidden cause of his final fall, as an ominous black mark on the back of his hand indicates.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the attractiveness of the hilariously funny (and ultimately repulsive) portrayal of a contemporary intellectual, this reading can be discarded as reductive and shallow. A deeper semantic analysis reveals much more ambiguity that characterizes the protagonist; this is simply because the reality in which Beard finds himself entangled is not, strictly speaking, a reality of hard facts which he can use for his own benefit, but an elastic, ever-changing reality of clashing discourses. What Michel Foucault defined as "discourse" refers, according to Chris Weedon, to "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them." Weedon also explains that "[n]either the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases" (Weedon 1987: 108). This understanding of the term applies quite neatly not only to *Solar* but also to the other twenty-first-century novels of Ian McEwan, with their prevailing power game of various discursive situations.

An exemplary moment appears in *Saturday* – though, strangely, the episode I refer to tends to be neglected in critical analyses of this novel: Henry Perowne decides to spend part of a Saturday morning at the squash centre, playing a match with his colleague Jay; for critics, this event is only important because on his way to the sports centre Perowne has a minor car accident which becomes his first encounter with a young delinquent who will, later in the day, break into his flat and threaten several members of his family gathered for a party. This is undoubtedly a crucial moment in the plot development, but the subtlety of McEwan's art of construction rests in the way in which he manages to connect a dramatic scene, relevant for his central theme of different forms of violence in the post-9/11 world, with an event that can provide a more universal clue to what kind of reality we live in. This event is the squash match itself which Perowne believes he has won, only for victory to be snatched from him at the last as his rival convinces him that the last service was a let, and must be repeated; after accepting this view Henry, subsequently, loses the match. Not only does this mean that reality is not what is or what seems to be, but what becomes, principally as a result of the discursive power relations (in which what is can be revised and completely reversed), but also that nothing exists as one's private possession, least of all an event turned into a story, however much Perowne would like to cherish such a notion: "Isn't it possible to enjoy an hour's recreation without this invasion, this infection from the public domain? He begins to see the matter resolving in simple terms: winning his game will be an assertion of his privacy. He has a right now and then – everyone has it – not to be disturbed by world events, or even street events" (McEwan 2005: 108). Losing the game is interpreted in this sense as the result of the intrusion of the world into the private sphere – anticipating the critical scene of violent intrusion into Perowne's home later that day but also, perhaps more importantly, linking the match with Perowne's initial encounter with Baxter, which was in fact resolved in the same way as the squash match: the situation that seemed almost lost for Perowne finally turned in his favour due to his eloquence or, more accurately, discursive power. In this way his lost match mirrors, in a reversed manner, his previous triumph and creates semantic balance between the two closely related scenes. At the same time, it prepares us for the resolution of the final crisis: first it seems that the only effective means to break

the pernicious dominance of Baxter over the Perowne family is Henry's authority as a neurosurgeon and, by extension, his possession of a clue to Baxter's brain, a clue which lends Perowne the power of manipulation. But the precise tool that effectively disarms the pathological delinquent is, paradoxically, poetry – Perowne's daughter Daisy's reading of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." Here the intricate web of discourse power relations is foregrounded in full: while in the morning Perowne won over Baxter by lying to him about his disease and soon after lost his match by being distracted from what he believed was the truth, in the evening the family is saved by Daisy's plagiarised performance of Arnold's poem. Reality is thus defined by ontological relativism or, in other words, by how we *construct* reality in our discursive strategies.

A similar conceptualisation reappears in *Solar*. If Perowne's triumph (which includes his expertise, his moral integrity and his belief system) seems to be repeatedly challenged by the rivalling discourse strategies and is ultimately undermined by the ontological relativism of multifaceted reality, the portrayal of Beard's egoism, expressed superficially in his opportunist manoeuvring, his revolting immorality and his lack of tolerance, similarly loses its definition in scenes whose reading invites yet more ambiguity. While on the satirical plane Beard appears as an unscrupulously manipulative, self-seeking man, more profound semantic levels reveal him also as a victim, prey to the intricate discursive matrix of the contemporary world, not just as a thief but also one who has been robbed. This is not conveyed to the reader by means of refracted parallelisms but of *multiplied echoes* (motif multiplication) of the same variety discussed in relation to the triumph-defeat dichotomy in *Saturday*. Beard is introduced to reality as intellectual construct rather than hard fact by Nancy Temple, a professor of science:

> She said she could best explain her field by outlining a recent project, a four-month in-depth study of a genetics lab in Glasgow as it set out to isolate and describe a lion's gene, Trim-5, and its function. Her purpose was to demonstrate that this gene, or any gene, was, in the strongest sense, socially constructed. Without the various "extending" tools the scientists used – the single-photon luminometer, the flow cytometer, immunofluorescence, and so on – the gene could not be said to exist. These tools were expensive to own, expensive to learn to use, and were therefore replete with social meaning. The gene was not an objective entity, merely waiting to be revealed by scientists. It was entirely manufactured by their hypotheses, their creativity, and by their instrumentation, without which it could not be detected. And when it was finally expressed in terms of its so-called base pairs and its probable role, that description, that text, only had meaning, and only derived its reality, from within the limited network of geneticists who might read about it. Outside those networks, Trim-5 did not exist. (McEwan 2011: 181)

However much Beard resists accepting this interpretation of reality, believing "that the world exist[s] independently, in all its mystery, awaiting description and explanation" (McEwan 2011: 181–2), he cannot help becoming part of such a conception. Not much later he is confronted with it again when he meets Jeremy Mellon, lecturer in urban studies and folklore: "Well, I'm interested in the forms of narrative that climate science has generated. It's an epic story, of course, with a million authors" (McEwan 2011: 203). Beard identifies this as "the Nancy Temple tendency" and manages to distance himself from it so far, to stand outside such a world. His aloofness soon becomes untenable, however,

and the gap between disengagement and involvement is bridged by the repeated motif of being sick: first, Professor Temple responds to Beard's explanations about the scarcity of women in science by announcing that she will "go outside to be sick, and I mean violently sick because of what I've just heard" (McEwan 2011: 185); later, while Beard opens his speech at a conference saying that the planet is sick it turns out that "using the word 'sick,' rather like vomiting itself, gave Beard some instant relief" (McEwan 2011: 204); and, finally, Beard is actually sick and vomits behind a curtain after finishing his speech where he defends the idea of the impending negative effects of global warming. This instance of motif multiplication plays the role of moral imperative: explicitly, Beard is sick because he has eaten some bad smoked salmon but implicitly, and therefore more significantly, he becomes sick because in his speech he has unashamedly appropriated the ideas of Tom Aldous, the student whose death he was indirectly responsible for and the reincarnation of whom he robbed of his crisps. Thus the cause of Nancy Temple's sickness and of Beard's sickness is shown to be identical – it is Beard himself. This series of motif echoes then makes a semantic connection between Nancy Temple and Jeremy Mellon with his "Nancy Temple tendency": if the young man in the train compartment stands for a reincarnation of Tom Aldous, Mellon is a metamorphosed Professor Temple. He too interprets reality as a social – and linguistic – construct, and entangles Beard in the web of such a reality, insisting that his story from the train, which Beard has presented during his speech, is a stock rhetorical strategy called "the Unwitting Thief." This means that the sociolinguistic discourse robs Beard of the authenticity of his experience and, even more distressingly, makes any authentic experience, any sign of individuality, highly dubious.[7]

A paradoxical outcome of this situation is that the egoist, with all his instincts of possession and appropriation, is finally appropriated by something stronger, by the egoism of discourse. Beard, who initially believed that the idea of global warming simply ensued from scientific narratives and was proud to keep his distance from such constructs, becomes subject to a multifaceted discursive reality. He is fragmented into an environmentalist, a womanizer, a "'Neo-Nazi' Professor" and, finally, into a medical case, which an American doctor describes "with a disengaged, insulting frankness" (McEwan 2011: 329). Yet at this final stage of Beard's transformation, the roles are reversed: Beard

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[7]   Curiously, the question of authenticity has become acute in Ian McEwan's own literary career. As Tibor Fisher points out in his review of *Solar* for *The Telegraph*, there was "a ridiculous palaver over material McEwan had acknowledged in *Atonement* and two years ago McEwan read out a section of *Solar* at The Hay Festival which immediately invited comparisons with a passage from Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*" (Fischer 2010). To avoid suspicion of plagiarism, in the published version McEwan let Mellon cite a number of books and films in which the archetypal story of the Unwitting Thief appears in various modifications, including Adams's novel. A more serious case of plagiarism, with which McEwan was charged in the *Mail*, occurred in *Atonement*, where the story of Briony's service as a hospital nurse draws in many details upon Lucilla Andrews's *No Time for Romance* (1977) and an unpublished transcript called "The Memoir of Mrs A. Radloff." On this, see Natasha Alden's "Words of War, War of Words: *Atonement* and the Question of Plagiarism" (Groes 2009: 58–69). That McEwan tends to be problematically inspired by other people's works can also be demonstrated in the above-mentioned "magic-realist" citation of *The Child in Time* in *Saturday*: the same trick appears in Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), where the narrator chides a young novelist for inaccuracy and quotes a sentence about "the first, suppressed edition of *Madame Bovary*," the fact that he dismisses as nonsense (Barnes 1985: 85); the sentence in question is transferred verbatim from Barnes's own first novel, *Metroland* (1980) (see Barnes 1981: 93). Such "loans" suggest that even authors are entrapped in a web of discursive acts and become unwitting (or perhaps not so unwitting) thieves.

no more clings to law and independent existence as he always claimed to do; instead he identifies with the discursive reality of ontological relativism and this new bias of his must be checked by the old-fashioned rationality with which Doctor Parks warns him: "This won't go away just because you don't want it or are not thinking about it" (McEwan 2011: 328). Paradoxically, this grave statement lends a serious air to the opening passage of the novel, which at first reading appears to be merely the narrator's light-hearted way of introducing a comic character: "He belonged to that class of men – vaguely unprepossessing, often bald, short, fat, clever – who were unaccountably attractive to certain beautiful women. Or he believed he was, and thinking seemed to make it so" (McEwan 2011: 3). With Doctor Parks' words the circle of Beard's story closes; seeming has transformed into becoming.

Michel Foucault asserts that there are set rules to the processes of appropriation of discourse. As he writes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, "in our societies (and no doubt in many others) the property of discourse – in the sense of the right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices – is in fact confined […] to a particular group of individuals" (Foucault 1982: 68). This relative autonomy, this egoism, of discourse stands behind the idea of power with which each discursive strategy is endowed. According to Weedon, power "is a relation […] exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects," and at the same time, power "structures relations between different subjects within or across discourses" (Weedon 1987: 113–14). McEwan's recent novels seem to follow the same assumption, showing what effects such power strategies can have in practical life. In *Solar*, an intellectual in a world dominated by information technologies is envisaged as being eventually disarmed by the power of discourses he is unable to oppose and which more and more infect his conceptual sphere; in *Saturday*, another intellectual has to surrender, at least temporarily, to a discursive strategy he is very sceptical of, and to admit its superior power.

Sweet Tooth and *Atonement* show that the relationship between the subject treated by a specific discourse and the reality from which the subject is "appropriated" is arbitrary. Serena's life as "stated" by Tom's narrative differs from her real life due to the interference of the writer's imaginative powers; in the same way the lives of Cecilia and Robbie in Briony's account are vastly different from the reality that inspired them. And it does not matter that the discursive strategy in both novels is a literary one; each discourse manipulates and thus reshapes. Briony's presentation of real events is not determined merely by her misinterpretation of them, i.e. her inability to understand what has happened; it is to a large extent dictated by the intrinsic rules of a specific discourse, which in this case may be understood as the literary fashion of the 1940s. In the formation of a discourse, the personal meets the extra-personal. When Briony's radical aesthetic views – "A modern novelist could no more write characters and plots than a modern composer could a Mozart symphony. […] The novel of the future would be unlike anything in the past" (McEwan 2002: 281–2) – are toned down by a *Horizon* editor's recommendation to allow for "the backbone of a story" (McEwan 2002: 314), we are invited to enter the world of ontological relativism where we cannot draw a clear line between a real-life story and a story as a *sine qua non* of literary discourse.

Compared to McEwan's post-2000 novels, *Enduring Love* offers a more unproblematic relationship between what is happening and how these events are interpreted by the protagonist-cum-narrator, Joe Rose. Stalked by Jed Parry, a young man who tries to convince him of his love, Joe rightly indicates such behaviour as a case of de Clérambault's syndrome. Joe's ability to understand reality correctly and not to get deluded by medical discourse, turns the novel into something close to a thriller in which a character must defend his truth against all odds. McEwan's later novels tend to entangle their characters in a more complex web of discursive strategies. The moral focus has thus shifted but the issue of responsibility, now for a world defined very much by language, remains as intense and disconcerting as ever before in Ian McEwan's fiction.

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METAFIKCE, INTERTEXTUALITA, DISKURS
V ROMÁNECH IANA MCEWANA PO ROCE 2000

Resumé

Ve svých románech publikovaných po roce 2000 (*Pokání*, *Sobota*, *Solar* a *Mlsoun*) využívá Ian McEwan narativních postupů typických pro postmoderní prózu, např. prvky metafikce, intertextuality a diskursivní plurality. Článek se zabývá otázkou, jak se toto pojetí liší od postupů užitých v autorově předchozí románové tvorbě. Román *Mlsoun* je tak interpretován z hlediska McEwanovy snahy revidovat vlastní krátké texty z počátků své literární dráhy v 70. letech minulého století. Do protikladu jsou poté postaveny romány z 80. let (*Dítě v pravý čas* a *Nevinný*), pro něž jsou charakteristické takové postupy jako motivický paralelismus a alegorie, a pozdější tvorba, využívající složitější vypravěčské postupy. Zvláštní pozornost se nakonec věnuje tematizaci diskursu v románu *Solar*, který není prezentován jako pouhá satira na moderní vědu a korupční vliv komercializace, ale také jako reflexe „ontologického relativismu" daného autoritou různých diskursních formací v současném světě.

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